

NEHEMIAH 3

At first glance this chapter just seems to be a list. However it is important as it explains how the work of rebuilding the wall got done, and there are some important details we can learn from.

Think creatively about how to do the reading in the group – it may send people to sleep if you read the chapter in one go, and the person you have asked to read may not thank you for having to struggle through the names!

The questions don't go through the chapter verse by verse but draws out some key applications.

QUESTIONS

What is the work we have been called to do? How can we apply the message of Nehemiah? – See Ephesians 2:19-22, 4:15-16, 1 Peter 2:4-5

I think it would be good to ask this question to begin with to remind people of the application of the book – it's not about buildings, but about doing God's work and building God's city, which is the work of building the church (both evangelism, discipleship, and serving one another in love).

Who is involved in this building work in chapter 3? – see verse 1, 8, 12, 14-16, 17, 26

Don't simply get people to list the groups of people but notice that EVERYONE was involved in this work, even those who don't initially look like they have the skills for building work (like perfume makers, verse 8). It is men and women who are involved.

Who is involved in "church building" work? – see 1 Cor 12:14-20

1 Corinthians 12 shows us that God uses and gifts everyone for involvement in building his church.

Who takes a lead with the work? (see verse 1). Is this significant?

It is noticeable that the priests are mentioned first. The spiritual leaders of the people are not afraid to get their hands dirty and set an example to be

followed. This is always the pattern in the Bible – see 1 Peter 5. Leaders set examples, they don't use their position not to work.

Where does the work begin? Do you think that is significant?

The work begins at the Sheep Gate (in the north east of the city, near the temple) – the place where animals came through for slaughter and sacrifice at the temple. The temple was the focal point of their life as a people. It emphasises the fact that worship is primary in the life of the people.

Who refuses to work? Does this ultimately harm the work?

Verse 5. The nobles refuse to work. There will never be 100% cooperation in God's work. We do not know why they refused to work – was it because they thought the work was beneath them?

But this does not ultimately harm the work. See verse 27 – those who were involved did extra.

It has been said that in many churches “80% of the work is done by 20% of the people”. Why is that often the case? What excuses or reasons can we give for not playing our part?

Where do most people work? Where is the wisdom in this?

Look at verse 23, 28, 30. Nehemiah set people to work at the section of the wall opposite their own house. This gave them incentive to work, as it was their own house that was to be protected by their own bit of wall. It also meant they were near their families as they worked. This again shows Nehemiah's leadership skills and how he incentivised people.

Although the work of God requires hard work and sacrifice, it does not necessarily need to be deliberately painful. Human incentives are valuable (for example, it is easier to encourage people to lead a mothers and toddlers group if they have kids of that age) etc.

What do you think the work was like? (Look at verse 13-14)

It was hard and dirty. I'm not sure I'd have enjoyed working at the dung gate – which lead out to the valley of Gehenna! BUT see 4:6. The people worked with all their heart. It was built in 52 days.

What produces hard, faithful obedience in doing God's work?

The application of this chapter should not simply be to make us feel guilty and to encourage us to “work harder”. These people saw the need, and trusted God (look back to 2:17-18).

We will work if God has worked in us by his grace to see the need and produce obedience. Look at Ephesians 2:9-10, 4:7, Philippians 2:12-13. If we are struggling or tired in the work, pray that God will strengthen us.