



Looking Inwards (15 mins) Caring For Each Other

*Reflecting on your life at the moment, is there anything you would like to share with other members of your home group which you feel is appropriate (this is an **opportunity to share**, not something you have to do, however, 'it's the sharing that enables the caring!') for:*

- Thanksgiving?
- Prayer?
- Encouragement?
- Support in any way?



Looking Outwards (15 mins) Concern For Others

*Is there anything concerning someone in your: family; circle of friends; neighbours; or church, which you would like to share (please be careful not to pass on anything that is **confidential** or which you think the person/people concerned would not wish to be shared) for:*

- Thanksgiving?
- Prayer?
- Encouragement?
- Support in any way?



HG67: Annual District Church Meeting 2012 Building Walls, Restoring Lives

Nehemiah 3:1-32

Home Group Study Notes

25th March 2012 - Revd Paul A. Carr



PLEASE COMPLETE AS MUCH AS YOU CAN ON THIS WORKSHEET IN PREPARATION BEFORE THE MEETING!

Don't forget to take your Bible to Home Group with you, along with any previous notes and other resources which might be helpful.



Welcome (10 mins) Ice Breaker

Just for fun! The leader starts a story with a sentence that ends in 'suddenly.' The next person then adds to the story with his own sentence that ends in 'suddenly.' Continue the story until everyone has contributed. For example: 'Yesterday I went to the zoo and was passing the elephant enclosure when 'suddenly' ... !'



Looking Upwards (10 mins) Worship

In your time of worship, you may want to sing Songs of Praise; listen to a Worship CD, as well as using Meditations; Bible Readings; Prayers ...





Looking Upwards (40 mins) Bible Study

Read through the text for this study, and any references given below, alongside those in the sermon notes, then answer the following questions - you may find it helpful to read through the sermon notes as you do so. Discuss some, or all, of your answers with your Home Group.

1) An ADCM is often a time to look forward to the year ahead. However, spend some time looking back at the past twelve months and share with each other those things which have been a real encouragement to you, personally, and those things which are an encouragement in the wider life of Emmanuel.

2) Eliashib, the high priest, did not finish the work he started so enthusiastically. Paul said: *It's not important how we begin a project, it's how we finish that counts.* Have you seen it happen in, and around, Emmanuel? What do you think might be the cause of a project floundering? What can we do to ensure people finish well?

3) Remember the story of the stonemasons? Why does one stonemason only see himself putting in a nine to five job that involves cutting blocks of stone? Why does another only see part of the big picture and limits his vision to a building a wall? What is it about the third stonemason that separates him from the other two? What do you see as you look into the future for the mission and ministry of Emmanuel?

Some people worked as families, In vs3, the Fish Gate was rebuilt by the sons of Hassenah and in vs12, the daughters of Shallum worked on the wall. Some worked on a section in front of their home, or on another section away from their neighbourhood: vs23: *Beyond them, Benjamin and Hasshub made repairs in front of their house; and next to them, Azariah son of Maaseiah, the son of Ananiah, made repairs beside his house.*

At least six different workers, plus an unknown number of priests, repaired the portions of the wall that were nearest to their own houses. Those who lived in Jerusalem were told to repair the section of the wall that was opposite where they lived. This is God's design for ministry. Because God has placed us, strategically, where he wants us to be.

We are to find the nearest and most obvious place where we see a need that we can meet and begin to serve the people God has already put in our life: in our home, in our work place, in our neighbourhood. Begin by doing what seems the obvious thing to do. Go through the door that is already open. I'm convinced that if we set our hand to what's to do, the Lord will open other doors and move us where he wants us to be and give us the opportunity to do things that suit us right down to the ground.

I think another lesson that we can learn from the way the people worked is this: because they would be looking at their own handiwork outside their house for many years to come, they did the best they could! I'm sure it was a great deterrent to shoddy workmanship. We're called to start at home, but we're not supposed to stay there.

As a church family, we have many opportunities to serve in our neighbourhoods and in our community. Instead of just looking at what you can do as an individual, think creatively about how you can include your family or Home Group in the joyful task of kingdom building.

If all of us would follow this example, our neighbourhoods would look very different, wouldn't they? Friends, look at your neighbours as your mission field. Serve them and Pray for them. I want to challenge each of you to identify three neighbours that live near you and then commit to do three things: Pray for them; Care for them; and Share Jesus with them. As you **pray** for them, God will give you opportunities to **care** for their needs, which will open up avenues to **share** the Good News of Jesus. Give them an Easter leaflet and encourage them to hear of the 'Epic story of Love, Sacrifice and Hope.'

Conclusion

The city's ruin was great, and the only possible way of seeing the walls rise again was for the community in Jerusalem to work together and, in doing so, experienced a success which they wouldn't have done alone. We can't succeed in anything by ourselves, and we've been called together to serve one another and serve God together.

And, whilst the reality is we all won't give equally, as we all have different gifts to offer, we can all make equal sacrifices. Remember that nothing has ever been done for God without hard work, but he does promise to honour all that we do in His name, not for our own glory but for the reason the work on the wall began in the first place, for the Glory of God.

I've called my talk: 'Building Walls, Restoring Lives' because we're in the business of restoring lives aren't we, by building the walls of God's kingdom around us. But let me ask you: are you building a brick wall or a cathedral? It's my prayer that each of us would be challenged afresh to commit our time and talents to the mission and ministry of Emmanuel, and to see God's glory revealed in new and wonderful ways. Amen?

4: Some people do not want to work

Having said that there is a place for everyone, and a job for everyone to do, some shirked their responsibility. We see this in vs5: *The next section was repaired by the men of Tekoa, but their nobles would not put their shoulders to the work under their supervisors.* Tekoa was a town about eleven miles from Jerusalem, and while some of the people commuted to the job site; the nobles from Tekoa called in sick. Actually, the text says that they refused to participate in the work of God because they didn't want to follow orders. They were too proud to submit themselves to the supervisors. They were too important to get their hands dirty. The phrase: *would not put their shoulders to the work* suggests that it was pride more than anything else which kept them from joining in. Sadly, these nobles of Tekoa had their failure to respond forever recorded in Scripture. If a history of those who are involved in the 'day to day' ministry of Emmanuel were to be written, what might it record about you?

D.L.Moody: *A great many people have got a false idea about the church ... They have got an idea that the church is a place to rest in ... to get into a nicely cushioned pew, and contribute to the charities, listen to the minister, and do their share to keep the church out of bankruptcy, is all they want. The idea of work for them - actual work in the church - never enters their minds.*

I can't think of anything more rewarding than being involved in kingdom work. You can't beat it, can you? Some of the happiest Christians I know are those who are serving in their area of giftedness. On the other hand, some of the grumpiest Christians I know are those who are not willing to put their shoulder to the work.

5: Some people work more than others

In every church there will always be those who more work than others. In vs5, the men from Tekoa finished their section of the wall, even though their nobles didn't help out at all, and they, vs27: ... *repaired another section ...* Refusing to follow the bad example of their leaders, these workers went the extra mile. I picture them coming up to Nehemiah and telling him that they finished their job and Nehemiah asking them if they wanted another section and they respond: *Bring it on, man. We're in a groove.*

In vs21: ... *Meremoth son of Uriah, the son of Hakkoz, repaired another section, from the entrance of Eliashib's house to the end of it.* After he finished his assignment, he worked on the wall in front of his neighbour's house. When he was done shovelling his own path, he moved down the street to his neighbour's driveway. When we complete one job for the Lord, we can't sit back and think we've fulfilled our responsibility as a Christian. Friends, as long as there is work to be done in God's kingdom, there's work for you to do – there's no place for us on the couch!

6: Some people work with passion

In this entire chapter, there is only one person mentioned who worked zealously, vs20: *Baruch son of Zabbai zealously repaired another section ...* Here is a man who was commended for the zeal with which he did his work. Some were lazy, some were zealous. Baruch burned a lot of energy. He was not just serving; he was on 'fire' (that's what zealous means) this is amazing because in 4:6 we read that: ... *the people worked with all their heart.* Everyone was working hard, but in a crowd of committed workers, Baruch stood out from the rest. How we need men and women like Baruch, who will say: *I don't really care what others are doing, I'm going to do my very best.* I'm sure as we look around we will see at least one Baruch in our midst – male and female.

7: Some people work better working alongside others

This passage shows how people working together can accomplish more than if just one person tried to do all the work. Twenty eight times we read the phrases: 'next to him' 'next to them' 'after him' and 'after them.'

4) What most struck you about this Bible passage and/or Paul's talk? What analogies, if any, do you see between the walls of Jerusalem and God's church: Local; National and International? How might you respond to the challenges of this passage? How might we as a church respond?

5) There's no doubt that each of us are 'SHAPED For Ministry' and that God is calling each of us to serve him in the 'day to day' ministry of Emmanuel. What is on your heart? Do you see people in your Home Group (and others in the wider church) who have gifts and talents which are not being put to good use? How might you/we encourage them?

6) Paul encouraged each of us to identify three people neighbours and then commit to do three things: Pray for them; Care for them; and Share Jesus with them: *As you pray for them, God will give you opportunities to care for their needs, which will open up avenues to share the Good News of Jesus.* Name three people and resolve to pray for them every time your Home Group meets under the 'Looking Outward' section.



Is there anything you most want to put into practice as a result of this study?



HG67: Annual District Church Meeting 2012 *Building Walls, Restoring Lives*

Nehemiah 3:1-32

Home Group Sermon Notes

25th March 2012 - Revd Paul A. Carr

Introduction

It's always a privilege to speak on an ADCM Sunday and, especially so, when so many good things have taken place this last year. I have to be honest and say that I've spent quite some time deliberating over whether to conclude our series on 'Inhabiting the Promised Land' by looking at Joshua chapter 10, or, as I suggested a couple of weeks ago, whether I might choose to something else. I did write a talk on Joshua 10, but I just didn't feel comfortable with it and found myself drawn to Nehemiah ch3 (I'll keep Joshua 10 'in the bag' for another time!) At first glance, Nehemiah ch3 seems a bit dry and boring, doesn't it? It reads like 1st Chronicles with its long lists of names that are difficult to pronounce and a chronology that seems meaningless. However, Nehemiah ch3 contains a list of people who achieved something quite significant and I believe this chapter contains some great insights and principles that have direct application to our lives today - especially as we consider our commitment to serving God, each other, and the community around us in the year ahead.

Just in case you're not familiar with the background to this OT story, let's have a quick summary! Nehemiah was living in Babylon as a servant to King Artaxerxes when he heard that the walls of Jerusalem had been destroyed. Nehemiah was moved to tears and prayer at the fate of the city of his ancestors and he pledged, before God, to do something about it. It's a great story of trust and faith; of God's guidance and provision and of Nehemiah steadfastly following the vision God placed in his heart. Nehemiah was someone who had ... *a deep dissatisfaction with what is and a clear grasp of what could be* ... and, in spite of all the opposition he encountered, he stayed focused on the job and saw the Holy City restored. I think there are seven principles from this chapter that are helpful as we work together to build God's church here at Emmanuel.

1: Focus on the purpose of the work

There is a story set in medieval times that tells of a traveller who comes upon three stonemasons. He asks each in turn: 'What are you doing?' The first answers, without hesitation, 'I am cutting this stone.' The second, who appears to be doing an identical job makes a gesture with his hand and says; 'I am completing the wall.' The third who, again, seems to be doing the same job slowly raises his eyes to the sky and says; 'I am building a cathedral'. They all had the same job, but they each had a different vision of what it was they were doing.

Nehemiah was able to build his team around a central rallying point - he reminded them of the purpose of their work: the glory of God. They weren't just building walls; they were worshipping their God and repairing His dwelling place: the Holy City. They longed for God's city to regain its splendour. The purpose of all ministry, and really of life itself, is the glory of God. A reminder of our text for 2011, if you can remember it: Colossians 3:23: *Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord ...*

Take a look at vs1: *Eliashib the high priest and his fellow priests went to work and rebuilt the Sheep gate. They dedicated it and set its doors in place ...* It's no accident that the work starts at the Sheep Gate. It's another way of saying: "Put God first." The Sheep gate was given this name because it gave easy access to the sheep that would be sacrificed in the Temple. By beginning here, Nehemiah is establishing that their relationship with God was central. This was the most important place to start.

2: Leaders must set the example

We see this in vs1: *Eliashib the high priest and his fellow priests went to work and rebuilt the Sheep Gate. They dedicated it and set its doors in place, building as far as the Tower of the Hundred, which they dedicated, and as far as the Tower of Hananel.* If anybody in the city should have been busy with the work, it was the priests - after all, God's reputation was at stake! The high priest had no hesitation using his 'consecrated' hands to swing a hammer, pick up rubble or lay a brick or two.

But when we talk about leaders, who might they be? Me? Tom? Andy? Our churchwardens; those who serve on DCC; Action Group members; Leadership Team ... the list could go on. I want to suggest that each one of us are committed to supporting you in your growth in faith; your pastoral and spiritual needs; enabling your service and, as 2 Thessalonians 2:17 suggests, to: ... *encourage your hearts and strengthen you in every good deed and word.*

It's sad to see that Eliashib, despite his position as a priest, didn't remain true to his calling and later, 13:4-9, collaborated with the enemy to create serious problems for Nehemiah. This serves as a good reminder that it's not so important how we begin a project, it's how we finish that counts. Some people who enthusiastically begin a job or a ministry may drop out or even turn against it for one reason or another. I've learned through the years that responsibility is always the mark of spiritual maturity. The most mature Christians are not, always, those mature of years, but those who stay with the work that has been assigned to them until it is completed.

3: God provides full employment for all!

A corny point, I know. But it's true. The more I've read this chapter, the more I've found it a great picture of what life in the church ought to be like. Thirty-eight individuals are named and forty-two different groups are identified. There are more than thirty households mentioned by their family names and the places they came from. Some lived in Jerusalem, some were from Jericho, vs2, and some from Tekoa, vs5. The regions of Gibeon and Meronoth are both mentioned, vs7. People came from different places and joined together to be part of the rebuilding programme - it caught their imagination as well as their vision!

There are also various occupations highlighted in this chapter, with different social strata represented. Take a look at vs8: *Uzziel son of Harhaiah, one of the goldsmiths, repaired the next section; and Hananiah, one of the perfume-makers, made repairs next to that ...* The Lord didn't need a thousand masons and carpenters to rebuild the wall; he needed ordinary people who were willing to get their hands dirty! There are also references to farmers and soldiers and nobles and merchants. People from a variety of backgrounds, trades, and from all walks of life, joined together to do the work that needed to be done.

Nehemiah works his way around the wall, assigning each worker a place to work and a task to do. Just as no one person could construct the whole wall by himself, so too, you and I are called to work in a certain part of God's kingdom. No one can do everything, but everyone can do something. Romans 12:6 says: *We have different gifts according to the grace given us.* We are all 'SHAPED For Ministry' - there's a surplus of tasks that anyone of you should be able to undertake.