

The Call to Action

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Prepared from the spoken message and lightly edited for readability. Scripture quotations and spoken phrasing are preserved as delivered.

I want to invite you to take God's Word and turn with me to Nehemiah chapter 2.

One of my favorite missionaries to read about, whose name I remember first hearing in church as a little boy, is a man by the name of William Carey. I've talked about him in services before. He was born in England in 1761, and he is held in high regard in Baptist circles specifically because he was a Baptist pastor and then a Baptist missionary. He is known as the father of the modern-day missions movement.

Carey was an amazing person to study. He was self-taught and taught himself Latin and Greek. He had a way with languages that would prove to be very beneficial for him in his later years, as he translated the Scriptures into over 40 languages and dialects as a missionary to India. He was an amazing man.

At the age of 18, using our terminology, he was saved. He was converted mainly because of the influence of a friend and mentor who was in his life and would ask him spiritual questions. It just got him thinking, and ultimately he came to know Christ. It changed the whole trajectory of his life.

He was a shoemaker by trade but just fell in love with God's Word. He began preaching the gospel. He was ordained at 25, and as he grew in his love for the Lord, he also grew in his passion for those who were lost, those who were far away from God.

One of the highlights of my life was two years ago. I was able to be in Moulton, England, and I preached at Carey Baptist Church. It was the church where he pastored. On the premises of the property, they still have his shoe shop - his cobbler shop, if you will - and they've turned it into a bit of a museum.

In that museum, they have Carey's pulpit. I brought a picture just to show you. I wanted to jump in and get behind it, but they wouldn't let me, so I got to the side of it there and got a picture. But I'm showing you the one where it's just the pulpit. It's just so awesome.

Carey also had on his wall a picture of the world that he had diagrammed, just a map. You can't really see this, but there are pin marks all over the map as he was studying where people were from and where they lived. God just put a heart for the nations in this man, and he would pray for them.

In fact, if you zoom in on some of this writing - and we'll zoom in on it - I don't know if you can see it, but do you see the word "pagans" there? In some places where there was no gospel witness, he would write "pagans" or "heathen," and he would pray for these people to come to know Christ.

We call him the father of modern missions because, in 1793, at the age of 32, he decided to leave the

comforts of England and take the gospel to India. That was not something that was popular. It was not something that was taught in churches at that time. In fact, there was a feeling in churches at that time that if God wanted to save the pagans, if God wanted to save the heathen, He didn't need you to help Him out. He could get it done.

But Carey was so impressed by the Great Commission to go into the world and make disciples, and his heart was so burdened for those who didn't know Christ, that he decided to go. He started schools and worked to influence the culture. Again, he translated the Scriptures into more than 40 languages and dialects. He preached the gospel, and for 41 years he planted his life in India.

One of the statements he is known for - in fact, in the church, in one of the rooms off to the side, it is written in big, bold letters the length of the church - is this: "Expect great things from God. Attempt great things for God."

I don't know exactly what inspired Carey to make this statement, but it is exactly the mindset we see in Nehemiah here in Nehemiah chapters 2 and 3.

I'm calling the message today "The Call to Action." We're going to look at all of Nehemiah 2 and 3. We've got a lot to cover, so let's get after it.

The Context of Nehemiah

For the sake of context, for those who perhaps missed last week, I want to encourage you to go online. These messages build on top of one another. You can download our app and listen to these messages.

Nehemiah is a cupbearer to the king of Persia. To remind you about this position, he is a trusted advisor to the king. You need to think of him like a personal valet, if you will. He helped the king out in a lot of ways. He was privy to private conversations that were going on. The king, no doubt, would bring him along from time to time, and he probably asked for his counsel from time to time.

Nehemiah was the one who was over the sleeping quarters of the king, making sure nothing happened to him at night. He's called a cupbearer because he would set out the wine for different parties and festivals, and he would even taste the king's wine to make sure it wasn't poisoned.

From all that we can gather in Scripture, the king of Persia, Artaxerxes, and Nehemiah had quite a relationship.

Now, it's important to note that several kings before King Artaxerxes came into power, the first king of Persia, a man by the name of Cyrus, allowed Jews who had been deported during the Babylonian regime to return to Jerusalem. This started three major returns of Jews who had been deported back to the city of God, the city of Jerusalem. These returns were chronicled in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah.

The Jews had been back for about a hundred years. At this point, some of the Jews who had returned came back to Persia to give a report of what was going on. They reported back to Nehemiah, and when they gave him their report of what they'd seen in Jerusalem, the fact of the matter was that it wasn't going well.

You read chapter 1, verse 3, and the report is given to Nehemiah that the walls of the city of Jerusalem have been destroyed and the gates of the city have been burned.

You've got to remember, these walls represented security. They represented safety. The fact that the holy city of God was in disarray was a reproach to the name of God. It was a shame to the glory of God.

When Nehemiah hears that this city isn't functioning, that its walls are broken and its gates are burned, it cuts him to the core. In fact, last week, the Bible says that he weeps. He mourns. He has to sit down at this news. He fasts, and the Bible says that he prays for four months.

This is where we pick up in Nehemiah chapter 2. I'm going to break this message into two scenes, if you will.

Scene One: The Palace in Persia

Nehemiah chapter 2, starting in verse 1, says this:

In the month of Nisan, in the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes, when wine was before him...

— Nehemiah 2:1

The month of Nisan is the Persian New Year. All right? So they're having a party. It's New Year's, and the wine is flowing.

Nehemiah says:

I took up the wine and gave it to the king.

— Nehemiah 2:1

Then he says:

Now I had not been sad in his presence.

— Nehemiah 2:1

He hadn't been down. He hadn't been discouraged. The word carries with it this idea of being out of sorts, if you will. He hasn't been sad because this isn't something you're supposed to do in the presence of the king.

You don't bring your problems to the king. You're supposed to alleviate his problems, okay? You certainly don't want to make him question anything that's going on or see that someone is upset or that something isn't right.

Nehemiah stood in the king's presence. Again, they knew each other well, so the king asked Nehemiah:

Why is your face sad, seeing you are not sick? This is nothing but sadness of the heart.

— Nehemiah 2:2

Nehemiah says:

Then I was very much afraid.

— Nehemiah 2:2

Nehemiah is about to step out and make a request of the king. We'll see that request in just a moment. This request, this situation, is something that Nehemiah has been covering in prayer for four months, and he

senses in his spirit, "It's go time. It's time to ask the king."

The reason he's scared is threefold.

First, again, you don't bring personal requests to the king, and Nehemiah is about to. If you've ever been around somebody who is important or has prominence, position, or power, and you bring something up but don't know how they're going to respond, that can create some fear. That can create some anxiety. That's one of the reasons he's scared.

The second reason he's scared is because King Artaxerxes, while there is an affinity and a relationship there, is still the king. Just to give you a little history, when Artaxerxes' father was assassinated, Artaxerxes killed his brother so that he could ascend to the throne. Then he had the man who murdered his dad hunted down and killed.

The fact of the matter is, this isn't Mr. Rogers we're talking about, okay? This is King Artaxerxes. You don't want to twist him off. You don't want to make him mad.

Thirdly, if you read Ezra chapter 4 - and you should read it in your time alone with the Lord because it's kind of like the prologue to Nehemiah - you will see that King Artaxerxes was in power during the second return, when they had begun building up the walls of the city.

There were some troublemakers in Jerusalem who sent a letter back to King Artaxerxes and said, "Listen, you need to do your history. If this city is built up, it's going to cause you trouble, so you need to put a stop to this."

This king does what any earthly king would do. He doesn't want a threat to his kingdom, so he sends a letter right back and says, "Put a stop to this."

This happens 15 to 20 years before Nehemiah is about to make his request. This king whom he's confronting has already put a stop to the rebuilding of Jerusalem. So you can understand Nehemiah's fear.

But even in this fear, he moves forward by faith.

We talked about this last week in our next-steps application: We need to prepare to move forward by faith. If God is going to use us for His glory, we'd better be ready to act on faith when He says, "Go."

That's Nehemiah. He's prepared to act on faith. The window opens. He's been praying about this and sitting on this for four months.

Here's the thing with Nehemiah: He knows he's done everything he could do. Now it's time for God to do what only He can do.

Nehemiah has had this lethal combination going of planning and praying. We know he's been planning because we'll see what he requests in just a moment and how he requests it. There's no way he just came up with this on the spur of the moment. No, this is four months of praying and planning.

Just a point of application here: Maybe you're here this morning and you're facing a dire situation. Your back is up against the wall. There's an obstacle in front of you. Maybe, like we talked about last week, there's just this

burden in your heart.

Take a note out of Nehemiah's leadership playbook, if you will. You do what only you can do. You plan. You strategize. You think. You get wise counsel. You work. Then you trust God to do what only He can do.

I think it was St. Augustine who said, "Pray as though everything depended on God, and work as if everything depended on you."

I can tell you, as we've entered into this NEXT initiative, that we as a leadership team have been planning and praying for months. We first started talking about this back in January. We had our first meetings in February and March as a leadership team. We got clarity on what we needed to do in the June and July time frame. We started having meetings with leadership in August and September.

We have been planning and praying. Planning and praying. Planning and praying.

I can tell you with the utmost integrity that we feel, as a team, that we've done everything we know to do naturally, from a human standpoint. Now God's got to do what only He can do supernaturally.

Nehemiah is prepared to answer, all because he's been putting in the work - planning and praying, planning and praying.

Look at verses 3 and 4:

I said to the king, "Let the king live forever!"

— Nehemiah 2:3

He softened him up, all right? Who doesn't want to hear that? "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

Notice he didn't say the word "Jerusalem." He's being wise right here. To use the words of Jesus in the New Testament, he's being as innocent as a dove and as wise as a serpent.

He didn't want to bring up Jerusalem. That might twist the king off. So he just says, "The city of my fathers." Then he plays on what would be very sensitive to a king at that time, and that's his ancestors' graves. There was great respect for the bones and bodies of kings and people who had gone before you.

Then look at verse 4:

Then the king said to me, "What are you requesting?"

— Nehemiah 2:4

Make it known.

Here's where Nehemiah steps up. This is his now-or-never moment. What does he immediately do?

So I prayed to the God of heaven.

— Nehemiah 2:4

This is a short prayer, okay? There are several prayers in Nehemiah, seven or eight in the book. The first one was in chapter 1. I think it took up seven verses. This second prayer that Nehemiah prays doesn't take up any verses.

The point is, short prayers, long prayers - God hears all prayers.

However, I like what commentator Stephen Davey wrote. He said, "A short prayer is best preceded by consistent praying."

That's been Nehemiah's posture, right? For four months, he's been sitting in this, saturating it and soaking it.

Men, think of it like you're marinating a piece of meat. What do you do? You put it in seasoning, and you just let it sit. The longer it sits, the juicier it gets, all right?

Well, that's what Nehemiah has been doing with this situation. He's just been marinating it in prayer. Now the king says, "What do you want?" Because Nehemiah has postured himself in prayer for four months, he breathes a quick prayer: "Help me, God."

Then he makes his ask. Look at verses 5 through 8:

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.

And I said to the king, "If it pleases the king, let letters be given me to the governors of the province Beyond the River, that they may let me pass through until I come to Judah,

and a letter to Asaph, the keeper of the king's forest, that he may give me timber to make beams for the gates of the fortress of the temple, and for the wall of the city, and for the house that I shall occupy."

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

— Nehemiah 2:5-8

That's a beautiful statement right there.

We know, and Nehemiah readily admits, that the reason the king grants his request is because of the good hand of God being on his life.

What's monumental here, when you think about it, is the ask. Again, Nehemiah has been covering this in prayer. There's no way that when he is put on the spot by the king, he suddenly comes up with everything he's asking for.

"King, I'm going to need some extended time off. Secondly, I want to go back and rebuild the city that you put a stop to 10 to 15 years before. Third, I need a letter of reference that guarantees me safe passage from

Persia back to Jerusalem. And fourth, I need you to finance the entire project. What do you think, King?"

It's a crazy ask, but again, it had been soaked in prayer.

Nehemiah knew the truth of Proverbs chapter 21:

*The king's heart is a stream of water in the hand of the Lord;
he turns it wherever he will.*

— Proverbs 21:1

He had been praying to Providence. When the opportunity presented itself, it may have been a crazy, big ask, but the king granted Nehemiah what he asked, for the good hand of God was upon him.

That's scene one: the palace in Persia.

Scene Two: The Walls in Jerusalem

It seems that Nehemiah immediately begins his journey. He leaves Persia, and he makes the roughly 800-to-1,000-mile journey back to Jerusalem.

This is verses 9 and 10:

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

This is just another way of saying that he entered the region and the surrounding regions that we call the Holy Land today. He had made it.

I'll say more about these guys in just a moment, but this is a very good lesson to remember. It's a truth as old as time: Not everyone gets excited about the work God calls us to do.

There will always be people out there who choose to oppose the work of God. This is one of Satan's greatest strategies in the world today - to oppose the advancement of the kingdom.

So we don't need to be surprised. I'm saying this to you, and I'm saying this to myself: We don't need to be surprised when we meet opposition or resistance.

More on that in a moment. Look at verse 11:

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.

I went out by night by the Valley Gate to the Dragon Spring and to the Dung Gate, and I inspected the walls of Jerusalem that were broken down and its gates that had been destroyed by fire.

— Nehemiah 2:11-13

The word "inspected" is a medical term that was used to describe doctors probing a wound and looking at a wound. It's to carefully investigate.

Nehemiah is walking around the city and investigating. He is looking in depth at the damage he sees. He's making notes. He's taking it all in.

Then I went on to the Fountain Gate and to the King's Pool, but there was no room for the animal that was under me to pass.

Then I went up in the night by the valley and inspected the wall, and I turned back and entered by the Valley Gate, and so returned.

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 2:14-16

Nehemiah goes out in the middle of the night. I'll put this image on the screen for you of the old city of Jerusalem, the City of David. If you have a study Bible, you probably have a map that looks a little something like this in it.

If you look at about the 10 or 11 o'clock range, that's where Nehemiah walked out first. Then he went counterclockwise around the city, observing the city, looking at the city, and taking it all in.

He observes the walls. He sees the burned-down gates. I'm sure that as he's circling the city, he's praying. That burden he had in his heart that we talked about last week, I bet it just continued to grow within him.

Now remember, it wasn't the physical walls or the physical burned gates that burdened Nehemiah. It was what those walls and gates represented. It was the people behind these walls and gates. There was no safety. There was no security.

This was Jerusalem. This is where people would come and see the glory of God in this majestic temple. Now the temple has been rebuilt, but it's just a shell of its former glory. These walls were once what everybody wanted, and now the glory of God and the reputation of God were a reproach. It was a shame.

It burned within Nehemiah. As he circles the city, don't you know that for a hundred years the walls had been destroyed? The gates had been burned. But as Nehemiah inspects the walls and sees the city, you don't get a sense of hopelessness. Rather, he starts getting fired up.

"With God, we can do this!"

As a matter of fact, look at verses 17 and 18. This challenge doesn't discourage Nehemiah. It inspires him.

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

Notice how he uses "we" and "us." He makes it plural.

He's been back in Persia. All these Jews have been here for years, and they haven't done anything. But he doesn't say, "Look at what you've done. Why did you let it come to this?"

No, he says, "Look at what we can do together. This is affecting all of us."

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

He's inspiring them. He's encouraging them. He's speaking words of life over them.

Don't miss those two words right there. I want you to underline them in your Bibles, or if you're taking notes, just write them down: "good work."

What God had called them to was a good work. Whenever God calls His people to a good work, just as we said a moment ago, you'd better steady your hands and steady your heart because opposition and resistance are coming in the form of naysayers, cynics, and just plain negative people.

May I introduce to you again Sanballat, Tobiah, and now a new character, Geshem. Look at verses 19 and 20:

But when Sanballat the Horonite and Tobiah the Ammonite servant and Geshem the Arab heard of it, they jeered at us and despised us and said, "What is this thing that you are doing? Are you rebelling against the king?"

— Nehemiah 2:19

There are always going to be people who try to intimidate and ridicule God's people when they attempt to do something great for God. There are always going to be people who try to discourage, jeer, and call us foolish.

Sanballat, Tobiah, and Geshem are three people you don't want to invite to your birthday party, all right? They're not any fun.

I tell our team all the time, "Do not be the person who lights up the room when you leave it," all right? You know what I'm talking about? You want to be the person who lights up the room when you come in, not when you leave.

They're just negative, cynical, mean-spirited, glass-half-empty people. Don't be that person.

Charles Swindoll tells a story about an optimistic farmer who had a very negative neighbor. He was always trying to talk him up. He'd go outside, the sun would be shining, and he'd scream across the way, "Hey, the

sun's out! This is going to be a good day for our crops."

The negative, pessimistic neighbor would say, "I sure hope it doesn't stay out too long. It could scorch them and kill them."

The next week, it would be raining. The optimistic farmer would come out and say, "Look at what God did! He gave us rain to feed our crops."

That negative, pessimistic neighbor would say, "I sure hope it doesn't rain too long. It'll drown them out. It'll flood them. We'll have trouble on our hands."

So that optimistic farmer started thinking about this. He said, "You know what I'm going to do?" He went out and invested in the most amazing dog he could ever find. This was a dog that could literally walk on water.

He said, "I'm going to put this neighbor to the test."

Duck hunting season came along, and he took his neighbor duck hunting. They were out there and shot a couple of ducks. Those ducks fell in the body of water.

That farmer, so proud, said, "Go get them!"

That dog walked on water, ran on water, got those ducks, brought them back, and put them in the boat. The optimistic farmer was so proud. He said, "What do you think of that?"

To which the negative neighbor said, "Can't swim, can he?"

Cheesy joke, but that's how negative, glass-half-empty people see life.

Nehemiah had to deal with them. We're going to have to deal with them. Let's take another note out of his leadership playbook.

How did he deal with negativity? How did he deal with opposition, resistance, and cynicism? Did he answer their accusations? Did he get into a back-and-forth with them? Did he send a passive-aggressive Facebook post?

No.

When they went low, Nehemiah went high. Look at verse 20:

Then I replied to them, "The God of heaven will make us prosper, and we his servants will arise and build, but you have no portion or right or claim in Jerusalem."

— Nehemiah 2:20

He just shut them down.

He knew opposition was a reality. He knew he'd face resistance, but he wasn't going to let the naysayers, the critics, or the negative Nellies have the final word.

He would rise above. He would continue on mission. He drew a line in the sand between those who belonged to God - those who were going to rebuild the city - and those who had no portion in the city.

He said, "We're not going to allow those who don't have any portion to have a say in what we're doing. Certainly, they're not going to determine the outcome of this project."

The People Begin the Good Work

It's at this point that Nehemiah puts all the people to work.

Now, we're not going to read all of chapter 3, but I want to highlight some notes that we need to mention out of this chapter.

First, you can count them later, but there are over 50 names listed in chapter 3. These 50 names represent families, and they come from all walks of life.

You can read about them. The people who participated in this project included priests, goldsmiths, perfumers, and merchants. There were families who worked in front of their homes, rebuilding their section of the wall. There were people who came in from the outside and helped rebuild the wall.

Thirty-five times in chapter 3 the phrase "made repairs" is mentioned, and there are 40 different places among the wall and the burned gates where people are stationed.

Some worked in nice areas around gardens. Others worked around garbage heaps. But they all worked together.

The bottom line is, this took coordination. It took leadership, and it took teamwork.

In fact, the most common phrase you hear - look in your Bibles - is in almost every verse in chapter 3. It'll say, "So-and-so, and next to him..." Then, "Next to him was so-and-so," or, "After him was so-and-so."

It's just name after name after name after name - people working, and they're working together.

There are three names I want to highlight here. I'm going to highlight these very quickly, and then we'll get into our next-steps application and call it a day, okay?

First, I want you to notice who's mentioned first. Look in chapter 3, verse 1:

Then Eliashib the high priest rose up with his brothers the priests, and they built the Sheep Gate.

— Nehemiah 3:1

Notice that the rebuilding starts with spiritual leadership. It should always start with spiritual leadership.

We have a saying on our team. They've heard it, and we repeat it: "We cannot take our people, Champion Forest, where we ourselves as leaders are not willing to go."

As it relates to this NEXT initiative, this Tuesday I want you to pray for our staff. We're having a chapel service, and we're going to bring our pledges and our first and best offering this week. It's symbolic of us leading the

way.

Pray for us on Tuesday as we do this because, as spiritual leaders, we want to be an example to the flock. We want to lead the way.

It doesn't just include our staff, though. If you're in leadership here at Champion Forest, to our deacons: You lead the way. To our life group leaders and directors: You have to lead the way.

Anybody who has a servant-leadership position in our church, we must lead the way in this. It's a spiritual principle. If we're going to step out on faith, it starts with those in positions of leadership.

Secondly, in this chapter, you see people working - name after name after name, more than 50 names. But look at verse 5. This is very interesting:

And next to them the Tekoites repaired, but their nobles would not stoop to serve their Lord.

— Nehemiah 3:5

The Tekoites were a group of people who lived south of Jerusalem, near Bethlehem. This is where the prophet Amos was from - Tekoa.

This is the only time in chapter 3 where it's mentioned that someone didn't participate in the work. We don't know why. This whole idea of not stooping to do the work carries with it, in the Hebrew language, the idea that there was some pride there for some reason.

We don't know why. Did they think they were above the work? Did they think they didn't want to get their hands dirty, that they were too good for that? Did they disagree with the plans or how it was rolled out? Maybe they were cowering to the fears of Sanballat, Tobiah, and Geshem.

We don't know why the nobles chose not to work, but I want you to contrast that with Baruch in verse 20. Look at Nehemiah 3:20:

After him Baruch the son of Zabbai repaired...

— Nehemiah 3:20

If you have a Bible like mine, you've got a little note by the word "repaired" with a little letter next to it. If you look at the bottom of the study note - mine says "G" right here - it says some translations read, "vigorously repaired."

This is the only time among the more than 50 names given that the attitude of the person is listed. He vigorously repaired.

The word "vigorous" means to burn or to glow. In other words, Baruch was whistling while he worked, all right? He was glad to be there.

Now, truthfully, if we were there, Baruch probably would have gotten on all of our nerves, okay? He shows up every day smiling and going to work.

But as I was reading this and thinking about our initiative, I was praying, "God, would You give us some more Baruchs? Give us some people who don't just want to repair, but who want to vigorously repair. God, give us Baruchs."

These people in chapter 3 had a mind to work.

Just a spoiler alert: For a hundred years, the walls had been destroyed and the gates burned. But when the people came together to work, these walls were rebuilt in 52 days.

It was a miracle of God, all because they chose to work together.

Our Next Steps

What does Nehemiah's story mean for us as we stand here in this NEXT initiative, at our own moment of rebuilding, expanding, and driving our stakes deep, as our theme verse, Isaiah 54:2, says?

Let me give you some next steps. We'll fly through these.

Remember, we're focusing on our NEXT initiative, but the application of this is certainly not limited to it.

1. Realize That What We Are Seeking to Accomplish Is a Good Work

These five initiatives that we're giving you, that we're setting out to do as a church, are a good work.

Do you know why I know that? Because of why we're doing it.

It's about the glorification of Christ's name, from Northwest Houston to the world, so that people would hear about Jesus and grow deeper in their relationship with Jesus.

Don't lose sight of that.

These are projects we want to do, but these projects are a good work.

Are you asking God, "God, what part of this good work do You want me to be a part of?"

I would encourage you to take that NEXT book we have. You can get it at our NEXT booth. If you're not passionate about anything we're doing, start praying through the initiatives one by one. See if God doesn't light a fire in you for one of these initiatives that just does it for you.

That's the only way I know to get a burden - to pray and ask God.

2. Keep Moving Forward Despite Opposition, Resistance, Negativity, or Cynicism

When opposition comes - and it will come - we're going to experience some setbacks.

This is a three-year initiative in which we're committing to give over and above our regular tithes and offerings. Over three years, there are going to be some setbacks.

But you know what? The "why" - the glorification of Christ's name, that whole idea of expanding and making

sure we can have life groups on campus at North Klein so people can go down deep, rooting our stakes deep - that's a good work.

That good work is going to be fuel for us to keep going even when there's negativity and cynicism.

Listen, I know that when there are projects like this, people have opinions, and that's fine. We welcome opinions and honest concerns. We want to answer as many questions as possible.

We can disagree, but we don't want a disagreeable spirit. We definitely don't want a disagreeable spirit spreading in the church.

I've said before that one of my goals, if God gives us favor and leads, and if I and our team lead in the right way, is that at the end of these three years, we're going to be stronger as a church than we've ever been and more unified as a church than we've ever been.

So let's decide now. I don't think we're going to have all that negativity and cynicism, but let's decide now that we're going to keep moving forward in the direction God is calling us.

One commentator said Nehemiah had a "holy stubbornness." I like that. Let's have a holy stubbornness.

You don't have to be Baruch, but don't be Sanballat, Tobiah, or Geshem either.

3. Play Your Part and Look Out for One Another

This is what the people of Israel did in rebuilding the walls. They played their part. They did what they could, where they could.

That's what we're asking of you.

As we prepare for March 1, have conversations with your family where appropriate. Our children's ministry did a wonderful job on our kids ministry podcast of explaining how we can get our kids in on this. Just Google "Champion Forest Kids Ministry Podcast."

This is a spiritual journey.

We're asking the question, "Where can we cut? Where can we sacrifice to give toward this project?"

Ask that question.

If you skip a five-dollar cup of Starbucks coffee a week, that's \$250 over a year.

I did it with my own family. I looked back at my Chick-fil-A app. The average cost for our family to go to Chick-fil-A - a family of five, with our sixth being in college, and we're paying for hers too - is 60 bucks, right? It's 60 bucks.

I go large on the fries and the Coke Zero, all right?

But it's 60 bucks. If we cut that, that's \$720 a year we could redirect to the work of Christ.

I don't know what it is for you. It could be canceling a streaming service or delaying a purchase you really want. I don't know.

The question isn't, "What can I afford to give?" The question is, "What am I willing to sacrifice for the kingdom?"

When you ask these questions, I'm telling you, that's where God does His best work in our hearts.

So play your part, and remember that you're next to someone who's playing their part, who's next to someone playing their part, who's next to someone playing their part.

Let's expect great things from God and attempt great things for God. I believe that if we do, we'll see God do something special in our day, just like He did in the days of Nehemiah.

It is a call to action. Amen.