

Assessing the Damage

by Shane Idleman

In 'Assessing the Damage', Shane Idleman emphasizes the importance of recognizing spiritual decay and taking action through prayer, fasting, and hard decisions to rebuild our lives and communities.

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Scripture: Nehemiah 1:3

Topics: "Intercession", "Rebuilding"

Description

Shane Idleman emphasizes the importance of assessing the damage in our lives, drawing parallels from Nehemiah's journey to rebuild Jerusalem. Nehemiah, a cupbearer to the king, learns of the distress in Jerusalem and responds with prayer and fasting, recognizing the need for action. He encourages the people to rebuild the walls, despite facing mockery and discouragement from adversaries. Idleman highlights that true change requires hard decisions and perseverance, urging listeners to confront their own vulnerabilities and take steps towards restoration. Ultimately, he calls for a heart of intercession and a commitment to rebuild what has been broken.

Transcript

Nehemiah chapter 1, I'm hoping to get through a couple of chapters each Wednesday, Nehemiah chapter 1, and it's interesting because the book of Ezra and the book of Nehemiah were both written as one book. And I wish I had time to give the historical background because it's very interesting. The nation of Israel, as most of you know, were conquered.

They were taken captive for 70 years. And what happened is somebody by the name of Zerubbabel went back to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple. And then Ezra went back to rebuild the temple and helped rebuild.

And then Nehemiah, where we're at now, went back and helped rebuild the wall around the temple. And all of that was probably about an 80 or 90 year period. Here's where the reign of the kings started.

Saul, David, Solomon, this whole period here. Then it was divided to the northern, southern kingdoms, Israel and Judah, this whole period here. Looks like 300 and what, some years, 350 some years.

And then Israel, because of disobedience, right here was conquered. That's that famous verse I like to quote that when God says, I sent messengers to my people to warn them, rising them up early and

sending them, because I had compassion of my people, but they did not listen to me. And judgment came.

So they were conquered right here. And then they went into exile for 70 years. But as God promised in Daniel, in different passages, that they would come out of exile, meaning they were in captivity.

So here's where the book of Esther was written. So here is where Ezra got involved and here's where Nehemiah got involved to rebuild the city of Jerusalem, to rebuild the temple and the different places. Does that make sense? Wonderful kingdom here, broke up northern, southern kingdoms.

They were fighting against God. God judged them and they were taken captive for 70 years. And then they began to rebuild the city of Jerusalem and the wall here.

However, it was never as good as the former or the past setup of Israel. They still were held by different nations and different things. So let's look at Nehemiah chapter 1. And Nehemiah is a cup bearer.

And a cup bearer was a very significant role because they would actually check the wine or the drink before the king drank it in many cases. Because how would people die back then often? Through poisoning. So he was a cup bearer, quite a position there.

If there's poison in it, you're going first. So he would take that cup, he would drink of it. Nothing would happen for a little while.

And then he would give that cup to the king and that king then would drink. Or he would maybe pour it into a different cup and maybe a pitcher of juice. And then he would pour the king the rest of it once he verified that it wasn't poisoned.

So he's in a very good spot. He's an influencer in the government. So what Nehemiah is going to do, he's going to assess the damage of what's going on in Jerusalem.

And Nehemiah is not even there yet. He's not in the area of Israel. He's far away and he's going to ask the king for protection to go and visit the people.

But let's read what he wrote. Nehemiah chapter 1, actually it could have been Ezra writing it. The words of Nehemiah, the son of Hallelujah, something like that, right? It came to pass in the month of Chislev in the 20th year as I was in Shushan, the citadel.

A lot of hard words in that first one. That Hananiah, one of my brethren, came with men from Judah. And I asked them concerning the Jews who had escaped, who had survived the captivity and concerning Jerusalem.

And they said to me, the survivors who are left from the captivity in the providence are there in great distress and reproach. The wall of Jerusalem is also broken down and its gates are burned with fire. So he's asking, how are the people of God doing? Well, they're not doing good.

They're in distress. The wall is broken down. The gates representing entrance.

These gates are massive iron gates. All the gates are down. They're on fire.

They've been burned and the city is in disarray. The survivors who are left from the captivity in the providence are there in great distress and reproach. The wall of Jerusalem is also broken down and its

gates are burned with fire.

So what he saw here was distress, distress and disappointment in what God had done. And that should fuel, that often fuels motivation. You'll remember the sermon I gave Sunday.

Seeing America in the state it's in, the distress it's in, the disappointments, and things that often fuels motivation to do something. So don't let distress always get you down. Sometimes it's a motivating factor.

It can help, does anybody need any help, need any motivation? Right? And often it's the distress and seeing things, hey, this isn't right. I'm assessing the damage. There's something wrong whether it's your personal life, whether it's your family, whether it's a church, whether it's your workplace.

There's a holy discontentment and it forces us to do something. That's what Nehemiah did. And the wall that was to protect them is now broken down.

The gates were burned so everything is in shambles. And gates were actually a place of vulnerability and access. So they could go through the gate or they could close the gate.

It was a place of vulnerability in the city. If those gates were down, the enemy could come right in, just like a stronghold in our own lives. So what gates, vulnerable access points have been breached in our own lives is a question we might want to ask.

Is there access points? Is there any area where we're vulnerable, where the enemy is coming in, where the gates have been burned and there's a place of entrance for a stronghold? That's where we have to reassess the damage, like Nehemiah. We have to say, okay, there's some damage here. The enemy is coming against me in this area.

I need to make some radical changes in order to prevent this. And they had the temple built at this time, but not the wall, the protection. And it's interesting, if you read Ezra, the people had outward movement.

Have you heard me say before, going through the motions? Or you've heard that, going through the motions? They had outward worship. They were going to the temple, they were worshiping, but there was nothing going on in the heart. The heart was dead and decaying.

And that's something all Christians have to be careful of. Because usually it's the person who is the last to see the decay in their own lives. Others see it, right? We see it happening, but usually it's a person.

If pride comes in, they're the last to see it. And it's an area of decay that can come in, just like it was happening here in Nehemiah's time. So it was, verse 4, So Nehemiah heard these words.

It's like we see the state of our nation, we see the state of the church, and it should break our heart sometimes. We don't want to live in that state. But there's tears, there's a weeping that should take place, a mourning.

And what did Nehemiah do? Well, here's that word again, let's circle it. Fasting. It's everywhere.

So that was his response. It's fasting and prayer. Because what fasting does, I'll remind you, it helps to starve the flesh, it gets the fleshly appetites out of the way, and it begins to starve the flesh and we're filled with the Spirit.

If you marry that with prayer, that's powerful. And that's one of the things I want to do a little bit as we're praying about the Wednesday night service, what to do in that, is I want to incorporate some fasting and prayer. Okay, Lord, I'm going to deny myself food, and I want to seek your will in this area.

That's all Nehemiah was doing. Because it is hard. If we're constantly full and we want to pray, it's hard, it's difficult.

The flesh will prevail, the flesh will say, no, let's take a nap. No, let's sit down and watch a good show. No, let's just go to bed, it's late.

That's what fullness does. Being full of the Spirit and full in the belly is kind of hard sometimes to have both those operating. Of course, food is good.

We need it, we enjoy it, God gave it to us. But if that's the predominating influence in our life, then it's going to be harder to hear from God. Especially when you want direction.

Is anybody wanting direction? I'm guessing probably everybody in this room. Fasting and prayer. Fasting and prayer will open that door.

So assessing the damage. What's happening and how can I correct it is what Nehemiah was doing. That was the title of the message, assessing the damage.

So Nehemiah heard about the damage. He went to God in prayer and fasting. He assessed everything.

He said, okay, how can I make a difference? And then verse five. And I have sinned. We've acted very corruptly against you and have not kept the commandments and the statutes nor the ordinances which you commanded your servant Moses.

So what he's doing here, and this is a good part, a good reminder for us when we pray. He's positioning himself for God to hear him even more so. He's reminding God, hey listen, we are people who have done wrong.

We are repenting. I acknowledge this. He's acting as an intercessor.

He's interceding on behalf of the people. So God, hear the prayers of your people. Intercede for us.

He said, you who keep your covenant and mercy with those who love you and observe your commandments. So he's acknowledging, God, we've fallen off course. Been there? Acknowledge it.

Lord, we've fallen off course. I need to get back on course. You're a God of mercy and love.

Lord, hear the prayers of your people. And that's really the prayer that God hears. It's a repentant, broken heart praying out.

And Nehemiah had the heart of an intercessor. If you truly want to pray for your family, if you truly want to see God make a difference, you have to pray as an intercessor. You intercede.

You feel the pain. You feel the emotion. It's not just a quick prayer that really doesn't matter to you.

I found if it doesn't matter to me, it might not matter to God. Now, of course it matters to God. It's just a play on words.

But if it doesn't matter to me, God sees the sincerity of my heart or the lack thereof. And when it comes to answering prayers, if it doesn't matter to me, he's not inclined to answer a prayer that I pray half-heartedly. Well, Lord, do this.

It's really no big deal. He hears the groanings of his people. He hears the travailing.

He hears the crying out, Lord, you have to do something. I'm desperate for you. Unless you move in this area, I can't do anything.

God, would you move? So he's asking, Lord, what do I do? And then verse 8, Remember, I pray the word that you command your servant Moses. Now, he's going to remember what God told the children of Israel. If you are unfaithful, which they were, I will scatter you among the nations, which he did.

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 I have chosen as a dwelling for my name. This is a good reminder for us as well. If you return, if something is not going right, if you're off balance, if the enemies come in and begin to do something in your life that you know is against God's will, if you simply return and get back on track, God will honor his commitment.

He will honor his word. Verse 10, 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.

Now, here's where it gets interesting. Chapter 2, And it came to pass in the month of Nisan, in the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes, when wine was before him, that I took the wine and gave it to the king. Now I had never been sad in his presence before.

Therefore the king said to me, Why is your face sad since you are not sick? This is nothing but sorrow of heart. So he could see that Nehemiah was carrying the pain of the people. He could see that he was upset.

He could see that he was groaning inside. Have you ever been that hurt where people can tell something's wrong? And the king asked, And this can be scary because you're not supposed to be sad in the king's presence. The king could say, Off with your head.

But he couldn't hide his feelings. So I became dreadfully afraid and said to the king, May the king live forever. Why should my face not be sad when the city, the place of my father's tombs, lies in waste and its gates are burned with fire? Then the king said to me, What do you request? So Nehemiah was saying, Why shouldn't I be sad? Why shouldn't I be sad when the place of my father's tombs lies in waste? Why should we not be sad when our families, when our nation, when we look around, why should we not be sad? When the place that people died for, for the freedoms that we cherish and we take for granted, why should we not be sad when this is falling into ruins and we see it before our very eyes? Because that sadness can prompt action.

And I would say the same thing today, wouldn't you? Why should I not be sad? But see, we don't live in that sad state. We're not to walk around woe is me and depressed all the time, but that sadness to see a holy discontent should make us, actually motivate us to take action on something. Okay, I'm going to do

something.

I'm not going to live in this depressed state. I'm going to take action. I'm going to do something.

I'm going to make a difference. I'm going to be joy-filled most of the time. I'm going to be seeking God, but there comes a time and a place where we have to say, Lord, enough is enough.

We need to take action, Lord. Show me what that looks like. So I prayed to God in heaven, and I said to the king, if it pleases the king, now this must have been a very quick prayer, right? The king said, so what do you request? And he said, well, I prayed to God, and then I said to the king, so it must have been one of those, Lord, please help me right now.

God, please help me. Give me the right answer. I need you to speak to me quickly.

He didn't have a lot of time. And he said to the king, if it pleases the king, and if your servant has found favor in your sight, I ask that you send me to Judah, to the city of my father's tombs, that I may rebuild it. Then the king said to me, the queen also sitting beside him, how long will your journey, how long will the journey be, and when will you return? So it pleased the king to send me, and I set a time.

So he's saying, let me go and make a difference. I know this is a lot to read, but I'm trying to get through it so you can see the story in the background. So he basically said, let me make a difference.

Then verse seven, furthermore I said to the king, if it pleases the king, let letters be given to me for the governor of the region beyond the river that they must permit me to pass through till I come to Judah. And then I'm just gonna skip down verse nine. In a nutshell, the governors gave him permission to go through.

So here's what happened. He wrote letters to the governors of the area that he was gonna go through. Because I believe if I had a map I could show you, he's coming down from where he's at to Jerusalem.

So he had to get permission to go through all these lands and all this area. So not only did he have the favor of the king, guess what else he had? He's gonna have struggles. Welcome to the Christian life.

Because we want the favor struggle free life. That might be a good book title. The favor of God struggle free.

But you'll never see that, especially in Nehemiah. There's two little stink bugs named Sambalot and Tobias. And they harass him every step of the way.

Even when he's building the wall, they said, hey, why don't you come down and let us talk. And he said, I'm not gonna stop the work just to come and meet with you. And then they would tease him later.

They said, even if a fox runs on your wall, it's gonna fall down. Contractors, have you ever built something and somebody teased you? Say, that block wall, it's just gonna come crumbling down as soon as a fly lands on it. So this is what's happening here.

There's favor and there's struggle. It often goes hand in hand. We have the favor of God, we're going in the will of God, and then here comes the struggle.

And what's the struggle often designed to do? Or the discouragement? It's designed to knock us off track. That's why it comes alongside. It's to knock us off track, but it also strengthens us.

The person who's been through a lot of struggles is very strong when it comes to spiritual fortitude. So now Nehemiah is going to view the wall of Jerusalem in verse 11. So I came to Jerusalem and was there three days.

Then I arose in the night, and a few men were with me. I told no one what my God had put in my heart to do at Jerusalem, nor was there any animal with me except the one on which I rode. So, what happened here? He told no one what God has put in his heart.

I think that's good advice for someone tonight. Right? We don't always have to go around doing this. Look what happened to Joseph.

Hey, I had a dream that all of you were going to submit to me. And it got him thrown into a pit and sold into slavery. Of course, God was in that, in the sovereignty and what they intended for evil.

God designed it for good. But this is good advice for us. He goes there.

He's looking around. I'm not going to tell anybody yet what God has put in my heart. In verse 13, And I went out by night through the valley gate to the serpent well and the refuge gate and viewed the walls of Jerusalem which were broken down, its gates which were burned with fire.

Now, it's interesting. This valley gate would lead to a valley. They would have other gates that would lead to different areas.

It's this huge city. And you would go out the different gates to different areas. So, all the gates are burned with fire.

Then I went out to the fountain gate and to the king's pool. But there was no room for the animal under me to pass. And then verse 15, So I went up in the night by the valley and viewed the wall.

Then I turned back and entered by the valley gate and so returned. And the officials did not know where I had gone nor what I had done. And I didn't even tell the Jews nor the priests nor the nobles nor the officials or the others who did the work.

So, assessing the damage involves taking a hard look and making hard decisions. Just like Nehemiah had to do. What do you need to do? What damage do you need to assess? What hard decisions need to be made? Because here's really the point I want to get to tonight that a lot of people need to hear.

Is when you need to make a change. When you say, Okay, this needs to change. Anyone been there? Or just me? God, this has to change.

Hard decisions need to be made in order for that to actually change. Because if we pray, Lord, just take this away sometimes it doesn't just vanish. Often it doesn't.

Lord, help me with my whatever. Anger? Jealousy? Lying? Whatever it is. Often there has to be hard decisions have to be made.

We have to sometimes cut off old relationships. We have to spend our time differently. We have to make hard decisions to see results.

And I think sometimes as Christians we forget that. We think, well this should be easy. God should just change me.

God should just take it away. And sometimes, often he doesn't. Because it's a struggle.

It's a fight. Like Nehemiah, you're rebuilding something in your life. One brick at a time.

One fight at a time. One struggle at a time. So the encouragement is to get back up and just keep fighting.

What about with parenting? Finances? Marriage? Addictions? Wrong attitudes? Everything I just said. All of those things. Especially parenting.

I'm going through this now, right? I'll interview with young kids or you've had young kids, remember? Tough decisions sometimes need to be made. Okay, if we say, okay we're not going to do that anymore. Less computer time, more family time.

You think that's going to come easy? Or fits going to be thrown. Or marriages. Okay, we need to work on our marriage.

This isn't working. We need to come together. We need to fall in love again.

We need to... You think that's going to come easy? It's going to be very difficult. Very challenging. So we have to make those hard decisions.

And then verse 17. Then I said to them, you see the distress that we are in? So now he's talking to the nobles. He's talking to the priests.

He's talking to the leaders. He said, see the distress that we are in. How Jerusalem lies in waste and its gates are burned with fire.

Come and let us build the wall of Jerusalem. So he motivated the people. Sometimes we need to be the motivating factor and say, come on, let's rebuild this church.

Let's rebuild our lives. Let's rebuild our marriage. Let's rebuild whatever it is.

Being that motivating person like Nehemiah. And I told them of the hand of my God which had been good upon me and also the king's word which had spoken to me. They said, let us rise and build.

Then they set their hands to this good work. Here they come, verse 19. But when Sanballat, the hornet's nest.

No, he's called a hornite. And Tobiah, the Ammonite. They were officials.

And Geshem, the Arab heard of it. They laughed at us and despised us and said, what is this thing that you're doing? So here comes Nehemiah. He's motivated.

I can picture this. I've been there many times. He's motivated.

The king gave him permission. He's got favor. The nobles and their leaders are behind him.

Now let's rebuild this wall. And then here comes these little guys. Oh, that won't happen.

You're just doing this to be a king. You're just doing this for your own glory, for yourself. Why are you doing this? And here comes the harassing factors.

Anytime God is doing a good work, watch out. Watch your sides. Watch the rear guard, the front guard.

Because the enemy is going to come in and try to persuade you to do something different. So when Sanballat and Tobiah saw this, they laughed at them and they mocked them. Anybody laugh at you and mock you? Does it feel good? What are you going to do? Are you kidding me? You know that family member that just thinks they're funny, but really they're not? And they just mock you and they're a little sarcastic.

You know how they are, right? And they're just sarcastic and mocking. And it's trying to, and the many people at work, they go back home and they just stop. Well, maybe it's not God.

I don't want to deal with this. My feelings are hurt. Listen, you got to have rhino skin as a Christian, don't you? Rhinoceros? Thick skin.

And you have to be able to know what God's called you to do and then do it. There's always going to be the taunting voices. And they said, will you rebel against the king? So Nehemiah said, so I answered them and said to them, the God of heaven himself will prosper us.

Therefore, we his servants will arise and build. So in their face he said, God will prosper us. I don't care what you say.

We're going to arise and we're going to build regardless of what you say. And it's that tenacity, that boldness in the face of adversity that really helps things. We will arise and we will build, but you have no heritage or right or memorial in Jerusalem.

So he's kicking these people out. Tobias and Sambal, he's kicking them out. He's saying, you have no right here, you have no heritage.

Get away from here. Now, you would think they would leave, but they didn't. You're going to see that they keep harassing and keep harassing.

So I want to ask a few questions after, without reading anymore. What are you doing? What are you doing and are you discouraged? Are you trying to do something for God but you're very discouraged? I want to encourage you to stay the course. Stay the course because there's often a blessing after the struggle.

There's often fruit after the failure if we keep moving forward. Because God says, if you're faithful, I'll bring the fruit. When you don't feel like it, when you're mocked, just keep moving forward.

God looks at faithfulness. How else is the enemy going to try to sidetrack us or knock us off course? Many times that discouragement comes in so anger comes out. And anger worketh not the righteousness of God.

So the enemy uses discouragement to bring anger in our homes often. And we get angry, we get upset. We go, forget it, I don't want to do that anymore.

And this discouragement comes in. That's what they were trying to do. And we're going to read a little bit later next week, I believe it is, maybe chapter four.

Tobias and Sam Ballant said, even if a fox, a little tiny fox, runs on your wall, it's going to fall down. And the enemy taunts us with those same things. Do you think your little Bible study's going to succeed? Do you think your little endeavor's going to succeed? I heard that.

Do you think your little church is going to succeed many years ago? Do you think writing that book or working on that or helping that person, do you think that's really going to succeed? That's not going to work. That's so little. And I found that God often uses the little things first.

He who is faithful in the little things shall be a ruler over much. God wants to see how you do with the little things, how I do with the little things. And sometimes, yeah, maybe one person shows up or two or three or it's not going like we thought.

And that really helps to clear our motives. Why are we doing what we're doing? Are we doing it for the wrong reasons? Are we doing it for the right reasons? So you'll feel this way. The enemy will come in.

Oh, that's not going to succeed. That's going to fail. And you start to think about failure.

And that's what I really appreciate about Nehemiah is he, through this whole book, he pushes through regardless of what people were saying. And you'll hear the enemy whisper, won't you? You're a bad parent. You're a terrible parent.

You failed. How can you look at yourself in the mirror? How can you go to church? You're not a good Christian. You can't even deal with this.

You can't even overcome that. And he'll use those taunting thoughts to try to knock you off track. So that would be my encouragement tonight on this message.

Assess the damage. Assess the damage, what's going on in your life, whether it could be a breach in the wall. You know that it's there.

God's maybe convicting you it's there. And assess that damage and then reposition yourself and say, okay, Lord, I need you to fix this damage. I need you to repair this.

I need you to restore this. God, just help me. Would you help me? And God will answer that prayer.

But the first thing is we have to reassess the damage and assess it often. Many people don't do that, do they? No, my wall's not broken. Oh, yes, it is.

The bricks are falling down. No, it's not. My wall's not broken.

Pride comes in. But a true leader, a true believer, will assess and reassess their life often. They'll examine themselves and they'll see is God really pleased with what I'm doing? Do I need to make changes? And just position yourself again and begin to rebuild those walls and God will honor that.

That's this I know.

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