

The Wall
“Night Moves”
Sunday, April 27, 2008

Life is full of decisions—some small, some great. We might wonder what God would have us do in this area or that, and sometimes wish he'd just put a letter in our mailbox telling us what the best decisions might be! When it comes to taking next steps in discernment, how do we listen to God and know his voice over our own inner voice? If you are interested in seeking to follow God's will in your life, Nehemiah 2:11-20 outlines some key principles to help with discerning next steps—whether for the practical areas of life, or for aligning overall with Christ's mission to the world.

Nehemiah Chapter 2 sets out some key principles of godly discernment that can help us with decisions in our lives: identifying 'standing stone' events, where God has clearly acted in the past to set a course into the future; determining if the direction we're choosing is in keeping with God's ways overall; checking our facts and assumptions before moving forward; and seeking the discernment of a few trusted companions who will journey with us. Like in Nehemiah's case, these 'night moves' can help us move forward with a sense of God's presence, and to stand firmly against opposition when it arises. We can have confidence that we are aligned with God and boldness as we participate in his plans for us, one day at a time.

Questions

Reread the passage of scripture Nehemiah 2:11-20

1. God has been active in each of our lives leading up to the present time. Take a moment to reflect and write down some times when you clearly know God was at work to bring something about in your life. Have you experienced his presence in this kind of way? Share with the group. For those of you who have, describe for the group how you knew it was God's voice you were hearing.

2. In Old Testament times, the people of God marked the times when God had clearly spoken by erecting what have been called 'standing stones'. These markers were put in place for a few reasons: firstly, so God's people would remember that God had clearly spoken at that time and not question this direction moving forward; secondly so they could stand in conviction if and when opposition arose; and thirdly, so they could trace the trajectory of God's activity in the past and better understand and align to his activity in the present and for the future.

When you think of times where God has been active in your life, can you see any patterns of his activity unfolding in your life? As you've listened to the stories of others in your group, can you help them see a pattern of God's activity in *their* lives? Pray and ask God for discernment as you try to speak into one another's lives. Take time for this.

3. Remember Karen's story about the man she met at Out of the Cold who was homeless and the stranger who approached him on the street and gave him a typed message saying he needed to be saved. The man wondered what it was about him that made her draw the conclusion that he *wasn't* in fact saved. Did she draw the conclusion that he didn't know Jesus simply because he didn't have a home? If she had asked him first, she would have discovered that he considers himself a follower of Jesus already!

Discuss together some of the assumptions we make as Christians and how those assumptions can lead us to act in ways that might not be accurate or helpful. What can we do to check our observations and be sure we have all the facts before we decide on a particular direction?

4. Nehemiah checked his observations and his facts by surveying the walls himself—seeing them firsthand. When he went out to observe, rather than going alone, he took a few trusted companions with him. Are there situations in your life where you've brought others in to walk with

you in discernment, or do you tend to make decisions alone? Share with the group your tendencies and talk about the value of having others engage with you in discernment areas of your life? Why do you think this is difficult for us in our culture?

5. Nehemiah made himself 'one of the community' when he said in verse 17, "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." Imagine the people who lived in Jerusalem and who looked at the broken walls of their community every day. What effect, if any, do you imagine it had on them that Nehemiah spoke in terms of 'we' rather than 'I' when it came to his calling them to action? When we want to be engaged in mission around the 'broken walls' in our world, how important is it that we be involved in the community we serve, rather than only bringing help 'from the outside'? Can you imagine some contemporary applications of this?

6. In verse 17, we saw Nehemiah's call to the people to rebuild. In verse 18, they reply with "Come, let us rebuild the wall of Jerusalem". These people had been looking at these broken walls every day for years. What was it Nehemiah shared that made them want to rebuild now? Can you identify anything new in between these two statements that Nehemiah added to their story that made them want to take action at this particular time?

7. Recognizing, reflecting on and drawing attention to God's activity around us is powerful in helping us to discern and align with God's will for our lives. Sharing this helps others discern his will as well. When we see God's activity around others, we should want to jump in and participate! What might this look like for a faith community...? How might we recognize and track God's activity collectively so we can discern leadership into the future? (If you have ideas for this, please email them to karenwest@waterloomb.org.)

8. Nehemiah 2:19 and 20 identify opposition that rose up against the rebuilding of the walls. What do you notice about the people who bring the opposition and the methods they use? As followers of Jesus, how should we handle opposition when it arises?

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.