

## Nehemiah 1:1-11a

The words of Nehemiah the son of Hacaliah.

Now it happened in the month of Chislev, in the twentieth year, as I was in Susa the citadel,<sup>2</sup> that Hanani, one of my brothers, came with certain men from Judah. And I asked them concerning the Jews who escaped, who had survived the exile, and concerning Jerusalem.<sup>3</sup> And they said to me, "The remnant there in the province who had survived the exile is in great trouble and shame. The wall of Jerusalem is broken down, and its gates are destroyed by fire."

<sup>4</sup>As soon as I heard these words I sat down and wept and mourned for days, and I continued fasting and praying before the God of heaven.<sup>5</sup> And I said, "O LORD God of heaven, the great and awesome God who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments,<sup>6</sup> let your ear be attentive and your eyes open, to hear the prayer of your servant that I now pray before you day and night for the people of Israel your servants, confessing the sins of the people of Israel, which we have sinned against you. Even I and my father's house have sinned.<sup>7</sup> We have acted very corruptly against you and have not kept the commandments, the statutes, and the rules that you commanded your servant Moses.<sup>8</sup> Remember the word that you commanded your servant Moses, saying, 'If you are unfaithful, I will scatter you among the peoples,<sup>9</sup> but if you return to me and keep my commandments and do them, though your outcasts are in the uttermost parts of heaven, from there I will gather them and bring them to the place that I have chosen, to make my name dwell there.'<sup>10</sup> They are your servants and your people, whom you have redeemed by your great power and by your strong hand.<sup>11</sup> O Lord, let your ear be attentive to the prayer of your servant, and to the prayer of your servants who delight to fear your name, and give success to your servant today, and grant him mercy in the sight of this man."

Jerusalem was not what it used to be. The good ole days are no more. The walls of protection lay in rubble and the gates of blessing have been burned to the ground. The city that Nehemiah had once known and loved. While he had lived his entire life in exile, he had heard the stories of the great kings Saul, David, Solomon, and others. He had been told since he was a child of the land flowing of milk and honey, the land that Abraham had first settled and was later developed by Joshua. He had always longed to go, but his bondage prevented him. He continued to hold out hope because He knew

that God was a God of his word and that if people would turn back, God would restore the land.

The news of Jerusalem's perilous state hit him like a ton of bricks. It drove him to the ground in weeping and mourning as he digested what he had heard. In solitude, he sat. Days went by. He denied himself food and comfort while he petitioned waited on God. He waited expectantly like a soldier awaits orders from a commanding officer. He knew what needed to be done, but wasn't sure how to do it, or if he was the right one to carry it out.

Nehemiah doesn't tell us God's response, but by his actions, it is clear that God had commanded him that it was time to act. When God speaks, His word demands action.

## **Nehemiah 1:11b – 2:8**

Now I was a cupbearer to the king.

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>5</sup> And I said to the king, "If it pleases the king, and if your servant has found favor in your sight, 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.

Nehemiah carried this burden with him until God revealed to him that it was time to act. The day Nehemiah spoke to the king was like any other day, except for one thing.

The queen was with the king while he ate, which was extremely rare. Persian Kings were known to eat alone on most occasions. Why is the queen's presence important? Historical context reveals that Nehemiah was a contemporary with Queen Esther, and it was most likely her sitting there by the king's side. While in our Bible's the book of Esther comes after the book of Nehemiah, in the Biblical timeline, Esther's heroics preceded Nehemiah. If you recall, there was a Persian leader named Haman who hated the Jews. He came up with a plan to force all people, including the Jews to worship him and when Esther's Uncle Mordecai refused, Haman sought to have him hung. In one of the greatest plot twists of all of scripture, Esther stepped up and risked her life to save her Uncle and her people from Haman and it was Haman that was hung on the very gallows he had prepared for Mordecai. Her presence in the throne room that day was a big deal and it likely emboldened Nehemiah and hinted to him that this may be his moment.

The king noticed something was different about his servant and called him out. Nehemiah responded with his burden and the king wanted to know what should be done. Artaxerxes understood that things don't get fixed with feelings, it takes action. It's not enough to be saddened, frustrated, or angered about a reality, we must be willing to move. To act!

In verse 4, Nehemiah prays to God before making his request. He understood that this was God's plan, God's will, not his own.

The king granted the request and sent Nehemiah to restore the city he loved. He didn't just wish him good luck but gave him complete access to the King's resources and power. There was no person or power within the known world who had authority to stop Nehemiah from carrying out the mission.

Just as Nehemiah heard the cry of the generation of those living in Jerusalem, there is a cry going out today, Like Jerusalem to Nehemiah, this cry comes from a place that you and I are quite familiar with.

I can remember playing out in the neighborhood until the street lights came on and often times later. The only drug problem I had to worry about was twice on Sundays and once on Wednesdays when my mom drug me and my siblings to church every time the doors were open. You cleaned your plate and said yes ma'am and no sir. We feared God, but not quite as much as we feared our mother's spatula. We made mistakes and

learned the hard way. If we had a disagreement we were more likely to fix it behind the dumpster with two fists and a bloody lip than to go home and write about it on the computer. Speaking of computers, there was only one and it was in the living room and you had to wait 20 minutes to connect to the internet. Messenger was something you did on the playground between your best friend and their latest crush and tagging people was a game you played when your one bud forgot to bring his football. There was no Snapchat, cyber bullying, or sexting. Your only access to pornography was if that one friend happened to steal his uncle's girlie magazines and bring them to the sleepover. Even then you didn't look because you just knew your mom would find out...and yeah... remember that spatula? No thrill is worth having to deal with that!

Your childhood may sound similar to mine, it may have been different, but none of us grew up with the realities of what our current young people are facing.

Meet Generation Z (That's right, they aren't Millennials)

Generation Z was born from 1999 to 2015 (basically anyone from 3 yrs old to 19)

Sean McDowell of the Josh McDowell Foundation and a recognized global leader of Youth Culture tells us that Gen Z

**1. Digital Natives:** While Millennials grew up in a technologically savvy and connected world, younger members of Generation Z cannot remember a world without the Internet. They grew up swiping an iPad before they learned how to talk and are the first generation to be raised in the era of smartphones. Teenage members of Gen Z are connected nearly every waking hour of the day.

**2. Entrepreneurial:** Gen Zers have been raised with businesses such as Uber and airbnb, seeing how easy and simple it is to use your own time and resources to make money. 72% of older members of Gen Z want to start their own business.[\[1\]](#)

**3. Diverse:** This is the last generation that will be majority white (52%). Between 2000-2010, the country's Hispanic population grew at four times the rate of the total population.[\[2\]](#) The idea of a black president is not exceptional to them—its normal. Gen Zers have grown up experiencing diversity, and they feel overwhelmingly positive about it.

**4. Less Religious Identification:** In 1966, 6.6% of incoming college freshman reported being unaffiliated with any religion. In 2015, nearly one-third (29.6%) of all incoming college students reported not identifying with any particular religion.[\[3\]](#)

**5. Blurry:** Formerly distinct lines are now considered “blurry.” Technology has blurred the lines between home and work, study and entertainment, and public and private. Gen Zers have a different experience of family—same-sex households, working moms, stay-at-home dads, three-parent families, and couples choosing not to have kids. The nuclear family will make up less than a third of all families by 2026.<sup>[4]</sup> And, of course, gender and romantic identities have become blurry as well.<sup>[5]</sup>

**6. Overwhelmed:** In her interviews with teens for her article in *Time* magazine, Susanna Schrobsdorff says that “there was a pervasive sense that being a teenager today is a draining full-time job that includes doing schoolwork, managing a social media identity and fretting about career, climate change, sexism, racism—you name it.”<sup>[6]</sup> 68% feel overwhelmed by everything they need to do each week.<sup>[7]</sup>

**7. Lonely:** There has been an increase in anxiety and depression among high school students since 2012. And this upsurge cuts across virtually all demographics—suburban, urban, and rural.<sup>[8]</sup>

**8. Progressive:** Most Gen Zers plan to get married, have children, and buy a home—although probably later than previous generations. And they are less likely to drink, smoke, and take drugs. Yet they hold more progressive views on issues like the legality of marijuana and the morality of same-sex marriage.<sup>[9]</sup> In other words, “I don’t think it’s right for me, but it’s okay for others.”

**9. Individualistic:** “Gen Z is used to having everything personalized just for them, from playlists to newsfeeds to products features of all kinds. They’ve grown up expecting that.”<sup>[10]</sup>

Within Generation Z we are seeing...

- Higher anxiety levels in young people, even as young as early elementary
- Higher levels of depression
- More young people reporting having suicidal thoughts and attempts
- The rate of teen suicide has risen over 70% within the last 10 years
- This year in America one teenager will commit suicide every 100 minutes.
- Among those who do not use drugs, the legalization of marijuana is something they are still in favor of
- Same-sex relationships is an acceptable option to Gen Z

- While tobacco use is declining, the consumption of alcohol, vaporizers, and electronic cigarettes are at an all time high

Satan is taking in huge victories in the lives of our young people and their families. The war flag has been waved and he is not relenting. While I pray regularly for revival within our nation, apart from a miraculous work of God's hand, public prayer is not coming back into our schools, Rowe vs. Wade is not being overturned, and spiritual apathy is quickly growing as the majority within our young people.

Just as Hanani carried the message of ruin to Nehemiah, we have heard the cries of the current generation. The culture that you and I grew up in, is never coming back. The walls of protection have turned to rubble and the gates of blessing have been burned to the ground. And here we sit. As Nehemiah sat weeping and crying for God to move, God we cry out for you to move in our land and in the hearts and lives of our young people. But O brothers and sisters of previous generations, Millennials, Gen X, Baby Boomers, Elders, and beyond, we are the ones who know the way and God always moves people to accomplish his purposes in every generation. God is prompting, but are we moving?

For guidance, lets look back at what Nehemiah did.

The king asked Nehemiah what was wrong. But what did Nehemiah do before answering? He petitioned the one true King! He knew that Artaxerxes was a means to an end. It was Yahweh who he needed to follow and whose attention he needed. This is where he got his marching orders. God blessed him in his action and sent him to Jerusalem with full authority to restore the protection of the walls and the blessing of the gates.

After arriving in Jerusalem and surveying the damage, Nehemiah did three key things that insured he would bring restoration to the remnant in Jerusalem.

#### 1. He Reinforced the Importance of the Family Unit

- a. In Chapter 3 the work begins and we see the different clans begin working in an organized fashion together in different areas of the city.
- b. In the weakest areas of the wall, Nehemiah placed the family units as protectors. He knew that if people were fighting for their city, they would make a great effort, but if they were fighting for their families they would give their lives.

- c. The family unit is the strongest motivator for us and it always has been. I have great friendships all over the world. There are people that I would do almost anything for, but there is no one that I would sacrifice my family for. I'm sure each of you are the same. This is what makes God's love so incredible. He sacrificed the life of his own son for each of us.
- d. The family unit in today's culture has never been more under attack. As a church and as individual believers we must work to keep our own marriages and families pure, but we also must fight for those families around us.
- e. The Family is the first institution created by God, even before the church. If Satan can destroy the family, he has no need to go after churches because he knows that they will follow suit.
- f. Men, when we take the time to cherish our wives and be involved in the lives of our children, we are actively fighting against Satan and opening up our families for God's blessing.
- g. When we allow ourselves to get too busy or we buy into the idea that our role is simply to provide and dictate, Satan sends his lures to woo the hearts of our loved ones.

## 2. He Prioritized the Needs of the People

- a. We see this in the order of which they built the gates.
- b. Each gate represents a different blessing.
- c. For the sake of time, we will only look at the first three gates, but there are 10 in all. (sounds like a great sermon series. I'll leave that one for Pastor Zach to tackle!)

### i. The Sheep Gate

- 1. In Nehemiah 3:1, "Then Eliashib the high priest rose up with his brothers the priests, and they built the Sheep Gate. They consecrated it and set its doors. They consecrated it as far as the Tower of the Hundred, as far as the Tower of Hananel."
- 2. The Priests jump to action first and rebuild this gate.
- 3. The Sheep gate was where they would bring their sacrifices to receive forgiveness and salvation.

### ii. The Fish Gate

1. This gate represents the spread of the Good News through Evangelism. This is where the fishermen of Galilee would bring in their catch to sell
2. Jesus himself told us that he would make us fishers of men.

### iii. The Old Gate

1. This was most likely the oldest gate of the city and one that people could depend on. This gate represents Truth.
2. Truth is old and does not change. It is able to be built upon as it can be depended upon.
3. Our young people need truth now more than ever. The sands beneath them are always shifting which is why their culture is as shaky as we have discussed today.

### 3. He Kept At It

- a. In Neh. 4:7-9 we see neighboring cities rise up against Nehemiah,
 

“<sup>7</sup> But when Sanballat and Tobiah and the Arabs and the Ammonites and the Ashdodites heard that the repairing of the walls of Jerusalem was going forward and that the breaches were beginning to be closed, they were very angry. <sup>8</sup> And they all plotted together to come and fight against Jerusalem and to cause confusion in it. <sup>9</sup> And we prayed to our God and set a guard as a protection against them day and night.
- b. Instead of stopping to fight against them, they armed themselves and continued to work. Each worker had a brick in one hand and a sword in the other.
- c. In the same way, our fight is not against culture. It is not against media. It is not against anything that has changed from the time you and I were growing up. It’s as Paul said in Ephesians 6:12: <sup>2</sup> For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.
- d. We must be mindful of our enemy, while we are completing the work of our King

Incredibly, the construction of the wall was completed in 52 days!

Protection and Blessing was restored to the city!

Gut Check:

1. What is your response to the cry?
  - a. Are you distraught or are you unbothered?
2. If you are distraught are you looking for God to move you or are you stuck just focusing on how bad things have gotten?
3. When God moves you, just go!
  - a. Nehemiah didn't make any excuses
  - b. "I'm just one guy"
  - c. "I'm not skilled"
  - d. "I don't understand their culture"
  - e. "That's someone else's job. I've served my time."

The Opportunity: Recent Statistics Show that up to 97% of all believers choose to follow Christ before the age of 30. What does that mean for Generation Z? If we don't reach them now, we more than likely, never will.

I saw a commercial this week of a car that parks itself. I've spoken with friends who homeschool their kids and never have to read the textbooks because the teachers and courses are all online. I have an app on my phone that allows me to video chat with a doctor so I can get prescriptions without having to go wait in line at the office. So many facets of our lives can be ran on auto pilot, but this is not one of them. If we sit back and wait for someone else to reach this generation, we will be sadly disappointed.

- D.L. Moody "If I could relive my life, I would devote my entire ministry to reaching children for God!"
- Dr. Billy Graham "God has given us two hands, one to receive with and the other to give with."
- Dr. Martin Luther King "Everybody can be great...because anybody can serve."
- Jesus said "Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven."<sup>5</sup> "Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me,
- Dr. Theodor Seuss Geisel "Unless someone like you cares a whole awful lot, nothing is going to get better. It's not."

So where's God got you?

1. Children's Ministry

2. Student Ministry
3. Young Adult Ministry
4. Community Involvement