

# 2

# PLAN



*When have you enjoyed a once in a lifetime opportunity?*

**QUESTION #1**

## THE POINT

*Serving God requires intentionality.*



## THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

My parents built a new home when I was in high school. The entire family was involved in designing the house. We looked over the plans from the architect, sometimes staring at the two-dimensional renderings for an hour or more. As we planned, we all imagined the look and feel of our new home.

Our old home was tiny, built in the early 1900s. My room was in the renovated attic, and I often bumped my head on the doorframe when I went upstairs. But now we had the opportunity to create a house that worked for everyone. We had a one-time opportunity to get it right, so a lot of intentionality and planning went into the design. You can't redo a home once it is built.

God gave Nehemiah a "one-time opportunity" with King Artaxerxes. Once Nehemiah learned of a great need in Jerusalem, he prayed and he planned. Everything hinged on how he approached the king. It was a do-or-die moment.

# WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

## ***Nehemiah 2:1-5a***

<sup>1</sup> In the month of Nisan, in the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes, when wine was before him, I took up the wine and gave it to the king. Now I had not been sad in his presence. <sup>2</sup> And the king said to me, “Why is your face sad, seeing you are not sick? This is nothing but sadness of the heart.” Then I was very much afraid. <sup>3</sup> I said to the king, “Let the king live forever! Why should not my face be sad, when the city, the place of my fathers’ graves, lies in ruins, and its gates have been destroyed by fire?” <sup>4</sup> Then the king said to me, “What are you requesting?” So I prayed to the God of heaven. <sup>5a</sup> And I said to the king, “If it pleases the king, and if your servant has found favor in your sight,

Many times, when we ask God to do something, we forget about it if we don’t get an immediate answer. Not Nehemiah. When he first heard the news of the grim situation in Jerusalem “in the month of Chislev” (November–December; see Neh. 1:1), he started praying—and he kept praying for four months, all the way into “the month of Nisan” (March–April). When something is important to us, we don’t let it go.

Meanwhile, he went about his daily routine as the king’s cupbearer. Part of being intentional is not giving up until God directs us otherwise, and Nehemiah kept to his normal duties as he prayed. He could do his work responsibly, but apparently he couldn’t mask how he felt inside and the king took notice. “The king said to me, ‘Why is your face sad, seeing you are not sick? This is nothing but sadness of the heart.’”

King Artaxerxes may have been truly concerned for his trusted cupbearer, but he was concerned for himself too. After all, his very life depended on his cupbearer. The system of royalty in the Persian Empire was fragile. Revolts and assassination attempts happened regularly, so a sad cupbearer was not a good sign. Had the king’s enemies gotten to Nehemiah? Was Nehemiah covering up something?

***How can we tell an opportunity is from the Lord?***

**QUESTION #2**

Here it was: the opportunity Nehemiah had been praying for! He “was very much afraid.” But Nehemiah didn’t retreat in fear; instead he spoke boldly—and he prayed even as he spoke. Through this, Nehemiah shows us three things about our own service:

- 1. Rely on God in spite of fear.** Like Nehemiah, we will face fear and doubt, no matter how well we have planned or how intentional we live. Our doubts and fears can push us away from God, or they can move us closer to Him.
- 2. Act on the opportunity God gives you.** Nehemiah had waited on God for months. Waiting is not wasting time—when the moment arrives we must be prepared to act.
- 3. Keep praying.** The king asked Nehemiah what he wanted, opening the door wide for Nehemiah to make his request. After months of praying, Nehemiah’s instinct was to seek God once more. For Nehemiah, the confidence of prayer overruled the fear of the moment.

## ***Nehemiah 2:5b-8***

<sup>5b</sup> that you send me to Judah, to the city of my fathers’ graves, that I may rebuild it.”<sup>6</sup> And the king said to me (the queen sitting beside him), “How long will you be gone, and when will you return?” So it pleased the king to send me when I had given him a time.<sup>7</sup> And I said to the king, “If it pleases the king, let letters be given me to the governors of the province Beyond the River, that they may let me pass through until I come to Judah,<sup>8</sup> and a letter to Asaph, the keeper of the king’s forest, that he may give me timber to make beams for the gates of the fortress of the temple, and for the wall of the city, and for the house that I shall occupy.” And the king granted me what I asked, for the good hand of my God was upon me.

*How can Nehemiah’s example of planning help us approach our own God-given tasks?*

### **QUESTION #3**



We've seen how Nehemiah prayed, but he also had planned and prepared for God's work. So Nehemiah was ready when King Artaxerxes asked him, "What are you requesting?". Nehemiah was up front about what he wanted from the king.

Without a specific plan, Nehemiah's goals would've been merely a pipe dream, but he was ready with the particulars. The goal was simple but bold—rebuild the walls of Jerusalem—and toward that end, he needed three specific things:

- ▶ **Time.** Nehemiah gave the king a definitive timeline of how long the work would take.
- ▶ **Permission.** He requested letters from the king to ensure safe passage.
- ▶ **Resources.** He requested a letter to get timber and raw materials to complete the project.

He had a plan and he was ready to work it. He would not be distracted! Building our lives to serve and honor Christ also requires planning—and no distractions. Let's follow Nehemiah's example and not get distracted from the opportunity to do God's work.

Amazingly, King Artaxerxes granted Nehemiah's requests. Was it the great plans Nehemiah made? No. We plan, but God works. While our plans are important, only God can implement them. God gives what we need when we need it. We are to give God everything, then trust His gracious hand as He works.

## Nehemiah 2:17-18

<sup>17</sup> 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.” <sup>18</sup> 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 arrived in Jerusalem; however, seeing the city in ruins must have been a real shock because he had been there three days before apparently taking any action. But he did take action. Still being careful to plan and prepare, before Nehemiah did anything else or even told anybody what he planned to do, he went out to inspect the city and its walls. (See vv. 11-15.)

After assessing the situation, Nehemiah called the local officials and religious leaders together and shared both the good news and the bad news.

- ▶ **Bad news.** The physical ruins were a sign of disgrace; it indicated they were in trouble and defenseless. For outsiders, collapsed walls signified their God had abandoned the city.
- ▶ **Good news.** God had not abandoned them! Indeed, His hand was on Nehemiah, and God was ready to restore the people and the city. Their task was more than simply rebuilding a city. It was also a spiritual endeavor, for the rebuilt walls would be a testimony to others of God’s grace. God’s grace superseded their disgrace.

God is glorified when ordinary people come together for His work. When the people started rebuilding the walls together, they no longer “suffer[ed] derision.” However, it wasn’t the rebuilt walls that removed the derision. The extraordinary work was how everyone came together for the sole purpose of giving God glory. The same thing can happen through us, in our churches, and our communities!

*What sometimes holds us back from asking others to help?*

### QUESTION #4

*How can our group better work together to accomplish God’s plans?*

### QUESTION #5

## PEOPLE YOU CAN COUNT ON

*In Nehemiah 2:17-18, Nehemiah enlisted the help of others. If you had something for which you needed extra help, who are five people you could call? Write their names here:*

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

Send each of these people a text or email and thank them for being able to count on them.

If you have something you are seeking God's direction for or if you have a prayer request, share it with them when you send your note of appreciation.

Thank the Lord for these important friends in your life.

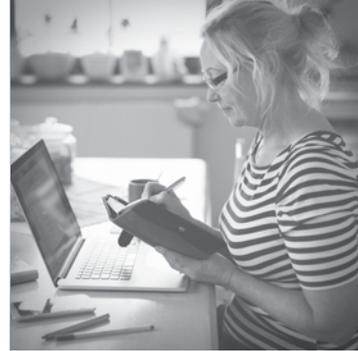
*"Nehemiah lifted his heart to God;  
now he must open his mouth to the King!"*

—RAYMOND BROWN

# LIVE IT OUT

God has a plan for all believers. He desires to accomplish His work through you. How will you join Him this week in His plan?

- ▶ **Set goals.** Develop a plan for your spiritual growth. Set some goals and include dates by which you would like to achieve them.
- ▶ **Set a time.** Commit a specific time of day to pray for a month. Pray God would reveal opportunities to serve and do His work in the routine of your normal days.
- ▶ **Set an appointment.** Talk to your pastor or group leader to discuss opportunities to serve. Discuss ways you can work with other people in order to see God do extraordinary work. Your group may also want to discuss this, and plan ways to serve together.



God has a plan for your spiritual development and service. Be intentional in following His gracious plan for you.

My thoughts

1. Raymond Brown, *The Message of Nehemiah* (IVP Academic, 1998), 48.