

Ignited: The Heart of a Nation Builder

Nehemiah was a man of prayer. This image is clear at the start of the book. I believe God is raising up an army of men and women who will be like Nehemiah. He was a man who allowed what was on the heart of God to touch His heart. And not only touch His heart, but break his heart, moving him to pray for the situation.

God also made Nehemiah to be the answer to his own prayers. We see that he wasn't only a man of prayer, but was also a man of action. God often does this in our lives with the areas that burden us. At times He raises us up to be part of the solution to the problem we are praying about, or the burden we carry. Some of us have a bias for prayer, others for action. I believe God is raising up men and women of both prayer and action.

Nehemiah was a man of prayer and of action, that image comes through strongly.

Another strong image that we find in this book is that of the Israelites rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem with one hand holding a sword and the other hand holding building implements. God is raising up these types of nation builders at this time. Those who will be prayerful and wield the Sword of the Spirit, ready to fight, whilst at the same time hard at work on the ground rebuilding the broken down walls in our nations and in our lives.

We learn many lessons from the book of Nehemiah regarding the heart of a nation builder. It challenges us as the church, and yet also encourages us. We will be looking at this book more closely over the next 2 weeks. Let's have a closer look:

A man called Nehemiah

In chapter one of the book of Nehemiah, we find Nehemiah in a position of personal ease and prosperity. He was a favoured servant, a cupbearer to the king, in a foreign palace. He was not a minister of state like Joseph or Daniel, but would have taken high position amongst household servants.

Neh 1:1-4 NLT

"In late autumn, in the month of Kislev, in the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes' reign, I was at the fortress of Susa. Hanani, one of my brothers, came to visit me with some other men who had just arrived from Judah. I asked them about the Jews who had returned there from captivity and about how things were going in Jerusalem. They said to me, "Things are not going well for those who returned to the province of Judah. They are in great trouble and disgrace. The wall of Jerusalem has been torn down,

and the gates have been destroyed by fire." When I heard this, I sat down and wept. In fact, for days I mourned, fasted, and prayed to the God of heaven."

Jerusalem was hundreds of miles away across the desert. Nehemiah was far removed from this destruction, ruin and the implications of it. Yet he enquired with a heart ready to bear the reality should the news be negative. He discovered that:

The wall of Jerusalem has been torn down, and the gates have been destroyed by fire.

What was his response?

When I heard this, I sat down and wept. In fact, for days I mourned, fasted, and prayed to the God of heaven.

He allowed it to break His heart and took it to the Lord in prayer. In other words, He carried the burden.

This is where I want to pick up learn from for those who are called as nation builders and intercessors. And I would like to assume that is most if not all of us.

We have to allow ourselves to be emotionally involved.

We must allow ourselves to feel what He feels. And even ask Him to give us His heart concerning what we see around us.

Burdens:

When I watch the news, or more especially reports of current affairs and injustices and so forth like Carte Blanche or Third Degree, it's relatively easy to pick up burdens and feel sad. In life in general driving through certain parts of the country or being exposed to what is happening in certain spheres and domains can burden a sensitive person. Some of us can be sensitive and pick up burdens easily, even if they aren't ours to carry. I remember once the Lord helped me with this. Explain.

If the burden is ours to carry, then we need to pray it through, regardless of the discomfort.

On the other hand, maybe we have become so hardened by life that we no longer feel anything. We just feel numb. We can actually have both extremes at the same time and vacillate between them. Our hearts have become hardened. We have developed a hardness and callousness of heart because of life. Maybe we have needed to harden our hearts to cope, or for self-protection.

We no longer know how to process things emotionally. When life happens, disappointments, betrayal, hurt, disillusionment, tiredness, weariness, corruption, unfairness, whatever it is, we develop coping mechanisms. These oftentimes involve hardening our hearts in one way or another. When we harden our hearts to others, we invariably harden our hearts to God and His heart. We cannot compartmentalise numbing. When we numb ourselves to pain, we become numb to joy.

Think of it, from corruption in government and business, to abortion or murder of the unborn, if we want to call it what it is. From mercy killing, or murder of the aged, to abandoned babies and street children living outside, starving, in winter. We can come to a point where we bury our heads in the sand so to speak and just get on with our lives. But we need to remember what we are instructed in Jeremiah 29 to pray for our nation, and wherever we are, because in its peace, we too will have peace.

I like how C.S. Lewis says it:

“To love at all is to be vulnerable. Love anything and your heart will certainly be wronged and possibly broken. If you want to make sure of keeping it intact, you must give your heart to no-one, not even to an animal. Wrap it carefully around with hobbies and little luxuries. Avoid all entanglements. Lock it up safe in the casket or coffin of your selfishness. But in that casket, safe, dark, motionless, aimless, it will change. It will not be broken, instead it will become unbreakable, impenetrable, irredeemable.”

- I remember once God said to me – Compassion is a gift.
- In order to keep it, you have to give it away.
- As soon as we block up the flow of compassion in self-protection, we begin to harden our hearts.

If we want to be effective as intercessors or prayerful people, we need to guard our hearts.

- What burdens you?
- What breaks your heart, or makes you feel heavy when you see it or think about it?
- There are some things that should probably burden all of us so to speak, injustices and the like. When we see them, we should pray and do something if we can. However, there are some things that are heavier burdens to carry. Burdens that we often see, are drawn to, feel passionate about. These are the ones that are likely ours to carry.

Neh 2:1-5 NLT

"Early the following spring, in the month of Nisan, during the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes' reign, I was serving the king his wine. I had never before appeared sad in his presence. So the king asked me, "Why are you looking so sad? You don't look sick to me. You must be deeply troubled." Then I was terrified, but I replied, "Long live the king! How can I not be sad? For the city where my ancestors are buried is in ruins, and the gates have been destroyed by fire." The king asked, "Well, how can I help you?" With a prayer to the God of heaven, I replied, "If it please the king, and if you are pleased with me, your servant, send me to Judah to rebuild the city where my ancestors are buried.""

Can you see that Nehemiah heard the news and began to carry this burden in the autumn, and had his first opportunity to do anything about it the next spring? He carried the burden faithfully for a number of months. And I think this is what gave him favour with the king and success with his plans to rebuild the wall! He had prayed it all through beforehand, and probably had the heart and mind of God on the matter.

What boldness Nehemiah had! What favour! I am sure born out of the prayer closet. The king financed his journey, his guard, protection and the timber for the project! We can safely say that God provided (*"Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning."* (Jam 1:17, NKJV)).

Long story short, and drawing attention to where I want, Nehemiah arrives in Jerusalem and the first thing he does is go out at night to inspect the walls and gates for himself. He was looking. He inspected the current situation. This is an important aspect of watching. We need to do this before we begin rebuilding. Ascertain where we are now and what we need to do to get where we want to be.

When Nehemiah heard the walls were broken down and gates were destroyed, he wept and fasted and prayed. Then he went to inspect these before beginning the rebuilding process. What is the significance of walls and gates today?

What is a wall?

A wall is a boundary. It keeps the good in and the bad out. It is used as a protective hedge.

In Isaiah 5 the Lord is speaking of His vineyard and says,

Isa 5:5 NKJV

"And now, please let Me tell you what I will do to My vineyard: I will take away its hedge, and it shall be burned; And break down its wall, and it shall be trampled down."

So we see the consequences of having a broken down wall, or broken hedge.

When we build our lives and continue to live our lives in accordance with the Word of God, we are building up those walls of protection. When we have His Word as the standard in every area of our lives, our families, our nations, it protects us.

For example:

- You won't find us travelling with someone of the opposite sex alone for extended periods of time.
- You won't find us watching certain movies in our house. We won't allow that in our house.
- We don't let our kids go out to the malls unaccompanied.
- As a couple, we pray together each night before sleeping.
- We honour our parents.
- We tithe on our increase (give to the Lord first and trust that He will rebuke the devourer).

And so forth. Those are some of the things we do to build up walls in our marriage and family.

Pro 24:30-34 NKJV

"I went by the field of the lazy man, And by the vineyard of the man devoid of understanding; And there it was, all overgrown with thorns; Its surface was covered with nettles; Its stone wall was broken down. When I saw it, I considered it well; I looked on it and received instruction: A little sleep, a little slumber, A little folding of the hands to rest; So shall your poverty come like a prowler, And your need like an armed man."

From Proverbs we are instructed that passivity and laziness cause our walls to crumble. In our nation, in our families, in our lives. We need to be actively building up these walls.

Eze 22:29-30 NKJV

"The people of the land have used oppressions, committed robbery, and mistreated the poor and needy; and they wrongfully oppress the stranger. So I sought for a man

among them who would make a wall, and stand in the gap before Me on behalf of the land, that I should not destroy it; but I found no one."

From this scripture we see some of the things that cause break down of walls in a nation:

- *The people of the land have used oppressions,*
- *committed robbery,*
- *mistreated the poor and needy;*
- *and they wrongfully oppress the stranger*

We see that standing in the gap on behalf of the land, coming to God in repentance and prayer, can help to rebuild the walls.

Nehemiah responded to the news regarding the wall and gates of Jerusalem with this prayer:

Neh 1:4-11 NKJV

"So it was, when I heard these words, that I sat down and wept, and mourned for many days; I was fasting and praying before the God of heaven. And I said: "I pray, LORD God of heaven, O great and awesome God, You who keep Your covenant and mercy with those who love You and observe Your commandments, please let Your ear be attentive and Your eyes open, that You may hear the prayer of Your servant which I pray before You now, day and night, for the children of Israel Your servants, and confess the sins of the children of Israel which we have sinned against You. Both my father's house and I have sinned. We have acted very corruptly against You, and have not kept the commandments, the statutes, nor the ordinances which You commanded Your servant Moses. Remember, I pray, the word that You commanded Your servant Moses, saying, 'If you are unfaithful, I will scatter you among the nations; but if you return to Me, and keep My commandments and do them, though some of you were cast out to the farthest part of the heavens, yet I will gather them from there, and bring them to the place which I have chosen as a dwelling for My name.' Now these are Your servants and Your people, whom You have redeemed by Your great power, and by Your strong hand. O Lord, I pray, please let Your ear be attentive to the prayer of Your servant, and to the prayer of Your servants who desire to fear Your name; and let Your servant prosper this day, I pray, and grant him mercy in the sight of this man." For I was the king's cupbearer."

We can't sit back and let it all happen around us and think it won't affect us. Remember the context of Jeremiah 29? The Lord was instructing His people in captivity to pray for the peace and prosperity of the place they found themselves, for in its peace they would find peace, and in its prosperity, they would find prosperity. The opposite would be true as well.

What is a gate?

A gate is an access or entry and exit point. It allows traffic in and out of whatever is hedged in.

It is also a place of influence. In the Old testament we see that influential leaders would often gather at the gates (Prov. 31:23). Jesus spoke about gates prophetically, declaring that the gates of hell would not prevail against His church (Mt. 16:18).

Walls and gates that are fully functional mean that what is contained therein is easier to protect. You can control what has access and what is taken away. I am speaking of the spirit realm, as the natural gives us a picture of the spiritual.

Eph. 6:12

For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places.

Often it is principalities, powers, rulers of darkness and spiritual hosts of wickedness that occupy and rule the gates of our cities, nations and domains.

Each domain has specific gates within it. These gates could be governing bodies, thought leaders, power centres and so forth. These gates are the primary influences controlling the culture, thinking, policies and majority of how that domain functions. The gates allow or disallow certain ideologies and behaviour. The dominant worldview and controlling spirit behind the gate are critical when we are talking about transforming society. A domain in and of itself can also be a gate.

Some examples of gates:

- The media (a domain that is also a gate): It influences people's thinking and behaviour.
- The education system with the worldviews espoused in the curriculae
- Cultural traditions
- Systems of government and the political system

- Legislation – it opens doors over a nation to allow and disallow certain behaviours.

What are the implications of broken down walls and gates? You are vulnerable, open to attack, you can't easily protect yourself from enemies and predators.

Walls and gates are critically important. Each of the domains will have walls and gates. Each of our families, our schools, institutions, and so forth will have walls and gates. A reminder of some domains:

1. Family
2. Education
3. Church
4. Government
5. Business & Economics (including agriculture)
6. Health, Science and Technology
7. Media & Communication
8. Arts, Entertainment and Sports

We can very quickly see in our minds eye that gates and walls are broken down in some of these domains.

Family:

The sanctity and preciousness of marriage is being diluted and attacked. From a culture of permissive premarital sex, living together being the norm, adultery being acceptable and when it's watched on the movies, even celebrated. The concept of marriage being between one man and one woman has also been under extreme attack and is taking hits left right and centre. Never mind what is being taught to our children by educators (not parents) in higher grades of junior school regarding sex and using protection. This gives connotations that sex before marriage is permissible and even expected. What are we teaching our children?

Education:

One look at some of the curriculae that are being taught to children at our schools and tertiary institutions should be enough to wake us from our slumber!

Unfortunately, in schools and on campuses today, evolution is taught, and atheism is often espoused. What are some of the consequences and end of following this idea to its logical conclusion?

Atheism views man as a current end product of an evolutionary journey that has taken millions of years. This evolutionary journey began with “spontaneous generation” when by chance all the necessary constituents for life came together in the correct manner. Atheists hold that the first form of life was a single-celled amoeba that slowly upgraded and evolved via “survival of the fittest” into more complex creatures and eventually man.

This is contrary to a biblical worldview, which holds that God is life (Jn. 1:4) and gave life to His creation (Gen. 2:7). Being made in the image of God, man was the apex of His creation (Gen. 1:27). This sets man apart from the rest of creation and means that man is significant and of “infinite and eternal value”.

For the atheist, man can have no more value and worth than a mammal, as both evolved by chance. When taken to its logical conclusion, application of this belief has terrible ramifications. Abortion, euthanasia and genocide are completely justifiable. In fact, this type of thinking was what propagated Hitler’s plan to speed up the evolution of a genetically superior people.

According to the Bible, there is a God who created the universe, - what is seen as well as the unseen spirit realm (p.47) (Gen. 2:1; 3:24; Col. 1:16). He created out of choice and love (Gen. 1:1-2), with purpose and design (Gen. 1:1-2; Ps. 139:13-16; Eph. 2:10).

The implications of an atheistic belief are devastating. If there is no God, there can be no objective moral law or standard to determine right from wrong.

For the atheist who has no God and spiritual reality, there is no ultimate purpose, no life after death and no accountability to any higher objective being or standards. This means that each individual assigns his own purpose to himself as he wills, lives according to his own subjective preferences and standards and has no eternal destiny.

You see if we all evolved from goo with the whole zoo, what differentiates us from animals? If we weren’t created in the image of God, how do we justify human rights? How are we special if not made in the image of God by a loving creator? If we evolved by chance and there is no ultimate higher power, how can there be right and wrong? Because who gives that standard of right and wrong if not God? Did someone just create a “good” standard for us? And if so, why can’t someone else decide something different? How can we say that there is right and wrong if there is no God to create it. So you see, what we believe and what we teach our children is so important! In what

we teach our children, and allow them to be taught, we are building up or tearing down the walls of our future generations.

A quote that encapsulates these thoughts so well is one by Viktor Frankl, an Austrian neurologist, psychiatrist and holocaust survivor who was not a Christian.

He said, "If we present man with a concept of man which is not true, we may well corrupt him when we present him as an automation of reflexes, as a mind machine, as a bundle of instincts, as a pawn of drives and reactions, as a mere product of heredity and environment. Then we feed the nihilism to which modern man is in any case prone. I became acquainted with the last stage of corruption in the human heart in my second concentration camp in Auschwitz. The gas chambers of Auschwitz were the ultimate consequence of the theory that man is nothing but the product of heredity and environment, or as the Nazis liked to say, 'of blood and soil'. I am absolutely convinced that the gas chambers of Auschwitz, Treblinka and Majdanek were ultimately prepared not in some ministry of defense or some such portfolio or other in Berlin, but rather at the desks and lecture halls of nihilistic scientists and philosophers."

Government:

It doesn't take a prophet to see that our government has many broken down gates and walls. Someone asked me a question the other day, what is the problem with these people? There is so much wickedness and corruption, we see rich politicians stealing from their own people who are starving and have nothing. Why? You know what my answer was? The depravity of man. Man without Christ as His Saviour AND submitted to the Lordship of Christ, is depraved. Fullstop. Simple as that. It was Malcolm Muggeridge who said,

""The depravity of man is at once the most empirically verifiable reality but at the same time the most intellectually resisted fact."

As soon as we start building our government with its policies upon the Word of God and a biblical world view, our walls and gates will be built. So we need to pray for those who are in office, for God-encounters, for God's guidance, for wise counsel, and also that God would raise up those who would fill office who would be integrous, grounded in the Word and a biblical worldview, and carry the heart of the King. People like David, Joseph, Daniel and so forth.

Legislature:

In our nation, we can't act like new laws being proposed won't affect us and ignore them. No! If the legislature wants to bring new legislation in that is unbiblical, we must speak out. We must have a say. See, the reality is when a law is created in a nation, when our leaders who have authority over us agree upon a law, that is a gate that allows and disallows certain things and behaviour in the nation.

Remember when Jesus taught his disciples regarding binding and loosing? It was to do with allowing and disallowing things on earth.

Mat 16:19 AMP

"I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatever you bind (declare to be improper and unlawful) on earth must be what is already bound in heaven; and whatever you loose (declare lawful) on earth must be what is already loosed in heaven."

The Passion translation puts it this way:

"I will give you the keys of heaven's kingdom realm to forbid on earth that which is forbidden in heaven, and to release on earth that which is released in heaven."

When abortion, or the murder of children was legalised in the 90s, that marked the opening of a gate so to speak. When we now find ourselves battling a spirit of death and of violence, especially against our children, who do we have to blame? We as a nation allowed that spiritual gate to be opened.

When we legalised so-called gay marriages, it marked the opening of a gate to certain behaviours and spirits. We gave them permission and free access so to speak. When we see a marked increase in sexual perversion, promiscuity, same sex relationships and all the stuff that comes with those types of unclean spirits, especially amongst the next generation, why are we surprised?

We have to keep certain gates closed over our nation and speak out whilst we can. A piece of legislation that hasn't been passed in this nation yet, is physician-assisted suicide, or euthanasia. It is not currently legal in this nation. The debate around euthanasia and its legal implications was stirred again due to the 2019 case of Professor Sean Davison, charged with three counts of murder in circumstances where the individuals had asked him for assistance in their deaths. As soon as we allow this type of legislation, we are opening a door to an ideology that if unchecked could lead us all to the edge of a slippery slope the bottom of which could hold similarities to the extermination of 6 million Jews in the second world war.

Arts and entertainment:

I believe that this domain is a gate. An extremely influential one that is shaping the culture, values, norms, and thinking of the next generation.

I would like to share 2 quotes from the late Ravi Zacharias.

“Young people, please hear me; this, to me, is the problem of 20th century man: he no longer knows what to laugh at and no longer knows what to weep at. So, you turn on your television screen and before you know it, you’re looking at a seduction yourself. And instead of weeping at it, you’re watching in intrigue as the story unfolds. You watch illegitimacies transpire before your eyes and mine, and because Hollywood has convinced us that it is entertainment, we become entertained, rather than sitting there with a crushed and a broken heart and a contrite spirit. And I often wonder, if my Lord Jesus were able to stalk some of the seats of Broadway, or sit in some of the theatres where things are perpetrated and shown to you and me, where jokes are made of His virgin birth, where Christianity is demeaned and mocked, where illegitimacies are glorified and exalted; that which is vulgar is intended to make us laugh, that which is sacred is intended to make us weep, rather than sit there in awe and gratitude for the sacred, what has really happened between the educational system and whatever else is happening, we’ve lost the differentiation between laughter and tears. It is vitally important what you laugh at. It is vitally important what you weep at. What breaks your heart tells God who you are. What makes you laugh tells God who you are.” - Ravi Zacharias

“We were created to see through the eye with the conscience, modern capacity is inviting us to see with the eye devoid of a conscience...” - Ravi Zacharias.

“Let me write the songs of a nation - I don't care who writes its laws.” - Andrew Fletcher, Scottish political activist (1655-1716).

You can see a play in a theatre, on Broadway, turn on the TV to watch a movie or cartoon, or listen to music and “you will find a certain philosophy of life is being endorsed, espoused or questioned”. The arts domain is the context within which many of the next generation are grappling with philosophy, worldviews and understanding life.

We see an example of some of the power and purpose of the arts in 2 Samuel 12 (Acknowledgement Tendai Chitsike).

King David had just done the unthinkable: he had taken another man's wife, slept with her and arranged to have her husband killed. This was David's shocking fall from grace, but also a picture of the depravity that lies within us all. It is one thing to confront a man who is hardened and unrepentant after adultery and murder. It is another thing all together when the man in question is the king, a man who up until this moment had led extremely well.

God sends the prophet Nathan to confront David, so as to bring about repentance. Even for a prophet of Nathan's stature, this is no small endeavour. How does he do it? He does so in a most unusual way to some of us. He does it with a story.

The story is so well told and paralleled to David's situation that it arouses within the king a righteous indignation that allows Nathan to reveal to David that the villain in the story is in fact himself. This, then begins the process of David's repentance, a repentance that arrested a situation that would have only gotten more destructive.

What does 2 Samuel have to do with the arts? Everything. We live in a world hardened by sin's deceitfulness, hell-bent on turning from God and centered on doing whatever it takes to secure personal pleasure and advancement. As God has done with both Nathan and Himself, prophets are desperately needed to bring us back to our senses through the power of story – the arts if you like.

I could carry on and talk about other domains and areas, like agriculture and land reform, business and economics and so forth. We don't have the time. Suffice to say that whatever domains or areas you and I are passionate about or called to, we need to:

- allow God to soften our hearts so we can carry His burden
- inspect the walls and gates
- study His Word in these areas so that we can populate our prayers with His Word and His wisdom
- begin to pray for these areas and bring them before God.

Next week we will continue looking at Nehemiah and learning about the Heart of a Nation Builder.