

Time to Celebrate

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NEXT: From Northwest Houston to the World | March 22, 2026 | Nehemiah 12

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

Good morning. I want to invite you to grab your Bibles and turn to Nehemiah chapter 12.

We have been on quite a journey together these last couple of months. This NEXT season has been something else, and I want to thank you, church, for how you have received this vision that we believe the Lord has set before us, how you have embraced this vision, and how you have responded during this time.

I told our staff at our staff advance in January, and I believe I mentioned it to you at the beginning of this series, that real success as we make our way through this NEXT initiative is not just in raising the funds needed to accomplish our goals. Real success is to come through this campaign, this NEXT initiative, stronger in our faith, stronger in our unity, bonded together as one, eyes on the Lord, and with a sense of confidence that we are doing exactly what God has called us to do.

I really believe that God has answered our prayers on this. I can't tell you the number of meetings that I've had, emails that I've received, text messages, and conversations - and not just me, but our entire staff team and our vision team. You talk to them, and the encouragement and support that we have received regarding this NEXT initiative has just been amazing.

I'm calling the message today "Time to Celebrate." We have termed this Sunday Celebration Sunday. At the end of our time together today, we're going to reveal to you what has taken place as it relates to our first and best offering, what we as a church have given. We're going to share with you what we have decided to pledge, what we have in cash on hand, and the total amount of money given to this NEXT initiative.

Here's what I want to do. I want to set all of this up this morning by reminding us of what NEXT is all about. What is it that we're setting out to do? We may have some new people here who have just been coming to Champion Forest in the last several weeks. Others of you have maybe been here just sporadically through this, and you're saying, "Now, what is NEXT all about?"

So I want to remind you of that. Then I want us to take our journey through Nehemiah up to where we are today, Nehemiah chapter 12. Then we'll close the message out and reveal why we're here to celebrate.

Sound like a plan? Let's get after it, okay?

What Is NEXT All About?

We have five major components that fit within this NEXT initiative, what we're trying to accomplish through this campaign. If you recall, we said these five components fit within the focus priorities of our church - what we do

as a church, our mission as a church.

If you've been here for any length of time, you know what we are about. We are all about making disciples, focus priority number one. We are about loving our community, focus priority number two. And we are about strengthening the global church, focus priority number three.

This is what we're about, and all five components of our NEXT initiative fit under these umbrellas. We're not trying to do something new here, but we are funneling everything that we're attempting to do through the focus priorities and the mission of this church.

Our tagline for NEXT has been "From Northwest Houston to the World," and our theme verse was Isaiah chapter 54, verse 2. It says this:

*Enlarge the place of your tent,
and let the curtains of your habitations be stretched out;
do not hold back;
lengthen your cords
and strengthen your stakes.*

— Isaiah 54:2

There was a sense of urgency there: "Do not hold back." Everything we are seeking to do in this NEXT initiative is about the expansion and advance of the gospel. That is lengthening our cords. And it's all about deepening our faith, our commitment, and our discipleship. That is strengthening the stakes. It's going deep, and it is going wide.

The five components of NEXT were, first, we are looking to remodel this worship center. It has served us well for 23 years, and we want to get it in a position to serve us for the next 20-plus years.

Second, we are adding 15,000 square feet to our North Klein discipleship space for adults and for children, as well as adding a much-needed parking lot at our North Klein facility.

Third, we're expanding our digital and broadcast ministry. In other words, we want to take, again, from Northwest Houston to the world, the messages that are preached here, both in English and in Spanish, and we want to get them out over the airwaves in every way that we can - through streaming, radio, television, the internet, any way that we can.

Fourth, we have an international church planting piece attached to this, where we have partnered with three major mission organizations that have been longtime partners with Champion Forest. We want to saturate four cities in Europe in our partnership with Greater European Mission. We want to help a church planting movement begin in Nepal with our mission partnership with For All Mankind Movement. Then we are partnering with the International Mission Board to begin a church planting residency in Madrid. That's the international church planting piece.

Then we are planning to start a third campus in the Magnolia area. This project was to set aside a certain amount of money for land acquisition, should that land come up and present itself. We wanted a little nest egg

available to be able to grow that nest egg should land ever come up.

These five projects make up the NEXT initiative.

Our Journey Through Nehemiah

What we've done over the course of the last six weeks or so is walk through the book of Nehemiah. Nehemiah is a great book when you're setting out to do something great for the Lord. It's a great book to study when you want God to come through in a big way. It involves teamwork and vision. It involves sacrifice and hard work.

We've looked chapter by chapter at the book of Nehemiah, and today we come to chapter 12.

As a reminder of where we've been, Nehemiah was a cupbearer to the king of Persia. This was a very powerful and prominent position. While he's serving the king of Persia, he receives word. This is Nehemiah chapter 1. His brother comes back from being in Jerusalem. He was one of the first groups from the exile who went back to Jerusalem.

When he comes to report to Nehemiah what is taking place in the city, he communicates that Jerusalem, the holy city of God, is in disarray. The walls are down. The gates of the city are burned, and morale in the city of God is at a low.

When Nehemiah hears this message, it breaks him. As a matter of fact, it was such bad news to him that, if you remember what we talked about in that message, it causes him to sit down. The Bible says he weeps. He humbles himself. He begins to fast, and for four months he does nothing but pray. Before he ever had a plan, he prayed.

When God opens a door for Nehemiah to have a conversation with the king, Nehemiah steps out on faith and asks the king for permission to go back to the city of his ancestors and help rebuild the city. He doesn't only ask the king for permission to go back; he asks the king to sponsor the trip, to pay for it.

In the sovereignty of God, the king allows Nehemiah to go back. He travels 800 miles from Persia to Jerusalem. When he gets to the city, he and a small group of people go out under the cover of darkness. They don't want anybody to see them. They walk around the city, and they see the walls in disrepair. I assume they prayer walk, and they're just observing what's going on.

Then they call the people together, and Nehemiah issues this challenge to the people. He says, "It's time to rise up and build."

What you begin to see take place is this extraordinary amount of teamwork. The people come together, and Nehemiah's project actually becomes the people's project. Shoulder to shoulder, they stand repairing the walls of the city.

Now, I want you to remember that the walls of the city were representative of their lives. Those walls represented safety and security. It wasn't as much about the rebuilding of the physical walls of Jerusalem as it was about what the rebuilding represented and what it allowed for.

The rebuilding was so that they could move back into the city, repopulate the city, and thrive in the city. They could worship as they wanted to worship in the city without fear of attack or opposition coming from the outside.

Nehemiah calls this work of rebuilding the walls in chapter 4 a great work. We learn that with every great work we attempt to do for the Lord, opposition comes. It certainly did for Nehemiah and the people of Israel. They had people on the outside who were threatening them, mocking them, ridiculing them, and lying about them. They had internal conflict from the inside that was threatening this rebuilding.

Nehemiah deals with all of it, and he keeps them together. If you remember, he gives the people a trowel in one hand and a sword in the other, and he encourages them to stay at work. He even says in Nehemiah chapter 4, verse 20:

Our God will fight for us.

— Nehemiah 4:20

They were accomplishing something great for God. There was a sense of urgency in what they were doing, and it took hard work and dedication. But ultimately, they finished the job.

What had been destroyed for a hundred years - the walls down and the gates burned for a hundred years - by God's grace and by God's power, they rebuilt what was broken in 52 days. It was a miracle. Everybody who was watching them work looked at it and said, "That doesn't happen without the help of their God."

In fact, Nehemiah chapter 6, verse 16, says:

For they perceived that this work had been accomplished with the help of our God.

— Nehemiah 6:16

All of them, inside of Israel and outside of Israel, when they saw what happened in 52 days, perceived that this work had been accomplished with the help of their God.

Then what happens is amazing. Nehemiah gathers the people together, and he brings out the scribes and the priests to read the Word of God to them and to explain it in a way that they can understand. If you remember, they stand from sunup to midday listening to the Word of God.

As they hear it and as it is explained to them in a way that they can understand, do you remember their response? They start crying. They understand that they haven't kept God's law, and it breaks them so much that they cry out a prayer of repentance and ask God for forgiveness: "We have not obeyed your law."

They sign a covenant. I mean, they put their names on it and say, "God, we commit today to do whatever you tell us to do." They commit that day that they're going to start doing what God tells them to do.

They exemplify this by bringing back the Feast of Tabernacles. They obey what is called for in the Feast of Tabernacles, not just by the letter of the law, but by the spirit. They do it exactly as the law commands, and Nehemiah says that hadn't been done since the days of Joshua.

It's a time of celebration, and it's a time of remembrance. They are rejoicing in what God has allowed them to be a part of.

You get to chapter 11, and they start moving back into the city. You've got people moving from the burbs back into the city, and there's great joy.

Then we get to chapter 12. Here's what I want you to see, big picture, in this passage, because what we see happening in Nehemiah chapter 12, I believe, is happening at Champion Forest right now through this NEXT initiative.

First, we notice that the people attempt something great for God's glory. We've talked about that. That's the rebuilding of the walls, and they actually achieve it.

Second, and this is Nehemiah chapter 12, which we're going to talk about today, the people consecrate themselves and their work to the Lord. We're going to work that out.

The end result of attempting something great for God's glory and consecrating themselves and their work to the Lord is that God gives them great joy.

This is the passage. This is the movement of the text, and this is our story today.

Consecration and Great Joy

Let's look at it. Nehemiah chapter 12, starting in verse 27. The Bible says this:

And at the dedication of the wall of Jerusalem, they sought the Levites in all their places, to bring them to Jerusalem to celebrate the dedication with gladness, with thanksgivings and with singing, with cymbals, harps, and lyres.

— Nehemiah 12:27

So here it is. The wall has been rebuilt, the Word has been read, people have repented, the covenant has been signed, and the city has been repopulated. They have attempted and achieved something for the glory of God. So what's next? Consecration.

Verse 28 tells us that they gather people together from surrounding villages that were in and around Jerusalem. Then look at verse 30:

And the priests and the Levites purified themselves, and they purified the people and the gates and the wall.

— Nehemiah 12:30

This act of purification is consecration. It's a way of saying, "Lord, our leaders are Yours. Lord, we are Yours. Lord, this wall that we've built is Yours. Lord, this city that we live in is Yours."

Now, this is huge right here. The people consecrate their work and their lives to the Lord. Notice they don't just move on after they rebuild the wall. Notice they don't just post it on their social media and then go about their regular business.

Instead, they gather everyone together. They worship. They sing. They make sacrifices. They give thanks. It's all an act of consecration where they say, "God, all that we have done is Yours, and all that we are is Yours."

Then look at verse 31:

Then I brought the leaders of Judah up onto the wall and appointed two great choirs that gave thanks. One went to the south on the wall to the Dung Gate.

— Nehemiah 12:31

Now, this is interesting. Do you remember when they were rebuilding the walls in the early stages, in Nehemiah chapter 4? They had some opponents, some naysayers, and some critics - Sanballat, Tobiah, and Geshem. Remember them?

They're working to rebuild this wall, and in Nehemiah chapter 4, verse 3, these guys come up to them and say, "What are y'all trying to do here? I mean, if a little old fox climbs up on this wall, it's going to crumble down."

But Nehemiah and the people didn't listen. They said, "We're doing too great a job. We're not coming down to meet with you. We're not stopping."

Now it's not a little fox up on top of the wall. According to Scripture here, you've got two great processions, two great choirs, standing on top of the wall. That wall is not going anywhere.

Scholars tell us it was around eight feet wide. So you get a large number of people widthwise, and then you've got people following them, these two great processions. What Nehemiah notes is that one choir started going south and another started making their way north.

I brought this picture of the walls of the city, the city of Jerusalem, the holy city of God, just to give you some context. You see the great wall surrounding it. Just imagine two great processions. What are they doing? They're walking the wall. One is going to the south, and the other is going to the north.

They are, again, consecrating the wall to the Lord. They are praising God and celebrating what He has done. Don't you know that when they walked across the wall, they remembered, "I laid that brick"?

These two great choirs meet together at the temple. Look at verse 38:

The other choir of those who gave thanks went to the north, and I followed them with half of the people, on the wall, above the Tower of the Ovens, to the Broad Wall.

— Nehemiah 12:38

Look at the first part of verse 40:

So both choirs of those who gave thanks stood in the house of God, and I and half of the officials with me.

— Nehemiah 12:40

He names some of the priests. He names some of the singers. Then look at verse 43. This is where we're camping out today. This is where we're going to spend our time.

And they offered great sacrifices that day and rejoiced, for God had made them rejoice with great joy; the women and children also rejoiced. And the joy of Jerusalem was heard far away.

— Nehemiah 12:43

I love that. They rejoiced with great joy, and the joy of Jerusalem was heard far away.

That's the third movement we see. They have attempted something great for the glory of God. Then they consecrate their work and themselves to the Lord.

When you think of consecration, we've got Mother's Day coming up in a few weeks, and we're going to have a parent-child commitment, baby dedication, child commitment - whatever we call it. What do we do? We bring these families up, and they have their child, and they symbolically offer that child to the Lord. They say, "God, this son, this daughter is Yours all of their days."

They're not giving the child away physically, but they're declaring, "God, this child is a gift from You, and they belong to You."

That's exactly what's happening in Nehemiah chapter 12. They're saying, "God, all that we've done and all that we are, it's Yours."

What is the result? Joy. Great joy.

This is what we're experiencing today. We've attempted something great for the glory of God. On Commitment Sunday, many of you came forward, dropped your sacrificial offering, laid it before the Lord, and consecrated it. Many of you paused and prayed here at the altar. Others of you prayed together in homes, and you laid it before the Lord: "God, this is Yours."

Today we come forward to celebrate what God has done, and we say, "Lord, all that we've done and all that we are is Yours."

Now, if you read chapter 13, we're not going to go into it today for a couple of reasons. One, time doesn't allow. Two, it's 10 years past the dedication of the wall, what we're reading about.

If you read it, Nehemiah goes back to Persia. When he comes back to visit Jerusalem, the people have not kept their commitment to the Lord, and Nehemiah calls them out once again.

It's just a good lesson to remember that we consecrate ourselves to the Lord, but really, consecration is a daily activity. "God, I'm Yours." Tomorrow morning, I'm going to have to wake up and say, "God, I'm Yours. All of me today."

But in chapter 12, in this moment, they mean it from their hearts: "God, we're giving You everything that we've got and all that we've done for Your glory."

What does God give them as a result? Ultimate joy.

Commentator Douglas Nykolaishen said this: "Great joy comes from both receiving God's gifts and devoting them to Him to use as He pleases."

Think about this: Receiving God's gifts and devoting them back to Him produces joy.

I want you to hear, in real life, several testimonies that speak to this whole idea of attempting something great for God's glory, consecrating our work and ourselves to Him, and the joy that He gives.

I mentioned on Commitment Sunday José from our Spanish ministry. He's an engineer and has a work visa as an engineer, but due to recent changes in immigration policies, he's waiting to see what's going to happen. There's a real chance that he might have to leave the country.

He says, "Despite the uncertainty, my faith remains strong. Since arriving at Champion Forest, this church has deeply impacted my life and the life of my family. I found in the children's ministry a place where my children are growing spiritually, as well as in the student ministry."

He says, "I don't know what will happen or where I will be, but I'm giving in faith because, just as this church has been a blessing to me and my family, it will be a blessing to others who do not yet know Jesus."

He's attempting something great for the glory of God, consecrating it, and even in times of uncertainty, God's given him joy.

Steve Allen, who works in our Connection Room after services, told me about a young man. I quote: "I met this young man over a year ago in the Connection Room. He came by after the 10:45 service on Commitment Sunday to share his experience with me. He said he's in between jobs, and he came to the church with \$200 in his pocket with no intention of participating in NEXT.

"He said as he stood there watching the congregation bring their sacrifices to the altar, God touched him and told him to take his \$200 to the altar. After giving God every excuse not to follow His call, he finally went forward and brought his sacrifice."

He said, listen to this, "The sense of obedience he felt was overwhelming. To God goes the glory."

Greg Krill, a member of our North Klein campus and a deacon in our church, came to First Saturday Prayer earlier this month, pulled me aside, and shared this story with me. I said, "Would you please just put that in writing and email it to me?" I asked him for permission to share it today.

He said, "When I first heard about the NEXT Initiative - you shared it with the deacons at the North Klein campus - I was really excited. My wife and I immediately started praying and knew that we wanted to be a part of it. We're excited to see what God is going to do in and through our church. We voiced our interest in being a part of the launch of the Magnolia campus.

"We then started praying about our NEXT commitment pledge and first offering. As Commitment Sunday approached, we sat down, prayed, and filled out our pledge card and our check for our first offering.

"During that week, the enemy came full force to attack and discourage us. A few days earlier, I had a procedure, and biopsies were taken from my stomach and esophagus. The news came back that both were positive, that cancer was detected.

"We were devastated and were trying to process the news, but we began to pray. That same day we got the biopsy news, my wife had to walk away from her job. So, in a matter of a few days, we got bad news and lost financial stability.

"We thought, 'Why, God? We just made our NEXT commitment.'

"The Saturday night before Commitment Sunday, the enemy really attacked, telling us that with all this going on, we could not follow through, that we were going to need those funds. The enemy whispered that others would step up. We didn't need to give.

"We were also questioned by others around us. If funds were going to be uncertain, and we didn't know what finances would be needed for medical expenses, then why would we still give and make a commitment if we didn't know that we could keep it?

"But we knew our God was faithful, and He would provide a way for us to keep our commitment and provide for the future. So Sunday came, and as they played the music, we prayed, held hands, and dropped our card and check in the basket."

Consecration.

"What a God we serve. That very week, we got a refund check from an overpayment. We got news that our mortgage payment went down, and our car insurance went down."

That's a miracle in and of itself.

"All praise to our Lord and Savior. At my follow-up, the doctor said the report was read incorrectly. We were given wrong information. No cancer. To God be the glory, honor, and praise."

He said, "He is faithful. Our life group, deacons, my prison ministry team, Bible study group, church staff and pastors, along with family and friends - their prayers were heard, and God answered."

He said, "Are we blessed? Yes. Are we thankful? Yes. Are we surprised? No. What God starts, He finishes. He gave us a desire to commit even in the midst of adversity. We stayed obedient, and He did the rest.

"I would tell anyone, don't let the enemy steal your blessing and joy. Be obedient, stay faithful, and watch God do amazing and wonderful things in and through your lives.

"My wife is still looking for employment, but we know that the perfect opportunity is coming, and one that will not only allow us to keep our commitment, but add to it, in Jesus' name.

"We love our church, Greg and Sandra Krill."

Amazing, isn't it? What a God we serve.

Champion Forest, it is Celebration Sunday. I think what you're going to see here in just a few minutes is the truth that we've talked about today. We have attempted something great for the glory of God. Today we consecrate our work and all that we are to God.

And you know what He's going to give us in return? Joy.

I'm praying that the joy He gives us, just like the joy of Jerusalem, will be heard far away.