

Bold Action - Together

Steven Morris

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Is anybody else watching the Olympics right now? All right, a few more in here. The first service was like me and one guy over there, and that was it. But I'm glad that you guys are.

Because you are, you've seen that speed skater Jordan Stolz, right? Man, he has been so fun to watch. He's so fast, setting records in the 1,000-meter and in the 500-meter. Two gold medals. He might be the first U.S. Winter Olympian to win three gold medals in the same Olympics. It's absolutely incredible.

But I want you to think for a minute about all that it took for him to get right there, because I can assure you he did not wake up last week and decide that he wanted to skate in the Olympics. Right? He spent quite a bit of time.

In fact, he tells a story from when he was five years old. He's sitting on the living room floor in front of the TV watching Apolo Ohno. You remember him? He's watching Apolo Ohno skate, and he says, "That's what I want to do."

So his parents are like, "All right, we're going to help you out." Dad got out back, moved all the snow off the pond in their backyard in Wisconsin, and set up a spot for him and his sister to ice-skate all winter long, for them to work on it and practice it year after year after year. It's an incredible picture to see those two little kids out there on the ice.

So what happened was this: From the time he was five until he was 17, after 12 years, he's out there getting after it. He's practicing. At 17 years old, he made his first Olympic team. Isn't that cool? Seventeen years old. He didn't place that year, but he was an Olympian. Now, four years later, he wins his first medals - two gold medals.

Think about that: 16 years of work. Here's what I want you to take hold of today: All of the moments before the spotlight are what put him in the spotlight. All of the work happened ahead of time.

I read a quote from another Olympian as well. This is what she said: "People are jealous of people with Olympic gold medals, but they're not jealous of the process and the journey it took to get those medals."

It's the moments before the moment, right? The moments before the moment absolutely matter. So many times, when the spotlight comes on, what happens has already been decided by the work that's been put in beforehand.

It's the same with Nehemiah. If you've got your Bible, open up to Nehemiah chapter 2. We were in chapter 1

last week. Here's what we saw: He was faced with a crisis, this major moment in his life for him and for the people of Israel, and he met the moment with prayer.

That was the application last Sunday: Meet the moment with prayer, and then act and move. The order matters. For us as Christians, it's prayer first. That's foundational. We build on that base. After we spend time in prayer, we act with boldness, trusting in God to move.

In Nehemiah chapter 2, we're going to see this: Bold prayer leads to bold action. The beautiful reality for Nehemiah is that he didn't have to take this bold action alone. He was surrounded by the people of God. That is a great picture of what we should be like and what the church should be like today.

If you're taking notes, here's our title this morning: Bold Action Together. There are no Lone Rangers in the body of Christ. We operate as a unit. Believers operate in community.

The Palace in Persia

Look with me at Nehemiah chapter 2, starting in verse 1. Scene one, if you will, is the palace in Persia. What's happening now is happening in the palace in Persia.

Just a reminder, if you missed last week, Nehemiah is the author. He's writing in the first person. So when we read "I," just think Nehemiah. He's the one speaking here.

In the month of Nisan, in the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes, when wine was before him, I took up the wine and gave it to the king. Now I had not been sad in his presence.

And the king said to me, "Why is your face sad, seeing you are not sick? This is nothing but sadness of the heart." Then I was very much afraid.

— Nehemiah 2:1-2

Remember where we are in history. Nehemiah is in the fulfillment of Scripture. God had promised an exile if His people were disobedient to Him, and it happened. But God had also promised forgiveness, redemption, restoration, and a return to the Promised Land. That's what Nehemiah is praying for.

He had been praying about it ever since he was devastated by the news at the beginning of chapter 1. He heard that the people of God back in Jerusalem were living in two things: great trouble and great shame. His heart was burdened for them. He deeply cared that they were hurting. He deeply cared that the kingdom of God was not lifted up among the nations.

So what did he do? He met the moment with prayer. That was his posture before the Lord, and it needs to be my posture and your posture too. We meet the moments with prayer.

At the end of chapter 1 last week, I didn't read the last line. I was saving it for today. Here it is. Chapter 1 ends like this. Nehemiah says:

Now I was cupbearer to the king.

— Nehemiah 1:11

It's not just a throwaway line. This is a line that puts a bright spotlight on the sovereignty of God and the providence of God. Nehemiah is saying, "By the way, I'm placed in a position within the kingdom where I have a personal relationship with the king," which would have given Nehemiah a considerable amount of influence with the king as well.

From the end of chapter 1 to the beginning of chapter 2, we've got a span of about four months. We've got the months and the years in chapter 1 and chapter 2, so we know there's been a four-month gap.

What's been happening? We know Nehemiah's been praying. He's been asking God to move. He's been asking God for forgiveness for him and for his people. He's asking God to redeem His people and to restore them to the Promised Land. At the end of that prayer in chapter 1, he actually prays for success in front of the king.

Nehemiah is devastated by the condition of his people. He's carrying this burden around. He's been praying about it, and finally, that burden in his heart shows up on his face. He's not able to hide his emotions in front of the king anymore. He couldn't hide it, and the king noticed.

That's a big deal because, frankly, part of Nehemiah's job was to fake it. When he was in front of the king, he was supposed to appear happy even if he wasn't. He was supposed to live with joy even when he didn't have joy down in his heart. Anything less than joy could have been perceived by the king as an act of disobedience or, at worst, disloyalty before him.

When he was called out for having a sad face, he writes, "I was afraid." But still, he speaks up. Look at verse 3:

I said to the king, "Let the king live forever! Why should not my face be sad, when the city, the place of my fathers' graves, lies in ruins, and its gates have been destroyed by fire?"

— Nehemiah 2:3

"Let the king live forever." That's how he starts. He's saying, "I'm loyal to you. I'm not planning or plotting. I'm loyal to you." Then he explains the reason behind his sorrow.

In verse 4, the king asks him what he wants:

Then the king said to me, "What are you requesting?" So I prayed to the God of heaven.

— Nehemiah 2:4

I want you to pause here and just sort of think about the beginning of chapter 1 up to this moment. The bad news, the great trouble, and the shame come in. Nehemiah meets his moment with prayer. Meet your moments in prayer. That's what we learn.

He's been praying for months, which means God didn't step in and solve the problem right away. God didn't provide a solution right away. God didn't send him or someone else to Jerusalem right away. There is still an issue four months later, but Nehemiah does not stop praying.

Now, four months later, in God's timing, not Nehemiah's timing, a door is open. But I want you to look at what Nehemiah does. He doesn't run through the door yet. The door's open. He's been praying about this for

months. He's been hoping for some kind of conversation with the king. The door is open for it, and instead of running through it, he stops and prays to the God of heaven.

His first instinct with an open door is prayer in the moment.

We don't know what he prayed. Maybe he said, "God, give me the words." Maybe he said, "God, grant me success." Maybe he said, "God, soften the king's heart as I'm about to lay this request on him." I don't know what he said, but I do know he didn't go to his room, shut the door, and pray. He prayed in the moment.

Pray in your moments, day in and day out. Things are going to happen at work. Things are going to happen with your family. Things are going to happen in relationships. Pray in the moment: "God, give me wisdom. God, give me the words. God, give me clarity. God, grant me favor. God, grant me success."

Pray in the moment. When you do, it showcases your dependence on the power of God at work in your life.

Think about Nehemiah and the kind of prayer we saw in chapter 1 - thoughtful, this deep prayer posture before the Lord. It's the kind of prayer that leads to the prayers we see in chapter 2. Here's what I mean: Those private prayer moments spill over into public life. Those private moments of prayer before the Lord will spill over into your daily life. That is what we want.

This entire book of Nehemiah is bathed in prayer. Nehemiah has his moment. He prays, and then he speaks.

It's been four months. Do you think he rehearsed the conversation in his head a little bit? Have you ever had a big conversation coming up where you rehearsed it in your head ahead of time? Maybe you made notes or a cheat sheet for it. Maybe it was going to be an awkward phone call, so you wrote down bullet points so you didn't miss anything. Maybe you were going to have a job interview, so you planned it ahead of time. You thought about the questions that might be asked, and you rehearsed your answers.

Valentine's Day was yesterday. Maybe that first time you asked her out, guys, you were nervous and you went over in your head how the conversation was going to go. I'm sure Nehemiah was there. Look how it went:

And I said to the king, "If it pleases the king, and if your servant has found favor in your sight, that you send me to Judah, to the city of my fathers' graves, that I may rebuild it."

And the king said to me, the queen sitting beside him, "How long will you be gone, and when will you return?" So it pleased the king to send me when I had given him a time.

— Nehemiah 2:5-6

Surely he had rehearsed. He had planned. When the time came, he was prepared. He had answers. He had a timeline to give the king for what he wanted to do.

Let's piece together chapters 1 and 2. We learned last week that correct theology leads to bold prayer, meaning a proper understanding of who God is and what God has said will lead His children to pray boldly before Him. Correct theology means bold prayer.

Look at this: Bold prayer leads to bold preparation.

You know what I mean, right? Bold preparation. Nehemiah expected God to answer. He expected the opportunity. He believed that God was going to answer this bold prayer, so he didn't sit around doing nothing. He prepared, and he was ready in God's timing when God opened the door.

Nehemiah didn't force the door open. He didn't kick a door down. But when God opened the door in His timing, Nehemiah had been prayed up and planned up, and he was ready to come through it.

We're going to see that this bold preparation readies us for bold action. He takes it even further with the king. Look at verses 7 and 8. He says, "If it pleases the king, give me some letters to the governors of the province Beyond the River so that they'll let me pass through. Give me a letter for Asaph, the keeper of your forest, so I can get some timber for the walls of the city, for the fortress of the temple, and for my own home as well."

Then he says:

And the king granted me what I asked, for the good hand of my God was upon me.

— Nehemiah 2:8

I love this: "The good hand of my God was upon me."

That's bold action. Think about what he does. He says, "King, I need time off with pay. I need letters of recommendation to every other king and ruler that I'm going to pass by, saying that I'm allowed to go there. I need a letter to the man who controls the resources of your forest to give me whatever I need for my temple, for my walls, for my gates, and for my personal house. King, I need you to fund and resource this entire project. Then, by the way, yes, King, I will take your army officers and your horsemen to get me where I need to go."

God provided. God provided answers to prayer in a really, really big way.

That's another note for us. Let me ask you this question, and I want you to think about it: If this afternoon God answered the prayers you've been praying, what would happen?

Nehemiah's been praying for months that God would grant success, that God would forgive and redeem His people, and that God would open the door for him to get back there. If God answered your prayers this afternoon, what would happen?

You hear what I'm asking. Nehemiah had this holy burden for the spiritual condition of other people and for the name of God to be lifted up, and he prayed about it. What are you praying for? Who are you praying for?

Who's going to come to know Jesus as Lord as an answer to your prayers? Who's going to be healed because of an answer to your prayers? Whose marriage is going to be restored in a beautiful way for the glory of God because of the way you're praying for that couple, for that husband and wife?

Last week, we looked in chapter 1 of Nehemiah and saw that you could say the people's lives were in ruins. Whose life is in ruins right now in marriage, family, or finances? Whose life is going to be restored because of your prayers?

Prayer matters. Nehemiah has this season of prayer, and the Lord opens doors. But prayer doesn't just matter for Nehemiah. Prayer matters for me and you right here, right now, as children of God.

Come before Him with bold prayer. Be consistent. Be thoughtful. Be faithful in prayer. Look around you. See what's going on in your life and in the lives of others, and begin to pray.

The king resourced Nehemiah and sent him on his way. I love verse 8. It says:

The good hand of my God was upon me.

— Nehemiah 2:8

That was true throughout the entire process. Nehemiah is prayed up. He's planned up. He's prepared. All of these doors are opening, but he says that in verse 8 to remind us that it's not really Nehemiah at work. It is God at work. It's the power of God working through him to make any of this actually happen.

The Walls of Jerusalem

In verse 9, Nehemiah gets moving. This is scene two. We move from the palace in Persia to the walls of Jerusalem. Look at verse 9:

Then I came to the governors of the province Beyond the River and gave them the king's letters. Now the king had sent with me officers of the army and horsemen.

But when Sanballat the Horonite and Tobiah the Ammonite servant heard this, it displeased them greatly that someone had come to seek the welfare of the people of Israel.

— Nehemiah 2:9-10

He gets close, and he faces immediate opposition. Just know that when you seek to do a great thing for the Lord, there are going to be people who oppose you. We'll talk more about that next week.

Then Nehemiah says:

So I went to Jerusalem and was there three days.

Then I arose in the night, I and a few men with me. And I told no one what my God had put into my heart to do for Jerusalem. There was no animal with me but the one on which I rode.

— Nehemiah 2:11-12

He goes on to say:

And the officials did not know where I had gone or what I was doing, and I had not yet told the Jews, the priests, the nobles, the officials, and the rest who were to do the work.

— Nehemiah 2:16

So, more planning and more praying. He's getting his eyes on the project, and he knows it's going to take all of them working together to get it done.

In verse 17, he says:

Then I said to them, "You see the trouble we are in, how Jerusalem lies in ruins with its gates burned. Come, let us build the wall of Jerusalem, that we may no longer suffer derision."

— Nehemiah 2:17

Another word for that is shame: "So that we may no longer suffer shame."

He tells the people, "Honestly, this is where we're at. This is a season of great trouble and great shame." The walls are broken, and it's not just a practical problem. This is a visual, public testimony of defeat and judgment. The neighboring nations can look at us, and what they see is a people whose God had abandoned them.

The rubble was a tangible, visible reminder that they were exposed and vulnerable. A city without walls was a city without dignity.

Nehemiah is saying, "The disgrace of the city is real, but it does not have to be permanent. The name of God is not lifted up right now. Worship in the temple is not happening right now, but it can once again."

Remember, this is not just about bricks and stones. We saw it a few verses earlier. He had come for the welfare of the people who were there, the glory of God, and the spiritual condition of others.

Look at verse 18:

And I told them of the hand of my God that had been upon me for good, and also of the words that the king had spoken to me. And they said, "Let us rise up and build." So they strengthened their hands for the good work.

— Nehemiah 2:18

They said, "Let's do it. Let us rise up and build."

This is bold action together. This is a group project. We're familiar with group projects, aren't we? You remember when you used to have to do a group project in school? Anybody remember that?

There are two kinds of people in a group project in school. You had someone who would always do 90 percent of the work. Then you had everybody else who would sort of ride their coattails.

This was interesting in the first service. Just by a show of hands, let's see who's in the room. Who was the one in school who did the work of the group project? You just got it done. You made it. Listen, I love it. More than half the room. You guys are getting it done.

All right, hands down. Now, be honest with me. If you were the coattail rider, let me see your hand. Who are we working with in here? Okay, listen. This is a safe space. We're not judging them. We just wanted to know.

Here's the deal: What's going on in Nehemiah is not like that. These people are locking arms together. There's no one person doing it all. There's no one person lagging behind. All of them are together for the glory of God. They prayed. They planned. They prayed some more. Now it's time to take action.

Verse 18 tells us that they're determined to act together to do a good work. The naysayers are still there. In verse 20, Nehemiah says, "Listen, we're not worried about you and what you have to say. We know that the

God of heaven is the One who's going to make this prosper."

Now they get to work. They get to work in chapter 3.

Bold Action Together

As we turn to chapter 3, it's beautiful. We see a bunch of people doing what God had called them to do, and their names are written down there.

Now, there are a lot of Hebrew names, a lot of old Hebrew names that are hard to pronounce. So I thought it would be fun to put a microphone under one of your seats. Go ahead and check. If you've got the mic, you're up for all the names.

Most of y'all aren't even looking. Okay, fine. I'll do it. I just wanted to make sure you're awake.

Look at chapter 3, verse 1:

Then Eliashib the high priest rose up with his brothers the priests, and they built the Sheep Gate. They consecrated it and set its doors. They consecrated it as far as the Tower of the Hundred, as far as the Tower of Hananel.

And next to him the men of Jericho built. And next to them Zaccur the son of Imri built.

— Nehemiah 3:1-2

If your Bible's open, underline that phrase: "next to him."

It goes on like that for 32 verses: "next to them" and "next to them." That same phrase, "next to," appears over 30 times. There's a reason for this. It's because the people are all in. There's a sense of ownership here for the project.

Nobody is hanging back, expecting someone else to do their part. Nobody is saying they can't help. Nobody is saying, "I'm weak," or, "I'm not big enough," or, "I'm not strong enough." Nobody is saying, "My contribution doesn't matter."

In a commentary this week, I read a great note highlighting what's going on here in chapter 3, this bold action together. Here's what it said: "Chapter 3 is God's way of saying, 'I see who showed up.'"

I see who showed up. Are you building, or are you watching?

In chapter 3, a diverse group of people showed up and worked together. There are over 50 names from all walks of life: priests, goldsmiths, perfumers, merchants, and families with kids. All of them are working together.

In the days of Nehemiah, we have bold action together. If you turn forward a couple hundred years in your Bible to the book of Acts and see the movement of the early church, what is that? It's the same thing: bold action together.

If you move forward in history to right here, right now, the model hasn't changed. For the people of God, it is still bold action together. There's no change.

I love Nehemiah. We learn the history, the prayer, and the bold action. Next week, we're going to see the determination to see it through, even when we face obstacles. It's an inspiring book. It's an encouraging book. But we don't just read it to feel good and move on. We come to God's Word, and we respond to what we see.

Our Next Steps

What are our next steps from chapters 2 and 3? I hope they're obvious, but let me share them with you as we begin to wrap up.

The first next step is this: When God speaks, take bold action.

Here's the reality: God's going to speak. We're doing Experiencing God on Wednesday nights, and last week, almost every Bible study going through it talked about how God speaks to His children and how, as His children, we need to be ready to act.

How can you be ready? Look at Nehemiah's example. Be prayed up. Pray about what God puts on your heart. Begin to plan it out.

Here's an example. Imagine you've got a friend who doesn't know Christ. Pray, like we talked about last week, that God would put a burden on your heart, that you would care deeply for them and for their walk with Christ.

Then pray for them. Pray that God would soften their heart. Pray that they would understand how loved they are by God and how they were designed to be in a loving relationship with God. Pray that they would do what Scripture says, that they would confess their sin, that by faith they would put their trust in Christ alone, and that they would be saved by grace through faith.

Pray for that. Pray the promises of God over them. Pray Scripture over them.

If we're going to be like Nehemiah, as we're praying for them, what else are we doing? We're planning.

What does that look like? It means we're memorizing Scriptures that go along with that. We're memorizing Romans 10:9-10. We're memorizing Romans 5:8. We're memorizing Ephesians 2:8-10. We're memorizing these verses in Scripture so that when they ask questions, we can say, "This is what the Bible says about how much God loves you. This is what the Bible says about how you can trust in Him alone as your Savior."

We're planning. We're thinking it through ahead of time.

When they trust Christ, Jesus said to make disciples and then teach them to obey everything He has commanded. So how am I going to teach them? We're planning ahead because we're expecting God to answer. We're praying with faith, trusting God to move.

You see what I'm saying? When God speaks, take bold action. Be ready ahead of time.

Nehemiah was prayed up. He had a timeline laid out. He had a resource list there before he even spoke to the king because he was expecting God to move. Pray with expectation. Plan with faith. Then, when God speaks, what do you do? Take bold action.

Leading a friend to Christ is one of many examples of bold action.

Nehemiah took bold action, but I want to argue with you on the front end: It would have been way more comfortable for him not to think about that. I assure you, he would have been way more comfortable in the palace, eating off the king's table, than he was building a wall.

There's no way he would have been at peace, though, living in disobedience to God and not moving when God had told him to move.

There are a lot of people who don't move. There are a lot of people who are stuck. They know that God's speaking. They know that God is pushing and moving, but they don't move. Sometimes it's because they're comfortable and they don't want to risk their comfort.

We can't do that. When God speaks, we've got to move.

But a lot of times, people do not respond and move when God calls them to go because they don't think their contribution matters. They don't think what they have to offer matters.

Our Experiencing God study addressed that too. Listen to a quote from this week: "When you don't believe that God can use you, it says a lot more about your belief in God than it does about your belief in yourself."

Think about that. When you don't believe that God can use you, you're saying, "God, You're not big enough to work through my life." When you don't believe that God can use you, you're saying, "God, You're not powerful enough to do something in me."

Let's not tell God that.

That's actually action step two: Act together. When God speaks, act together.

You can say that in so many different ways. Write down whatever connects with you. Write down, "Act together." You can say, "Show up and do your part." You can say, "Teamwork makes the dream work." Say it how you want, but that's what we see in chapter 3.

"Next to him" was this family. "Next to him" was this group of people. "Next to him" was that group of people. We read it all the way through, and we just see a couple of people who don't participate.

About halfway through chapter 3, it says that there were some nobles who didn't join in. I don't know if they didn't want to work, get their hands dirty, or break a nail, but they didn't join in. We don't want to be like them.

We want to be like the guy who's mentioned in verse 20. I love this. Look at verse 20 of chapter 3:

After him Baruch the son of Zabbai vigorously repaired another section from the buttress to the door of the house of Eliashib the high priest.

— Nehemiah 3:20

This is the only time, in more than 50 names, where the attitude of the person is listed. He vigorously repaired.

That phrasing in the original language means to burn or to glow. To help us understand what's going on there,

he's the guy who's whistling while he works. He's the guy who's got a song in his heart and joy on his face as he works.

Honestly, if he's the guy on the section next to us, there's a good chance that every now and then we get a little annoyed. We say, "Hey, stop singing. I'm trying to work over here."

But at the end of the day, who would you rather have? Baruch whistling and working with vigor, or the nobles who are holding back? Obviously, Baruch.

As we were praying about this this week, we were praying that God would give us some Baruchs - some men and women in our church who are all in on what's going on. They're leaning into NEXT, not because they have to be since they're part of the church family, but because they're excited about it. They're vigorous about it. They're pumped about it.

We all need more Baruchs in our lives, working together for the glory of God.

That's the picture in chapter 3: shoulder to shoulder for the glory of God, every person faithful to do what they can. Each person did something a little different in chapter 3. There's not a superstar doing it all. It's believers taking bold action.

As a church family, we're in an exciting season. I love the phrasing that Nehemiah uses in verse 18. He says, "Know that we're doing a good work." That's the same thing we believe is happening here.

All five of those initiatives for NEXT - from restoring the Worship Center, to adding a space here at our North Klein Campus, to our digital reach, to international church planting, which you saw just a piece of this morning with the Vasquez family, and then that third campus in Magnolia - all of that is a good work.

Why? Because of the why behind what we're doing.

Don't lose sight of this: This is not about projects. It's about good works to glorify God and to reach people.

As we lean into NEXT, just like the rebuilding of the wall, we understand that it's going to take all of us doing what we can. It's going to take all of us taking bold action together.

That's what the people of Israel did in rebuilding the walls. They played their part, and next to them was someone else playing their part as well.

When it comes to NEXT, that's what we've said: My family, your family, all of us playing our part and doing what we can. Not equal gifts, but equal sacrifice, knowing that it's going to take every single one of us.

If we decide to do this together, I believe we'll see God do something incredibly special, just like in Nehemiah's day.

Would you pray with me this morning?

As we bow our heads this morning, I just want to encourage you. Think about where you've been praying. Think about what God's been doing, and commit to taking bold action in the direction that God's taking you.

Be willing to do what God's called you to do, all for His name and for His glory.

Be praying through that. Like Nehemiah, ask God to put that burden on your heart. Pray for the condition of others. As God opens doors, be willing to live and walk in obedience to Him.

As you're praying through that, pray about what it looks like for your family as we lean into NEXT with our church. How would God have you participate? How would He have you pray? Ask God to speak and to give you clarity. Ask Him what it looks like to do your part, your section. As God speaks, respond with faith.

In just a minute, we're going to stand and sing one last song. We're going to have pastors and prayer partners down here. We'd love to pray with you this morning.

Is there something going on in your life? Maybe you're ready to trust Christ. Maybe God has been poking, prodding, and pushing you to take that next step, that bold action, in a certain area of your life, and you just want someone to pray over you. We'd be honored to do that.

Maybe it's been a rough week. Maybe you're in a rough season, and you want someone to come alongside you in prayer. We'd be honored to do that as well.

Whatever God's laying on your heart, when we stand and sing in just a moment, that'll be your invitation to come. We'd love to pray for you.

Father, we love You. We trust You. We thank You for Your Word. God, I pray that as You speak, we would take bold action and that we would do it together, surrounded by a church family that loves us and supports us. God, it's in Your name we pray. And everybody said, "Amen."