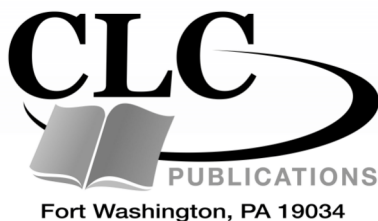


# *Revival in the Rubble*

# *Revival in the Rubble*

*How God Rebuilds His Broken People*

*John A. Kitchen*



# *Revival in the Rubble*

ISBN: 0-87508-873-2

Copyright 2006 John A. Kitchen

*Published by CLC Publications*

*U.S.A.*

P.O. Box 1449, Fort Washington, PA 19034

*GREAT BRITAIN*

51 The Dean, Alresford, Hants. SO24 9BJ

*AUSTRALIA*

P.O. Box 213, Bungalow, Cairns, QLD 4870

*NEW ZEALAND*

10 MacArthur Street, Feilding

Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations are from the  
HOLY BIBLE: NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION®.  
Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984 by International Bible Society.  
Used by permission of Zondervan Publishing House.

Scriptures marked NASB are taken from the  
New American Standard Bible®, copyright © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968,  
1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995 by The Lockman Foundation.  
Used by permission. ([www.Lockman.org](http://www.Lockman.org))

Scriptures marked NEB are taken from the  
New English Bible © The Delegates of the Oxford University Press and  
The Syndics of the Cambridge University Press 1961, 1970.

Scriptures marked NLT are taken from the  
*Holy Bible, New Living Translation*, copyright 1996.  
Used by permission of Tyndale House Publishers, Inc.,  
Wheaton, Illinois 60189. All rights reserved.

*All italicized words in Scripture passages are the emphasis of the author.*

All rights reserved  
Printed in the United States of America

to

**Lou**

Thanks for telling me of Jesus

# Contents

Foreword.....	9
Preface.....	11

## *PART I — The Person of Revival*

1	Becoming a Person of Influence.....	17
---	-------------------------------------	----

## *PART II — The Preparation for Revival*

2	Make It or Break It.....	37
3	Real-World Revival.....	51
4	I Don't Even Know Where to Begin!.....	67
5	Big Job, Little Time.....	83
6	When Opposition Mounts.....	97
7	Flawed Foundations.....	113
8	A Bull's-Eye on Your Back.....	131
9	We've Got It All—But Something's Missing.....	145

### *PART III — The Profile of Revival*

10	The Power of God's Word.....	163
11	It's My Fault!.....	183
12	I the Undersigned Hereby . . .	197

### *PART IV — The Perpetuation of Revival*

13	To Obscurity—and Beyond!.....	215
14	Joy in the Lord.....	229
15	A Creeping Compromise.....	243
Endnotes.....		259

## Foreword

**Y**ou must do more than simply read this book. *Why?* Because God wants to do something magnificent in your heart and mine, and in the heart of our struggling nation. He is searching for people who are broken, prayerful, and wholly surrendered to Him, people with whom He can share and satisfy the single greatest passion of His heart—revival. Pastor John Kitchen reminds us that this is what God found in a layman by the name of Nehemiah. And that is why it is critical that those who care about the glory of God, and the destiny of our nation, prayerfully ponder this powerful and passionate plea for spiritual awakening.

It's interesting that exactly one hundred fifty years ago God raised up a "layman" in New York City to become a modern-day Nehemiah. His name was Jeremiah Lanphier. God used this surrendered servant to lead God's people and our nation into what has commonly become known as the Third Great Awakening. Though we haven't seen a nationwide revival since that remarkable outpouring, both Nehemiah and Lanphier engender hope that God will "do it again."

Nehemiah was an unlikely candidate to become a revival leader. He had never been to the homeland of his beloved people, the Jews. He didn't have firsthand knowledge of what was at stake for the people of God. Nor was he in a vocational position to help. He was not a theologian, a priest, or even a prophet. But he had heard about the condition of Jerusalem and the distress of his people. And because he was broken and surrendered, God was able to work through him to restore His people and their city to its prior glory.

## ***Revival in the Rubble***

Even if we don't envision ourselves being a Nehemiah, each of us can be a Hanani. When this messenger of the Lord arrived in Susa and expressed his concern over the condition of Jerusalem, did anyone expect Nehemiah to drop everything to become the torchbearer of revival? When we spread the truth about the rubble in our land today, God will use it to ignite passion in others and stir them to godly action.

Revival is not just a nice idea or another alternative. It is our *only* option . . . our *only* hope as a nation. As John Kitchen highlights, the book bearing Nehemiah's name is the last historical record we have before 400 years of silence settled over the people of God. God's silence, no matter what form it may take, or in whatever era it is experienced, is truly a fearful form of His judgment. It behooves us to take another look at what was on God's heart before those silent years if we are to comprehend what is on God's heart today.

I pray God will use this book to spark an authentic work of His Spirit in our day . . . that historians once again will be able to record that God visited America in revival! Read it carefully, prayerfully, and with a humble spirit of obedience, asking God to bring revival to your own heart. I don't know about you, but I want the thrill of telling my children and my grandchildren that I was there when God's Glory came. When ashes turned to beauty. When rubble turned to revival.

Byron Paulus  
*Executive Director,*  
*Life Action Revival Ministries*



# Preface

*We have heard with our ears, O God;  
our fathers have told us what you did in their days,  
in days long ago. (Psalm 44:1)*

**W**hy not here? Why not now? Why not us? These are the questions that I can't shake from my heart. We have heard with our ears what God has done in generations past. Is it all hype? Is it overstated, airbrushed propaganda? Or did it really happen? If it did, why doesn't it again? Why isn't it now? Why isn't it here?

Call it what you want—*revival* is a common term—but I want it. A deeper intimacy with God. A clearer evidence of His presence. A more powerful impact among and through His people. We expect more from our churches. We expect more from ourselves. We expect more from (gulp!) God.

Is it okay to admit that? I submit that it's not only acceptable, it's *required* if we are ever going to experience what God desires for us.

The state of things in our churches is not good. True, in America, eighty-five percent of people identify themselves as Christians and ninety-five percent say they believe in God as an all-powerful, all-knowing, perfect Creator who rules the world. Why then is the influence of such a massive throng so muted? If eighty-five percent are Christians, how can seven out of ten of us have no clue what John 3:16 means? How could only a third of our citizens know what "the gospel" is? How can nine out of ten of us fail to accurately describe Christ's Great Commission?

Look within our own camp. How can nearly half of born-

## *Revival in the Rubble*

again Christians say that Satan is not a personal being, but merely a symbol of evil? How can twenty-eight percent of born-again Christians believe that Jesus sinned while on earth? How can over one-fourth of born-again Christians preach that it doesn't matter what faith you follow because they all teach the same basic lessons? How can one-third of us say there are no moral absolutes? How can two-thirds of all regular church attenders admit to having never (yes, never!) experienced the presence of God in a church service?<sup>1</sup>

Rubble. It's all around us. We walk over it all the time. It's the crumbled superstructure of a previous generation's true spiritual experience with God. Most never notice that on which

**R**UBBLE: THE  
CRUMBLING  
SUPERSTRUCTURE OF A  
PREVIOUS GENERATION'S  
TRUE SPIRITUAL  
EXPERIENCE WITH GOD.

they trample. But every so often God awakens a heart and injects into it disturbing, unsettling questions: *Is revival really possible? In these days? Inside my heart? In the midst of a people like us?*

Nehemiah was just such an individual. He asked those same kinds of questions. The state of the people of God had never been lower. The condition of the nation of God had never been worse. The prospect of the promises of God being fulfilled had never look more unreasonable. The purposes of God appeared lost amid the rubble of what had once been.

Can God do it again? Will God do it again? Here? In me? In us? Or is this it? Do we need simply to dial back our expectations?

When God wants to do a fresh, reviving work in His people, He finds a person and breaks his heart. He makes that person look upon the state of God's people and work and then imparts to him the great grief that fills His own heart. When God wants to do a new thing, a fresh thing, a God-thing, He starts with one and breaks him. Then God draws out that brokenness in convulsive, compulsive, confessional praying.

## *Preface*

That's what He did in Nehemiah's day. That's what He'll do in ours, if He should sovereignly grant us to experience a fresh outpouring of His Spirit.

God starts with one. Then He causes the fire of God to arc from that heart to a few others. They begin to believe . . . again. They begin to dream . . . again. He brings them to the place where they would rather die than live without the fullness of God. And they begin to tell God just that. They can't help it. They can't hold it back. They won't hold it back. They must. They will. They won't be dissuaded.

Is that your heart?

Do you agonize, wondering before God: Why not *here*? Why not *now*? Why not *us*? If so, read on.

# *Part I*

## *The Person of Revival*

*Lord, revive the church—beginning with me.*

—Samuel M. Shoemaker

*Revival is God's finger pointing right at me.*

—Wilbert L. McLeod

**When God sovereignly determines to revive His people, He usually begins by awakening one person. The history of God's people is studded with the names of solitary souls who refused to let go of God until He blessed them. Their spiritual tenacity was first granted them by God and then used by Him to ignite a field of other parched souls. The result is always a sweeping move of the Spirit in which God is exalted, His people revived, and the lost converted.**

**In the thronging masses of newly awakened hearts, however, never lose sight of that one solitary figure who became the torch of God to set His people ablaze once again. God is always prior. His first move in revival is always to find one willing heart and break it. Nehemiah stands as a prototype of one so burdened and so blessed.**

# 1

## *Becoming a Person of Influence*

**I**t's starting to come into focus. No, it's more than simply focus; it's a weight. You don't just *see* the need, you are starting to *feel* it. God is opening your eyes, but it's not simply a cognitive recognition that something is wrong, it's a burden that has come to rest upon your heart. You want to make a difference. You *must* make a difference; God is calling you.

How can *I* make a difference? If God is calling me to do something to influence His people, why am I still in this job? Why has He placed me in a family that seems so disinterested in the things of God? Why this school? This office? This neighborhood? This city?

Do the great dreams, hopes and aspirations that God has injected into your heart seem hopelessly detached from where it is God has set you? Ever wonder how you are going to get from where you are to that place where God is using you in significant, eternal ways?

You are not alone. You might be surprised at just how many people within close proximity of your life feel the same way. But there's another guy not so far from where you are who has felt that weight and wrestled with that frustration. He's only as

## *Revival in the Rubble*

far away as your Bible.

His name is Nehemiah. In the Biblical book that bears his name, we discover him to be a man like us. The opening sentence (“The words of Nehemiah, son of Hacaliah,” 1:1) informs us that what lies before us are basically Nehemiah’s memoirs, his personal journal. In fact, peering into these pages we almost feel uneasy, as if we are looking in on intimate revelations of heart and spirit not meant for public consumption. It’s like peeking into someone’s diary. But our uneasiness is soon matched by a compelling familiarity. Not many lines into the book we catch the sound of a familiar echo. It is the sound of a frustrated man. We meet a man with a divinely given passion for the purposes of God, but one who wrestles with what God is doing in his life. Nehemiah’s heart has been invaded with a desire to do something big for God. It’s about to explode with a burden to be used by God.

Sound familiar?

Note that it was this kind of man that God chose to close out the historical record of the Old Testament. Malachi gives us the last prophetic word, but Nehemiah is the last historical record we have before 400 years of silence settled over the people God had chosen. Nehemiah served and then it was forty decades before God broke the silence in the person of John the Baptist as he announced the arrival of the Messiah, Jesus.

Nehemiah was like you and me; he simply wanted his life to matter when viewed through the lens of eternity. To understand something about our common struggle, we have to understand something about the times in which Nehemiah lived. You are all too familiar with the vexing conditions in which you live. Take a moment to familiarize yourself with Nehemiah’s.

As a faithful Jewish man living four and a half centuries before Christ, Nehemiah found himself in a mess. The nation of God was in disarray. The kingdom of Judah was filled not just with people of common descent, but with a people of common desolation. Their dreams had been destroyed. David had led the nation of Israel to its zenith. They had been dreamy days of

## *Becoming a Person of Influence*

God's blessing. Then Solomon came to the throne and, though blessed for a time, his unfaithfulness began to dissolve the spiritual threads that held the fabric of the kingdom together.

God had promised that discipline would follow unfaithfulness as the night the day (Deut. 28:15ff.). He had pledged to divide the nation and scatter its people (Deut. 28:64ff.; 1 Kings 11:9–13). No sooner was Solomon gone than ten tribes anointed one king and the other two tribes another (928 B.C.). For over 200 years the people of God lived divided from one another, growing increasingly corrupt and wandering farther from God with each passing decade. God, through His prophets, picked up the ancient warnings of discipline and made them new to each generation. Yet there was no turning back, at least not in a lasting and permanent way. God eventually brought the promised judgment. The northern kingdom of Israel was led off into captivity by the pagan kingdom of Assyria (722 B.C.). Then, in a series of failures the southern kingdom of Judah first saw their nobles led away by the Babylonians into captivity (605 B.C.), then the city of Jerusalem captured and their king led away (597 B.C.), and finally the walls reduced to rubble, the city burned, the temple destroyed and its holy articles for worship taken away to a land of idols (587 B.C.).

The Jewish nation, as it had been known, ceased to exist, except in the heart and mind of God and in the heart and mind of a faithful remnant.

Nothing could have been worse. It was as bad as it could get for a believer. It was the end of everything that mattered.

It is in just such times that we should be most alert to a fresh work of God. He delights to bring revival out of the rubble. There, in the rubble, God unearths one of His promises and begins again.

***I**N THE WORST  
OF TIMES, WE  
SHOULD BE ALERT  
TO A FRESH MOVE  
OF GOD. HE  
DELIGHTS TO  
BRING REVIVAL  
OUT OF RUBBLE.*

## *Revival in the Rubble*

In Nehemiah's day God went back to His Word (Jer. 25:11). God began to do a new thing, just as He had guaranteed. God began restoring His people. He began to restore His temple and the worship He desired from there. And He began to restore His holy city, Jerusalem.

Through the fall of the kingdom of Babylon and the rise of the Persian and Median kingdoms, God began this new work. He shaped the heart of a pagan king so that a man named Zerubbabel was able to lead approximately 50,000 of the Jews back to the city of Jerusalem (538 B.C.; Ezra 1–2). Then Ezra was able to lead approximately 1,500 more back to Jerusalem (458 B.C.; Ezra 7–10).

Zerubbabel's call had been to rebuild the temple in Jerusalem (Ezra 3–6). Ezra was called to reestablish the worship of God in that temple. Ezra came with the Word of God and said, "Now that we have a temple we ought to worship God according to His Word" (Ezra 7–10). But a partially repopulated city with a temple and regular services did not fully fulfill the plan and purposes of God.

God sent back our man, Nehemiah, to finish the job. His job was to restore the city of God. He was to rebuild the walls that had been destroyed. His calling was to bring revival in the rubble. And in the process, Nehemiah became a pattern for us as we seek a similar revival in our day.

What God did through Nehemiah was not merely to raise a physical wall, but also to become a pattern for how God would rebuild His broken people throughout the ages. Here we discover how God restores His church when we've blown it and, through our own doing, we are missing out on all God intended.

How does God rebuild His people in the midst of corporate failure? Every page of Nehemiah has something significant to say in answer to that. For now, however, let's stand back and discern a pattern that emerges when we observe Nehemiah's life in its entirety.

Nehemiah's own memoirs reveal that he held three positions or fulfilled three roles during his ministry. He was a cupbearer



## *Becoming a Person of Influence*

to the king (Neh. 1:1–2:10), a builder of the walls of Jerusalem (Neh. 2:11–6:19), and the governor of the city (Neh. 7:1–13:31). These three roles were tangible realities for Nehemiah, but they also paralleled a process that God was working out through his life in order to achieve God’s purposes. That process is a repeated pattern wherever God uses a life to rebuild His broken people.

Begin to discern this pattern with me. *First, God grants you a position.*

We each come to that day when we take stock and we realize God has granted us a position somewhere, doing something. It isn’t the same as what God grants the next guy or the big guy or the famous guy. But it’s our position and it’s given by God. It is, therefore, a divine assignment with a divine purpose behind it.

For Nehemiah, his position was cupbearer to the king of the Persian Empire. Over time, Nehemiah began to realize that this position had been granted him by God. He began to put two and two together and discovered a simple equation for figuring out what God is doing in a person’s life and how He plans to use that for the good of His people and the glory of His name. The equation is simply stated as: *My position is granted that God might use me in His providence for His purpose.*

God has given you a position somewhere, in connection with some particular people, so that in His providence He might use you for His purposes.

Take the equation apart and examine its parts.

God has given you a *position*. Nehemiah confessed, “I was cupbearer to the king” (Neh. 1:11). Big deal. Compared to what Nehemiah knew God wanted to do for the glory of His name, what was being a cupbearer?

Perspective is everything, for in the eyes of the unbelieving Nehemiah had it made, simply because he was cupbearer. As cupbearer he tasted all wine and food before it reached the lips of the king. In a world of intrigue, someone was likely to poison the king. The cupbearer made certain all was well in the royal

## *Revival in the Rubble*

kitchen. You obviously want a trusted person in such a position. Simply putting the cup to your mouth without swallowing wouldn't suffice. No insincere "Mmmm" after sampling the buffet. The cupbearer had to be trustworthy.

Thus the cupbearer was not a mere lab rat employed to lessen assassination attempts. He was also a close advisor to the throne. The cupbearer wielded significant clout in the king's corner.

And there was Nehemiah! Ponder that for a moment. Just a couple of generations before, Nehemiah's ancestors had been lead off in captivity as defeated slaves. And now, in a providential turn of events, God had moved a Jewish slave's son into one of the most influential political positions in the kingdom.

It would be easy for us to think, "Way to go, Nehemiah! You've gotten yourself a cushy government job! Good for you!"

There's only one problem, Nehemiah's heart wasn't in his job. And his mind was forever wandering outside the royal courts. Nehemiah's dream was 800 miles away in a city called Jerusalem.

Have you ever found yourself saying something like, "If I really look at my life honestly, I've got it pretty good. I've got a lot more than many people do in this world. But I've got to admit, my heart's not in it anymore"?

That was Nehemiah's problem. Anyone else in that empire would have jumped at the chance to be cupbearer to the king. Nehemiah had a position. God had given him that position. But his heart was owned by another dream. He was consumed with a different, bigger vision.

Nehemiah had heard about those 50,000 of his brothers going back to Jerusalem with Zerubbabel. Perhaps he had listened to the pleas for others to join the 1,500 more who went back with Ezra. He wanted desperately to go, to throw caution to the wind, to move in faith, to join God in what He was doing. He longed to be a part of *God's* city, *God's* worship, and *God's* people. It's difficult to be faithful in places like that, isn't it? It's easy to begin to grumble, "Why doesn't God let *me* . . . ?"

## *Becoming a Person of Influence*

It's not easy to be faithful in your current position when your dream is somewhere else. Yet faithfulness is what God required of Nehemiah. That was precisely the sacrifice Nehemiah offered up to God. Nehemiah served faithfully in that position and in the end it positioned him perfectly for what God wanted to do next in His great purposes.

In God's own good time He revealed to Nehemiah His intention to providentially use that position for His purpose.

We often reason, "Someday I'm going to do \_\_\_\_\_ for the Lord," or "Someday I'll make a difference. I'll get a different job. I'll live in a different place. I'll work with different people. I'll live for a different purpose, something more eternal, something more important, something more meaningful." We all must ask the question that surely came to Nehemiah's mind: Is it possible that God has placed me exactly where He wants me?

It may not be where *your* heart and mind and dream are, but it's exactly where *He* wants you in His providence. The dream, vision, desire, and burden may be preparatory, rather than immediate permission to make a move. It doesn't mean the dream isn't correct; it just means that the way you may be thinking about the dream might not be correct.

It turned out that Nehemiah was exactly where God wanted him to be in order to make maximum impact for the kingdom of God. As we shall see, Nehemiah was granted a leave of absence from his position as cupbearer. He was appointed by the king of Persia to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem, and funded with monies from the pagan treasury of Persia! The sovereign hand of God is breathtaking as it sweeps through your life! But don't lose sight of the fact that it was because Nehemiah was faithful in his position that he was available and, in the providence of God, could fulfill the purposes of God.

**F**AITHFULNESS  
POSITIONS US  
PERFECTLY FOR  
WHAT GOD WANTS  
TO DO IN HIS  
GREAT PURPOSES.

## *Revival in the Rubble*

The difficulty of being faithful in a position that appears disconnected from the purposes of God is overcome by focusing yourself on those purposes, not on your position. Nehemiah could discern the providential move of God in his life because he was focused in on God's purposes.

How do I know what God's purposes are so that I can be aware when He moves providentially to use me in the position I'm in for the fulfillment of those purposes? How do I discover the purposes of God? The same way Nehemiah did, through the Word of God.

Nehemiah was a man immersed in Scripture. He knew, for example, that Jeremiah 25:11 was still on the books: "This whole country will become a desolate wasteland, and these nations will serve the king of Babylon seventy years." Nehemiah was where he was because God had said it would happen! It was part of the purpose of God that the people of God would be disciplined. The Bible said so.

Nehemiah likely knew what Daniel, one of his contemporaries, had discovered: "In the first year of his reign, I, Daniel, understood from the Scriptures, according to the word of the LORD given to Jeremiah the prophet, that the desolation of Jerusalem would last seventy years" (Dan. 9:2).

How did Daniel discover that? He too was in captivity. His heart was also in Jerusalem. He desired to do something big for God. How did he know the purposes of God? He went to the Word of God and he found the prophet Jeremiah. As he read he put his finger on a specific text and began to calculate, "It says that we're only going to be in captivity seventy years." Daniel began to count and suddenly stopped short, "You know what? It's getting close!"

So Daniel began calling out to God, "God, You said it! Here it is. These are Your words. Help us! The time is approaching. Move on behalf of Your people."

God did.

Nehemiah, I'm confident, clung to the same scriptural promise. He knew the Word of God, so that he was cognizant of the

## *Becoming a Person of Influence*

purposes of God, that he might have eyes to see the providence of God and how He wanted to use his position for those purposes.

The purposes of God are discovered, not only through the Word of God, but also through the *acts* of God.

Nehemiah knew what God was up to in the present because he knew what God had done in the past. He had studied the things God had performed.

So, we naturally ask, what did Nehemiah perceive that God had done? If you turn to the left in your Bible, leaving Nehemiah and passing through Ezra, you will come to the end of Second Chronicles and the answer to your question. In the Hebrew compilation of the Scriptures this was all one continuous narrative, and thus we do well to connect the dots historically.

Here we encounter the historical description of the nation's departure out into captivity. In outline form, what happened? Nebuchadnezzar stole the articles of the temple used in the worship of God, along with the wealth of the nation (36:18). Second, he burned the temple (v. 19a). Third, he broke down the protective wall around the city (v. 19b). Fourth, he destroyed every building of any consequence in the city (v. 19c).

Why? Because he was a greedy, power-mongering pagan. But what Nebuchadnezzar didn't know was that it was so that "The land enjoyed its sabbath rests; all the time of its desolation it rested, until the seventy years were completed in fulfillment of the word of the LORD spoken by Jeremiah" (v. 21).

Gone—both the temple and the wall!

The chronicler then took a big, bold marker and arched over that seventy years and pointed to the decision of Cyrus, king of Persia. "The LORD, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth and has appointed me to build a temple for him at Jerusalem in Judah. Anyone of his people among you—may the LORD his God be with him, and let him go up" (v. 23).

Tally things up. Gone: temple, temple articles for worship, populace of the city, protective walls of the city.

Seventy years later, what had God restored? Through Zerubbabel, part of the population and a rebuilt temple had been

## *Revival in the Rubble*

restored. Then, almost sixty years later through Ezra, God restored more people and the worship of God in that temple.

A dozen years after Ezra's arrival, Nehemiah went down the checklist in prayer. "People: partially restored—check. Temple: restored—check. Worship: imperfect, but restored—check." Then Nehemiah came to the last item on the list of things destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar. "City walls: um, er, well, God, we need walls to secure Your city!"

Grabbing the first visitor from Jerusalem he could find, Nehemiah asked, "What about Jerusalem?" (Neh. 1:2). The answer he got disturbed him: "Those who survived the exile and are back in the province are in great trouble and disgrace. *The wall of Jerusalem is broken down*, and its gates have been burned with fire" (v. 3).

I believe Nehemiah prayed something like this: "O God, Your acts based on Your word are not yet complete. The house has been restored. Ezra is there preaching the Word of God to restore the worship of God. But, Lord, the city is not secure. It has no wall. There's still one more item on Your divine checklist to be done!"

Nehemiah began to realize that in the providence of God he had been put in his position so that he might help complete what remained to be done for the establishment of God's people.

You want to know what God is up to. You want to know why God has you where He has you. You need to look at what God has said and at what God has done. Then ask Him, "What is yet undone? What must happen for all of this to be true among all of us?" Then be still and listen.

Wait on God. Cry out to God. Beg God, "How have You so positioned me—in terms of who I am, where I live, the job I hold, the gifts You've given me, the temperament You've fashioned me with, and the people I know—so that I might be a strategic part of what is yet unfulfilled of Your promises to us?" Ask, "Why have You given me this position and how is it that You want to use that in Your providence to fulfill all of these purposes among all of these people?"

## *Becoming a Person of Influence*

The equation still holds true: *Your position is granted that God might use you in His providence to achieve His purpose.*

As we continue to sweep across the whole of Nehemiah's memories we realize that God did not *leave* Nehemiah as a cupbearer (1:1–2:10). He made him also to be a *builder*, the builder of the walls of Jerusalem (2:11–6:19).

God grants you a position. You discover that your position is part of a bigger, divine plan. Nehemiah was discovering that God was moving him into that plan, by transitioning him from a cupbearer to a builder. He became a construction contractor to rebuild *the one missing part in God's grand restoration project*—the walls of Jerusalem.

The words “wall” or “walls” appear thirty-three times in the book of Nehemiah. The casual reader might ask, “What's the big deal about walls? The Babylonian bullies knocked them down—so what? We'll get around to painting the fence soon enough.”

The walls were not for mere decoration, however. What residents of the ancient Middle East knew was that city walls were significant for three reasons.

One was *security*. A wall around a city meant it was secure. “All these cities were fortified with high walls and with gates and bars” (Deut. 3:5). Walls secure things from two directions. They serve to keep some things from coming in and to keep other things from going out.

Walls were also about *perspective*. Sentries stood guard and watched over the surrounding plain from the walls of a city. They detected approaching armies. They observed life outside the city as well as inside. A city's walls were the highest point around. The walls were a place of perspective from which they could oversee what God had given to them.

Finally, a city's walls were a place of *witness*. When king Saul and his sons were murdered, their bodies were taken and were fastened to the wall of a certain city (1 Sam. 31:10). Picture it—headless corpses hanging from the city wall. (On second thought, don't picture it.) It sends a message, doesn't it? It's a

## *Revival in the Rubble*

witness. Foreign armies hired as mercenaries would come to a city and hang their shields on the outside of the walls so that approaching armies would realize, “Oh, we’re not just dealing with amateurs; we’re dealing with the armies of the nations” (Ezek. 27:10). The walls thus became a community billboard.

City walls obviously served a physical purpose, but they also served a symbolic purpose. They were a picture of God for His people. Seventy-five years before Nehemiah ever walked into Jerusalem another man stood in the rubble of those walls. He was a Jewish man with a heart like Nehemiah’s. His name was Zechariah and you can read his prophecy in the Old Testament.

He stood upon the scattered stone refuse of what had been the center of the glorious kingdom of Israel. He walked the perimeter of the city and examined the fallen walls; he saw the vulnerability and desolation of God’s people. Then he cleared his voice and, in God’s name, described a coming day when a perfectly restored Jerusalem “will be a city without walls” because “*I myself will be a wall of fire around it . . . and I will be its glory within*” (Zech. 2:4–5).

God is a wall to His people. This prophecy refers to the future reign of Christ from Jerusalem, but the truth is for us even now. The lesson we learn from Nehemiah is not to go home and build a big wall around your yard. It is to find God to be a wall about us and a glory within us. That sounds like revival—revival in the rubble.

How is that going to happen? By trusting God to be our security. By thinking His thoughts (by the Spirit through the Scriptures) and thus seeing with His perspective. By allowing Christ to become our defense witness (1 John 2:1), for whom we then bear witness (Acts 1:8). God is to become all that, not only for us individually, but also for us as a whole people.

God has put you where you are to be a part of restoring God’s people, individually and collectively, to all He wants them to be. You have some part to play in that grand purpose and it relates to your God-given position. That’s why God the Spirit moved Nehemiah to pick up pen and ink to write these things down—that you



## *Becoming a Person of Influence*

might come to discover that your position is a part of a larger plan. It is a plan about you individually and us corporately becoming the people of God.

As grand as that is, it is not the end. Many would settle to see that their position in life is part of God's great plan, but God does not. Add this to the mix: your position and God's plan relate to God's *passion*.

God has a plan. He has granted you a position of significance in the unfolding of that plan. That plan relates to the things God is most passionate about.

To bring that plan to fulfillment and to satisfy God's great passion, He moved Nehemiah out of the role of builder and into a third role. No longer is Nehemiah a cupbearer, nor even a builder. The position Nehemiah holds throughout the latter part of the book is that of governor of Jerusalem (7:1–13:31). He had served. Then he built. Where once he built, now he rules, leads, and administers.

Nehemiah's mission was about more than bricks and mortar, though that was a very necessary part of what he was called to do. His purpose was to share and satisfy the passion of God's heart.

What are *you* passionate about? Passion taps into energy reserves you didn't know you had. Passion creates vision where there was myopia. Passion transforms duty into joy.

What is *God* passionate about? God has, according to the latter chapters of Nehemiah, three great passions that He wants you to share with Him as He reveals to you His perspective on your position and His plan. God's goal is to impart these passions from His heart to yours.

Nehemiah discovered God's passion for His people. "So my God," said Nehemiah, "put it into my heart" (7:5). Put what into his heart? The people of God. Look carefully at chapter 7 and you will see a long list of names. To us they appear as strange collections of letters with odd pronunciations, but to God they

**Y**OU HAVE A  
PART TO PLAY  
IN GOD'S GRAND  
PURPOSE, AND IT  
RELATES TO YOUR  
GOD-GIVEN POSITION.

## *Revival in the Rubble*

each had a face, a family, and a future.

Eugene Peterson says, “At our birth we are named, not numbered.”<sup>1</sup> Your parents don’t call out, “Offspring #2! It’s time for dinner!” We don’t do that to our children; we *name* them. We name them because they are people—individuals created in the image of God, for the purposes of God, to share in the glory of God. Peterson continues,

The name is that part of speech by which we are recognized as a person. We are not classified as a species of animal. We are not labeled as a compound of chemicals. We are not assessed for our economic potential and given a cash value. We are named.<sup>2</sup>

This list of names in chapter 7 is about Nehemiah being moved by God to discover who was there among the people of God. It’s true—it is easy to love humanity, but hard to love people. Yet God loves us all, and also loves each one of us. You are the passion of God’s heart. The world doesn’t orbit around you or me or any other single individual, but God has a passion, a love for people, and He wants us to share that passion.

Nehemiah also came to discover that God is passionate about His Word. Thus we read in the next chapter “all the people [the folks designated in chapter 7] assembled as one man. . . . They told Ezra the scribe to bring out the Book of the Law of Moses” (8:1).

Do you notice? “*They* told Ezra” to get that book of God and teach them. They ordered their leaders, “You get the Bible and get back here!”

So on the first day of the seventh month Ezra the priest brought the Law before the assembly, which was made up of men and women and all who were able to understand. He read it aloud from daybreak till noon as he faced the square before the Water Gate in the presence of the men, women and others who could understand. And all the people listened attentively to the Book of the Law. (8:2–3)

## *Becoming a Person of Influence*

“Bring out that book of God, we want to hear it!” There they stood, absorbing the words of God. No padded pews. No seats of any kind. They stood and listened attentively for hours as the Word of God was read and explained. Sounds like revival to me!

Throughout the rest of the book we find Ezra and Nehemiah taking that word of the LORD and helping the people, teaching the people, counseling the people to bring their lives in line with that word.

It’s about people. It’s about the Word of God. It’s about the lives of people being transformed by that Word. That’s *God’s* passion. That is central to God’s heart because He is also passionate about people’s fellowship with Him.

**G**OD IS PASSIONATE  
ABOUT PEOPLE —  
ABOUT SEEING THEM  
TRANSFORMED BY HIS  
WORD AND COMING INTO  
FELLOWSHIP WITH HIM.

The last five chapters of Nehemiah’s diary find him laying one hand on the shoulder of people while in the other hand holding the Word of God. He bridges from the words of God to the people of God in order to bring their lives in line with all God wants them to be so that they might live in fellowship with Him.

Meander through those chapters. You’ll find repentance, re-dedication, and reformation. It’s all about fellowship, vertically and horizontally.

God asks us to be faithful in the position in which He has placed us so that we might see that this position and our very lives are part of a bigger plan. Part of seeing and accepting our place in that plan is coming to share a whole new passion with God for what’s really important. God’s great desire is to impart His heart to us—to make what is passionate in *His* heart passionate in *our* hearts.

As we’ve already noted, Nehemiah is the last historical word we have before the coming of Jesus Christ. After 400 years of silence, John the Baptist came declaring, “Prepare the way of the Lord!” What a privileged position Nehemiah held. What an in-

### ***Revival in the Rubble***

credible part he played in God's plan. God has a part for you to play in the same plan. Take note of the pattern that has emerged from a survey of Nehemiah's life: *Faithfulness in my God-given position results in discovering God's purpose for my life and ultimately in my sharing God's passion with Him.*

Two truths resonate in my heart as we prepare to enter Nehemiah's life. I am reminded that a change of position without an increased understanding of God's purpose won't cure what's ailing me. Change for change's sake doesn't really change anything. I'm also coming to realize that faithfulness where I am is required before I get to go where God ultimately wants me to be. Faithfulness now means fruitfulness later.

Now, I hear weeping. Let's go see what has Nehemiah so upset.

## *Reaching Toward Revival*

1. Study your life—how has God positioned you in your family, workplace, community, church or school? What roles do you fill in each setting?

---

---

2. How do those positions facilitate or frustrate your dreams?

---

---

3. What dreams has God put in your heart? How might they relate to your God-given positions? To His purposes?

---

---

4. How does focusing on God's purposes change the way you see the positions you hold in life? How do your positions in life seem to distract you from God's purposes?

---

---

5. What does faithfulness in your current God-given positions look like?

---

---

6. How do your positions in life relate to God's passion for His people and His Word?

---

---

7. If you are faithful where God has placed you, how will it help you discern God's ultimate purpose for your life? Or help you share in God's passion with Him?

---

---