

## **Faith in Action**

Nehemiah 2

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As we saw last week, Nehemiah serves as an example for us on how to balance faith and action. His faith acts with conviction, and his actions are rooted in faith. The Bible calls us to action in every aspect of our lives, and it can seem overwhelming. However, Nehemiah 2 provides an approach to action in which we do not have to carry the burden alone.

The first step of this approach is to pray more. Chapter 2 takes place 4 months after Nehemiah first heard about the state of Jerusalem. He has been mourning, fasting, and praying all this time. This fasting was not for show, but kept sincerely between him and God, so the king couldn't see Nehemiah's grief. But eventually this deep grief and longing surfaced, and God used this to answer his prayer. The king asks Nehemiah what is troubling him, and before answering, Nehemiah prays once more. He knows that 20 years prior, Artaxerxes shut down previous attempts to build the wall because of Jerusalem's history of rebellion. Artaxerxes had no reason to change his mind now. Only God could change his heart. Even though Nehemiah had built some rapport with the king as his cupbearer, he didn't rely on this, but rather he relied on God. So Nehemiah prays. This consistent prayer isn't a means to force God to act. Prayer doesn't buy God's intervention. Rather, it is a reflection of a close relationship with God, in which we constantly talk to Him and trust Him to do His will in our lives. It's within this loving relationship that God changes the king's heart in v. 8. Artaxerxes grants Nehemiah's request to return to Jerusalem, sending letters to the governors to guarantee safe passage, and providing materials for the rebuilding. Like Nehemiah, our action must begin with prayer because we acknowledge that any work of faith ultimately depends on God.

The second step is to gather knowledge rather than jumping in blindly. In the early days of the Pentecostal movement one group believed that they could speak in tongues and sent missionaries to various countries with no language training, only to find out that nobody could understand their tongues, which ended up not being actual foreign languages. When we act, it must be with knowledge. Nehemiah gathers knowledge in vv. 11-16 by inspecting the walls. For the first 3 days, Nehemiah was probably inspecting the more inconspicuous parts of the wall by day. Then during the night, he sets out with a few others, probably experts, to inspect the less accessible and more conspicuous parts of the wall, where it would be too easy to be spotted

during the day, being near the eastern cliff with only ruins all around. Before revealing his plans and mobilizing the people, Nehemiah first gathers information, assesses the situation, and consults with experts. Our action likewise must be informed. Learn from those who are experts in the word of God. God gives us everything we need to live a godly life through His transformative power, His Spirit, His word, and also through each other. So we can act in faith with knowledge. For example, when we begin to deal with the problem of loneliness in our lives, we can turn to the Bible for knowledge. Hebrews 10 and Galatians 6 tell us that the church family is meant to help those who are lonely by providing community. We experience God's care through others.

This leads to the third step, which is to find help from others. In vv. 17-18, Nehemiah rallies the people because he knows he can't rebuild the wall on his own. They probably had given up on rebuilding and got used to the ruins. But Nehemiah reminds them about the sorry state of their city, and tells them about what God has done and how He moved the king's heart, so they agree to join in Nehemiah's work. They all know that without God they can't do anything, so they are willing to act together when they know God is working for them. Likewise, it's God's design that we as a church community should work together and help each other act in faith. To deal with loneliness, He provides community. When we deal with continuous struggles with sin, we must not become discouraged like the Israelites did, but know that God is working for us and that He has provided brothers and sisters that can support us, counsel us, and keep us accountable. But we must be humble and admit that we need help. We can't do it by ourselves.

Finally, we must act with confidence in God. In vv. 10 and 19, we see Sanballat, the governor of Samaria, along with Tobiah and Geshem, oppose the rebuilding. They were among the foreign occupants of Judea during the exile and they felt the land was theirs. But they didn't worship God sincerely or legitimately, and had no real relationship with Him. So in v. 20 Nehemiah confidently answers that God will grant Israel success even in the face of opposition. In all our actions rooted in faith we likewise can have confidence in God. Let us pray with confidence in Him, act with knowledge, humbly seeking help from others, and in everything let us rely on God, being sure that He will accomplish His work.