

The Wall
“Off the Wall”
Sunday, April 13, 2008

Are there things God has placed on your heart that you've struggled to believe and to act on? Do you carry burdens that you feel have no possible solutions? Do you wonder if God is really active around you—that he might actually position you to make a difference in the world?

In the Old Testament, in the book of Nehemiah, we saw in our study last week (“What Makes You Weep?”) that a disappointing report of the condition of the city of the Jerusalem and the state of people who lived there drove Nehemiah to weep and mourn and fast for four months, without seeing any activity of God regarding the issue throughout that whole time. And then God opened up an amazing opportunity for this cupbearer to a foreign king to follow God's invitation into a great adventure with God—the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem. But the adventure, extraordinary as it was, began with one step of obedience on Nehemiah's part, in the ordinary course of an ordinary day—a step that required conviction, risk and courage. Nehemiah has much to teach us about trusting and following God's direction with the concerns we have on our hearts today.

Questions

Reread the passage of scripture Nehemiah 2:1-10

1. Over the years, what are the things God has placed on your heart that you've struggled to believe in and to act on? Discuss with your group what those things might be, and how you think and feel about those things now. Do you still carry these burdens?
2. The burden on Nehemiah's heart was this: The 'city on a hill' that God designed Jerusalem to be as an example to the world — physically, spiritually and socially—remained a shamble of destruction. The people who lived there were homeless. And the witness God intended Jerusalem's people to be to all surrounding nations seemed compromised. Yes, the temple had been rebuilt, but the city and its people were not yet restored. Discuss with your group how Nehemiah might have felt, given that he was hundreds of miles from Jerusalem, and tied to the courts of the Persian King as a cupbearer, when he heard the report about Jerusalem. Try to imagine the questions he would have had regarding this situation. Share those with one another.
3. Sometimes the things that seem like the biggest obstacles to our being positioned by God can turn out to be the biggest gain. What are the obstacles in the concerns of your heart? How do you respond when you come up against those barriers? Is there another perspective you can bring to one another's situations?
4. Nehemiah spent four months praying...which is twice as long as it would actually take to rebuild the walls once started. Think about our culture as Christians in North America: Are we prepared to spend more time praying in preparation for what God is doing than we spend in the actual activity? Talk about that with one another. What should this look like for followers of Jesus today?
5. God used a cupbearer in the courts of a foreign king to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem, and bring restoration to the people. God's activity around Nehemiah began in the ordinary places of his daily world—through his brother's news; through the stories of his heritage; through his workplace; through the relationship he had with a non-Jewish king. In what ways might he be positioning you in the ordinary places of your life? As a group, listen to one another's stories and see if you can help one another discern God's activity in each person's life.
6. Being such a 'results-oriented' culture, it can be hard for us to pray about outcomes that are beyond what we can imagine as possible. Do you think you limit God's possibilities by your own comprehensions concerning a solution? What are the implications of that? Is there a way we

can help one another to pray BIG asks? What stops us from asking God for answers that seem “off the wall”?

7. “Justice”, in simple terms, is alignment with God’s heart. As Christians, we are to be change agents in our world—to step out to bring realignment to God’s good and perfect will. We are called to ‘rebuild broken walls’. Discuss what you think this might include for us at WMB Church.

8. Spend the rest of your time praying for one another and for WMB as a faith community—regarding the discernment you have been engaging for God’s activity in our lives—about the steps of courage and risk we are being asked to take—about the issues of justice (alignment with God’s heart) that are being planted in your heart as you listen to God’s voice in your life. If your time together hasn’t surfaced anything tangible for you as a next step, pray for one another that God would open your eyes to his activity in the ordinary places of your lives—your family, neighbourhood, workplace, etc.

Pray for one another. Pray for the preaching team, that God would use this series in Nehemiah to surprise us and to build something new and fresh and solid in our lives and the life of the church.