

The Common Good

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Work in Progress / Nehemiah 3

God builds His kingdom through ordinary people doing assigned work with shared purpose, so no one's part is pointless and no one's presence is optional. In Nehemiah 3, you don't just see a wall going up, you see a people waking up, as names and neighborhoods line up shoulder to shoulder for the common good. It's a chapter that reminds us God doesn't only use the gifted and the visible, He uses the faithful and the available, right where they are. After all, we know God's work moves forward when all of His people take their place.

Introduction - Show Alaska Airlines Image

- Imagine boarding a flight with your coffee in one hand and your phone in the other, settling into the ordinary rhythm of a routine trip.
 - The cabin feels familiar. The overhead bins thump shut.
 - The safety card sits there like a formality.
 - Nobody walks onto a plane expecting their life to depend on four pieces of hardware the size of your finger.
- On January 5, 2024, Alaska Airlines Flight 1282 took off from Portland, Oregon and within minutes the flight experienced a terrifying failure.
 - A mid-cabin door plug separated from the airplane, and the cabin rapidly depressurized.
 - Normal became emergency in seconds, wind blasting through the cabin as oxygen masks dropped and passengers held on, literally for dear life.
 - If you're familiar with the story, then you know the crew brought the aircraft back and landed safely, and injuries were reported as minor.
 - But the picture people couldn't shake was that open hole where the panel belonged, a reminder that the security we feel is often held together by work we never see.

- When investigators began tracing the chain of events, the story turned toward a detail you'd never notice from seat 22B.
 - The National Transportation Safety Board reported that four bolts meant to secure the door plug were missing.
 - Those bolts were not decorative. They were quiet, uncelebrated, easy to overlook, and absolutely essential.
 - Without them, forces that are normally contained have room to work, and what seems solid can become unstable.
 - One of the sobering parts of the investigation is how plain the lesson sounds once you hear it.
 - The NTSB's reporting described failures in process, documentation, and accountability that should have prevented an aircraft from moving forward without those bolts in place.
 - In other words, the danger didn't begin with dramatic sabotage or some sensational act of recklessness.
 - It began with ordinary work that lost track of an ordinary step, and the "ordinary step" mattered more than anyone in the cabin could see.
- That's the haunting thing about a missing bolt.
 - You can do ninety-nine things right, and a single unseen omission can turn into a moment that affects everyone.
 - You can have brilliant engineering, a strong airframe, trained pilots, and a capable crew.
 - Yet the system still depends on people doing the small assignments with care, because the small assignments are often what hold the line.
 - That's not just true in aviation. That's true in families, communities, and yes, especially in the church.
- Most of us spend our lives around spiritual versions of these essential "bolts."
 - Tasks that don't feel dramatic. Roles that don't get applause.

- Responsibilities that are easy to assume someone else will handle.
 - Prayer that no one hears.
 - Hospitality that no one posts.
 - Teaching that happens week after week in the same room.
 - Setting up chairs.
 - Checking on a shut-in.
 - Discipling a teenager who acts unimpressed.
 - Showing up early. Staying late. Serving when you feel invisible.
- And here's what we forget: the health of a church, the strength of a family, the stability of a ministry, and the momentum of a mission often depend on the quiet parts being in place.
 - The "four bolts" moments of faithfulness.
 - The things God uses to protect people and bless people and build people, even when nobody is watching.
 - The Apostle Paul said in [1 Corinthians 12:7](#) "7 To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good."
 - That means that God puts his people together, puts his church together, so that every person is pertinent, every work is worthwhile, and every act of service - no matter how inconsequential we perceive it to be - is significant.
 - And most of the time, the **common good** is carried forward by uncommon consistency in ordinary obedience.
- That's why [Nehemiah 3](#) is in our Bible.
 - At first glance, it looks like a chapter built for skimming: names, gates, sections, repetitive phrases, one crew after another repairing one stretch after another.
 - Yet what you're really reading is a picture of how God builds for the common good.

- He assigns work. He gathers people. He places them shoulder to shoulder.
- And the wall rises because the community shows up and takes their portion seriously.
- [Nehemiah 3](#) is a roster of spiritual reliability.
 - People doing their job. People repairing the section in front of their house.
 - People stepping into their place because God’s purposes are bigger than any one person, and those purposes move forward through shared obedience.
 - So today, if you’ve ever wondered whether your part matters, [Nehemiah 3](#) answers with a steady, gracious “yes.”
 - God builds His kingdom through ordinary people doing assigned work with shared purpose, so no one’s part is pointless and no one’s presence is optional.
- I’m not going to preach through every verse, nor read every verse.
 - So I will read just a selection of verses and then consider what kind of significance they have for us today.

Scripture Reading

Nehemiah 2:17–18 *ESV*

¹⁷ 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.”

¹⁸ 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 3:1–5 *ESV*

¹ Then Eliashib the high priest rose up with his brothers the priests, and they built the Sheep Gate. They consecrated it and set its doors. They consecrated

it as far as the Tower of the Hundred, as far as the Tower of Hananel.

² And next to him the men of Jericho built. And next to them Zaccur the son of Imri built.

³ The sons of Hassenaah built the Fish Gate. They laid its beams and set its doors, its bolts, and its bars.

⁴ And next to them Meremoth the son of Uriah, son of Hakkoz repaired. And next to them Meshullam the son of Berechiah, son of Meshezabel repaired. And next to them Zadok the son of Baana repaired.

⁵ And next to them the Tekoites repaired, but their nobles would not stoop to serve their Lord.

Nehemiah 3:20 *ESV*

²⁰ After him Baruch the son of Zabbai repaired another section from the buttress to the door of the house of Eliashib the high priest.

Nehemiah 3:28–32 *ESV*

²⁸ Above the Horse Gate the priests repaired, each one opposite his own house.

²⁹ After them Zadok the son of Immer repaired opposite his own house. After him Shemaiah the son of Shecaniah, the keeper of the East Gate, repaired.

³⁰ After him Hananiah the son of Shelemiah and Hanun the sixth son of Zalaph repaired another section. After him Meshullam the son of Berechiah repaired opposite his chamber.

³¹ After him Malchijah, one of the goldsmiths, repaired as far as the house of the temple servants and of the merchants, opposite the Muster Gate, and to the upper chamber of the corner.

³² And between the upper chamber of the corner and the Sheep Gate the goldsmiths and the merchants repaired.

- As we think through this, it is helpful to consider this is a project summary.
 - Nehemiah is able to get the wall built in about 6.5 weeks.
 - In chapter 4, we will see that it's not just a completely smooth 6.5 weeks.
 - So chapter 3 gives the overview and we will revisit some things beginning in chapter 4.
- At first, it may seem all too tempting to skim over chapter 3.
 - After all, these are names of people we don't know and they're working in geography we're unfamiliar with.
 - That's hard to track.
- At the same time, there are some really good principles at work here that should shape how we see the Kingdom of God and our responsibilities for the common good as Kingdom Citizens.

1 - Responsibility Is Shared, Even When the Work Is Not Equal (v. 20)

- When you look through this list, you'll see a repeating pattern.
 - After him, so and so repaired, next to him so and so repaired
 - And then there's a description of the section of the wall and from time to time there are some other details that emerge.
 - Those other details are where some interesting things start to happen.
- For example, when you look at v. 20, you'll meet a guy named Baruch.
 - That's a common name - there are more than one Baruch's in the Bible.
 - In this list, this Baruch gets treated a little differently.
 - The ESV has a footnote regarding Baruch.
 - And the reason for this difference between versions is the presence of a Hebrew verb that makes up part of an idiomatic expression.

- Literally, the word means “to burn or be kindled.”
- The way this gets translated is:

Nehemiah 3:20 CSB

²⁰ After him Baruch son of Zabbai diligently repaired another section, from the Angle to the door of the house of the high priest Eliashib.

- The KJV says he earnestly repaired, the NAS says he zealously repaired.
- The point of this is simply this - something was different about this guy’s work than anybody else’s.
- But that’s really the point
 - Baruch was still part of the overall work, even though his work was apparently somehow different.
 - When we think about the Kingdom of God, that is a really important principle for us to keep in mind.
 - There are ALL kinds of different work - but all Kingdom work is valuable even if we all have different and unique responsibilities.
- And, If Baruch can teach us anything in the brief few words we read about him, then whatever we do, do it with zeal.

2 - No Task Is Small When It Serves God’s Purpose (v. 14)

- If you go back and look at v. 14, you will meet a guy named Malchijah.
 - Again, we don’t know much about the guy.
 - We know who his daddy was.
 - And we know he’s a political leader of community just outside of Jerusalem.
 - I’m not sure if he made Nehemiah angry or something, but his task was, well, less than pleasant.
 - He’s responsible for rebuilding The Dung Gate.

- That's not metaphorical or allegorical...it's a real place.
 - It was an opening in the wall that led to the Valley of Hinnom, where rubbish and refuse were dumped.
 - All of the waste from the city would be carried out through the Dung Gate and dumped in the Valley of Hinnom.
 - When people in Jesus' day would talk about hell, they would use the Valley of Hinnom as a metaphor for hell.
 - The city had to have a way to remove its waste, otherwise disease and decay would run rampant in the city.
 - So the Dung Gate may have been unglamorous, it was absolutely vital to the long-term prosperity of the city.
- Not every job in the Kingdom is one that earns gold stars.
 - Not every job gets you accolades and praises.
 - Not every job even gets noticed.
 - But every job that builds the Kingdom of God is essential.
- Sadly, when we think about making an impact in the Kingdom, we often think about prominence (that's how we're wired to think in this world).
 - What preacher has the biggest audience or sells the most books?
 - What worship program is writing the best songs and selling the most albums?
 - Even in smaller churches, what Sunday School teacher's class is growing the fastest?
 - There are a lot of up-front leaders that ARE necessary in the Kingdom.
- But there's always a place for those who aren't interested in the spotlight.
 - The church I served in seminary wasn't the most glamorous church.

- I remember one of my greatest leadership decisions was asking everybody to drive separately to church to make the parking lot look fuller when people drove by.
- As far as kids go - we didn't have any - other than mine.
- But there was one sweet older lady, Lizzie Phillips, who made it a point to teach our children's SS class even though mine was typically the only one there.
- You want to talk about an unglamorous job - showing up every Sunday to teach a 2-year-old PK?
- She did turn her back one Sunday and he made it out the door and was visiting with the horses in the neighbor's pasture by the time we found him...but that only happened once.
- (Also, just to be clear, I'm not suggesting that teaching my kid is the equivalent of building the Dung Gate)
- That leads to a closely related, but distinct point...

3 - Different Gifts Still Build the Same Wall (v. 8)

- If you go back and take a look at v. 8, we meet a couple of interesting guys.
 - Uzziel and Hananiah - like just about everybody in this list, we know next to nothing about them other than their professions.
 - One is a goldsmith, the other is a perfumer.
 - Those are two interesting professions.
 - A goldsmith was somebody who made jewelry.
 - And a perfumer...well...I hope you don't need me to tell you what he does.
 - That's probably an important job in a civilization that hadn't yet invented deodorant.

- Again, without any additional biographical information, I would imagine these two guys have something in common - their hands probably didn't have a lot of calluses.
 - Moving rocks, mixing mortar - that was probably not part of their every day work.
 - But still they showed up for the task.
 - In my mind movie, they're probably getting poked fun at for having to get out and do a "real job."
 - As somebody who reads, writes and talks for a living, I can sort of identify with these two guys.
- In spite of their gifts not being the normal or anticipated gifts for construction work, they're still an integral part of this massive undertaking.
- Men like Uzziel and Hananiah remind us that God wants to include everybody in the family in his work.
 - You'd think that when the guy who makes perfume for a living shows up for his assignment, he's not getting picked.
 - But that's just not the case.
- You need to hear this today...this principle is still very much at work in the church.
 - If you believe what Paul says in [1 Corinthians 12:7](#) "7 To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good."
 - Then the reality is whatever your gifts and talents are, they have a place in the work of the Kingdom.
 - I firmly believe that God has put you together with his greater purposes in mind.
 - I firmly believe that God has put you in our church with your gifts in mind.

- One of the greatest frustrations I experience as a pastor is the number of Christians in churches that don't contribute their giftedness to the church in any way.
 - When that happens, there are parts of the wall that remain unmended.
 - I'm just convinced, if a guy who makes perfume for a living can make a meaningful contribution to the construction of a city wall, then you, in whatever way you are gifted, can make a meaningful contribution to God's church.
- But when you find that place where your gifts are put to work, there's nothing like it.
 - The fulfillment you get knowing you've had a part of a God-sized-work is one of the greatest experiences you can have.
 - It is a gift from the LORD.
 - And it makes you come back for more, which leads to point #4...

4. The Work Gains Meaning When We Invest Ourselves in It (vv. 22ff)

- Starting in v. 22 there is a bit of a pattern shift.
 - Many of those who are involved in the work are working immediately adjacent to their own house and dwelling.
 - The wall wasn't just some giant construction project that they needed to help finish.
 - The wall was part of their everyday life.
- One could argue that they had selfish reasons to do the work.
 - The bible doesn't speak to their motives at all, but I don't think that they were doing it just because it was in their own back yards.
 - If they had selfish motivations - then they would have cleaned up their own yards long ago.
 - Instead, what I think happened is that this broken down wall was now personal for them.

- Over the last generation, a trend has taken place in the church.
 - It is called by many different names - I call it “commercialization.”
 - Churches become known by what they offer.
 - And people choose churches based on how they receive those offerings.
- And here’s what happens -
 - This church over here has a better dodgeball program.
 - This church down the street has credit card swipers built into the back of their pews.
 - The pastor of this church has better hair.
 - And you have this endless cycle of trying to find the best combination of programs that will meet whatever need people are feeling in any given moment.
- And as a result, people are less and less invested into the work that their churches are doing.
- I’m about to make some folks really angry.
 - I’ve never met a soul who loves the NCAA transfer portal.
 - We have coaches retiring because they refuse to play the transfer portal game.
 - The only people who like it are the people making money off it.
 - I has been a Board Member at Shorter University over the last few years, and during my time I have been on the Student Affairs Committee...we provide oversight to the athletic department.
 - The VP for Student Affairs said it plainly - the transfer portal is destroying college sports - and there are a lot of reasons why - but one of the main reasons is that it destroys team loyalty.

- As much as we hate the transfer portal in sports, the church perfected the transfer portal long before the NCAA figured out how to make money off it.
- Please don't hear me say that people aren't loyal to their churches anymore. That's NOT what I'm saying.
 - What I am saying is that it is far more rewarding to build something that your family can build with you.
 - It is far more rewarding to build a life together with brothers and sisters in Christ who are on the same road.
 - It is far more rewarding to plant roots that grow deep than it is to bounce from program to program to program.
- Here's the good news - it is never too late to get to work, investing in the work of the Kingdom...

5 - God's Work Always Welcomes Late Starters (v. 4)

- There's a guy mentioned in v. 4 by the name of Meshullam.
 - You probably don't remember that name - but we have encountered it before.
 - Way back in [Ezra 10](#).
 - [Ezra 10](#) is when the whole scandal about foreign wives unfolds and it turns out that Meshullam was not much of a team player.
 - It actually says in [Ezra 10:15](#) that he was one of four people who rejected Ezra's plan to deal with the gross sin that had taken over the people.
- Now, to be fair, Meshullam is not an uncommon name.
 - There is a real possibility that the Meshullam in [Nehemiah 3](#) is not the exact same man as the Meshullam in [Ezra 10](#).
 - Scripture does not give us enough information to be dogmatic about that.

- But here's what we *can* say with confidence.
 - Whether this is the same individual or not, Ezra and Nehemiah are describing the **same generation** of people.
 - These are men who lived through failure, conflict, and public sin.
 - These are people whose spiritual record was mixed at best. And yet when the time came to rebuild, the list in [Nehemiah 3](#) is not a roll call of perfect saints.
 - It is a roster of people who showed up and got to work.
- And that's the point.
 - God's work is not carried forward by flawless résumés.
 - It is carried forward by people who are willing to step in now.
 - If this is the same Meshullam, then what we are watching is a quiet story of repentance and restoration.
 - A man who once resisted reform is now shoulder to shoulder with the rest of the community, strengthening the wall.
 - Scripture does not pause to shame him. It simply records that he worked.
- And if it is not the same Meshullam, the principle still stands.
 - [Nehemiah 3](#) is full of people whose pasts we do not know and whose failures are not cataloged.
 - What matters is that when the opportunity to participate in God's work appeared, they did not stay on the sidelines.
- That's why this point matters so much for us.
 - Some of us assume we are disqualified because we did not start well.
 - We look at earlier seasons of compromise or hesitation and conclude that we missed our chance. B

- ut [Nehemiah 3](#) does not read like a list of early adopters. It reads like a list of people who decided that *today* was the day to join the work.
- God's work always has room for late starters.
- You cannot change when you should have begun.
- But you can decide whether you will begin now.
- And the wall in [Nehemiah 3](#) rises not because everyone started at the same time, but because enough people eventually said yes.

Conclusion

- The wall in [Nehemiah 3](#) did not rise because a few people worked perfectly.
- It rose because many people decided to take their place.
- And that is the invitation in front of us today.
- If you are already serving...
 - ...this is a call to keep strengthening your hands for the good work. Do it with zeal.
 - Do it knowing that what feels small is never small in the Kingdom of God.
- If you have been standing on the sidelines, today is a good day to step in.
 - God's work still welcomes late starters.
 - You do not need a flawless past to begin faithful obedience in the present.
 - You simply need to say yes.
- So as we respond this morning, I want to invite you to ask one simple question: Where is my place in the work God is doing here? And then trust Him enough to take a step toward it.