

Let's Build Something Together

Noble Cedar Series Week 4

Nehemiah 2:11-18

Welcome/intro/vision

We're in our fourth week in our Noble Cedar series and if you're new let me get you up to speed

We're getting ready to do 2 wonderfully crazy things at the same time:

We're launching our Pittsboro service on March 5th, super-excited about that

We're also getting ready to buy 10.5 acres of land just down Andrews Store Rd. that will one day be the site of our permanent facility

So we're talking about what kind of church we want to be as we do both of these things

And specifically as we get ready to purchase the land, we're asking everyone to be praying and thinking about how you might be able to give financially over the course of the next two years to help us purchase that piece of property to eventually build a building

And our goal throughout this series has been for this to be a high vision, no-guilt invitation to be a part of something bigger than all of us, the mission that we feel God has put us here to do to connect all kinds of people to God and to each other

and if you can't give or don't want to give, that's fine, we totally understand there's a variety of reasons why you might not be able to or might not want to give

But we are asking everyone to be willing to at least pray and ask the question, "God how would you have me to be a part of what you're doing here at this church in this season?"

And to start with, a couple weeks ago we looked at this promise that God gave to Israel when they were an over-run, beat-down nation in exile

[I myself will plant it... that it may bear branches and produce fruit and become a noble cedar. And under it will dwell every kind of bird; in the shade of its branches birds of every sort will nest.]

God said he was going to take this little vulnerable sprig that was Israel and he was going to plant them and make them into a NOBLE CEDAR, with big strong branches and deep roots and lots of fruit

and the point of all that growth and nobility was so that God's people might SERVE all the birds of the air, so that all the peoples all around them from all the nations and all the countries around them might come and make their nest and find their rest

And we've been talking last week about this vision of becoming a Noble Cedar kind of a church.

What if we were a place where you knew that YOU could invite your friend, neighbor, co-worker, family member, no matter what they did or didn't believe, no matter their church background or baggage, no matter their political affiliation, no matter anything

Everyone's invited to come and see what God has done in Jesus's life, death, and resurrection. A radical hospitality because Jesus is at the center of it all and Jesus welcomed and hung out with all sorts of people

We are asking you to consider making a financial commitment to the noble cedar campaign because a building gives us deeper roots in this place where God has planted us

AND it gives us broader branches and more branches for more different kinds of birds to make their nest right here with us.

About 150 years after that promise of God to make Israel into that noble cedar, Israel is still a conquered and over-run nation but God starts to stir up a man named Nehemiah to deliver on that promise

Nehemiah is in exile, he's a servant of the king while living in captivity and he hears that Jerusalem is still in ruins 150 years after they were initially over-run

And he's heartbroken when he hears about this—Nehemiah weeps and mourns and prays and fasts and cries out to God to repair the city

And last week we saw Nehemiah press through his fear to take a tremendous risk in asking the king to send him to Jerusalem to rebuild the city

And incredibly, as he says, "because the gracious hand of God was on him," the king grants him his requests

And today, we're going to pick up **as Nehemiah ends** what was likely a 900 mile or so trip from Susa to Jerusalem

And Nehemiah's going to take on a massive renovation project that's way too big for him to do by himself and way beyond his skillset.

Have you ever attempted a home repair project that you knew was beyond your skillset?
Have you ever regretted taking on said project?

What we're going to see today is that Nehemiah is going to teach us how to tackle big jobs in a thoughtful and thorough way

And today, in your own life, whether you've got a big job like a home renovation project

OR if your big job right now is something very different and maybe more personal: like raising your kids, re-building your marriage, tackling a big project at work, getting on top of your finances, or fighting to get healthy and well

Nehemiah's going to teach us how to tackle big projects: the value of patience, which I stink at by the way, and the value of doing big work in community

If you've got a Bible you can turn with me to Nehemiah 2, if you don't have a Bible it'll be on the screen behind me:

¹¹ I went to Jerusalem, and after staying there three days ¹² I set out during the night with a few others. I had not told anyone what my God had put in my heart to do for Jerusalem.

So Nehemiah makes this long trip, he's got calvary with him and lumber so when he arrives in Jerusalem he probably created a bit of a hubbub

But he tells us something right here that's a great place for some of us to start: I had not told anyone what my God had put in my heart to do for Jerusalem.

Nehemiah here is practicing a thoughtful and holy secrecy that is not attention-seeking, not throwing himself his own ticker-tape parade, he's not tweeting or posting status updates every 6 minutes about how he's coming to Jerusalem to save the day

He's arriving and he's going to assess the situation and do so slowly and deliberately.

And then as we'll see in a minute, there IS a time and a place to go public

because for many of the things that really matter in our lives, we're going to need OTHER PEOPLE to help us to accomplish it.

But Nehemiah shows us what it might look like to be deliberate, thoughtful and intentional about what we share and what we don't share and when we do it.

Here's what he does next:

¹³ By night I went out through the Valley Gate toward the Jackal^[a] Well and the Dung Gate, examining the walls of Jerusalem, which had been broken down, and its gates, which had been destroyed by fire. ¹⁴ Then I moved on toward the Fountain Gate and the King's Pool, but there was not enough room for my mount to get through;

¹⁵ so I went up the valley by night, examining the wall. Finally, I turned back and reentered through the Valley Gate. ¹⁶ The officials did not know where I had gone or what I was doing, because as yet I had said nothing to the Jews or the priests or nobles or officials or any others who would be doing the work.

We saw last week that Nehemiah was not only a committed man of prayer, he was also very committed to planning.

He does this inspection around the city walls in the middle of the night, of course no artificial lighting, so he's inspecting the walls around Jerusalem by the light of the Big Dipper!

Because he wants to get a full understanding of the situation and make a good plan

And we talked a couple of weeks ago about how essential walls around the city were back in those days—it was really the only form of protection for people for hundreds of miles around the city

How long has Nehemiah been there? 3 days. And it's not really that hard to see what the problem is at first glance! There's supposed to be a ginormous wall of protection around the city, but it's burned out, overturned and the place is in shambles!

But Nehemiah is a deliberate, thorough, patient man. Which then gives him the AUTHORITY and the CREDIBILITY to call everyone around him to step into an incredibly daunting task

Any time you and I are building or re-building something that matters, I mean really matters, like our health or our families or our careers or our finances, OUR FAITH

doing it well requires that we do the ground work and the grunt work of walking all the way around the walls and fully assessing and understanding the situation that we're in.

Because very often our first impulses at solving the problem only address surface symptoms and doesn't get all the way down to root issues

Fixing our finances might not just be "I need to make more money"—it might mean, "I need to look at my spending habits."

Fixing our marriages might not just be "We need to spend more time together"—it might also mean, "I need to treat you with more respect and take you less for granted each and every day"

In anything that really matters, the pre-work of walking all the way around the walls and understanding the fullness of the problem is crucial to get all the way to the root of it

And so Nehemiah does this night-time walk-around, here's what he does the next morning:

17 Then I said to them, "You see the trouble we are in: Jerusalem lies in ruins, and its gates have been burned with fire. Come, let us rebuild the wall of Jerusalem, and we will no longer be in disgrace."18 I also told them about the gracious hand of my God on me and what the king had said to me.

They replied, "Let us start rebuilding." So they began this good work.

So we have this funny thing at our house, see if you resonate with this: every so often we'll take advantage of the fact that someone's coming over for dinner as a motivator to clean the house.

We KNOW we need to do it, right? House-cleaning is an obvious thing that needs to happen

But having someone else come in from the outside is what galvanizes us and sparks us to do what we already know that we need to be doing!

Nehemiah opens his rally cry to all the people not with a question but with a statement of the obvious! He doesn't ask "do you see the trouble we're in?" Why is that? Because everyone knows it!

they've lived among the ruins every day for their entire lives!

But no one's doing anything about it, are they?

They've needed someone else to come in and spark them, motivate them, galvanize them to do what needs to be done but nobody's had the wherewithal or the leadership or the energy to tackle it!

They've been in passive bystander mode, dealing with life among the ruins for several generations at this point. And so they're settling for the disgraced life of living in a city that's in ruins

So Nehemiah comes in from the outside, states the obvious, and gets them moving towards a solution that they all knew that they needed to do before Nehemiah got there

which as someone in my small group pointed out this past week is essentially what drives the multi-billion dollar business consulting industry!

Have you ever noticed how we use the pronoun "they" a lot when it comes to stuff that's wrong around us?

"They really should put a stoplight at this intersection."

"They need to fix that computer system at work"

"They really need to make a dishwasher that unloads itself."

When we notice things around us that are wrong, especially if it seems outside of the purview of our daily tasks or authority to do anything about or beyond our skillset to configure

we become passive bystanders, and the default pronoun of the passive bystander is "they"—and by they, you mean simply "someone else"—very often the boss or the DMV or the government in general

The people of Jerusalem are stuck in the passive bystander pronoun "they"—"they really need to fix that wall around Jerusalem."

When Nehemiah FIRST heard about how bad things were hundreds of miles away in Susa, the most natural posture he could have taken would have been passive bystander mode

"those people in Jerusalem, THEY need to get their act together and get to work fixing that city!!"

Instead, Nehemiah spent four months back in chapter 1 praying and fasting and seeking God's heart and in the process, and he's made a significant pronoun move

He moved from **"THEY"** to **"WE"**

Nehemiah is embracing their pain, identifying and becoming one of them, he's entering into a situation that is stuck and not going anywhere and he's introducing NEW ENERGY into this stagnant situation

And he's fully embracing not only the project that THEY need to do but the work that WE need to do together--look at the pronouns Nehemiah uses

you see the trouble **WE** are in...let **US** rebuild the wall so that **WE** won't be in disgrace—HE'S ONLY BEEN THERE 3 DAYS!

But it's not "let's rebuild so that so that "YA'LL" won't be in disgrace but so that WE won't be in disgrace, let's re-build our people and our nation, that we might become the noble cedar community God promised!

Nehemiah moves from a "THEY" to a "WE" which is HUGE, but there's one more step that every single one of them has to make, which is maybe HUGER if that's a word: "I" will do something about it

Which is where they all get to here at the very end, as each one of them begins to actually DO this good work

See, it's not enough for Nehemiah to simply say "WE" should re-build the city. It's likely he'd get general agreement there:

"yes, WE SHOULD re-build our city. That sounds like a great idea for someone else to do!"

But the gap between "We should do this" and "I'm willing to sacrifice to make it happen, that's huge, isn't it?"

You've got household projects that you all agree y'all SHOULD get around to doing, you just haven't been willing to sacrifice the time/money/energy/focus to get it done, right?

The gap between general agreement, "we should do this" to "I'm willing to take ownership and make a commitment to making something happen"—that gap is huge.

But by leaping through these three pronouns, Nehemiah and the people of Jerusalem are setting things in motion that will change the destiny of their nation and world history forever

I want to suggest to you that as we talk about the vision of becoming a Noble Cedar church community where all the birds of the people around us might make their nest

That for each one of us, we have to walk through those same pronoun steps to actually helping to make it happen

The first wonderful step is what happens if you're a guest or a visitor: the "THEY" experience

Maybe you've just joined us in the past couple of weeks or even past couple of months and you're hearing this vision of this church being a noble cedar, noble enough for all people to be welcomed

hearing that YOU'RE welcomed here no matter where you've been or what you believe

And hopefully your first thought is

"That sounds great! I'm interested in seeing how THEY work that out, how might THEY do church like that. Let's see how THEY do this!"

The "they" is a very appropriate pronoun if you've only been here a few weeks or a couple of months, thanks for joining us, AND this is a HUGE step for some of you

Because for many of you just coming into a church to explore re-explore faith in a church community is a BIG step, thank you for being here, you're welcome here

But one of the things that happens for some of us is we get STUCK in "they" land for months and even years.

And maybe just because you're busy, maybe because you're not sure about the whole church thing still,

Maybe you're not sure about the whole Jesus thing or the faith thing—so you've kind of stayed on the edges of the church community for months and months and years

So for whatever reason, you've stayed at the "THEY" for a long, long time—and I want to invite you to make the leap from "THEY" to "WE" today, this morning

This series is all about inviting us as a community to be a part of creating something bigger than ourselves that we are praying and planning will become a noble cedar that will serve and bless all kinds of people in Chatham County and even beyond!

And this morning, if you're one of the people who have kind of camped out in orbit around the church for many months or even years, if you still feel like CCC is a "they" situation for you rather than a "we" situation for you, I want to invite you to take that HUGE pronoun step

And find a way to increase your level of ownership in some way—maybe find a small group, maybe volunteer somewhere

maybe just say "we're going to commit to being here more often, because this is going to be "OUR" community.

What if you said, 'we're going to be here 4 Sundays out of 6 no matter what. Even if that means we have travel less on weekends. Even if we're up a little later on Saturday night, we're going to find a way to be here more frequently because this is OUR community.'

I want to invite those of you who have been camped out in the "they" for longer than a couple of months to make a move to the "We" in some way this morning

Still others of us, we're all about the "we"—and hopefully if you've been here long enough to feel like you're a part of this church community, hopefully you love the vision of the noble cedar community where all people are welcome

But being generally on board with it and being a part of making it happen are two very different things, aren't they?

"We should be a noble cedar kind of a church, a welcoming kind of a church for all kinds of people" that's general agreement

But this is personal ownership: "I'm going to invite my church-allergic friends to come with me to church" --That's a huge step in taking personal responsibility to help make this happen

"We should be a church where everyone is welcome" is general agreement, "I'm going to go out of my way every Sunday to say hello to at least one person that I don't know"—that's personal ownership that helps to make that kind of community happen

I want to invite you, if you're at the "WE" stage of general agreement with the vision of us being a noble cedar kind of a church community, I want to invite you to take a step towards personal ownership—how might you be a part of actually making it happen?

And if you're already here at the "I," helping to contribute making this church the noble cedar kind of church that we pray and plan God will make us to be

I want to say a big thank you. None of us could do this alone.

The mission is too big and the opportunities are too big for any one of us to do this alone. We need each other's gifts and energies and personalities to make this happen—thank you! Thank you! Thank you!

There's this progression from the "THEY should be a noble cedar church" to the "WE should be a noble cedar church" to the "I will take personal responsibility to help make this happen" that I want to invite all of us to take

And there's a parallel journey to the whole building thing, you ready?

"THEY should build a building."

A couple of years ago there was a guy here for about 8 months, he was in my small group for a while, and he couldn't stand it that we didn't have a building, drove him crazy, felt like we weren't really rooted, not really established

And so he left us and is driving 30 minutes to go to a church far away—and I think if you went and asked him, he lives 6 minutes from here, what he thought about Chatham Community Church he'd say, "I think THEY should build a building!"

Now, if people come and get plugged in and get involved and stick around, this can and has morphed into **"WE should build a building!"** And actually, just about everyone's excited about this!

We had a vote here several weeks ago about the building and it was UNANIMOUS! We didn't get ONE thumbs down vote, someone needs to capture that in a book somewhere, perhaps the first time in church history that a whole church has agreed on anything!

“WE should build a building”—we've got general agreement as a church to the fact that after 10 years, it is time to do this!

But the gap between “We should build a building” to “**I'm willing to commit to making it happen**”—that's a HUGE gap. And this morning, we're going to ask you to spend some time this week praying and thinking and talking with whoever you might need to talk with about how you might close that gap

Right now, we're going to pass out commitment cards that we're going to ask you to pray over and discuss and return next week. For this week, this is your wildly important take-home.

If you're willing and able to move all the way to the “I'm willing to take some responsibility for helping to make this happen” then we're going to invite you to fill out this card next Sunday and turn it in as an offering to the Lord

Again, for some of you, filling out this card won't be your role right now in building a noble cedar church: you just don't have the money, you're brand new, you're on your faith journey trying to figure out what you believe

You are welcome here and there's plenty of OTHER work to do to make us into a noble cedar church community—volunteer, invite people to join us, go out of your way to talk to new people here—those are things all of us can do

But for most of us, we want to invite you into a prayer process where you consider how or if God would have you to commit to making a financial commitment to helping to make this whole thing happen

Last week we talked about our goal for this: \$300,000, which would pay for the land and closing costs and the capital campaign expenses

And I laid out a map of how we might get to \$300,000, which included a couple of really big gifts: especially \$75k.

Here's my true confession, this MIGHT happen, but I'm not sure if we've got that here with us. Maybe we do, and I'm praying that we do, but I'm not sure if it's here

So if we take out that \$75,000 gift, we're going to have to make our goal

that'd take additional people committing all up and down at various levels [**2 people for a total of 6 at \$10,000, 4 more for a total of 8 at \$5,000, 10 more people giving at \$2000 for a total of 16, and 10 more at \$500 for a total of 18**—for a total of about 30 more families giving!

This is why we're asking everyone who can to be able to give! And even if we do get that higher gift, anything that we raise over and above our goal will move us closer towards being able to do build sooner and quicker

And again, this over 2 years: monthly, quarterly, whatever, and again, a \$5k gift is about \$209/month.

One family this week told me they're looking to double-up their car payments for the next six months to finish that off and transfer that payment to the capital campaign

Super thrilled to report that we've been talking to our leaders ahead of time and asking them to consider what they might do

and we've already got 20 families who have either made a contribution or made a pledge!

We're asking everyone to pray about being a part of this next week when we fill out and submit these commitment cards

We're moving towards a building because we believe that a permanent facility gives us deeper roots and broader and different kinds of branches to do different kinds of ministries so that we might more robustly and more generously serve all the birds of Chatham County

Because there are needs in our community that we believe meeting in a school does NOT position us to meet, but a building might

How many of you know someone within 20-30 minutes of here who's in a very hard spot in their marriage, in the process of a divorce, or just ending some nasty divorce proceedings?

Keep your hands up—we'd love to have a building here where we might host Divorce care.

How many of you know someone within 20-30 minutes of here who's battling an addiction of some sort?

Keep your hands up—we'd love to have a building here where we might host addiction recovery ministries and workshops

How many of you know of a family where a child needs extra help with food, tutoring, or some other services that the family can't afford to pay for?

Keep your hands up—we'd love to have a building here where we might partner with local non-profits to help kids be educated, cared for, and fed

How many of you know someone who was in a church at one point in their lives but right now they are far from God or far from any faith community?

Keep your hands up!

We think that having a building not only makes it easier to invite friends and neighbors to church, if we use it in a generous-hearted way that serves the whole community, we can

start to build trust with everyone in the community, even the people around us who don't like church people.

Which makes it more likely that those folks will be willing to come and join us here.

My friends, do you see the trouble we are in? There are people's lives all around us that are in great trouble and distress!

Do you see the troubles of your friends, neighbors, co-workers and family members?

There are people for whom a church building positioned to serve and meet needs all across our community would be one giant invitation for them to connect with the God of the universe and with a community of people who will walk with them through all the ups and downs of life

Let's build it! You and I and the person next to you and the person next to them and the person next to them. Let's build this thing together! It's going to take time and energy and resources, but the outcome is worth it!

Let's pray and seek the Lord and then make whatever commitment we can make next week so that we might build something that will change our community and people's lives for an eternity for generations ahead!

Let's build something together!

That the God of the universe might be glorified here, that the birds of the air around us might be cared for and served here, and that we might have the joy of doing something that makes this kind of difference in the lives of the people around us for generations to come.