

A Spirit of Response

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[0:00] Hey, good morning, One Harbor. Donnie Griggs here. I am one of the pastors at One Harbor, but I also have the privilege of serving as the lead pastor for the church. And so if you're brand new to Christianity, brand new to our church, just checking this whole thing out.

We are so, so glad you're here this morning. If you're part of One Harbor, we are doing some videos like this from time to time to help me communicate with all of you, help us talk about things that are happening in the church that you need to know about, talk about our vision, those kinds of things. I wanna say that I'm sorry if it feels a bit hokey, and I wanna tell you that I promise that this is not because I think I look really good on a huge screen. So let's just get that out of the way. Couple of just whole church things I would love you guys to know about and be praying for before we jump into the sermon this morning.

Firstly is to be praying for our Swansboro site. So if you're new, One Harbor is one church with four locations. We've got one in Moorhead City, one in Beaufort that we call East, one in New Bern and one in Swansboro.

And the Swansboro congregation, they just moved into a brand new building on Easter Sunday. It was crazy, like crazy. Like they had hundreds of people that they don't normally have.

[1:11] And just, it was amazing. Chaos, but amazing. But I was there last Sunday. Man, they're doing so well. There's lots of new people. There's lots of challenges, lots of opportunities.

Please pray for them. They need our prayers and our support, especially in this first season, getting used to being in this new building and trying to figure out what they're gonna do with all these people that are now coming.

I'm over there now a couple of days a week working in the office, and I'm over there some on Sundays as well. And so that's the first one. It's the Swansboro site. And the second one is, if you've been around at all, you should know that one of the things that we're really trusting God for this year and probably forever, to be honest, is that our church would grow more and more into kind of what we're describing as radical discipleship.

A disciple is a follower of Jesus. And we're using the term radical just to kind of accent it and say, hey, man, we're really hoping that we wouldn't just be like Christians who go to church, but we'd be like radical followers of Jesus.

We'd be willing to do whatever he says. We'd be fully devoted to him. That's not anything new. I mean, this church actually started. It was founded, birthed out of some Acts 4.13 kind of Christianity, which is like just a bunch of ordinary people who'd been with Jesus and were turning the world upside down.

[2:29] That's what was in our heart in the beginning, and that's still there. And we're just, we wanna see that grow and grow and grow more. And so we're all praying for that. The pastors and leaders are praying for that.

All the pastors and wives, a couple weeks back, we took two days where we fasted. We didn't eat, we prayed, we worshiped. We're just praying and God help us with this. And I wanna invite you to please pray with us for that.

Pray that God would give us clarity on next steps, that God would help us with how do we help as all of us that call One Harbor Church Home continue to grow more and more into radical followers of Jesus.

Okay, lots and lots more we could talk about with church vision stuff, but that's good for now. Let's jump back into our series in Nehemiah. Now, if you're new, Nehemiah is a short book in the Old Testament, the first kind of portion of the Bible, if you will.

And usually, like, you only hear Nehemiah get preached in a church setting, like, when there's a building project. And that's for a good reason, because Nehemiah is about a guy on a building project.

[3 : 31] And so, you know, if you've gotta put up a new building or raise money, it's a good book to look at, because we don't have a whole lot of those, right? So it's good for that. But, like, it's also nestled, it's got way more than that, obviously, it's nestled in and amongst a lot of other books of the Bible.

And we, at One Harbor, we believe and talk about this all the time, that the whole Bible, it's a bunch of little stories, but it's actually telling one big story. I've got a friend, Andrew Wilson. He's a good friend of our church and just an excellent Bible teacher.

And he sums up the Bible by using a series of words that start with E, very preacher-like. And so I'm gonna just kind of buzz through these really quick to help you get a sense of, one, if you're new to the Bible, what's the, like, the width and breadth of the story?

But if you're not new and you're just like, I've heard of Nehemiah, but where is it at in the story? This will help place it, okay? So we're just gonna do this quickly. This is the whole Bible in, like, two minutes. So the Bible starts off, the first word that starts with E is the word Eden.

The Bible starts off in a garden that God creates with man and woman. God, he creates them. He makes them into his own likeness. He gives them his presence. He gives them everything they need, but they quickly fall from grace and sinners the world and a whole bunch of bad stuff.

[4 : 45] Fast forward to Genesis around chapter 11. We get election, which is where God chooses a man and his family, Abraham, and says, like, through you, the families of the world will be blessed.

Like, I'm gonna make your people a great people. Fast forward again, we get to the story of the Exodus. And this is where God's people have fallen into sin, fallen into slavery, and they are now captives.

And God sends Moses. He comes and he rescues his people from slavery. It's a giant story in the Bible. It's all over the place in the Bible. Fast forward again through Judges and all the rest.

We get to the next E word, which is empire. And this is where all the tribes of Israel are ruled together by one king. Saul, then it was David, then it was Solomon.

Solomon's amazing. He builds the temple. He's incredibly wise. He's, like, wealthy. It's like the pinnacle of everything, right? And that lasted about one generation. So not so long.

[5 : 47] Civil war effectively breaks out. Now you have a northern kingdom and a southern kingdom, you know, Israel and Judah. And things descend and get really terrible. Fast forwarding to the next E, God's people go into exile.

And they're now forced to live in Babylon. It's all kinds of bad. But then along comes this guy named Cyrus, and he decrees that the Jews can now go back home to their land, and they can worship their own God.

They get to go home, and they get to rebuild their temple, and they get to rebuild their city. And so we get a few books that talk about this. Ezra is one of them. Ezra talks about them going home to rebuild the temple for the second time.

And then Nehemiah is about them rebuilding the walls of the city of Jerusalem. And then kind of carrying on the E's theme quickly, Easter is what Andrew uses. You know, he had to find an E. Easter is the arrival of Jesus. It's the life and ministry of Jesus. It's the death and resurrection of Jesus. It's all of those things. Ends of the earth, that is Jesus. He commissions his disciples, his followers, after he's risen from the dead, he empowers them with the spirit and sends them to cross the whole earth, he says, to be his witnesses, to make disciples, to fill the earth with the gospel.

[7 : 03] And then E is the last. The last E is end. That's the end of the Bible, the end of the story, where Jesus returns for a second time to restore all things and remake the world, okay?

So that's the scope of the Bible, thanks to our friend Andrew, with letters, words that start with E. And Nehemiah falls chronologically right at the very kind of end of the Old Testament.

And he talks about the plan, he talks about God's plan through Nehemiah to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem. Why are walls such a big deal? I mean, like, what's the big deal about walls?

It's kind of lost on us in our modern moment. But imagine your house not having a door. That would probably not be, you know, a great thing. Now, some of you might, like, not have a door at your house, or it gets working out fine.

But for most of us, like, having a door is kind of a big deal. It was like that. It was like, it was what kept them safe. Like, walls kept them safe. And you know this from all kinds of movies and stuff. [7:59] I mean, that's how the world existed for a long time. It's actually not too dissimilar from living in a gated neighborhood, right? Why the implication is that you're gonna be a little bit more safe because of this security.

Well, it certainly was that for them. So there's like a safety issue for the people of God. But then also, more than that, this wasn't just any old city. This was like Jerusalem. It was the city of God. And so not having a wall made it a poor representation of God's glory to a watching world. So that's what was the importance of walls. Why should we care, aside from this being like our historical ancestors and the faith?

Well, we should care because the Bible tells us that the Old Testament is actually a shadow of the things to come. And so these Old Testament pictures actually point to New Testament realities that we're living in.

And that means that the story isn't just important historically. This story has got something to say to us. The church, the Bible tells us, is the new Jerusalem. And so the church is meant to be a safe place where God's people can do life together, the life of the Spirit together.

[9:07] It's meant to be a beautiful witness to a watching world. One way that Jesus describes the church is as a city set on a hill and our light shines into the darkness. That's what we're supposed to be like.

And so we can draw a lot from Nehemiah as a shadow of things to come. We can look at it. So we're gonna pick up the story today. Nehemiah is a cupbearer to the king.

That's a very privileged role. It's the king of Persia. It's some 800 miles away from Jerusalem. And he hears through a friend about the city of Jerusalem being destroyed. And his response is not, well, I'm glad I'm not living there.

You know, it's not like, it's not my problem. You know, I got a sweet job and I'm 800 miles away. It doesn't sound like a problem that I need to think about. That's not his response. His response is weeping and praying and actually begging God to use him to help.

That's his response. And he's in this privileged role. It's not his problem, but he makes it his problem. He goes to the king, Artaxerxes, and ask him to send him to rebuild the city, to send him with letters for safety, and to send him with wood from the king's forest.

[10:15] He says, I even wanna take the trees down in your forest and use it to rebuild the walls and to rebuild the city. Remarkably, the king agrees and sends him off and that's where we pick up the story.

Nehemiah chapter two, verses 11 through 20. So I went to Jerusalem. I was there for three days. Then I rose in the night and I and a few men with me and I told no one what my God had put into my heart to do for Jerusalem.

There was no animal with me, but the one on which I rode, I went out by night to the valley gate, to the dragon spring, to the dung gate. I inspected the walls of Jerusalem that were broken down and its gates that had been destroyed by fire.

Then I went on to the fountain gate and to the king's pool, but there was no room for the animal that was under me to pass. Then I went up in the night by the valley and inspected the wall.

And I turned back and entered by the valley gate and so returned. The officials did not know where I'd gone or what I was doing. I had not yet told the Jews, the priests, the nobles, the officials, the rest who were to do the work.

[11:17] Then I said to them, you see this 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.

And I told them of the hand of my God that had been upon me for good and also of the words of the king had spoken to me. And they said, let us rise and build. So they strengthened their hands for the good work.

But when Sambalot, the Huronite, and Tobiah, the Ammonite, servant of Geshem, the Arab, heard of it, they jeered at us and despised us and said, what is this thing that you're doing?

Are you rebuilding against the king? Are you rebelling against the king? Then I replied, the God of heaven will make us prosper and we, his servants, will arise and build. But you have no portion or right or claim in Jerusalem.

All right, there is so much here. If you are a leader in any sphere at all, this is such a great passage to go look at and learn leadership lessons from. But it's not just good for leaders and it's not just good for building projects.

[12:24] It's good for all of us all the time. That's what God's word is. Like it's good for us all, all the time. All of us are encountering things that, you know, need to change. All of us are confronted with seemingly impossible odds.

All of us are facing temptations to turn inward or to look away. All of us face hostility and negativity and so on and so on, right? And so let's dive in and let's see what this passage can say to us as a church now.

Firstly, what a daunting task. He's going to rebuild city walls, the city. I mean, it describes the situation. It is unbelievable. And there's like, there's gates that people are meant to enter through that he can't even get, he can't even get through with a horse, right?

Well, like them, we too have a massive task ahead of us. How do we know what our task is? Well, we can do what he did. You figure out what your task is by having to look around.

Nehemiah saw that the city was in decline. He came and inspected it, right? And in verse 13, it says, and I inspected the walls of Jerusalem. He goes out and he does an inspection.

[13:26] He's surveying the situation. And he sees that they are broken down and that the gates had been destroyed by fire. He had heard about it way back in the beginning of Nehemiah.

Now he sees it with his own eyes. He goes and has a look around, right? Where do you and I see decline in our city? Like our actual city and our church and all of that.

Like where do we see decline? Think of things like addiction and poverty and anxiety and depression and marriages being destroyed and deconstruction of people's faith and hatred being normalized and all this stuff.

We're actually living in a very dark cultural moment where people are abandoning God and abandoning the church. They're worshiping sex, money, power, and so on instead.

And the result is that they are more and more anxious, broken, destructive, distracted, all the things. It's not just true for our cultural moment, by the way.

[14:27] Every generation has to contend. John Raleigh Mott, a famous missionary, wrote a book in 1900 called *The Evangelization of the World and This Generation* where he argued to a generation that it was their job to take the gospel to the whole world in their generation.

Every generation has a responsibility to pass on the gospel to the next generation. Every generation has to face cultural idols and all kinds of challenges and wars and pandemics and all kinds of things, right?

That's every generation's task. Don Carson famously said that one generation believes the gospel, it passes the baton on to another generation that will assume the gospel and they will pass it on to a generation that will then deny the gospel.

And we're living in a moment in our kind of little part of the world here in the rural south where a previous generation, maybe even our generation, assumed the gospel to some extent and passed the baton on to a generation that's now denying the gospel.

We've got this heart for filling Eastern North Carolina with the gospel. We've talked about how we've prayed for years now, over 10 years, that God would use us to plant churches all along the Eastern coast of North Carolina to plant churches in towns where no one right now is thinking about putting a church, where we can see the gospel not just preached on Sundays but lived out every day of the week and see the gospel impact and change our whole region.

[16:00] These little towns with big problems that only Jesus can solve, with darkness that only the light of the gospel can penetrate. Where we live is beautiful, but it's broken. And I wonder if you would agree with me that if we were to survey all of this, we would see it in decline.

And maybe you're even thinking, why should the church care about this kind of stuff? And we should just do Sunday mornings and Wednesday nights and just let the world, you know, figure their self out, right? Well, we have lots of Bible verses to tell us to do otherwise.

One is actually in Jeremiah 29, 7 where God speaks to his people who are then currently in exile and tells them to seek the welfare of the city where he had sent them and to pray to the Lord on its behalf.

Now, you might be thinking, gosh, I don't know. I don't think where we live is that bad. I mean, I know of places that are really bad. I mean, there's this one place on the news or I used to visit this

one city or this one country. And that's true.

Like we can always look around the world and go someplace else has it worse. But there's also like a truth, guys, to being conditioned to your own environment, right? You ever like been over to someone's house that's got like dogs and they've never ever considered washing the dogs and the dogs are like sitting at the dinner table and they're like up on the couch in your lap.

[17:19] They're like all over the place. There's just like hair wafting through the whole place and it smells like musty, wet dog. And then the people are just like oblivious to all of this, right? Why?

Because it's their dogs, you know? As I'm saying this, I'm thinking, I have a dog. Is this me? Is this my house? Right? Some of you have been to my house. You might be thinking, that's you, buddy, right? You get conditioned to your own smell, to your own environment.

The fact is though, guys, like the world that we live in does not look like what God had in mind. And that's just, we're thinking about the outward culture around us. What about inward?

What about inside the church? Our friend Rigby Wallace says this, we want to see the gospel advance to the outermost parts of the earth and the innermost parts of our own hearts. So what about things inside the church?

Here at One Harbor, do they look as God had in mind? Well, I think in a lot of ways, yes. I mean, there's a lot to be encouraged by. There's a lot of just generosity and servant-heartedness.

[18:20] Tons of people coming. I mean, on Easter, I don't know if you know this, on Easter, across our four locations, there were over 4,300 people that came to One Harbor on Easter. That is crazy.

There's people responding to the gospel, people being baptized. There's lots of good stuff, right? But there's maybe other areas that aren't going so well. What about our commitments of following Jesus personally?

How would it look if we did a, quote, survey of those things, if we inspected those walls? Like, what if the walls and the gates represented each of us who call One Harbor Church home, the way we spend time in God's word, our time in prayer, fasting, the way we love our enemies or speak about those who do us harm, the way we're hospitable, opening our homes, our willingness to share our faith with others, our faithfulness in giving or serving or any number of things?

I mean, what if those were the walls and gates that, like, God did a survey of? What would they look like? If it was your life that was getting surveyed, how would it look? I wonder if this is not the biggest task before us as a church.

I have seen our church on the front lines, I've watched it rally in the face of tornadoes and hurricanes and pandemics and crisis and tragedies and stuff in our communities, stuff on the other side of the earth.

[19:53] I have seen our church rally to things that are outside. My heart is that we would keep doing that. We'd keep holding out the gospel to our towns and that we'd be able to fill eastern North Carolina with the hope of the gospel.

Like, I really hope for that. But I also hope that as we hold Jesus out, that we would also maybe even get better, guys, at holding on to Jesus, holding tightly to Jesus ourselves.

Not just holding him out to others, but holding tightly to him ourselves. Paul, and you don't have to choose, by the way. Paul, one of my favorite evangelists, he famously says in that passage where we get all for the sake of the gospel, he says, lest after preaching to others I myself would be disqualified.

He's running all over the world preaching to everyone else. He's like, hey, I'm looking out for me too. I want to make sure I'm following Jesus. I wonder if you're concerned about that for yourself. I am.

And I would encourage you to be. You know, Matthew 7, Jesus said, on that day, the day of judgment, many will come and say, Lord, Lord, didn't we prophesy in your name? Cast out demons in your name.

[21:00] Do many mighty works in your name. And I'll declare to them, I never knew you. I don't want us to be just a church that does great things for God.

I want us to be a church that knows God and loves God. And because of that, swings for the fences. And does everything we can for God. We got a lot of work to do.

We want our church to continue to grow and our love for Jesus to be a safe place for those who call it home. To be a safe place for people who are just wondering if Jesus might be able to save them,

might be able to care for them.

I love that our church is a safe place for that. For folks in addiction, folks, you know, whose lives have kind of gotten up onto the rock, so to speak, and they need help. I want us to shine like a city on a hill.

I want us to be able to face whatever challenges come our way with courage and fill East North Carolina with the hope of the gospel and on and on and on, right? And that means if we're going to do that, we're going to need a lot of help, which gets us to verse 17 and 18.

[22 : 03] He says, you see the trouble we're in? Like Nehemiah sees it for himself, but then he looks at everyone else and says, can you see the trouble we're in? Jerusalem lies in ruins.

Its gates are burned. And then he invites them in verse 18, at the end of verse 18, he says, come, let's do something about it. Come, let's build the wall of Jerusalem that we may no longer suffer derision.

And they said, you're on your own, buddy. No, they said, let us rise up and build. And they strengthened their hands for the good work. And so, like them, we've got a massive task ahead of us, and like them, we each must be willing to help.

And there's a classic example that finds its way into a lot of movies, like remember the Titans and those kinds of movies, where there's a high school or kids sporting event, and there's invariably a dad in the stands who's obnoxious, who's, you know, normally he's out of shape, and he's shouting from the stands, like, you know, yelling at the coaches and yelling at everyone else, like all the things they should be doing better and complaining like crazy.

And then there's invariably one dad, he's the protagonist, he's the good guy, and he shows up at practice and coach, can I do anything to help? And he manages to get in there and he, you know, like there's like this kind of like picture, this proverbial of two kinds of people who are looking at the same problem, but both have very different responses.

[23 : 28] One sees the problem and chooses the cheap seats of complaining, might even choose the cheap seats of just, you know, looking the other way, and the other sees it and chooses to do whatever he can to help solve it.

Right? And Nehemiah is the second kind. Right? He's the dad who shows up at practice. He says, you see the kind of trouble we're in? He, back in Nehemiah 1, he hears they're in great trouble and that they're in shame and even though his life is awesome and he doesn't even know these people and he's 800 miles away, he makes their problem his problem.

But as he gets into this, he can tell straight away he's gonna need a lot of help. He can't rebuild it all on his own. Even with the king's resources, he still has to have help. So he's got this vision, but the vision requires everyone to get involved, to strengthen their hands for the work.

Even involved is not really the right word. My friend PJ told me the story years ago about a tennis player who was asked what it was like being involved in tennis and she replied, I'm not involved, I'm committed.

And then she added this little thing that, you know, I don't know much about tennis, but I know a lot about breakfast. And she added this, it says, she said, the difference between involvement and commitment is like ham and eggs.

[24 : 43] The chicken is involved, the pig's committed. Right? And her whole point was like, I'm not just laying eggs for tennis, I am bleeding. I am like giving my life for this thing.

This was a monumental task that Nia had in mind here. He didn't just need people's little like, little couple little like, you know, little baby efforts of involvement, but he needed commitment.

Friends, we can, just like them, we can fall easily into the trap of taking the cheap seats and being critical, making comments about the state of affairs, of the church, of the culture.

We can sit back and be thankful that it's not our problem. In fact, I think that's actually what happened to us, kind of in rural America, when it comes to this whole deconstruction thing that we're currently facing in America where people are deconstructing their faith.

I think a lot of us watched what was happening in cities a long way away from here and thought, well, sounds like a problem in cities and that's why, you know, whatever. We made excuses for ourselves.

[25 : 43] We, you know, found ways to comfort ourselves. And now, it's happening all around us to people and to families we know. Friends I knew. Friends I had in ministry.

Nehemiah saw the problem and he wanted to be part of the solution, but he needed a tremendous amount of help. And can I tell you something here at One Harbor? We need a tremendous amount of help.

One of the downsides of being a church our size, and there are multiple downsides, right? But one of the downsides is that it's really easy to accidentally look like you've got it all covered when you don't.

And so, man, I'm hoping that in this series, you'll start to get a sense of like, oh my gosh, I'm needed. Like, whatever your gifts are, we need them.

Like, whatever amount of resources you can contribute, I promise you we need them. Like, I promise you, we need them. So I'm hoping again that like in this series, you get a sense of like, man, I'm part of this thing.

[26 : 46] I've got something to contribute and you strengthen your hands for the good work and you get involved. Yeah, we have a lot to be thankful for. I mean, our church has grown so much numerically, which is incredible.

We're amazed by every opportunity we have to tell anybody. I am still amazed as I was on the very first Sunday of One Harbor over 15 years ago. I'm amazed that anyone shows up. It is amazing to me.

So it's a privilege. Don't hear me wrong. It's a privilege. But we need a lot of help. We need more resources. We want to actually do more than have a big Sunday event.

We want to actually care for every single person who calls our church home. We want to like come alongside them no matter where they're at on their journey with Jesus and help them follow Jesus. That's what we want to do.

And so we need a lot of help if we're going to do that, right? You need a little bit of help if you're going to pull off big events on Sundays. You need a lot of help if you're going to try to like disciple and come alongside all the people who are calling this church home.

[27 : 43] And we need a lot of help. Even if we ride together though, we won't all just have smooth sailing. We see this little verse 19. These two guys, you know, they come along, these three guys, and they jeer them.

They despise them. They mock them. Like them, you know, we too are going to face opposition, right? There's mocking. There's kind of a hatred. There's questioning vision. Maybe the most painful thing, there's questioning motives.

Are you rebelling against the king, right? Sometimes that's the hardest thing to handle is when someone questions your motives. What about you personally? Maybe you're facing some of these voices right now.

I mean, if you're in substance abuse recovery, my guess is you've faced all of those or are facing all of those. You know, you've got friends mocking you, maybe even despising you, and you got people questioning your plan.

How's that really going to work? And maybe even people questioning your motives. Like, who are you trying to con this time? Or just, it can be really hard and painful. We're facing these questions too when we think about our church.

[28 : 42] Now, I don't think there's any people that personally, certainly that I don't know of or certainly not any churches that are rooting against us or, you know, these kinds of things. But it doesn't mean we don't have those voices because there's one voice that you can always count on for all of it, right?

In Revelation 12, we read that one of Satan's names in the Bible is the accuser. He is the accuser of the brethren, the accuser of our brothers who accuses them day and night.

The accuser of the brethren. His accusations are relentless. If you and I are going to, if we're going to try to live a life pleasing to God, if we're going to try to be a church where we swing for the fences and we attempt great things for God and all that, man, guys, we are going to face opposition.

All right? William Carey famously said, expect great things, attempt great things when it comes to like the gospel. Expect God to do great things and attempt great things for him. When we believe God at his word, when we live with big gospel boldness and we expect big things, we attempt big things, we're going to face opposition.

And those things can be tough. It can, you can start to believe them yourself, those voices, right? I remember when we first started to think about, you know, filling Eastern North Carolina with the gospel.

[29 : 57] It was like, man, what a pipe dream. What a fantasy. You know, now fast forward, we've got these four locations and they're going well and it's so encouraging. And guys, it still feels daunting and still feels kind of impossible.

Where are we ever going to get the money to do all this? Where are we ever going to get the leaders to do all this? Where do we even start with this? It can be this kind of like, you just start, you can just want to give up when you start thinking like that, right? So what do you do when you face discouragement?

We see a couple of things here. One, I think you can, you get good perspective. Our friend Steve Tibbert came through last October and reminded us as a church of, man, God is like, he's made you guys to be a base church.

It's like these churches in the book of Acts, you see them, you know, just some churches, like they were just a hub of resource for like, they massively helped with like things like poverty and church planning and all, and like God's done that with you.

Like, man, that's incredible. It's good to have people come along and remind you. When Paul would write to different churches in the New Testament, he would point out their sins and their, you know, all their issues, sure, but he would also point out the evidences of grace.

[30 : 58] He'd go, look at God at work among you. If you've ever wondered why we from time to time will have, you know, leaders from other churches come through and visit our church, it's largely because of this. We want people to help us see, help us see our blind spots and help us see evidences of grace.

Years ago, a pastor just visited, just came to town, knew of us, popped in, and just threw this little throwaway line. He just said, hey, Jesus got in your boat. And that was a moment for us where we were like, we were simultaneously made humble, like we're not, we're not great at this.

God is good. So we were made humble. We were eager to be holy. Man, Jesus is with us. Oh wow, we better like live differently. And we were hopeful. Man, Jesus is with us. Like, oh my gosh, we can do anything.

What should you do when you face criticism from others or from the enemy? Well, Nehemiah gave these critics no seat at the table. He says, you have no portion or right or claim in Jerusalem. Roosevelt famously said, it's not the critic who counts. Now, you can learn from criticism. We're not advocating arrogance or anything like that. But that's not the kind of criticism that was going on here.

[32 : 06] It wasn't like, hey, you know, yeah, can we just talk about maybe like some issues and maybe a little ways to do this different? That's not what it was. The voices weren't challenging Nehemiah to, you know, to disbelieve his own plan, but God's plan.

They were basically challenging him to disbelieve God. And those are just voices you never listen to. Which gets to our last point, guys, arguably the most important point. We see it in verse 18. We see it in verse 20. Nehemiah tells them in verse 18, I told them of the hand of my God that had been upon me for good. Verse 20, I replied to them, the God of heaven will make us prosper and we, his servants, will arise and build.

So, like them, we've got a big task. We need everybody. We're going to face difficulties. And like them, we too will need God's favor most of all. Nehemiah had a vision.

He became aware of the brokenness. He was able to rally everyone to use their gifts. He was persistent in the face of persecution. But as amazing as all that was, what great leadership, he needed more and we do too.

[33 : 09] We need more than visionary leadership, situational awareness, willingness to use what's in our hands, tenacity, or, you know, against, you know, persecution. We need God's favor. And how do we get it?

We pray and we depend on God's power. This is all over the Bible. I mean, I read that Jeremiah passage earlier. You know, seek the welfare of the city and pray to the Lord on his behalf.

Zechariah 4, not by might nor by power but by my spirit says the Lord.

Matthew 9, the harvest is plentiful. The laborers are few, Jesus says. Therefore, pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send that laborers into his harvest. We don't just need to rally together. We need God's help. In the beginning, I talked briefly about that summation of the whole Bible and talked about Solomon and his just wisdom and his wealth and in building the temple and the pinnacle of like everything that like God's people had ever thought they could hope for.

Solomon also says in Psalm 127, we get this song of Solomon. Unless the Lord builds the house, those who build it labor in vain. Unless the Lord watches over the city, the watchman stays awake in vain.

[34 : 15] This was a song of Solomon who was the richest king and the wisest king. And what did he say? Unless God does it, it's not gonna happen. Even with all his wealth and all his wisdom, he said if God doesn't do it, it's not gonna happen.

All of that wealth and all that wisdom means nothing without God. And that's like how I wanna leave us this morning is just to remember that all the resources in the world don't matter without God's help.

So we must be a people of prayer and a people dependent on God. Hey, that means like when we schedule prayer meetings from time to time, like show up. Like even if you're like, I don't know what to pray, I don't know what to do, just show up.

That's like, that's like a great life lesson anyway, right? Just show up. Just show up and maybe your whole prayer of the night is just God help us. Hey man, thanks. Thanks for jumping in with us and praying God help us.

As we look to respond this morning, if you're here or watching this, you're not yet a follower of Jesus, you might even be facing some of those voices that I mentioned. Why even start trying to go to church? You know you're not gonna be able to pull this off. Why even think about following Jesus?

[35 : 16] You've done so much. He's not gonna love you. He's not gonna forgive you. You're not gonna be able to pull this off. It's gonna be like everything else in your life. You're gonna fall short. You're gonna be an embarrassment. All that mess. Guys, can I just tell you that is not the voice of the Lord but it is the voice of someone else.

That is the voice of that enemy that we read about. He is the accuser and he is relentless. The voice of Jesus, Jesus says things like this, come to me all who labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest.

Maybe this is your morning to stop listening to those other voices and to say, all right Jesus, I'm gonna take you up on it. All you need is to have an awareness that you have nothing to give, nothing to bring and a willingness to do whatever Jesus says.

To come to, just come to him, follow at his feet as it were and just surrender. And here in just a minute we'll give you a second to pray that prayer if you wanna pray this morning. It begins with a prayer and it's a lifelong journey but you can begin that journey this morning.

If you're here watching this, you're already a follower of Jesus. Nehemiah is a story of a great leader but we have a better leader, don't we? Nehemiah left the privileged role of being a cupbearer to the king.

[36 : 32] He traveled some 800 miles to help and take away danger and shame. I mean, it's a beautiful, incredible story. I mean, what a guy. But we have Jesus, the king of kings, not the cupbearer to the king, who left heaven and came to earth.

That's more than 800 miles. And he comes as a servant leader who lives among us. He came and dwelt among us. His name was Emmanuel, God with us. And what did he do?

He made our sin his problem. It wasn't just the walls of our city. It was our own sin and our own darkness and our own shame and he made it his problem. He forever took away our sin.

He takes away our shame. And what else does he do? He enlists our help. Like the one who, the Bible tells us is, making all things new gives you and me a role to play.

That is incredible. Let me pray for us. Jesus, thank you for your incredible word. Thank you that it's always, it's always so good for us. Lord, when we look at your word, we see things we've never seen before.

[37 : 35] We see ourselves in ways we've never seen before. We see our church in ways we've never seen. Our community, our culture, our world. God, we're so thankful for your word. I pray though, God, that your word would speak to us right now.

You, Holy Spirit, would make this come alive to us right now. How do we need to respond this morning? You know exactly what that is. God, would you, would you speak to us and lead us right now in Jesus' name.

Amen. God bless you guys.