

# God Works Through People

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NEXT: From Northwest Houston to the World - NK | March 22, 2026 | Nehemiah 11:1-30; Nehemiah 12:1-47

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

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I'm curious, does anyone recognize these pictures this morning? Any world travelers in the room? Do those jump out to anybody?

These are images of artifacts that have been cleaned up a little bit and are on display in the Louvre Museum in Paris. They're significantly bigger than they might appear in these pictures. They're fascinating. They're really, really incredible.

Take the bull statue, for instance. It's actually not a freestanding statue. That was placed on top of a 56-foot-tall column, and there were dozens just like it. They were found in the palace that Nehemiah actually prayed in at the very beginning of the book of Nehemiah, in Nehemiah chapter 1. All this was in the palace, and much, much more. A lot of it is now in the Louvre in Paris because when the palace was uncovered, historians were blown away by the beauty, the size, and the details of it.

This was a palace that was home to the most impressive empire in the world back in Nehemiah's day. It's just a reminder that as the book of Nehemiah opens, he is in the heart of the action, in the biggest, most impressive, most powerful empire in the world.

But we know that he didn't stay there. God had other plans for him. God moved him from the palace to the pile of rubble that was back in Jerusalem. Together, we've studied his journey for the past month and a half or two months. We knew that God had a different plan for him.

If you've got your Bible, open up to Nehemiah chapter 11. We're going to finish our book together in Nehemiah 11 and 12 this morning. As you're turning there, here's just a quick recap of where we've been so far in Nehemiah.

The people of God, as a result of their sin, were exiled, and they were far from home. Many of them were living close to that palace. Nehemiah was one of them.

While Nehemiah was far from home, he served as the cupbearer to the king. He lived and worked in the palace. While he was doing that job, he heard that Jerusalem was in ruins. If you flipped back to chapter 1, you'd see the specific state of the people. It said the people were in great trouble and great shame.

Nehemiah heard that, and immediately he was heartbroken over the spiritual well-being of the people of God back in his homeland of Israel, specifically in Jerusalem. We know that through miraculous circumstances, Nehemiah was able to leave the palace. He returned to Jerusalem with plans to rebuild the wall and eventually to rebuild the people as well.

He faced trouble constantly. There were enemies. There was opposition. But even so, Nehemiah and the people of God worked hard. They had great faith. They persevered. There was teamwork. There was a sense of unity among them. We read in the book that they completed the wall in miraculous time - about a month and a half.

Once the wall was done, I really love this part: the people of God focused on the Word of God. It was brought out and read over them from early in the morning until late in the day. As they heard the Word of God, their response was confession, prayer, and worship. We did that last Sunday morning. We set the day aside in here specifically for a time of prayer and worship. That's where the people of God were.

Now, as we step into chapters 11 and 12, we're going to see the people settle into the city. They're going to move in and put down roots. Then we're going to see them celebrate with great worship all that God has done.

Look with me at chapter 11, starting in verse 1. Even though all of this has already happened in Nehemiah and we're at the end of the book, we're still going to see God at work among his people.

*Now the leaders of the people lived in Jerusalem. And the rest of the people cast lots to bring one out of ten to live in Jerusalem, the holy city, while nine out of ten remained outside in other towns. And the people blessed all the men who willingly offered to live in Jerusalem.*

— Nehemiah 11:1-2

## God Works Through People

Our first point this morning is so very simple. It was true in the days of Nehemiah, and it's true right here, right now: God works through people.

Here we see people stepping up and moving into the city of Jerusalem. This is a big deal. To live in the city instead of the country would have honestly put a lot of these people at a great personal disadvantage. They had less land to farm. They had less land to raise livestock. They would have been more vulnerable to roaming armies because walled cities would always be attacked first.

But still, we had people moving into the city and investing their lives in the city because of what that specific city, Jerusalem, was about. Jerusalem was about the kingdom of God. It was about the glory of God. It was about the presence of God among the people of God, residing in the temple of God.

We read in verse 1 that some drew the short straw and had to move into the city. But in verse 2, we see a group of people willingly stepping up and moving into the city. Here's what they're doing: they willingly put the work of the Lord over their individual desires.

I'm going to say it again because I need to hear this over and over again for myself personally. I think we all do. This is a group of people who willingly put the work of God over their individual desires. They pursued the kingdom of God over their own safety. They pursued the kingdom of God over their own prosperity.

Talk about a heavenly mindset. Talk about a kingdom mindset. This is an example.

*And the people blessed all the men who willingly offered to live in Jerusalem.*

— Nehemiah 11:2

And rightly so. They were doing the hard thing for the glory of God, and because of it, they were blessed. Everyone else noticed and blessed them.

Here's the question for me and you this morning: Who should we bless? Looking around at our world today, who is willingly doing what is less advantageous to them personally, at least in the eyes of the world, for the sake of the Lord? Because that's what's happening as these people willingly move into the city.

As we wrestle with that question today and think about the people we could bless, we're probably not thinking about people who are moving into the city of Jerusalem. But we could be thinking about those people who are moving to faraway, hard-to-reach places.

We have families in our church who have picked up and left everything behind here. They live in some of the most dangerous countries for Christians in the world for the sake of the gospel. They're advancing the cause of Christ around the world and in places where, if I mentioned their names or locations here, it would be very, very dangerous to them. We should absolutely bless them for pursuing the kingdom of God over personal preference.

But it's not just those scenarios. I want you to listen to this well. We can't miss the fact that right here, right now, where we live, there are plenty of ways we can honor the Lord by doing the things no one else wants to do.

There was a very visible example in this room just a couple of weeks ago. We came to the front of the room and placed our commitment cards for NEXT in the offering baskets up here. We placed our first and best offering on the altar for the Lord up here.

That's a huge deal. I'm just telling you that the giving of our finances back to the Lord as an offering is a sacrifice. That's a sacrifice when we do that. There aren't a lot of people in our world today who are willing to do that. Bless you for being willing to participate in that.

We can keep looking around our church to find people doing what very few others want to do. As we look around, we see people doing what is challenging for them personally, all for the sake of the kingdom of God.

Walk through our kids ministry. Those who are serving there - many, many of you serve in there - are my Sunday morning heroes. Every week, they hold and rock babies and pray over them, that they'd grow up and one day know Jesus as their Savior. They spend time with our preschoolers and elementary school-age kids, telling them about the love of their heavenly Father and how cherished they are in the eyes of God.

Man, bless you for doing that. I know that some Sundays it'd be easier to serve somewhere else, but you are making a difference for the kingdom of God.

That's what's happening in chapter 11. People are stepping up to serve the Lord in ways that are far bigger than themselves. But if we think about it, that didn't begin in chapter 11, did it? We've seen it all throughout the

entire book: the people of God putting the purposes and plans of God ahead of their own personal preferences.

Nehemiah left that beautiful palace for a city that was in ruins, and there were a lot of people who picked up and went with him. Now many of them are moving into that city when country life would be much better for them.

As people put the plans of God first, God worked through them. We've said it from the very beginning of the book of Nehemiah: God worked through them for the spiritual well-being of others and, ultimately, for the glory of God.

Today, in that same way, as people put the work of God over personal preference or comfort, we still see God working in powerful ways.

## God's Faithfulness Is Seen Through People

The rest of chapter 11 goes on to list the names of many who were doing just that. We've got a list of the names of people who settled inside the city, people who served around the city, and some people who lived on the outskirts of the city.

In fact, if your Bible is open, look at that list. It starts in chapter 11, verse 3, and goes all the way through chapter 12, verse 26. Go ahead and look at the list of names there. At first glance, you're going to see a bunch of names. You'll see a few locations. You'll see a few job titles listed in there.

But more than likely, if it's a list you try to read out loud, you'd feel really silly trying to sound out many of these names. So for a lot of us, when we get to that list of names, if we were reading our Bible, we would get to verse 3 of chapter 11 and start skimming all the way down the columns until that list ended. Then we would pick it back up at chapter 12, verse 27. We would skip over the list.

But I want to encourage you this morning: Let's not do that, because this list is a declaration of the faithfulness of God. That's our second point this morning: God's faithfulness is seen through people. It's seen through these people here.

Think about where this list is found in the book. We've seen all that God's done. We've seen that the wall has been built. They've had this great time of worship, and they're about to step into this moment of incredible celebration. But rather than just jump to the celebration, Nehemiah takes the time to write out the list of names of the people who are going to be there.

If you look at it, there are Levites, priests, and gatekeepers - people who worked in and around the temple and people who settled in the city. In some cases, there are generations. We see generation after generation of people who showed up, people who stepped up to serve, and people who continued to teach the Word to their friends, neighbors, and family members even when their families were far away from the temple.

This is a list of people who lived out Deuteronomy chapter 6, ensuring that the generations following them knew and loved the Lord with all their heart, soul, and strength.

Sometimes we get to lists in Scripture and skip them, but Nehemiah doesn't because he knows this list is a declaration of the faithfulness of God. These are the people who made it back to the land, living out the promises of God.

Here's what should be so encouraging to you and me this morning: As you read this list of names, these are normal people. These are insignificant people in the eyes of the world. There's nothing unique or special about them. They're normal people with normal jobs, struggling through the normal trials and tribulations we all face in life.

God used them to demonstrate his faithfulness. God used them for his glory. In the same way that God used normal people in the eyes of the world to build up the city of Jerusalem and proclaim his name to the world then, God uses normal, everyday people to build up his church today.

As God kept his promises then, his faithfulness was on display. As God keeps his promises now, his faithfulness is on display.

I want to share an email from someone in our church family this morning about how they saw God's faithfulness on display in their life these past several weeks, specifically as they prayed about NEXT and how their family was going to participate in the NEXT initiative, the next chapter of our church family.

Listen to this:

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

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

"During that week, the enemy came full force to attack and discourage us. A few days before, I had a procedure, and biopsies were taken from my stomach and esophagus. The news came back that both were positive, and cancer was detected. We were devastated and were trying to process the news, but we began to pray.

"The same day we got the biopsy news, my wife had to walk away from her job. So, in a matter of days, we got bad news and lost financial stability. We thought, 'Why, God? We've just made our NEXT commitment.'

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

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

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

"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. Our car insurance went down."

That's a miracle in itself, by the way.

"And all praise to our Lord and Savior, at my follow-up appointment, the doctor said the report was read incorrectly, and we were given wrong information. No cancer."

No cancer. To God be the glory, honor, and praise.

Here's what the email says:

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

"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 God did the rest."

He closes with this:

"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. We love our church."

That's another example of God's faithfulness among our church family, and it's one example of many times when God has been faithful to us. He was faithful to the generations listed in Nehemiah 11 and 12. He's faithful to you and me here and now.

As we get to verse 27, we've got more evidence of a dramatic display of the faithfulness of God. Look at that, starting in verse 27 of chapter 12.

*At the dedication of the wall of Jerusalem, they sought out the Levites in all their places to bring them to Jerusalem to celebrate the dedication with gladness, with thanksgiving and with singing, with cymbals, harps and lyres.*

— Nehemiah 12:27

They're going to have a moment when they celebrate all that God has done through the rebuilding of this wall, and they're gathering up the band to make it a moment of worship.

Verse 31 says:

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

— Nehemiah 12:31

In the verses right after that, we see that it's not just a choir. They brought a lot of people up on the wall with the choir.

Verse 38 says:

*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

Again, we see a ton of people joining them up on the wall. Have that image in your head. We've got two massive choirs and two big groups of people, and they're walking around the wall. Go ahead and show that image, guys.

They're walking around the wall, where they're eventually going to come together for this great time of worship. There are a ton of people up on this massive, massive wall.

I want you to think back to what was going on as the wall was being built because, again, this shows the miracle that it is and the faithfulness of God. If you flipped back to Nehemiah chapter 4, you've got the opposition and the naysayers saying, "This is never going to happen."

Tobiah is one of them. In Nehemiah chapter 4, verse 3, it says this:

*Tobiah the Ammonite was beside him, and he said, "Look at what they're building! If a fox goes up on that wall, he's going to break down their stone wall!"*

— Nehemiah 4:3

The enemies are publicly mocking them, saying that a little fox is going to take down all of their work.

I want you to hear this this morning: There is an enemy, and the enemy wants to make you think that you are wasting your time when you're doing a great work for the Lord. The enemy wants to make you think that your work will not last long or that your work does not matter.

But when you know that God has called you to something great, God's voice is the only voice that matters.

God is faithful. God called them to a great work, and they did it. And listen, if this massive choir with instruments and parades of people behind them can walk across the wall, I'm sure the wall can handle a little fox, right?

This sentence in the text is not just a celebration. This is a theological statement. This is a declaration about God: God is faithful.

God didn't just let them finish the wall. He didn't just let them walk on the wall. He had them worship on top of it. If we're reading the book in its entirety, this wall that could not hold a fox becomes a stage for the glory and worship of God.

There is no doubt that the nation saw the faithfulness of God on display in and through the people of God. In the long run, we see that God is faithful. In the short run, we see that God is faithful. At the end of the day, we

can read this book and know that in that season of great growth in Nehemiah and the people, God did it all.

I've been praying that as people look back on this day and this season of our church, the only explanation they can give is the same: God did it all.

## God's Joy Is Heard Through the People

The choirs began to march. In chapter 12, they're marching on top of the faithfulness of God. They come together, and I love what happens when they do.

Look at verse 40:

*Both of the choirs who gave thanks stood in the house of God, and I and half of the officials with me, and the priests, and the singers, with Jezrahiah as their leader.*

— Nehemiah 12:40, 42

Verse 43 says:

*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

That's our third and final point this morning: God's joy is heard through the people.

Look at the end of verse 43 one more time:

*The joy of Jerusalem was heard far away.*

— Nehemiah 12:43

Let me point out a few things about that joy.

The first is this: Guys, God gave them that joy. Look at verse 43. It tells us right there: God made them rejoice.

This was not a man-made rejoicing. This is not a group of people faking it. This is not a group of people getting together and having an emotional moment that looks to the outside like joy. Not at all.

As the people saw the faithfulness of God, it produced this joy inside of them as a response to his faithfulness. Understand this morning that joy is a godly response to the faithfulness of God in our lives.

Second, godly joy is generational.

*The women and children also rejoiced.*

— Nehemiah 12:43

There is no way that every child there understood the magnitude of the moment and was filled with this godly joy. They just couldn't grasp what was going on at the time. But I tell you what they did know: the joy on their parents' faces and in their hearts. They could understand the joy in their parents' voices as they sang praise

and worship to the Lord.

Listen, godly joy is contagious in your family. It's contagious to your kids. It's contagious to the people around you - everywhere. You know that God is faithful. Respond in joy and let other people see it.

If you've trusted Christ as your Savior, you have firsthand experience of faithfulness. He has moved you from death to life. He has made you a child of God. You should be a joy to be around. People should want to be in your presence because of the joy of the Lord flowing out of you into all those around you.

That brings us to our third point on joy: Godly joy is a witness to the world. It is a witness to the world.

The nations heard the joy of the Lord that day. Look at what Psalm 126:2 says about the return of God's people from exile. This is a psalm that was written about moments just like this.

*Our mouth was filled with laughter,  
and our tongue with shouts of joy;  
then they said among the nations,  
"The Lord has done great things for them."*

— Psalm 126:2

Don't miss this. That phrase really, really matters. The nations noticed the joy of the Lord among his people, and they made a theological conclusion about it. Whether they meant to or not, they said, "The Lord has done great things among them."

This moment in Nehemiah 12 is not a one-time moment. This joyful moment is a pattern throughout Scripture that we see God using to reach the nations.

As our church family responds in joy to the work of the Lord, the watching world can't help but notice and see that God is doing great things. Not that we are doing great things, but that God is doing great things. Not that Nehemiah has done great things, but that God has done and continues to do great things.

That's the beautiful reality of godly joy. It's not just for those who are experiencing it. Godly joy was always meant to be a witness.

We're going to celebrate with joy what God's done in and among our church family with NEXT here in just a moment. As we get to the end of Nehemiah, that's a beautiful reminder to us that the joy we experience as we thank God for his faithfulness is going to impact far more people than just those in the room this morning.

It's a joy that truly is going to be heard and experienced from Northwest Houston to the world.

Would you bow with me this morning?

As you bow, I just want you to think about two words: faithfulness and joy.

I want you to take a minute to thank God for his faithfulness in your life. Name a specific time when God's been faithful to you. Maybe it's the moment of your salvation. Maybe you've recently seen him work in your life, in the life of a kid or grandkid, or in the life of a friend or family member.

Just name some times. Thank God for his faithfulness.

"God, thank you for being faithful when..."

Tell him this morning. Thank him for his faithfulness, and ask him to help you respond with godly joy. Not a manufactured joy, but a joy that comes because you're seeing the work of God around you, in your life, and in and among others.

God, you're faithful. Lord, we know that. We've seen it time and time again. Lord, my prayer is that we would always respond in joy, knowing that you're the one who has done and continues to do it all.

In your name we pray. And everybody said, amen.