

INTRODUCTION

I am going to be very upfront with you from the very start. We are looking at a building program that is going to require somewhere around \$20 million dollars. That is the number that has been tossed out there. Now I want to stand before you and say I do not know how on earth it can be done, but I believe we can find out how in heaven it is going to be done. The way Nehemiah and the people of Jerusalem accepted the challenge and were successful is same we as a body of believers, Green Acres Baptist Church, are going to have to accept the challenge and seek God's power for success. Now what we are going to asking you to do over the next three months is to just ask God. 1) God, will you provided what we need for this expansion? And 2) God, what do you want we do personally as it relates to a sacrifice?

Any gifts given to this have to be over and above our regular tithes and offerings for the regular budget. We are going to be asking everyone to make an initial gift toward the end of March and then a commitment for the next three years. I want this process to be something in which God is driving; God is moving and one in which God gets the glory. In the next three months I am praying that God will move in your heart, your home, and in our church in such a powerful way that even the coldest skeptic in East Texas will look at Green Acres Baptist Church and say, "Wow, God had to do that, because it certainly was not possible through human effort and human means."

It all begins with prayer and fasting—that is how it started with Nehemiah. I want to skip ahead to verse 11 in Nehemiah's prayer, because that is what we are looking for; we are asking God to give us success in this endeavor, then we will go back and pick up with verse one. Nehemiah concludes his prayer in verse 11 by saying, "Give your servant success today by granting him favor in the presence of this man." Our goal to have a successful process. How are we going to arrive at a successful conclusion? Let's back up and I want to share with you the three steps to spiritual success. These are steps Nehemiah took and these are steps we need to take.

A number of years ago a great Bible teacher taught me something about the Bible I've never forgotten and it has been a great help to me. He said whenever you study the Bible you need to always ask three questions: 1) What did it mean back then? 2) What does it mean now? And 3) What does it mean to me personally? This is really simple if you apply it every time you study the Bible. We are going to talk about what it meant to Nehemiah and what it means to Green Acres and I hope you will ask what it means to you.

There are three steps to spiritual success.

I. VISUALIZE THE PROBLEM

"The words of Nehemiah son of Hacaliah: In the month of Kislev in the twentieth year, while I was in the citadel of Susa, Hanani, one of my brothers, came from Judah with some other men, and I questioned them about the Jewish remnant that had survived the exile, and also about Jerusalem. They said to me, "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.'" (Nehemiah 1:1-3) You have to have a picture of the problem. This was a time when

Nehemiah and other Jewish people were in exile in Babylon. All this took place about 500 years before Jesus was born. If you recall your Bible history, about 80 years before this Israel, Judah the southern kingdom, had been rebellious against God. God allowed the godless Babylonians under Nebuchadnezzar to sweep into Judah, to conquer them, destroying Jerusalem and tearing down the temple of God. They had been in captivity in Babylon more than 70 years. Nehemiah was still in captivity, although some had returned to Jerusalem, including Ezra and others. Nehemiah was separated from Jerusalem in Susa, the winter palace of the king.

Look at those words, trouble and disgrace in verse 3. Walls are broken down, gates burned with fire. Have you ever moved away from home and a few years later had someone visit you from home? Maybe you have not been back in a while. The first thing you want to know is how everything is back home. How are the people? How are the situations? That is what Nehemiah was asking. What is it like back in the beautiful city of Jerusalem? In its pinnacle, Jerusalem was the most beautiful city on the planet. Hanani said “Oh, Nehemiah, it is terrible. The wall that surrounded Jerusalem is broken down. It is nothing but rubble and ruins, desolation, degradation, disgrace. Those beautiful gates, those beautiful wooden carved gates, they are burned down, oh, it is awful Nehemiah.” Nehemiah could visualize the problem in his mind.

Let’s apply it to 1998. Before you and I can achieve spiritual success in doing what God really wants to do in our midst, we have to visualize the problem here in East Texas.

A. Can you see the need?

Can you see the need around us here in East Texas? Do you think God really wants a great growing, thriving, Bible teaching, Christ exalting church here in East Texas? I really think he wants one. I think God needs a church like that here in East Texas. When we are talking about walls being broken down, I think that speaks of security and stability. Walls provide protection. They are a defense. We are not talking about literal walls here in East Texas broken down; we are talking about people who have lost the sense of spiritual defense. They are open to attack from the enemy.

There are people all around us living in misery and trouble, whose lives are falling apart. We are not talking about stones simply piled up on the ground. We are talking about something that is much more precious to God. We are talking about men and women, teenagers, and boys and girls in East Texas whose lives are broken down and falling apart. As a church, we are not in the construction business; we are not in the fundraising business—we are in the Jesus business. Jesus is in the life-changing business. When I read about those walls being broken down, I do not know about you, but I can visualize tens of thousands of people around us who have broken hearts, broken homes, and broken hopes. There is a need under God for a life-saving station here to send out the light, to send out the word of hope to people whose lives are like those walls.

There are a lot of people out there whose lives are like those gates. A gate represents access, in and out, and those gates in Jerusalem were burned. I listen to enough people tell me their problems. You would be amazed how many times somebody comes to me and they are not allowing God or any other person any access to their life. Why? They say, “I have been burned.” They do not mean burned with fire. They mean they have been hurt, so they do not open the

gateway to their heart; they have been burned by an ugly divorce. They have been burned by a bad business deal. Maybe they went to church one time and they got burned because of something that happened at church. They no longer give God access to their heart. They do not give anybody access to their heart. Can you see the need out there? Thousands and thousands of people who, like those walls, are broken down and like those gates have shut off access. You must see the need.

2. Will you be a part of solution?

Anybody can point out problems. It is one thing to stand back and point at a problem or point at a need, but it is quite another thing to step in there and say, “I will be a part of the solution.” Put yourself in Nehemiah’s sandals for just a moment. We are going to learn a lot about Nehemiah in the next few weeks, but understand he had a cushy job. He was the cupbearer to the king. He was a butler in the palace. He had had security. He had a wonderful living. He was not living in Jerusalem where the walls were falling down and the gates were burned. He lived in the king’s palace; had a wonderful bed in which to sleep. All his needs were met. You know what Nehemiah could have done? He could have stepped back and said “Oh those poor people in Jerusalem. What a problem. I sure hope somebody helps them.” No. He decided to be a part of the solution. “God I want you to use me, to try to fix this problem.”

I have already preached long enough and been a pastor long enough to realize that not everybody is going to get involved in Discover the Joy. It breaks my heart, but it is just my observation. Because there are always some people that are going to stand on the sidelines and say, “Well if they want to do that, they can go ahead and build that building. If they want to raise money, they can go ahead and do that. I might even just chip in a little bit every now and then. But if whatever they want to do, I am not going to resist them. They are not willing to be a part of solution like Nehemiah. Remember I told you there were 3 steps to success and the first thing you must do is to visualize the problem. Next week we are going talk about not only visualizing the problem, we are going to talk about visualizing the possibilities. After you see the problem you have must start looking for possibilities. Here is the second step.

II. AGONIZE IN PRAYER

Agonize in prayer. I’ve chosen that word carefully. Not just because it rhymes with visualize, but because that is what true praying is. It is agonizing in prayer. That is why the book of James says “The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.” (James 5:16 KJV) I am going to be asking you to spend sixty days in prayer and fasting. If you just give God a dry-eyed, unbent knee, milquetoast, mediocre kind of prayer—nothing is going to happen. If you will agonize—literally—agonize in prayer; God will do something in your life. God will do something in our church.

There are four steps of the kind of prayer that really grabs heaven’s attention, that is what we are asking you to do, pray and fast.

A. Heaven-moving prayer involves a burden

“When I heard these things, I sat down and wept. For some days I mourned and fasted and prayed before the God of heaven.” (vs. 4) The first step in the kind of prayer that changes lives and changes hearts and shakes heaven is burden.

I am asking you to pray and fast because the Bible is full of times and places and people whom, because they faced a tremendous challenge, they were so burdened that they spent time in prayer and fasting. Not everything in life requires or even necessitates prayer and fasting. But throughout the Bible there are times when an individual, a group, or a nation faces such a tremendous challenge that they say, listen, status quo will not get it. Business as usual will not get it. We must set aside some time and pray and fast. It starts with a burden. Nehemiah was so burdened he started weeping. When was the last time you wept? When was the last time you so were so burdened, you wept over a spiritual need? He spent time in prayer and fasting.

B. Heaven-moving prayer involves praise

“Then I said: ‘O Lord, God of heaven, the great and awesome God, who keeps his covenant of love with those who love him and obey his commands.’” (vs. 5) This is one of the greatest recorded prayers in the Bible and it starts with praise. That is the best way to always start your prayer. Sometimes we just pray what I call a “Polly-want-a-cracker” prayer. We only go to God when we want something. We take a shopping list to God and say, “Here God, meet my needs.” The kind of prayer that really gets God’s attention is prayer that starts with praise. What did he say about God? He said “God you are a great God, You are an awesome God.” The King James word is “terrible” God, which means he is an awesome God in his might. Do you think God already knows he is a great God? Sure he does. Do you think He knows he is an awesome God? Absolutely, why then, do we have to say those things about him that he already knows? When we acknowledge it, it does something for us to admit that he is an awesome, that he is a great God. Praise is bragging on God. So always start your prayer with praise.

C. Heaven-moving prayer involves confession

“Let your ear be attentive and your eyes open to hear the prayer your servant is praying before you day and night for your servants, the people of Israel. I confess the sins we Israelites, including myself and my father’s house, have committed against you. We have acted very wickedly toward you. We have not obeyed the commands, decrees and laws you gave your servant Moses.” (vs. 6-7) Every prayer that really grabs heaven’s attention is a prayer of confession.

It would have been so easy for Nehemiah to shift the blame to avoid the responsibility, because he was of a younger generation, and many believe he was born Persia. It would have been easy for him to say to God, “I hope you will forgive my fathers and their fathers for the way they forsook you.” Instead he took responsibility. He said, “I confess the sin we, corporately, have committed against you. We, corporately, have done wicked things in your sight.” I think America needs a revival. I think America needs a spiritual awakening more so now than ever before. Do you know what it is going to take for revival to happen? It is going to take God’s people confessing sin, not shifting the blame. It is so easy for us to say all the drug dealers in America are causing most of the crime. If we could just get rid of the drug dealers, our nation

would be a better nation. It's easy for us to say all those terrible abortion practices, and millions of unborn babies that are being murdered, oh, if that would just stop happening. If those people would just get right, our nation would be so much better. If the pornographers would just stop pouring that sewage into the minds and hearts of people, our nation would be so better. God did not say if the abortionist or the drug dealers or the pornographers will confess their sin. God said, "If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land." (2 Chronicles 7:14) We need to continually confess to God our sin as a nation that allows a culture where drug dealers are calling the shots and causing so much crime. "God, I confess that to you. We just need to start taking responsibility. God, I confess to you that I live in a culture that has allowed millions of babies to be killed. God, I confess to you that I live in a nation that has allowed pornography to become a seven billion dollar annual business. God, I confess to you that I live in a nation that is guilty of prejudice, which is guilty of abusing children, which is guilty of neglecting the elderly." When God's people start confessing, corporately, the sins of our terrible forsaken culture that is when God is going to do something. Prayer always involves confession. You will never find a strong prayer in the Bible without that element. Here is the final thing. The fourth element of this kind of prayer is

D. Heaven-moving prayer involves a bold confidence

"Remember the instruction you gave your servant Moses, saying, 'If you are unfaithful, I will scatter you among the nations, but if you return to me and obey my commands, then even if your exiled people are at the farthest horizon, I will gather them from there and bring them to the place I have chosen as a dwelling for my Name.' They are your servants and your people, whom you redeemed by your great strength and your mighty hand. O Lord, let your ear be attentive to the prayer of this your servant and to the prayer of your servants who delight in revering your name. Give your servant success today by granting him favor in the presence of this man." (vs. 8-10) When you have received a burden from God and you start praising the Lord and you start confessing then you have confidence to ask God boldly. All Nehemiah saying is, "God; I am just claiming your promises." Like that beautiful hymn we sing, I am standing on the promises God that you have already given. Notice Nehemiah does not even say, "Amen" to his prayer. He just puts a little word of explanation in there.

III. ORGANIZE A PLAN

If you want spiritual success, organize a plan. If you really want God to get hold of your heart and do something in your life in the next three months, I want you to visualize not only the problem, but the potential. I am going to ask you to spend sixty days in prayer and fasting. Then as God gives you a plan, an organized plan, then it is up to you to follow it.

A. The very best plans are begun in prayer

Let me tell you something about the very best plans: They are begun in prayer. Maybe you had a plan at one time for your job, your business, but you say you did not get it in prayer. Those are man's plans. God's plans always begin in prayer. Nehemiah realized there was a problem: Walls were broken down. Gates burned. He started praying about it. He was burdened. He was praying

and fasting and weeping. Nehemiah started praising God and confessing, saying, “God we are just standing on your promises, O Lord we need to do something about this,” and suddenly as he was praying, a plan started formulating in his mind. “Now wait a minute, I am the butler to the king and that king has a lot of authority, a lot of power. He has a lot of possessions. I wonder, I wonder if maybe I could influence him to help me out with this problem?” Has that ever happened to you? It has happened to me many times. You have been in prayer. You do not know what in the world you are going to do about a certain situation but you just pray. You just pray and pray, and suddenly as you are praying, BOOM! Something pops into your mind and you say “Hey that might work! I think it would work.” That is God giving you a plan. But do you know the problem with some of us? When we pray, we do not listen. We just talk. We make prayer monologue. We say “Listen up God, I have something I want to say to you.” After we finish we say, “Over and out, amen. That’s all.” And you get up and go on your way. I tell you what when you pray you had better stop, be still, be quiet, and listen. As you listen, God will give you a plan.

B. The very best plans are based upon your current position

Notice Nehemiah did not quit his job or look outside his sphere of influence and circle of relationships. God had already placed him in a strategic place and a good relationship; he used what he already had. God wants to do a miracle in Green Acres Baptist Church and in East Texas that is going to make everybody look and praise God. And the way he is going to do it is by using you and using me right where we are, right now. He is going to show us exactly how that is going to be accomplished. I do not have the answer for you and you do not have the answer for me. It is a process over the next three months, but I tell you that I have thought about this next statement: I am convinced that the next three months are the most critical months in the life and history of Green Acres Baptist Church to this point. We have never faced a challenge like this before. That is why it is terribly imperative that all of us get serious and meet God face to face. Fast and pray and say, “Okay God, what do you want me to do? God we need you to provide for this need.” That is what it is going to take.

As we talk about prayer and fasting, I want to conclude by giving you some very practical tips about prayer and fasting. Because some of you have never fasted before and do not even know what it is. Is it biblical? Absolutely. This is what Jesus said about it, “When you fast, do not look somber as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show men they are fasting. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, so that it will not be obvious to others that you are fasting, but only to your Father, who is unseen; and your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. (Matthew 6:16-18)

How will he reward you? Is he going to give you a lot of money? Let you win the lottery? Come into a great inheritance? If you are serious about prayer and fasting, he will meet you and he will answer you. That is great reward right there. You will find God and you will hear from God, and that is a great reward if you are burdened enough to pray and fast.

Here are three quick tips about praying and fasting.

1. It should always be a private practice

We are asking everybody to pray and fast for sixty days, but of course we are not asking any person to do it every day for sixty days. You might want to get a little creative there. You might want to decide that for sixty days you are going to give up one kind of food or one certain thing for sixty days. A better way to do it, you might for one day a week, over these next few weeks, you are going to pray and fast for 24 hours or 12 hours. It is between you and God. I do not want you to know when I am praying and fasting and I do not want to know when you are praying and fasting. It is a private thing. God sees you in private and he answers you.

2. It is always for a spiritual purpose

You never just pray and fast for no reason. The purpose of fasting is not to lose weight. I do not see many people who could not benefit from missing a few meals. That is not the reason and if that is your reason, just go on some other kind of diet, because losing weight is not the purpose of praying and fasting. It is always keeping before your heart and your mind an issue, a topic you are praying about. There is another purpose to it. The Bible talks about how we as Christians should be able to deny those appetites of the body. I have always been intrigued that when the Apostle Paul was writing to the church at Philippi, he talked about this certain group of people. He said their god is their belly. You know what that means. That means some people do whatever their physical appetites tell them to do. We are all like that a bit. We get up in the morning and our belly says, "Eat breakfast." Lunch time, whether we are hungry or not, your belly says, "You had better eat lunch." Supper time, "Better eat dinner." Midnight snack, your belly is telling you what to do. It is about time you decide who is God in your life. The Bible says one way to do that is by denying the desires of the flesh. There is great value to this spiritual discipline, but it is always a spiritual purpose.

3. It is always for a specific period

This is what will happen if you decide you are going to fast for 24 hours: The first meal you miss will not be a big deal, but you will be thinking about what you are praying about when you are not eating that first meal. Second meal, you are not really hungry. You are psychologically hungry, because you are accustomed to feeding your face three times a day. Instead of eating that meal you are thinking about what you are praying for. By the way, that third meal you miss you may start getting a little weak. That is why in our devotion book there are some guidelines and if you have any kind of blood sugar problem, always consult a physician before you start fasting. You may be starting to get a little weak and you may be depending on Jesus for the next step you take or the next deed you perform. This is a pretty good position for some of us to get into, dependent upon Him. For a set period of time, you decide to do it.

I am asking you, under God, to spend these next sixty days in prayer and fasting and participating in the devotional guide. Fasting and praying for certain period during that time. Join together in praying for God to do something. If you will do that, God will answer your prayer just like He answered Nehemiah's prayer.

OUTLINE

The steps to spiritual success

I. VISUALIZE THE PROBLEM (vs. 1-3)

- A. Can you see the need?
2. Will you be a part of solution?

II. AGONIZE IN PRAYER (vs. 4-10)

Heaven-moving prayer involves:

- A. A burden
- B. Praise
- C. Confession
- D. A bold confidence

III. ORGANIZE A PLAN (vs. 11)

The very best plans are:

- A. Begun in prayer
- B. Based upon your current position

The Challenge from January 6 to March 6: 60 Days of Prayer and Fasting

Jesus said, "When you fast, do not look somber as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show men they are fasting. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, so that it will not be obvious to others that you are fasting, but only to your Father, who is unseen; and your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you."
Matthew 6:16-18

Prayer and fasting should be:

1. A private practice
2. For a spiritual purpose
3. For a specific period

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David O. Dykes, Pastor
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For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes