

# Staying Committed

**Jarrett Stephens**

NEXT: From Northwest Houston to the World | February 22, 2026 | Nehemiah 4:1-23; Nehemiah 5:1-19; Nehemiah 6:1-14

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

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All right, I want to invite you to grab your Bibles and turn to Nehemiah chapter 4.

If you've been around Champion Forest for any length of time listening to me preach, you know that one of my preaching heroes is a man by the name of Charles Haddon Spurgeon. C.H. Spurgeon is what he went by. His nickname was the Prince of Preachers.

He started preaching at 19 years of age at what was called New Park Street Chapel in London. It later became known as the Metropolitan Tabernacle. When he started preaching there in 1854, there were about 300 members. By the time of his death in 1892 - he lived to only be 57 years old. I've got a lot of life in me, being 57 years of age. But by the time he had passed away, his church had brought in through their membership process some 14,000 people in just 38 years of serving as pastor there.

At the height of his ministry, he had expanded the Metropolitan Tabernacle. I've been there in London. It's smaller now, but at its height, it could seat 6,000 people. Now, just to give you a little bit of comparison here, this room seats 4,100. His room seated 6,000 people. He'd fill it to capacity at a Sunday morning service and a Sunday evening service. It was no doubt the largest Protestant church in the world at the time, and his sermons were printed each week in the local newspapers and carried throughout London and around the world.

I tell people that I'm still waiting on that phone call from the Houston Chronicle saying that they want to print my sermons and send them out in their distribution. I haven't gotten the phone call yet.

In his time, he built an orphanage. He started a school to train up pastors. He also started a media ministry, if you will, like us. Through this initiative, we're wanting to increase our digital broadcast ministry. At the time, his media ministry was print production. That was the form of communication at the time.

He started a magazine in 1865 for the express purpose of discipling believers through his sermons and articles. He wanted to extend to a wider audience and cast vision to a wider audience about what he believed God was calling him and leading the Metropolitan Tabernacle to do.

The name of the magazine was The Sword and the Trowel. I've got a picture of the very first edition on the screen for you. You'll see on the cover of this very first edition why I'm showing it to you and telling you all of this today. That's a picture of Nehemiah on the cover. He's got a sword in one hand and a trowel in the other.

The image and the language of the sword and the trowel are based on the passage we're going to look at in

Nehemiah today. It was imagery that spoke to Spurgeon's heart because it's what he wanted communicated to his audience: This magazine was going to help build up the kingdom. That was the trowel. It was going to fight for truth. That was the sword.

This wasn't just a clever name. At this time in Spurgeon's ministry, he was under attack by a lot of people. They didn't like his biblical preaching and his messages. So that sword and the trowel had a real meaning to him.

Just a little interesting side note here: I am holding in my hand - I'll show it to you right here - the actual trowel that Spurgeon used to lay the first brick to the Pastors' College. If you can't read it, I'll read it to you. It says, "Presented to C.H. Spurgeon by the deacons of the Metropolitan Tabernacle when the first stone was laid at the Pastors' College on October the 14th, 1873."

This is on display at the Lanier Theological Library, and they allowed me to show it to you today. It's unbelievable.

With this in mind, I want us to look at our passage today. I'm calling the message, if you're taking notes, "Staying Committed."

Nehemiah understood what Spurgeon understood. It's what we here at Champion Forest need to understand today: Whenever God calls us to a great work, we better have a trowel in one hand and a sword in the other. This is what staying committed looks like.

I want us to look at our text, beginning in Nehemiah chapter 4. I'm going to break this sermon up into three sections. We're going to see two threats that can short-circuit our commitment. Then we're going to look at how Nehemiah dealt with those threats - how he met them head-on. Then, as we've done every week of this series, we're going to give some next steps, specifically as they relate to what we're walking through here at Champion Forest.

## Outside Opposition and Discouragement

Let's look at threat number one. I'm calling this outside opposition. The danger of outside opposition is that it could produce discouragement.

Look at Nehemiah chapter 4, starting in verse 1:

*Now when Sanballat heard that we were building the wall, he was angry and greatly enraged, and he jeered at the Jews.*

*And he said in the presence of his brothers and of the army of Samaria, "What are these feeble Jews doing? Will they restore it for themselves? Will they sacrifice? Will they finish up in a day? Will they revive the stones out of the heaps of rubbish, and burned ones at that?"*

— Nehemiah 4:1-2

Now, if this is your first time here in a few weeks, I want to encourage you to go online, listen to previous messages, download our app, and listen to these messages because they build on top of one another.

If you missed this last week, we were introduced to Sanballat and a few of his friends. These guys totally rejected what Nehemiah and the people of Israel were trying to do. What we're going to see is that their opposition gets increasingly more aggressive.

They started out in chapter 2, verse 10, just displeased that the work was even being attempted. Then you go to chapter 2, verses 19 and 20, and they start jeering and ridiculing Nehemiah and the people. If you remember, they tried to intimidate Nehemiah.

These guys were mean-spirited. They were cynical. They were troublemakers. They were agitators. Nehemiah was pretty blunt with them. He said, "Look, you have no part. You're not going to help us build this wall. You have no part in Jerusalem. You have no part with God's people, and you're certainly not going to get a say in what we're doing."

Well, that didn't go over very well. They're back, and they are at it again. The original plan for creating fear through intimidation didn't work, so now they're angry. The Bible says in verse 1 that they are greatly enraged. Translation: They are hot.

They start jeering and ridiculing even more. They turn the temperature up. Sanballat says in the presence of his brothers and the army of Samaria, "What are these feeble Jews doing? Will they restore it for themselves? Will they sacrifice?"

This was a shot at God. "This city has been destroyed for a hundred years, and now God's going to come through? He's going to allow them to build the wall so they can sacrifice and worship their God?" It's just mockery.

"Are they going to finish up in a day? Will they revive the stones out of the heaps of rubbish, and burned ones at that?"

*Tobiah the Ammonite was beside him, and he said, "Yes, what they are building - if a fox goes up on it he will break down their stone wall!"*

— Nehemiah 4:3

Now, I've got to tell you, Nehemiah is a lot more spiritual than me, okay? I'd have been rolling up my sleeves, ready for a fight. But Nehemiah doesn't do that. He just does what he always does. He doesn't get too bent out of shape. He just turns it over to the Lord in prayer.

Now, it's an imprecatory prayer, where he prays judgment and a curse on them, but it's prayer nonetheless. Look at verses 4 and 5:

*Hear, O our God, for we are despised. Turn back their taunt on their own heads and give them up to be plundered in a land where they are captives.*

*Do not cover their guilt, and let not their sin be blotted out from your sight, for they have provoked you to anger in the presence of the builders.*

— Nehemiah 4:4-5

Nehemiah knew that his work represented a bigger picture of what God was doing. They weren't just rejecting Nehemiah and the builders of Jerusalem. They were rejecting God. So he says, "Turn it over to them. Shame them, God."

I love verse 6. Talk about staying committed:

*So we built the wall. And all the wall was joined together to half its height, for the people had a mind to work.*

— Nehemiah 4:6

That word "mind" there was a heart-level commitment. They weren't just working and putting in half an effort. No, they were all in - heart, mind, and soul.

But the opposition doesn't go away. I'm going to work this out more in a later section in this sermon, but it's important to note that God didn't answer Nehemiah's prayer the way he prayed it right away. He didn't answer his prayer immediately.

Rather, they're not mean girls; they're mean guys. These mean guys are right back after Nehemiah. Look at verses 7 and 8:

*But when Sanballat and Tobiah and the Arabs and the Ammonites and the Ashdodites heard that the repairing of the walls of Jerusalem was going forward and that the breaches were beginning to be closed, they were very angry.*

*And they all plotted together to come and fight against Jerusalem and to cause confusion in it.*

— Nehemiah 4:7-8

Talk about a threat from the outside. These agitators are stepping it up. It's no longer jeering, ridicule, and mockery. Now it's the threat of combat - actual warfare.

Again, you'll see a theme here. How does Nehemiah respond? Look at verse 9:

*And we prayed to our God and set a guard as a protection against them day and night.*

— Nehemiah 4:9

We did what? We prayed. His response was always prayer.

We talked a little bit about this last week. Nehemiah has this lethal combination throughout his life of planning and praying - praying and planning. He does what he can do, and he trusts and calls on God to do what only God can do.

In other words, he didn't just pray and do nothing. Instead, he prayed, he acted, he took responsibility, and he worked.

I shared this quote from St. Augustine last week: "Pray as though everything depended on God, and work as though everything depended on you."

This was Nehemiah - diligent in prayer and diligent in taking responsibility and doing what he could personally do. What could Nehemiah do? He could pray. He could plan and strategize. He could initiate a plan. He could encourage and coach up those who were helping him rebuild the wall. He could lead by example. He does all of these things and more.

Look at verses 10 through 14:

*In Judah it was said, "The strength of those who bear the burdens is failing. There is too much rubble. By ourselves we will not be able to rebuild the wall."*

*And our enemies said, "They will not know or see till we come among them and kill them and stop the work."*

*At that time the Jews who lived near them came from all directions and said to us ten times, "You must return to us."*

*So in the lowest parts of the space behind the wall, in open places, I stationed the people by their clans, with their swords, their spears, and their bows.*

*And I looked and arose and said to the nobles and to the officials and to the rest of the people, "Do not be afraid of them. Remember the Lord, who is great and awesome, and fight for your brothers, your sons, your daughters, your wives, and your homes."*

— Nehemiah 4:10-14

The people are at the halfway point, and they're tired. They're looking around. They've been working day and night, and there's still rubble all over the ground. They're only halfway there. They see that there is still a lot of work to do. On top of that, they've got their enemies threatening them.

These Jews came from all over to help rebuild the wall, so they left their homes and their families. These enemies are going to their villages and their cities, and they're stirring up all kinds of trouble. They're saying, "Your husband has gone to rebuild the wall. We're going to take care of him. We're going to war. He may not come home. Your dad, whom you love so much - we're about to see how much he can fight because we're going."

So the people from all the towns and villages come to Jerusalem, and they're telling their loved ones who are building the wall, ten times, "Come on back home."

But Nehemiah has a plan. In the lowest parts of the space behind the wall, in open places, he stations the people by their clans. He puts them with their family - people they knew, people they loved, people they cared about. That's wisdom right there. He gives them swords and spears and bows.

Then he says, "Don't be afraid of them. Remember the Lord, who is great and awesome. Fight for your brothers and your sons and your daughters and your wives and your homes."

I mean, this is the greatest Braveheart speech ever given, right?

Do you know what Nehemiah is doing here? He's encouraging the people to stay committed to the task at hand - to what God has called them to. Do you know why he's encouraging them? This is not a trick question. It's because they're discouraged.

That's what opposition from the outside does. It produces discouragement. I don't know of a greater human emotion that will cut off our desire to stay committed more than the emotion of discouragement.

That's why this threat from the outside was so dangerous. If it wasn't dealt with in a proper way, if it wasn't managed in a spiritually mature way, that discouragement could cause people to give up and quit on what God had called them to do.

These people are at a place where they're halfway there. They're tired. They're looking around and seeing that they still have a lot to do. Then there's all the noise from the outside. Loved ones are saying, "Come home." They're hearing about a threat of war, and they're just discouraged. It's naturally wearing them down. The threat of quitting because of discouragement is real.

We know this to be true, right? How many of us - okay, you don't have to raise your hand - have started a diet? You're running, you're cutting calories, and then you get on the scale after a week and it's like, "Plus three." You're discouraged, and it's hard to stay committed when you're discouraged.

Some of you have said in your marriage, "Man, I want a better marriage." So you go all in just to be a better spouse. As soon as you start, you and your spouse are in conflict. You get discouraged. "Is it even worth trying to be a better partner?" It's hard to stay committed when you're discouraged. It's a real enemy.

In Nehemiah's case, the source of discouragement was outside opposition, and it doesn't stop in chapter 4. As a matter of fact, just skip over to chapter 6. This comes in a personal attack on Nehemiah:

*Now when Sanballat and Tobiah and Geshem the Arab and the rest of our enemies heard that I had built the wall and that there was no breach left in it - although up to that time I had not set up the doors in the gates -*

*Sanballat and Geshem sent to me, saying, "Come and let us meet together at Hakkephirim in the plain of Ono." But they intended to do me harm.*

— Nehemiah 6:1-2

Ono was a retreat location. It was where the wealthier citizens would go for vacation. Think of it as 30A, all right? It was a nice place.

They said, "Nehemiah, come on down to Ono. Come on down to 30A, and let's talk. You've been working. You've been getting after it for six weeks now, constantly encouraging the people." A break probably sounded pretty nice.

But Nehemiah, I believe because he was a praying man, sees right through it. He says:

*And I sent messengers to them, saying, "I am doing a great work and I cannot come down. Why should the work stop while I leave it and come down to you?"*

— Nehemiah 6:3

This is clarity of calling if I've ever seen it in the Scriptures. He was staying committed, focused on the task at hand. What God had called him to do, he was going to complete.

I read this and say, "Dear God, give us a church full of people with this kind of mindset right here. We are not

coming down off the wall until we complete what God has told us to do. We're going to have a mind to work. God, give us that kind of heart."

Nehemiah says:

*And they sent to me four times in this way, and I answered them in the same manner.*

— Nehemiah 6:4

Nehemiah says, "Oh no," to Ono. All right? Not going to do it.

Then, in the same way:

*In the same way Sanballat for the fifth time sent his servant to me with an open letter in his hand.*

*In it was written, "It is reported among the nations, and Geshem also says it, that you and the Jews intend to rebel; that is why you are building the wall. And according to these reports you wish to become their king.*

*And you have also set up prophets to proclaim concerning you in Jerusalem, 'There is a king in Judah.' And now the king will hear of these reports. So now come and let us take counsel together."*

— Nehemiah 6:5-7

The king is Artaxerxes, who, I want to remind you, stopped the rebuilding project about 20 years before because of the same rumor - that there was going to be a king established in Jerusalem and that they were going to rebel against him.

Now Sanballat, Geshem, and Tobiah are spreading all these rumors, false accusations, and personal attacks. They say, "The king's going to hear this report. You're trying to set up your kingdom. You're trying to become king."

Let me just say this: From a spiritual leadership standpoint, all a leader has is his integrity. I'm just telling you, from a pastor's standpoint, all I have is my personal integrity. If I lose that, I lose influence. I bring disgrace to the name of Christ. All I've got as a leader is my integrity.

That's what Nehemiah has, and here he's being attacked. I can't imagine how discouraging that would be, for rumors and false accusations to spread when none of it is true. It had to be discouraging to Nehemiah.

How is he going to respond? He says in verse 8:

*Then I sent to him, saying, "No such things as you say have been done, for you are inventing them out of your own mind."*

*For they all wanted to frighten us, thinking, "Their hands will drop from the work, and it will not be done." But now, O God, strengthen my hands.*

— Nehemiah 6:8-9

He simply ignores it. What does he do? It's the response that's on repeat throughout Nehemiah. He prays, "Strengthen my hands, God."

You keep reading in verses 10 through 14. We don't have time to go into it, but he has a friend come to him, a spiritual friend, who says, "Hey, come off the wall, and I'll hide you in the temple. That way, these guys don't find you."

He understands that this opposition is coming from a friend. It's wrapped in spiritual clothing. Again, because of his discernment, which I attribute to his prayer life, he avoids the trap. He sees through the deception.

What could have been very discouraging for Nehemiah - being personally attacked, being betrayed by a friend who says, "Come on and hide out in the church. I'll take care of you" - instead of giving in to discouragement, Nehemiah pushes through. He stays committed. He stays on mission, and he leads Israel to do the same.

## Inside Conflict and Division

Now let's look at threat number two. Where threat number one was outside opposition, threat two is inside conflict. Threat number one led to discouragement. The danger with inside conflict is that it leads to division.

Go back to chapter 5. Look at verse 1. Here's the internal conflict:

*Now there arose a great outcry of the people and of their wives against their Jewish brothers.*

*For there were those who said, "With our sons and our daughters, we are many. So let us get grain, that we may eat and keep alive."*

*There were also those who said, "We are mortgaging our fields, our vineyards, and our houses to get grain because of the famine."*

*And there were those who said, "We have borrowed money for the king's tax on our fields and our vineyards.*

*Now our flesh is as the flesh of our brothers, our children are as their children. Yet we are forcing our sons and our daughters to be slaves, and some of our daughters have already been enslaved, but it is not in our power to help it, for other men have our fields and our vineyards."*

— Nehemiah 5:1-5

I'll explain this in just a moment, but let me say this: It's one thing for threats to come from the outside and create fear and panic. Typically, when threats come from the outside, they draw people together. It makes them stronger because they have to rely on one another. The threat is from the outside.

But threats from the inside are so dangerous because they don't make us stronger. Instead, they have the potential to make us weaker. Why? Because they divide us.

This is what Nehemiah and the people were facing in chapter 5. It's the danger of division.

Listen to this: Regardless of where the opposition is coming from, regardless of where the threat is coming from - whether it's outside opposition or inside conflict - the author is the same. It's the enemy. It's the devil. The Bible calls him our adversary for a reason.

I want you to remember that our adversary, the devil, will do anything he can to thwart the purposes of God. And listen to me, Christian: He will use anyone he can to thwart the purposes of God, even believers.



So, Christians, I'm calling you to be wise to the schemes of the enemy.

Commentator Warren Wiersbe said, "When the enemy fails in his attacks from the outside, he then begins to attack from within." One of his favorite weapons is selfishness. That's what verses 1 through 5, when you boil it all down, are all about.

One commentator said that among the people of Israel, there was an epidemic of selfishness and greed.

To summarize what's going on, the people are working and building the walls to the city, but their families back home aren't doing well. They've got these threats coming from the outside, but internally, in verse 2, they're starving and can't feed their own families.

In verse 3, people who had land were having to mortgage it to feed their families. Do you know whom they were selling it to? Rich Jewish people who were taking it right out from under them. They were taking advantage of the poor.

In verse 4, you had people who owned land who were having to borrow money to pay the king's taxes, and they were being charged an extravagant amount of interest.

In verse 5, the wealthy Jewish leaders - that's "the flesh of our brothers" - were loaning money, but they were taking collateral for it. Do you know what they were taking as collateral? Their wives and kids, essentially making them slaves.

Just take a step back and realize what Nehemiah is going through here. The most important building project in the last 100 years is going on in the city. They're trying to do something great for God, and yet there's sin in the camp because the rich are preying on the poor, and the spiritual leadership isn't doing anything about it. They're not holding anyone accountable.

We'll see Nehemiah's response to this in just a moment. He was actually angrier at the internal threat than he was at the outward threat. Look at verse 6:

*I was very angry when I heard their outcry and these words.*

— Nehemiah 5:6

Nehemiah is hot because the Jewish people are taking advantage of their own people. He lets them have it.

Internal conflict will totally destroy a movement of God. Nehemiah knew it, and this is why he jumps on it.

Listen to what Pastor Stephen Davey writes: "From the very first church in Jerusalem, to the church in Corinth, to the church today, the greatest threat to the testimony and advancement of Christianity may very well be Christians."

What an indictment - and he's not wrong.

The selfishness, the backbiting, Christians who are believers in the Lord Jesus Christ but don't submit to the Holy Spirit and instead let their flesh well up in them - gossip and murmuring - internal conflict can short-circuit a move and work of God because it divides. God will not bless division.

*Behold, how good and pleasant it is  
when brothers dwell in unity!*

— Psalm 133:1

In Jesus' last prayer, in John 17, He says:

*I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word,  
that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you,  
that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me.*

— John 17:20-21

He's praying for us. What does He pray? That we may all be one.

Unity and oneness are a powerful testimony to a watching world. We have to make sure that nothing comes into the fellowship of faith that could threaten to divide and mess up what God sees as precious.

That's why this NEXT initiative, if we're all in together, is a beautiful testimony to the Lord - oneness of mind and heart and spirit.

## How Nehemiah Stayed Committed

It's interesting when you study Nehemiah. His strategy for staying committed never wavers. There are three actions. He does them over and over and over. I'll walk you through them very quickly.

First, he prays. Over and over and over, he prays. There are nine prayers in the book of Nehemiah, four of them in the text we looked at today. It was his first response in every situation to pray. At every turn, he prayed.

I think this is why he could rise above the personal attacks. I think this is why he could stay committed. I think this is why he could keep the big picture of rebuilding the wall - and what it was really all about - important. It's because he was a praying man.

By the way, God didn't immediately answer his prayers, but he stayed with it. It's a good lesson for us that sometimes God delays in answering our prayers.

The question is, will we stay faithful to the task God has called us to, even when He isn't answering our prayers immediately? Nehemiah sure did.

Second, he confronts. You read Nehemiah 4, 5, and 6. He didn't turn a blind eye to the issues that were going on, whether it was outward opposition or internal conflict. He confronted it. He met it head-on. He rebuked those who needed to be rebuked.

Whether it was Sanballat, Tobiah, and Geshem, or whether it was the Jewish elite of the day or the spiritual leaders, he was an equal opportunist in calling people out.

Just read Nehemiah 5:7-13. I don't have time to look at it, but essentially, in verse 7, he takes counsel. He looks within. I'm sure he was praying. Then he cuts loose and lets them have it.

He rails at the Jewish elite. They need to pay all this money back. They need to give the land back. They need to stop charging interest. He rails at them.

Then he looks at the spiritual leadership. Do you know what he does? He takes his robe - I think I've got a mint in here I want to throw out - and he empties his pockets. He says, "If you don't start calling this out and doing what God's telling you to do, this is what I hope God does to you. I hope He empties your life out."

If you read it, all of them got the message. They turned, repented, and changed. But Nehemiah confronted it and met it head-on.

It wasn't always pleasant. It's not always pleasant when we have to confront division, but it's needed. Scripture says:

*Faithful are the wounds of a friend;  
profuse are the kisses of an enemy.*

— Proverbs 27:6

We can learn from Nehemiah in this. We need to confront when something is threatening our unity. We need to confront when someone is opposing the advancement of God's agenda. It's okay to confront.

We need to confront sin and confront those who outwardly oppose the work of God. But take note: Nehemiah's strongest rebuke wasn't for those outside the church. His strongest rebuke was for those inside causing division.

He prays. He confronts.

Third, he works.

I love the fact that Nehemiah leads by example. We'll see this next week. Even in giving to the work of this building project, Nehemiah leads the way in his generosity. That's what we'll see next week on our Commitment Day. He led the way.

He certainly led the way by example in this rebuilding. I love that when the enemies were on the outside opposing them and trying to discourage them, Nehemiah just put the people to work, and he was right there beside them.

He wasn't hiding out in a palace. No, no. He was right there with them.

Notice verse 15 of Nehemiah 4:

*When our enemies heard that it was known to us and that God had frustrated their plan, we all returned to the wall, each to his work.*

*From that day on, half of my servants worked on construction, and half held the spears, shields, bows, and coats of mail. And the leaders stood behind the whole house of Judah,*

*who were building on the wall. Those who carried burdens were loaded in such a way that each labored on the work with one hand and held his weapon with the other.*

*And each of the builders had his sword strapped at his side while he built. The man who sounded the trumpet was beside me.*

*And I said to the nobles and to the officials and to the rest of the people, "The work is great and widely spread, and we are separated on the wall, far from one another.*

*In the place where you hear the sound of the trumpet, rally to us there. Our God will fight for us."*

*So we labored at the work, and half of them held the spears from the break of dawn until the stars came out.*

*I also said to the people at that time, "Let every man and his servant pass the night within Jerusalem, that they may be a guard for us by night and may labor by day."*

*So neither I nor my brothers nor my servants nor the men of the guard who followed me, none of us took off our clothes; each kept his weapon at his right hand.*

— Nehemiah 4:15-23

There it is: the sword and the trowel. If there's going to be a conflict, we're going to blow the trumpet, and we're going to come to one place. God will fight for us.

Look at this. Nehemiah led by example. Neither he, nor his brothers, nor his servants, nor the men of the guard who followed him took off their clothes. Each kept his weapon at his right hand.

I want to highlight the second part of verse 6: "The people had a mind to work."

Do you know why? Because their leader was working.

I'm so grateful. I tell our team all the time that I'm grateful for a mom and a dad who taught me work ethic. My dad was a blue-collar brick mason. I've told you before, he would wake me up on Saturdays after I played a Friday night football game to go cut firewood in North Louisiana. It never snowed or got icy in North Louisiana, ever. But he wasn't going to let me sleep in. "Get up. Work." Work ethic.

My mom was a nurse for 40-plus years. She worked as long as she could work.

Nehemiah responded to opposition from the outside and conflict from the inside in the exact same way: He prayed, he confronted, and he worked.

## Next Steps

Now I want to close with some next steps, and I want to make this specific to next Sunday's Commitment Sunday. I'm going to base them all on what we see here and what we read today.

Number one, I want you to saturate your decision in prayer.

This makes sense, doesn't it? Nehemiah saturated everything he did in prayer. When we talk about giving - bringing our first and best, our three-year pledge to the Lord - I want to challenge you: Don't just do the math. Don't just do what's comfortable or what seems right. Saturate your decision in prayer.

If you're married, I encourage you to go to your prayer closet as a spouse. You go to your prayer closet, and y'all pray about it. Come together, and then talk about it.

Debbie and I did that last week. I couldn't believe it. I don't think she could either. For the first time in 23 years, when it came to our first and best offering, we were on the same page. It was amazing. It's a miracle. We both just bowed down and worshiped right there. God is amazing.

Now, on a three-year pledge, it was a little bit different. We weren't on the same page, so that took prayer. That took discussion.

But I want to encourage you: The key is to pray it through. We've been talking all fall about going by faith. That's what Hebrews 11 was about. Next week, if we're going to be all in and do what God is telling us to do, the decision you make has to be saturated in prayer.

Number two, I want you to see this initiative as an act of fighting together.

At the end of the message next week, when we come and lay our offerings before the Lord, we are blowing the trumpet - not literally, of course, but symbolically. We're rallying to the same place, and we're saying, "We're all in this together."

Again, it's not equal gifts; it's equal sacrifice. "God, I'm going to do what You're telling me to do."

Next Sunday, we come together. We're blowing the trumpet. We're rallying to the cause. We see this initiative as an act of us being all in together. We are doing a great work, and we're going to do it together.

Third and finally, I want you to remember what this is all about.

What we're doing next week is about people more than projects. What we're doing next week has eternal consequences. We're standing on the shoulders of those who came before us. This is not new for Champion Forest. This is NEXT.

I got a text message this week. I read it to our staff in our chapel time, and I could barely get through it. I was weeping. I want to read it to you right now. It's from a leader in our church. Some of you may know him. I asked permission to share this so I can say his name. It's Hayden Austin. He teaches an adult life group.

Listen to what he texted me last week. What we're doing is way bigger than us. Remember what this is all about.

He said, "I moved to the Klein area from South Houston in 1996. I started attending Champion Forest with my dad in late 1996. When I turned 16, I was given a job working at the Family Life Center from 1997 to 1999, working the front desk of the gym, where I met so many amazing believers who impacted my walk with the Lord.

"I attended every summer youth camp in Panama City, where I made friends and brothers in Christ for life. Lauren and I met in 1999 at the newly constructed youth building, the Haven, back when Eric Hill and Mike Taylor led the youth group. Lauren and I were later married in the newly built chapel right here in 2004.

"I'm sure each of these buildings had a campaign drive associated with it, and I know I was sponsored to attend youth camp by generous anonymous givers."

Thank God.

This is what I want you to hear. This initiative is about way more than us. Remember what it's all about next week when we come to Commitment Sunday.

He said, "I'm sure each of these buildings had a campaign drive associated with it. Thank God faithful and giving members of Champion Forest said yes to the call, the vision, and the mission. Their yes gave me a job in high school, grew me in my walk with God as a teenager, led me to meeting my wife, and ultimately led me to marrying her 22 years ago. I just want you to know, we are in, Champion Forest."

Next week is a watershed day for us, when we by faith say, "From Northwest Houston to the world." We stretch by faith in what we give - our first and best offering and our pledge - and we say by faith, "We're going to stay committed to what God is calling us to."

What we are embarking on is way more than just projects. It's about that person up the north 249 corridor, in North Magnolia, where right now there's a family desperately in need, with a son or daughter who doesn't know Christ. Quite frankly, they haven't found a church, or maybe they're not even looking right now.

It's about that young man in Nepal who's never even heard the name of Jesus.

It's about those 7,000 people in Spain who don't have a gospel-centered church. They don't know it yet, but what we do next Sunday might have something to do with their eternal destiny.

That's what it's all about.

So I'm asking you, Champion Forest, to come next week with your sword and with your trowel, and let's lay the first brick of what God's going to do. It's going to be way more than we could ever ask, think, or imagine.

Amen.