

Serving God Fully

- I) Introduction
 - We all have multiple roles in life (mother, father, parent, spouse, worker)
 - We all come to the decision of whether to use those roles to serve Christ or to serve ourselves.

- II) The Story of Nehemiah
 - Nehemiah is cupbearer to the King
 - position of influence, service and danger
 - He learns of the desperate plight of Jerusalem
 - responds with weeping and prayer
 - He approaches the King
 - this is dangerous as no one is to be sad in the presence of the King
 - The King notices and asks Nehemiah why he is sad
 - Nehemiah prays and shares his desire to return and rebuild the wall, something which the King both grants and funds
 - Nehemiah travels to Jerusalem, inspects the wall and encourages the people to start rebuilding
 - Nehemiah and the Israelites face strong opposition on multiple fronts
 - from Tobias and Sanballat
 - from a socioeconomic crisis
 - time of famine
 - Persian tax practices led to economic impoverishment
 - rich were abusing the poor
 - Nehemiah stood against all these forces
 - worked diligently
 - spoke against injustice
 - refused to act cowardly
 - modeled integrity
 - the wall was completed in 52 days

- III) What does Nehemiah teach us about making the most of the roles we are in?
 - A) He is aware and engaged in the world around him
 - Nehemiah is clearly aware of the issues in his world and responsive to them
 - How do we remain engaged in our world ?
 - 1) Find meaning in our roles
 - a) What does it mean to find meaning?
 - reframe our lives as service to Christ
 - b) Those who find meaning in their lives do much better psychologically
 - this is particularly true of those who are suffering
 - numerous studies show that those who talk or write about difficult events in their lives (thus providing an opportunity to find meaning in their suffering) have better outcomes

2) Avoid desensitization

- when we are exposed to something negative or disturbing over and over again, we become less emotionally responsive to it
- we have the disadvantage of being desensitized by media
- studies show that our exposure to media violence desensitizes us to real life violence and makes it harder to respond emotionally

B) He responds with both prayer and action

- he prays at every major juncture (Neh 1:4/4:4, 9/5:19/6:9, 14/15;14, 22, 29. 31)
- there is also a unique physiological relationship between prayer and action
 - prayer increases positive mood, reduces sensitivity to pain, lowers stress hormones, and decreases fear
 - prayer excites parts of the brain (frontal cortex) associated with decision making, delaying gratification, suppressing bad actions, and projecting future consequences
 - the more we use these parts of the brain, the stronger those pathways become, and the better we can make decisions

C) He takes risks for what is right

- there is a powerful relationship between thought and action in the psychology literature

1) Actions change beliefs

- we usually understand that belief changes action
- it turns out that even more powerfully actions shape beliefs
 - wrong actions can lead to a negative cycle
 - the only way to break this cycle is repentance and right behavior

2) Actions are self-replicating

- when I act kind it predisposes me to act kind again
- An example: aggression
 - the more people act out on their aggressive urges the more aggressive they become

D) He works in community

- Nehemiah does not build the wall by himself
- we accomplish so much more in community and we are happier and healthier
 - community is so important that God even says he is specifically with us when we are in community (Matthew 18:20)
 - social support is associated with better physical and psychological health

IV) Conclusion

- The foundation is a right heart
- Example: Brother Lawrence

