



Church Jumpstart:

A 10-Week Journey Towards Reviving Our Church

Session 7: Look Around You

Devotional:

How God Can Change A Life And Transform A City - 10 Steps Of Transformation in Nehemiah 1 through 4

1. God stirs up within me **holy discontent**. (Nehemiah 1:1-4a)

Through the visit of his brother and the report which he brought, Nehemiah was made aware of the terrible conditions back home in Jerusalem. He was so shaken by what he heard that his first response was to *mourn*. Before he can remake my heart into something usable, God must first break my heart. I must feel the need to change deep inside, or I will lack the motivation to change. Am I willing to look at my city through eyes of faith and see what God sees?

2. I commit to **change**, to **work**, and to **engage**. (Nehemiah 1:4b)

Nehemiah mourned, then *fasted*. Fasting is an act of prayer and confession that requires great discipline and determination. Nehemiah was willing to make that commitment. He was willing to set aside his comforts to seek God with all his heart. God looks for that type of passion in a man or woman that he intends to use. We will seek God and find him when we see him with 'all our hearts' (Jeremiah 29:13) No change can be brought to our society unless God's people are "all-in". Half-heartedness will change nothing.

3. I seek God for his **presence** and **power** to guide and strengthen me. (Nehemiah 1:4c-11a)

Nehemiah mourned, fasted *and prayed*. He knew that no matter how much he was willing to give, it would fall far short of what was needed. He knew that 'unless the Lord builds the house its builders labor in vain' (Psalm 127:1). Time and again in the story, we will see Nehemiah giving his greatest effort *combined with* earnest, unquenchable prayer. Both are needed.

In the prayer he offers in the second half of chapter 1 we see Nehemiah exhibiting an amazing trait: He completely identifies himself with the sin of his ancestors. "We have sinned..." he cries out to God, even though the sins that led to Israel's exile were committed more than 150 years earlier. He knew that the same sinful and prideful tendencies that led to their downfall were imbedded in his heart.

As we look about our city, praying about the needs and weaknesses we see, it is important that we adopt an attitude similar to Nehemiah's. When our society crumbles around us because of sin, we are not above the fray. "We have sinned," should still be the cry of our hearts.

4. God **implants a vision** within me. (Nehemiah 1:11b – final sentence)

"I was a cupbearer to the king," Nehemiah writes at the end of chapter 1. A cupbearer was a prominent position in that age. It required unique integrity and education, and was highly compensated. Nehemiah had reached a station of comfort and security in life that most of us spend our days trying to aspire to. Yet it wasn't enough for him. There was more inside of him than a cupbearer. There was a city-builder inside of him, though Nehemiah scarcely knew it at first. And there was a governor inside of him as well. God was going to bring those dreams out.

We must remember that the purpose of life is not to get comfortable. We're not put here to just shore up our lives to the point where we are perfectly secure. There's more in us than that. "*The chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy him forever,*" said a famous Confession for centuries ago. A Christian lives to serve the growth of God's kingdom on earth. What visions might God grant us if we remember our highest calling?

5. I take time for the vision to **grow** and **gestate**.

(Nehemiah 2:1)

Using the dates that Nehemiah provides in his journal, we see that at least four months pass by between the time his brother first speaks to him and the time he finally approaches the king. Nehemiah had much to think about during the time. To act impulsively would get him nowhere. Vision must gestate inside of us if the changes it would bring are to be lasting. Jesus instructed us to count the cost before we attempt things for God. We see from God's own work with us, and with his people in the Bible, that he is never in a hurry. God takes extraordinary stretches of time to bring into being his own plans for our redemption.

6. The vision matures into a workable **plan**. (Nehemiah 2:2-9)

Minimally, Nehemiah needed to take enough time to work through all the details an ambitious project would require. Since he would need the king's permission and financing to pull this off, he needed to anticipate the king's questions and prepare answers for each of them. We see in these verses that Nehemiah had thoroughly reflected on what would be required. Good planning requires definition being given to seven areas (The 7 P's of Planning):

Program/Preparation/Personnel/ Promotion & Publicity/ Price/Problems/Progress

Making a lasting impact on our city for the good will ask of us to "love the Lord our God with all our *minds*" by thinking through a strategic plan to follow with specific objectives in mind. If evil people *plan out* the bad things they would do ("*Even on his bed he plots evil...*" Psalm 36:4), how much more should the righteous.

7. I **launch out**. (Nehemiah 2:11-20)

Some might object that planning nullifies the need for faith and prayer. But Nehemiah's example shows that great tactical wisdom *and* great faith belong together. Nehemiah can have all his 'ducks in a row', but without the faith to launch out into the deep, he would change nothing. Faith is the ligaments that joins each of these 10 steps together.

At any point in this journey from vision to execution, Nehemiah could have pulled out, and scuttled the entire project. We must certainly never reach a point where we begin relying on the greatness of our plan instead of the greatness of our God. On the other hand, as his stewards, our Lord looks to us to employ our God-given intellect and to act with discipline, responsibility and excellence.

8. I gather my **team** and begin the work. (Nehemiah 3)

Nehemiah knew he would accomplish nothing without the help of good and godly people around him. Chapter 3 is a careful record Nehemiah kept of all the key people and players who contributed to rebuilding the walls. Someone once said that great things can happen if you don't mind who gets the credit. That is Nehemiah's attitude. Changing our communities for the good will require working shoulder to shoulder with brothers and sisters of faith.

9. I anticipate and prepare for **opposition** to come. (Nehemiah 2:10, 4:1-3)

"It's never easy," is a good motto for life. The enemy is not going to take lying down our efforts to change ourselves and our communities for Christ. We must brace for challenges to come and obstacles to arise.

10. I evaluate my **progress** and make **adjustments**. (Nehemiah 4:4-23)

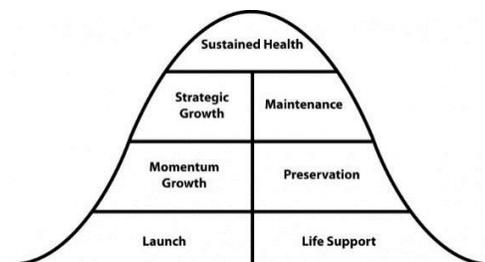
Nehemiah showed a remarkable ability to think on the fly, and to create solutions that addressed problems they encountered. The picture here of the people working with their tools in one hand and a sword in the other is a great symbol of the work we would do for God – always giving Jesus our very best while at the same time looking for Jesus to give us his very best. We cannot do this without him; and rarely will he do something without us.

What was the result of Nehemiah's efforts? (Nehemiah 6:15-16)

In 52 days walls that had laid in ruins for nearly 90 years were rebuilt. This story is a remarkable testament to the power of vision combined with the power of faithful obedience.

Discussion of *The Unstuck Church*

Chapter 7: *Life-Support – It's Time To Embrace A New Beginning*



*“It’s likely that the church will close its doors if it’s reached the life-support stage. The primary reason churches reach this stage is that they may want to grow, but they cling to old methods. If a church however acknowledges that the end is near and sometimes they are willing to do something dramatic to turn things around. **The church can’t survive at this point without a relaunch.**” ~ Tony Morgan*

According to Tony Morgan in “The Unstuck Church”, what are some characteristics of churches in this phase?

- They are unwilling **to change**
- There is no **fruit**. It’s not uncommon for the church to go years without any adults accepting Christ and being baptized.
- The church is being led by one key **family** or one key **donor**. The future depends largely on what these key influencers do next.
- They are typically in **financial** crisis.
- They are **aging**.
- The **blame-game** takes root.

How does a church in the preservation stage return to health?

Embrace A New Mission: Begin By Reestablishing Why The Church Exists

Why do you think Morgan keeps returning to this point? Has he run out of ideas?

Go Back To The Start: It's Time To Relaunch A New Life Cycle

"I know from personal experience that anytime I've wanted a new level of health and strengthen my life, I've had to engage some new disciplines. I had to have enough 'want to' first, and then I needed to put a plan in place and work that plan to ultimately achieve my goal. I've never just drifted into a new place of health.

"I'm always amazed at how many churches want new health and growth but are not willing to embrace a new vision and strategy. They aren't willing to set aside traditions and current methods. Don't let negative people who are stuck in their ways hold your ministry hostage. If your church is facing imminent death, it's time for a radical change." ~ Morgan

Can you think of some occasions in Scripture where God 'started over' with his people?

What are two ways we can 'start over'?

Experience Hope: But Develop A Plan And Put It Into Action

"Hope is not a strategy. You need a strategy...If you are in a hole, rule number one is to stop digging...Healthy churches plan to do what is healthy and then put that plan into action. There's almost a tenacious focus on making sure nothing gets in the way of their being the healthy church they believe God has called them to be. They are healthy, they plan, they live it out." ~ Morgan

3. Pretend that you are writing a letter to Jesus about Taft. Describe for Jesus in a paragraph one group of people that your heart hurts for right now – a group that you really wish Jesus could help.

Descriptors of Taft

Groups To Help

It's time for us to begin asking God to give us a _____ for ourselves corporately as a church, and individually. There are two questions to ponder for next week:

1. If FBC were to “relaunch” as a church, where would we focus our energies in Year One? A corporate “vision statement” would describe this.

2. If I were to serve my church joy-fully (*with joy, and fully*), how and where would I serve?

Keeping “mission” and “vision” straight in our thinking can be challenging, but Tony Morgan has worked overtime trying to help us see the difference. As you think through these two questions for next week, read through these Morgan “greatest hits” about “vision” and “vision statements” from “The Unstuck Church”. You’ll find that it helps.

Tony Morgan’s “Greatest Hits” On ‘Vision’

A *vision statement* describes where you picture the church to be heading in the future.

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In addition to mission buy-in, though, everyone needs to clearly know where they are going. That’s the vision.

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Mission: defines the primary purpose for the church. Typically, in twelve words or less, I help the church develop a mantra that answers the why question. Why do we exist?

Vision: paints a picture of where the church is going in the future. I like to develop that vision for three to five years out. I also like to make the vision specific and measurable.

Strategy: clarifies how the mission and vision will be accomplished. It’s good to take the big picture and break it down into bite-sized chunks of what needs to happen in the next 6 to 12 months.

Values: The values reflect the underlying principles that shape the culture of the church. If developed properly, they should really set the church apart from every other church in the region. They should drive the actions and decisions of every person on the team.

I challenge churches to be United around the following.

- Doctrine – every church should have a Statement of Faith.
- Mission – there should be one sentence defining why the church exists.
- Vision – There should be an agreement on what the church is planning and praying for in the future.
- Strategy – Leadership must have agreement on how that vision will be accomplished.
- Values – Values shape the culture.

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I've noticed that sometimes leaders get confused about mission and vision. They are not the same thing. I've also seen churches hold on to these pseudo-vision statements for way too long. Without specifics, you can't paint the picture of the future. Without that clear picture, it's impossible to rally people to the cause. The vision needs to be refreshed every few years or so.

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Let me offer these suggestions for how you might go about renewing the vision:

1. Don't go at it alone. Involve a dozen or so strategically minded leaders in the process.
2. Don't try to develop a vision with the entire congregation having a voice. You can't survey your way to vision. God's leaders should develop the vision for God's church.
3. Once you have the building blocks of the vision in place, engage other leaders, both staff and lay leaders, in developing the action plan. In other words a small group of leaders should shape the vision, and then a larger group of leaders should put the strategy in motion.
4. Communicate the new vision with the key stake holders first.
5. Use the renewed vision as an opportunity to rally people with their prayers, their time, and their financial resources.
6. Don't be surprised when a renewed vision causes some people to leave the church.

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You have to connect whatever changes you are making to the mission and vision of the church. Once the leadership team believes the change has been communicated, it should be communicated again and again. The person at the lowest level of leadership should have an understanding of the change that is taking place...Many times change fails, though, because leaders neglect this step. They jump immediately to implementation without expressing the why that is driving the decision. You need to rally people around the vision first.

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I've noticed it's very easy for church leaders to overestimate the level of negativity toward the change. Fear is often louder than reality...The church needs a vision for the future in order to remain healthy. It needs to be specific. It needs to be big enough to rally people to the cause. It needs to be big enough that it can't be accomplished in your own effort, but realistic enough that it could happen through a move of God.

For next week:

- Spend time praying and thinking about the “Two Questions”.
- Read chapter 1, “*Launch: Let’s Build Something New!*” in “The Unstuck Church”.
- If you are able, join Dr. Bob Orr on Saturday, September 7, from 2:00 to 4:00, for a hands-on workshop on redrafting the church’s governance statements. His work is based on John Kaiser’s book “*Winning On Purpose*”, which we recommend every church leader have on their shelves.

Bob will then be with us on Sunday, September 8th, in Sunday School and in the service.

