

### Lean Times 3: Faith to Move Out!

Nehemiah 2:1-10

Danny Cox, a former jet pilot turned business leader, tells his readers in *Seize the Day* that when jet fighters were first invented, they "flew much faster than their propeller predecessors. So pilot ejection became a more sophisticated process. Theoretically of course, all a pilot needed to do was push a button, clear the plane, then roll forward out of the seat so the parachute would open."

But there was a problem that popped up during testing. Some pilots, instead of letting go, would keep a grip on the seat. The parachute would remain trapped between the seat and the pilot's back.

The engineers went back to the drawing board and came up with a solution. Cox writes:

The new design called for a two-inch webbed strap. One end attached to the front edge of the seat, under the pilot. The other end attached to an electronic take-up reel behind the headrest. Two seconds after ejection, the electronic take-up reel would immediately take up the slack, and force the pilot forward out of his seat, thus freeing the parachute.

Bottom line? Jet fighter pilots needed that device to launch them out of their chairs. Question is, what will it take to launch us out of ours?

(Source: Jim Davis, pastor, Silverdale, Washington; source: Danny Cox, *Seize the Day: Seven Steps to Achieving the Extraordinary in an Ordinary World*, Career Press, 1994.)

Thriving in the midst of "lean times" is a matter of having a solid foundation of faith – your place to "lean" – and working hard as God gives you the opportunity.

When we began the story of Nehemiah a last week, we saw that Nehemiah lived in Persia's capital city, Susa, the most powerful place in the world at that time. His brother Hanani comes back from their homeland with bad news. The city of God's people, Jerusalem, is in ruins. Even though it had been decades since God allowed Jerusalem's destruction as a judgment on His backslidden people, its walls are still a pile of rubble and the gates are a charred shell. Morale is low. And the recently rebuilt temple of God in Jerusalem, is unprotected and in danger.

Nehemiah sees the need, and feels the call from God to do something about it. So, Nehemiah turned to God for help. In chapter one Nehemiah has seen the need. He has a passion to see things change. He prays for God's help. Now what does he do?

As we come to today's lesson, we see that there is a role for Nehemiah to fill. Remember we learned from chapter one that when God gives you the passion, He also often gives you the project. If God has placed that concern on your heart, He probably is calling you to join Him in doing something about it.

Jesus said to his disciples on the night he was betrayed, (John 14:12-14) **"Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do he will do also; and greater works than these he will do, because I go to My**

**Father. And whatever you ask in My name, that I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask anything in My name, I will do it."**

What does Jesus say? God wants to do great things through His people. And the way He does that is He calls out a people passionate to pray, people who ask in the power and authority of Jesus' name. These praying people have a great dependence on God. The Jesus has a word for dependence on God, **FAITH**. **"He who believes in Me, the works that I do he will do also; and greater works than these he will do,"** And in verse 15 He says, **"If you love Me, keep My commandments."** Faith is really a love relationship with Jesus Christ where we share His heart and His mission.

"Faith never knows where it is being led, but it loves and knows the One who is leading." Oswald Chambers

"I would rather walk in the dark with God than go alone in the light. I would rather walk with Him by faith than walk alone by sight." Mary Gardner Brainard

### **1.) Faith to move out is PATIENT- (v.1)**

**"And it came to pass in the month of Nisan, in the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes,..."** (Nehemiah 2:1a)

Nehemiah has been in PRAYER and periods of FASTING before the Lord for 4 MONTHS concerning the plight of his people in Jerusalem.

Let there be NO DOUBT that when God's people sense that something needs to be done...a heart needs to be changed...a church needs to be revived...a nation needs to be turned- God calls upon His people to PRAY and to persist in prayer!

Luke 18:1 (NIV)- "Jesus told His disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and NOT GIVE UP!"

Peter says to make every effort to add to your faith perseverance. How do we do that? James says the *testing* of your faith produces patience or perseverance.

Persistent, faithful praying is the first thing that Nehemiah did.

### **2.) Faith to move out may require TAKING RISKS- (v.1-3)**

**"...when wine was before him, that I took the wine and gave it to the king. Now I had never been sad in his presence before. Therefore the king said to me, "Why is your face sad, since you are not sick? This is nothing but sorrow of heart." So I became dreadfully afraid,"**

As the king's "cupbearer", Nehemiah was responsible to see that the food and drink given to the king was safe. He would personally make sure that it was not poisoned and, in this role, was TRUSTED by the king. As you can imagine, it was vital for Nehemiah to show up every day, looking and feeling his best...for the king likely preferred to eat and drink every day!!

I think it's important to point out that WAITING for God to answer his prayers didn't keep Nehemiah from doing his job. Was he somewhat distracted?

Probably! Was he weary and worn out from his prayer and fasting? Definitely (according to the text).

BUT HE STILL SHOWED UP AND DID HIS JOB...in fact, this is the first time in four months that his internal struggle really showed in his outward appearance:

**"I had never been sad in his presence before."**

Some might question: "Is this right? Isn't it like 'denial' or something for Nehemiah to act like everything's OK? He should have been sad earlier...let King Atreherxes know he was 'bummed out'."

I disagree...I think sometimes we fall into the "trap" of settling for human sympathy and miss out on God's solution. We walk around and put our BURDENS on public display...and we LOOK MISERABLE...and people FEEL SORRY for us...and that makes us feel better.

Jesus talked about this misguided trade-off in Matthew 6:16-18:

**"Moreover, when you fast, do not be like the hypocrites, with a sad countenance. For they disfigure their faces that they may appear to men to be fasting. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. But you, when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, so that you do not appear to men to be fasting, but to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly."**

WHILE WE WAIT FOR GOD'S ANSWER...until orders change...CONTINUE TO SERVE!

But on this particular day, Nehemiah's face showed sadness. To enter the presence of the king SAD or to talk about your problems was extremely risky. A king wanted to be served and made happy and Nehemiah was literally taking his CAREER if not HIS LIFE in his hands by letting his burden show this day.

"Hey preacher, ...I thought the your point was about NOT acting this way!"

Actually...the point was about being AUTHENTIC before God. Nehemiah is not seeking the sympathy of King Atreherxes...Nehemiah has prayed for God to give him favor with the king. And he stands before the one person God has shown him will help his cause. On this day the burden God has placed upon his heart is too heavy to deny. This is an "ALL or NOTHING" moment...not a pity-party.

Have you ever come to an all-or-nothing moment with God?

### **3.) Faith to move out PRAYS - (v. 4)**

**"Then the king said to me, "What do you request?" So I prayed to the God of heaven."**

This is a powerful example...and more evidence of the kind of man Nehemiah is. He has BEEN praying for 4 months. He is weary and worn by his prayer and fasting...and NOW, in this "all or nothing" moment...he pauses in his heart...to pray again.

Look back to Chapter 1:11 and see the prayer that Nehemiah has been praying:

**“... let Your servant prosper this day, I pray, and grant him mercy in the sight of this man.”**

It is COMPLETELY fair to assume that Nehemiah's DAILY prayer was, “God, give me success today...God, give me favor with the king today...” But that he WAITED until...the RIGHT MOMENT...and here it is! But he stops and just asks, “Lord, is this it? Is this the moment I've been praying for? I've been praying that you would grant me favor and I need the courage to step out now!”

I found a quote that I just LOVED about this important moment in Nehemiah's life: “Success comes when a thousand hours of preparation meet one moment of opportunity.”

Here's Nehemiah's one moment of opportunity.

**an effort to:**

#### **4.) Faith to move our makes a PLAN - (v.5-9)**

**“And I said to the king, “If it pleases the king, and if your servant has found favor in your sight, I ask that you send me to Judah, to the city of my fathers' tombs, that I may rebuild it.” Then the king said to me (the queen also sitting beside him), “How long will your journey be? And when will you return?” So it pleased the king to send me; and I set him a time.**

**Furthermore I said to the king, “If it pleases the king, let letters be given to me for the governors of the region beyond the River, that they must permit me to pass through till I come to Judah, and a letter to Asaph the keeper of the king's forest, that he must give me timber to make beams for the gates of the citadel which pertains to the temple, for the city wall, and for the house that I will occupy.” And the king granted them to me according to the good hand of my God upon me. Then I went to the governors in the region beyond the River, and gave them the king's letters. Now the king had sent captains of the army and horsemen with me.”**

Please do not think that “faith” means always “flying by the seat of your pants”.

Faith and Planning...Prayer and Planning go hand –in-hand.

The KEY to their relationship is found in Verse 8: **“And the king granted them to me according to the good hand of my God upon me.”**

Psalms 127:1 says: **“Unless the Lord builds the house, its builders labor in vain. Unless the Lord watches over the city, the watchmen stand guard in vain.”**

Andy Stanley puts it this way, “What God originates, He orchestrates.”

It was important that Nehemiah PRAY because the heart of the king had been against the rebuilding of Jerusalem.

But it was important that Nehemiah PLAN because when the king asked what he needed, Nehemiah's answer was critical...I need this much time...and I need

letters so I can get there safely...and I need permission to obtain building materials.

THEN GOD ADDS THE BONUS: He moved in Artaxerxes' heart to do even more and he sent Nehemiah with officers and soldiers to protect Nehemiah along the way!

### **5.) Faith to move out may bring OPPOSITION- (v.10)**

**"When Sanballat the Horonite and Tobiah the Ammonite official heard of it, they were deeply disturbed that a man had come to seek the well-being of the children of Israel."**

God's leading and blessing DOES NOT necessarily mean no trials/opposition.

Often, the very act of stepping out in faith will bring hardship. The history of the church of Jesus Christ is full of stories of faith which bring opposition. In Acts 3 Peter and John step out in faith to heal a crippled man and boldly preach the gospel. Immediately, the priests and the temple guard arrest them and threaten them. In Acts 6, one of the first deacons, Stephen steps out in faith and preached the gospel, he also was arrested and stoned to death. In Acts 13 Paul and Barnabas are sent out as the first missionaries from the church at Antioch. They preach the gospel and many believed and were saved. But Acts 13:50 tell us: **"But the Jews stirred up the devout and prominent women and the chief men of the city, raised up persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and expelled them from their region."**

We will not always face this same kind of opposition, maybe it will just begin with ridicule, like it did with Nehemiah. But you will never know how God can sustain you in hard times until you move out in faith.

Perhaps this message is geared toward the person dealing with an important financial decision, or a career move. Or a high school senior deciding on a plan for the future. Maybe it's about a key medical decision, or even a struggle of whether or not to get married. Most of those decisions don't sound like hard times ... but they are hard decisions. Lean times just make those decisions even more important. These decisions are too important to make a mistake. Take it to God, wait patiently for Him while you continue to serve, pray for God's direction, and move out in faith.

Illustration: It was Sept. 11, 2001, and the world was coming unglued. Planes had crashed into both towers of the World Trade Center. Another plane had intentionally crashed into the Pentagon. Smoke and flames were rising in the air, surrounded by the sounds of sirens and screams.

Todd Beamer was just trying to get to work, flying from Newark to San Francisco.

When Flight 93 was suddenly hijacked, Todd found himself in the back of a 737 with nine other passengers, and five flight attendants. Another 27 passengers had been forced to the front of the plane, where hijackers had wounded or killed the pilot and copilot.

In the back of the plane, the passengers connected through cell phones and the GTE In-flight phones on board. Todd got through to Lisa Jefferson, a GTE supervisor. Within a few minutes, the group had comprehended what had happened in New York and Washington, and what was apparently going to happen to them.

Todd stayed on the phone with Jefferson, giving authorities invaluable information about the situation. He also told Jefferson that the passengers and flight attendants had decided to do what they could to foil the hijackers' plans.

And that's where it all came together. Todd Beamer was a man of great faith. He and his wife Lisa had two young sons, and a third child on the way. They had been deeply involved in Bible studies, and in the fellowship of their church. They hadn't played the game of church or religion ... they'd plugged into the real thing. Todd was already moving out in faith when the most important moment of his life suddenly sprung upon him. Todd didn't have to waste time trying to match his actions to his words. Like all of us he was struggling in some areas, but by and large, he was living by faith in Jesus.

Todd had found the focus of his life, and it had changed him profoundly. His prayer life was the fuel behind his success as a software salesman. His faith in Christ, and the teachings of the Bible, were helping him to balance an overbooked, workaholic schedule with his family responsibilities. He and Lisa were enjoying the best days of their marriage, and looking forward to even better days.

Little did Todd Beamer know he was about to become the only reason American's would have to cheer on such a grief-stricken day.

Still on the phone with Lisa Jefferson, Todd asked her to call his wife, and tell her that he loved her. Then he asked the stranger on the phone to pray with him. He told her he knew he wasn't going to make it, when they jumped the hijackers. They quoted the Lord's Prayer together, and Todd asked Jesus to help him.

He left the phone off the hook, hoping to help the authorities even more. And that's how Lisa Jefferson heard the beginnings of the revolt. Todd looked 13 fellow Americans in the eye, and said, "Are you guys ready? Let's roll!"

Lisa Jefferson heard some noise, lost the connection, and later discovered that Flight 93 had crashed in a Pennsylvania field. All on board perished, but the plans of the terrorists also perished. Todd and the others gave up their lives while saving the lives and spirits of untold Americans. (Source: Details taken from Let's Roll, by

Lisa Beamer, and the transcript the FBI provided. <http://www.family.org/married/youngcouples/a0021853.cfm>

What will it take for you to move out in faith?