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DEVELOPING AND IMPLEMENTING THE NEHEMIAH MODEL OF
STRATEGIC PLANNING TO REBUILD LIGHT IN THE DESERT
BAPTIST CHURCH, MESA, ARIZONA

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Doctor of Educational Ministry

by
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APPROVAL SHEET

DEVELOPING AND IMPLEMENTING THE NEHEMIAH MODEL OF STRATEGIC PLANNING TO REBUILD LIGHT IN THE DESERT
BAPTIST CHURCH, MESA, ARIZONA

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PREFACE

This project was completed with the love, support, encouragement, and prayers of many people whom God has graciously chosen to bring into my life. First, I want to give all praise, honor and glory to my personal Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. I am humbled and eternally grateful, believing he has chosen to include me in the strategic plan of advancing his kingdom.

My wife, Linda, has been at my side sharing 34 amazing years together. She is the love of my life, my best friend, and my #1 cheerleader in all of life’s endeavors. Our adult children, Matt and Melissa, along with their spouses, Jill and Will respectively, have provided very timely encouragement and inspiration for which I am truly grateful. The Lord has blessed us with four grandchildren: Kristen, Caleb, Carson, and Samuel, who clearly help me to approach this project with wide-eyed, childlike faith.

I also wish to express heartfelt thanks to my parents, Don and Eleanor Meighan, for bringing me into this world and for their steadfast belief and faith that God would guide me every step of the way toward the completion of this project. In addition, I would like to acknowledge my father-in-law and mother-in-law, James and Geraldine Phipps, who in the mystery of God’s divine providence, went home to be with the Lord during a fatal car accident on September 30, 1998. James and Geraldine played an instrumental role in the early developmental years of my faith in Christ. One of the valuable lessons I learned from my father-in-law was the priority of strategic planning for life and ministry.

I would be remiss if I failed to mention two local churches for their involvement in and participation toward the success of this project. The first is Live Oak Community Church in Savannah, Georgia, where I served as pastor from 2003 to 2012. It was at Live Oak where I started the doctoral program and was in the preparation stages of embarking on this project. However, in the summer of 2012 the Lord called me to Light...
in the Desert Baptist Church in Mesa, Arizona, to serve as their pastor. In God’s foreknowledge and will, it has become evident that this local body of believers was to become my fellow travelers in the spiritual journey of strategic planning.

I want to express thanks to Dr. Shane Parker for serving as my faculty supervisor throughout the project. In addition to Dr. Parker’s wise counsel and advisement, I realize how truly blessed my life is to have been under the godly counsel and wise instruction of several Southern Baptist Theological Seminary professors during my tenure at the school. While preparing for and attending doctoral seminars, completing AME requirements and laboring for the Lord in this project, I would like to share my special appreciation to Dr. Michael Wilder, Dr. Hal Pettegrew, Dr. Troy Temple, and Dr. Brian Richardson. All four are godly men, and I am grateful the Lord has given me the opportunity to learn and grow in Christ under their leadership in my life and ministry.

Lastly, I want to express my deepest appreciation to Chantal Cail, my former administrative assistant at Live Oak Community Church, and my current administrative assistant Starr Wisniewski at Light in the Desert Baptist Church. They both have gone the “extra mile” offering their kind support and assistance throughout the doctoral program. Secondly, I could not have fulfilled the technical, editorial, and style requirements of writing this project without the professional, timely work and ministry provided by Betsy Fredrick, a very godly servant of the Lord.

My sincere prayer is that this project will help other local church pastors and leaders, and local church bodies, along with associations and state conventions in pursuit of their strategic planning efforts. Ultimately, my greatest desire is that this project will bring glory to the most influential strategic thinker and planner of all time—our Lord Jesus Christ! To him be all glory, honor and praise. Amen and Amen.

Darwin Lance Meighan

Mesa, Arizona

May 2014
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Purpose
The purpose of the project was to develop and implement the Nehemiah model of strategic planning to rebuild Light in the Desert Baptist Church in Mesa, Arizona.

Goals
Four goals determined the effectiveness of the project. The first goal was to provide a biblical framework for strategic planning in the church. Church members grew in biblical knowledge and discovered the principles of strategic planning through a message series from the book of Nehemiah. This series was taught for eleven consecutive weeks during Sunday morning worship services. At the beginning of this series, church members were asked to complete a pre-project questionnaire, which tested their knowledge of the book of Nehemiah. The same questionnaire was distributed post-project to measure each participant’s biblical knowledge gained from the eleven-week message series. A t-test for dependent samples was used to determine whether there was a positive statistical difference between the pre-project and post-project questionnaires. This goal was deemed successful because the t-test proved there were positive statistical differences gained from a comparison of the two questionnaires given during the Nehemiah message series.

The second goal was to implement a comprehensive prayer strategy which proved to be an integral part of the strategic planning process. First, church members were invited to complete a survey to determine their knowledge and understanding of both personal and church prayer practices and disciplines. This survey was an instrument analyzed by the church staff and strategic planning team to develop future prayer
strategies and ministries. Secondly, church members were encouraged to participate in a one-hour prayer walk during the ministry project. Following the prayer walk, participants were asked to write a brief one-page story of their prayer experience. Each member’s one-page prayer walk story was used to measure application of prayer truths and principles learned from Nehemiah. This goal of implementing a comprehensive prayer strategy was deemed successful if at least three church members agreed to serve for one year as prayer walk team leaders and fifty percent of the participants made the commitment to prayer walk four times during the next year under the spiritual leadership and direction of a prayer walk team leader.

The third goal concerned the development of a strategic plan, which reflected the Nehemiah principles. A seven-member strategic planning team was formed and commissioned with the responsibility of developing a comprehensive strategic plan for the church.

A church ministry analysis was completed by twelve members of Light in the Desert Baptist Church who were randomly chosen to participate in this aspect of the project research. The completed analyses assisted the seven-member strategic planning team in its assessment of the church and community’s present ministry context. The strategic planning team met weekly throughout the fifteen weeks of the ministry project to complete its task of leading the church to discover its core values, mission, vision, and to develop a ministry structure and strategy for “making disciples.” At the end of the fifteen-week ministry project, the strategic planning team’s goal was to seek approval of the proposed strategic plan. This third goal was measured by a completed strategic plan. The strategic planning team sought affirmation and support of the completed plan from the congregation during a special-called business meeting. This goal was deemed successful if at least 90 percent of the church’s membership affirmed the recommendation.

A fourth goal challenged members to covenant with God and with one another in faith and practice to “live out” the scriptural principles that they learn from the
Nehemiah model. Once the strategic plan had been affirmed by the church, every member was asked to prayerfully sign and commit to a covenant. This goal was measured by the number of covenants signed by church members. Signed covenants indicated the level of commitment church members were willing to make, that is, to share responsibility and take ownership of the church’s strategic plan. This goal was deemed successful if 75 percent of the church members signed the covenant.

An additional goal measurement of covenant implementation was utilized. In this step, a representative group of 25 adults were interviewed for the purpose of hearing them share practical and life-transforming ways they plan to incorporate the covenant into their lives. This goal was deemed successful if every adult interviewee shared at least one practical way they plan to implement the covenant in their lives for the purpose of rebuilding the church.

**Ministry Context**

These goals were accomplished as the project is carried out at Light in the Desert Baptist Church. Light in the Desert is a Southern Baptist church in Mesa, Arizona. The city of Mesa is a suburban community located in the East Valley of the greater Phoenix metropolitan area. The community demographics provided are compiled from a five-mile radius that surrounds the church’s buildings and property located at 7930 E. Baseline Road in Mesa:

The population of the study area is 208,977 which is a 47.8% increase from the 140,899 recorded in 2000. The ten year projected population is expected to increase to 255,618 or an increase of 11.6%. The median age is 39 and is projected to remain unchanged in the ten year forecast. The racial and ethnic makeup is 77% white, 15% Hispanic, 8% black, Asian or other. The average household income is $66,109. The number of adults who have attained the educational level of “some college” or higher is 62%. According to the religious beliefs and practices of the study area, 39% call themselves conservative evangelical Christians, 45% consider themselves “a spiritual person,” and 16% say, “my faith is really important to me.”

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In April of 1975, members of First Baptist Church of Apache Junction, Arizona stepped out in faith and purchased a five-acre plot located one mile west of Ellsworth on Baseline Road in east Mesa at a cost of $40,000 for the purpose of planting a new Southern Baptist church.

After several years of struggling with zoning and other start up related issues, R. G. Whitehead was called as the first pastor of this new church plant. The new congregation decided to name the body Baseline Road Baptist Mission. A mobile chapel was moved on the five-acre site on March 30, 1980, in which the first services were held. Based on the “Light in the Desert Baptist Church: Its History and Heritage” printed by the church in 2012, the church began to see numerical growth immediately and quickly outgrew their mobile chapel.

The church began to pray for more space to house the growing congregation. The first building, a 4,000 square foot first phase was constructed under the supervision of James Phipps, a local contractor who was also a Southern Baptist. A large portion of the building materials were donated by Don Meighan, a local businessman, who was also actively involved in area Southern Baptist churches.

The historical records of Light in the Desert Baptist Church indicate that in November 1980, worship services reached a high attendance of 200, and the entire year’s average was 179. Between 1980 and 1981 the church grew from a total Sunday school enrollment of 112 to 266. Average attendance for Sunday school was 50 in 1980 and grew to 87 in 1981. A ground breaking for a second building took place on the first anniversary of the mission.

In 1982, R. G. Whitehead was called to be the Director of Missions for the Estrella Baptist Association, where he served for over a decade. The church called Glen McFarland early that year to become pastor of the church. The church continued to grow numerically and began having bi-yearly revivals. Thirty-three people that year came to know Christ as their Savior. After a church wide vote on November 7, 1982, a ceremony
was held officially terminating the church’s mission status and recognizing it as a New Testament Church: Baseline Road Baptist Church. McFarland served another 7 years as pastor, later leaving his position to become an Army Chaplain.

In January 1990, Don Crosby came to Baseline Road Baptist Church in view of a call. Crosby remained with the church until his resignation in July of 2000. In September of 2001, Cecil Hopson was called as pastor of Baseline Road Baptist Church, and during the next few years the church struggled in attendance.

In the spring of 2005, Hopson began sharing with Rick Fowler, of Power Road Baptist Church in Mesa, about each church’s growth challenges. Fowler expressed concern over the reality that their church would have to sell their property due to mandatory relocation implemented by the State of Arizona. These discussions led to the thought of combining the two churches and building a new church facility that would be larger in size. Both congregations voted to move Power Road’s membership to Baseline Road Baptist Church in the summer of 2005. The church at that time had two full-time pastors: Rick Fowler and Cecil Hopson. The church also voted to change the name to Light in the Desert Baptist Church and begin the process of building a new 14,000 square foot building with a worship center and classes.

Toward the end of 2007 Fowler and Hopson agreed that the church was too small to accommodate two full-time pastors, so after much prayer and discussion, Fowler chose to resign his position as co-senior pastor. Not too long after this, Hopson decided to retire and the church was again looking for a new pastor.

In July of 2010, the church voted to call Doug Delong as pastor. August 10, 2010, the $2.3 million dollar worship center and classrooms were dedicated. The 14,000-square-foot building has seating for 400, 8 classrooms, and a kitchen. The congregation at the time was averaging about 90 worshipers. In April of 2011, Doug Delong resigned as pastor due to malfeasance in regard to church funds. During this time, the church reached a low point spiritually and numerically. The church struggled to provide basic
ministries as attendance dwindled to an average of 40-45 people each week, with a low of 17 attendees on one particular Sunday. This was definitely a time for church members to seek the Lord in prayer.

After months of prayer and résumé assessment, the pastor search committee asked me, Darwin Meighan, to preach in “view of a call” on May 20, 2012. At the time I was serving as a pastor in Savannah, Georgia,

I began my tenure with the church on June 10, 2012, with 43 worshipers in attendance. My wife, Linda, and I had grown up just a few miles from what was now their new church home and place of ministry. We had been away from the area for 29 years serving in various churches throughout the states of Texas, Arkansas, Ohio, and Georgia before returning to the Phoenix area. In the months leading up to God’s call of bringing us back to Arizona, God had been placing a burden and desire on my heart to return to my childhood home for the purpose of rebuilding God’s church.

Light in the Desert has an active resident membership of 128 members, an average Sunday school attendance of 35, and an average weekly worship of 68. The annual budget is $157,000. The church is predominantly made up of senior adults, however in recent months that dynamic has been changing as younger and median age adults, along with their families, have been visiting and joining the church.

Strengths of the church include (1) a Christian witness and presence for Jesus Christ in the community for over thirty-two years, (2) the church is debt free with modern facilities and property for future growth in a prime location, (3) core families who have been faithful to persevere and sustain God’s church and ministry through many difficult trials and challenges, (4) a desire to rebuild and grow the church through “making disciples,” and (5) the church is strategically positioned by the Lord in an area of remarkable projected growth for many years to come.

There are also several key areas in much need of improvement: (1) the church is currently structured more toward “maintaining the status quo” rather than having a
structure for “growing and moving” the church forward, (2) there is a significant need to
develop a strategic plan as a roadmap providing the church with a clear and compelling
vision for accomplishing its God-given mission, (3) develop healthy spiritual
relationships within the body of Christ based on the covenant principles found in the
Scriptures, (4) rebuild and strengthen the church through a greater scriptural
understanding and practice of prayer, and (5) create ministries and programs with the
intentional purpose of reaching and discipling all age groups in the church and community.

Rationale for the Project

Next, the rationale for the urgency of the project is explained in detail. At this
point in its history there was a great need for strategic planning at Light in the Desert.
The church had been a positive witness and presence for Jesus Christ for thirty-two years,
resulting in many transformed lives for God’s kingdom. However, following the recent
completion of a major building project, the church was left with intensely stressed
relationships, which resulted in a spiritually and numerically depleted and discouraged
church body. In addition, the church had recently gone through a lengthy season of
ministry without a full-time pastor. Each of these factors pointed to a great need and
urgency for rebuilding the Lord’s church at Light in the Desert.

Several key benefits arose from the development and the application of the
Nehemiah model for strategic planning. The first benefit was the priority and impact of
prayer. Church members experienced significant growth through prayer, walking together
through the process of strategic planning and rebuilding God’s church. Secondly, the
church affirmed and adopted a strategic plan that guided the church in the future to fulfill
its God-given mission. Thirdly, church members experienced a spiritually healthy
relationship with God and with others in the body of Christ by prayerfully entering into a
covenant based on the truths and principles of God’s Word.
Definitions, Limitations, and Delimitations

The following words and terms used throughout the project need to be defined.

*Covenant.* Holman’s Bible Dictionary defines a *covenant* as “a pact, treaty, alliance, or agreement between two parties of equal or of unequal authority.”²

*Prayerwalking.* In their book *Prayerwalking*, co-authors Steve Hawthorne and Graham Kendrick define this method of prayer as “praying on-site with insight. The walking is incidental. It is only the vehicle which enables us to pray in close proximity of those in the community who need our prayer. It is on-site intercession.”³

*Repurposed.* Merriam-Webster defines “repurposed”: “To use or convert for use in another format or product.”⁴ This worthwhile concept means to find new value in something instead of throwing it away.

*Strategic planning.* In his book *Advanced Strategic Planning*, Aubrey Malphurs gives a definition: “Strategic planning is the process that a point leader uses with a team of leaders on a regular basis to think and act as to design and redesign a specific ministry model that accomplishes the Great Commission in their unique ministry context.”⁵

A significant limitation was the fifteen-week duration of the project. Due to the brevity and restriction of time, the scope and depth of the strategic planning process was somewhat limited. Therefore, additional steps of strategic planning occurred long after the project was completed. The Nehemiah model provided the church with a solid, biblical foundation from which to springboard into the future.

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There were two delimitations of this project. The first delimitation was that the strategic planning process occurred only within the context of one local church which was Light in the Desert Baptist Church in Mesa, Arizona. A second delimitation was that the demographic data of the community was narrowed to within a five-mile radius of the church’s campus.

**Research Methodology**

Due to the extensive nature of strategic planning within the local church, several research instruments were utilized throughout the project. As stated earlier, four goals determined the effectiveness of the project. The first goal was to provide a biblical framework for strategic planning in the church. Church members grew in biblical knowledge and discovered the principles of strategic planning through a message series from the book of Nehemiah. This series was taught for eleven consecutive weeks during Sunday morning worship services. During the first week of the message series, church members were invited to complete a pre-project questionnaire immediately following the morning worship service. Only church members who committed to be present for eight of the eleven weeks of Nehemiah messages were eligible to participate. The purpose of the questionnaire was to test the participant’s knowledge of the book of Nehemiah. I developed the questionnaire and it consisted of ten multiple choice questions taken from Nehemiah’s book. Church members identified themselves on the questionnaire by providing a personal “code” word of their choice. The pre-project questionnaire was reviewed by the senior pastor and the results were compiled by Light in the Desert’s administrative assistant.

During week 15 of the ministry project, a post-project questionnaire was distributed immediately following the morning worship service to measure each participant’s growth in biblical knowledge. The post-project questionnaire was completed only by members who completed the pre-project questionnaire, and by those who were present for eight of the eleven weeks of Nehemiah messages. Once again, church members
identified themselves on the questionnaire by providing the same personal “code” word they indicated on the pre-test. A t-test for dependent samples was used to determine if there is a positive, statistical significant difference of correct between the pre-project to post-project questionnaire answers. The results were reviewed by the senior pastor and compiled by the administrative assistant. This goal was deemed successful if the t-test proved there was a positive, statistical difference gained from a comparison of the two questionnaires given during the Nehemiah message series.

The second goal was to implement a comprehensive prayer strategy. During the week 6 of the ministry project all church members were invited to complete a survey during the time which adult Sunday school classes meet on Sunday morning. The survey was prepared by the pastor and used to determine the participant’s knowledge and understanding of both personal and church prayer practices and disciplines. This survey was an instrument analyzed by the strategic planning team in consideration of future prayer ministries in conjunction with the overall strategic plan of the church.

Church members were encouraged to participate in a one-hour prayer walk on a Saturday morning during week 12. Following Nehemiah’s principles for prayer, church members were asked to identify a neighborhood or community near where they live in which to prayer walk. Following the prayer walk, participants were asked to write a brief one-page story of their prayer experience. Each participant’s one-page prayer walk story was used to measure their application of prayer truths and principles learned from Nehemiah. The completed stories were reviewed and compiled by the church’s administrative assistant and utilized in consideration for further prayer ministries and strategies. This goal of implementing a comprehensive prayer strategy was deemed successful if at least three church members agreed to serve one year as prayer walk team leaders and 50 percent of the participants made the commitment to prayer walk four times during the next year under the spiritual leadership and direction of a prayer walk team leader.
The third goal concerned the development of a strategic plan which reflected the Nehemiah principles. A seven-member strategic planning team was formed and commissioned with the responsibility of developing a comprehensive strategic plan for the church. The members of the strategic planning team were recommended by the pastor and affirmed by the leadership team and church body.

A church ministry analysis, adapted from The Malphurs Group, was distributed during the week 2 and completed by twelve members of Light in the Desert who were randomly chosen to participate in this aspect of the project’s research. The church ministry analysis was used with permission (see Appendix 1). The results were analyzed by the strategic planning team. This tool greatly assisted the team in its assessment of the church and community’s present ministry context.

The seven-member strategic planning team met weekly throughout the fifteen weeks of the ministry project to complete its task of leading the church to discover its core values, mission, vision, and to develop a ministry structure and strategy for “making disciples.” This third goal was measured by a completed strategic plan. The strategic planning team sought affirmation and support of the completed plan from the congregation during a special-called business meeting. This goal was deemed successful if at least 90 percent of the church’s membership affirmed the recommendation.

The fourth goal challenged members to covenant with God and with one another in faith and practice to “live out” the scriptural principles which they have learned from the Nehemiah model for strategic planning. Once the strategic plan had been affirmed by the church, every member was asked to prayerfully sign and commit to a covenant during week 14 of the ministry project. The church covenant was developed by the strategic planning team in coordination with the pastor. Signed covenants indicated the level of commitment church members were willing to make, that is, to share responsibility

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and take ownership of the church’s strategic plan. This goal was deemed successful if 75 percent of the church members signed the covenant.

An additional goal measurement was utilized as a representative group of 25 adult church members were interviewed during weeks 14 and 15 by the pastor. The pastor developed a written list of questions to ask the interviewees. The goal of the face-to-face interviews was to give the interviewees an opportunity to share practical and yet very life-transforming commitments indicating how they planned to implement the covenant in their daily lives, allowing God to use them to rebuild their families, church, community and world. Field notes were taken during the interviews. The interviews were also recorded for further review. The results were compiled by the pastor and administrative assistant. This goal was deemed successful if every adult interviewed openly shared one practical step from the covenant, which they planned to apply toward the process of rebuilding and of ultimately implementing the strategic plan.

All aforementioned research instruments was performed in compliance with and approved by the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary Research Ethics Committee prior to use in the ministry project.
CHAPTER 2

BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATION

Strategic planning is a predominant theme throughout the Scriptures. Beginning with the first book of the Bible, Genesis 1-2:3 provides rich details concerning the strategic plan of God’s creation. Therefore, it can be known with certainty, and by faith it must be expressed—strategic planning originates with the God of the Bible. In his commentary The Message of Genesis 1-11, David Atkinson affirms a striking pattern in God’s strategic plan of creation:

One of the most striking features of Genesis 1 is its pattern. The story is structured around the theme of one week of six days leading to a seventh. The regular refrain moves the story along: there was evening and there was morning. The gradually increasing complexity of what God creates, beginning with the formless waste (1:2), and ending with human beings, male and female in his image (1:27), gives a sense of deepening order and meticulous structure. God is bringing order and form into his world.¹

The Bible clearly portrays Creator God as the first strategic thinker and planner.

The thesis of this chapter is to provide a biblical and theological foundation from the book of Nehemiah for strategic planning. Six passages from Nehemiah will be examined. First, Nehemiah 1:4-11 will show that the biblical principles of prayer are necessary and must precede successful strategic planning in the church. Second, Nehemiah 2:1-20 will guide the church to (1) recognize God’s timing and the windows of opportunity he provides for strategic planning, (2) examine the ministry context before launching into the strategic planning process, and (3) set measurable goals. Third, select verses from Nehemiah 3 will demonstrate the need for teamwork and collaboration in

¹David Atkinson, The Message of Genesis 1-11, The Bible Speaks Today (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity, 1990), 18, emphasis original.
strategic planning. Fourth, Nehemiah 4:1-9 will examine key biblical principles for overcoming spiritual opposition which can occur during the process of strategic planning in the church. Fifth, an exposition of select verses from Nehemiah chapters 8 through 10 will unveil three vital signs for revival; each of which are necessary for strategic planning in an effort to rebuild the church. Finally, the sixth passage taken from Nehemiah 12:27-47 will examine how God’s people must make it a priority to affirm and celebrate successful strategic planning.

**Nehemiah 1:4-11: Prayer and Strategic Planning**

The Old Testament book of Nehemiah provides a valuable resource for strategic planning. In particular, this section will focus on the critical need for prayer among God’s people. Successful strategic planning can occur only after a period of intense prayer (Neh 1:4-11).

The Nehemiah memoirs contain the record of Nehemiah himself leading God’s people to develop and implement a strategic plan for rebuilding of the walls around Jerusalem. But even more importantly, a strategic plan was needed to rebuild people’s lives spiritually. One hundred and forty years had passed by since Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonians conquered Jerusalem, carrying off the Jews into exile (586 B.C.). The Israelites remained in captivity until 538 B.C. when the Persians overtook Babylon and Cyrus the Great released 50,000 of the Jews to go back to the city of Jerusalem to rebuild the temple under Zerubabbel’s leadership. Then in 458 B.C., God called Ezra to lead a second group of 1,500 people back to Jerusalem to reestablish the worship of God in the temple. The time period of Nehemiah is 445 B.C. and God is preparing Nehemiah to carry out his strategic plan in Jerusalem. Edwin Yamauchi addresses the great need God’s people were experiencing at this point in Israel’s history:

The walls of Jerusalem that had been destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar, despite abortive attempts to rebuild them (Ezra 4:6-23), remained in ruins for almost a century and a half. Such a lamentable situation obviously made Jerusalem vulnerable to her
numerous enemies. Yet from a mixture of apathy and fear the Jews failed to rectify this glaring deficiency. They needed the dynamic catalyst of an inspired leader, a man named Nehemiah.  

Upon hearing the news of the dire situation in Jerusalem (Neh 1:1-3), Nehemiah immediately begins to seek the Lord in prayer. Nehemiah had come face to face with a situation which was too big for him to solve alone.

Nehemiah 1:4-11 provides a remarkable pattern of prayer to prepare the people of God for the process of strategic planning: “When I heard these things, I sat down and I wept. For some days I mourned and fasted and prayed before the God of heaven” (Neh 1:4). When Nehemiah hears about the condition of God’s people and of the city walls in Jerusalem, he is broken before God. He weeps, mourns, and also practices the spiritual discipline of fasting, which indicates that he removed anything in his life that would distract him from hearing from God. What caused Nehemiah such deep concern and focused prayer at this point in his life? Leslie Allen and Timothy Laniak offer insight:

The event that triggered the new mission, by making a strong emotional impact on Nehemiah, was his hearing about Jerusalem, brought or at least mediated by his brother Hanani. The sorry plight of the Judeans is explained in terms of the damage inflicted on the walls and gates of the city. This damage can hardly refer to the catastrophe of 587, when the Babylonians destroyed Jerusalem. Nehemiah’s shocked reaction indicates that it must be the result of a recent disaster. It is probably linked with the frustrated attempt to rebuild the wall in Artaxerxes’ reign that is narrated in Ezra 4:8-23. The implication is that the military “force” that compelled the Judeans to stop at the end of that account was violent enough to stop the repair work they had already done. The mission of Nehemiah is the satisfying ending to the sad story of Ezra 4:23.  

Upon hearing the news of Jerusalem’s plight, Nehemiah knew what lay ahead was a formidable God-sized task which would require a season of fasting and prayer. Therefore, these spiritual disciplines which became the focus of his life during the four months that followed.

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Unfortunately, a majority of churches also find themselves in less than desirable circumstances, desperately needing to follow the steps of strategic planning to begin the process of rebuilding broken lives, ministries, and relationships. According to the Nehemiah model, the starting place for rebuilding is prayer. Raymond Brown states,

Nehemiah’s immediate reaction to the news of his people’s troubles was to go into the presence of God. Nothing mattered more than entering the Lord’s presence to express his anguish about his people’s needs, confess his inadequacy, reflect on his personal response to the news from Jerusalem, and seek guidance about what might be done.⁴

For what had become a customary practice in Nehemiah’s life, he prostrates himself, seeking the face of Almighty God in prayer. There are several aspects of Nehemiah’s prayer which need to be highlighted. First, is Nehemiah’s high and exalted view of God. Nehemiah prays, “O Lord, God of heaven, the great and awesome God” (Neh 2:5). He is making his appeal to the majestic sovereignty of God—the God who is to be feared and revered. It is as if Nehemiah is saying, “I’ve received this bad news that God’s people and God’s place are in ruins, but nothing is too difficult for you God. Since you are the ‘great and awesome God,’ there is hope. Rebuilding can happen. You are a God who keeps his promises and you are a God who performs miracles.” The same is true of God today—effective prayer starts with having a highly exalted, scriptural view of God.

Nehemiah’s prayer also portrays God as one “who keeps his covenant of love with those who love him and who obey his commands.” In both the Old and New Testaments God is characterized as a covenant-keeping God. The Hebrew word hesed suggests a quality that honors a covenant through thick and thin, a steadfast love. Regarding God’s covenant love, Brown comments,

God’s love is not fickle and changeable but constant and reliable. He is a faithful God who keeps his covenant of love with those who love him. His people have not always been what they ought to have been, but God has never acted unlovingly towards them. His chastisement has always been purposive, corrective and remedial. He has stood by them during long periods when they were far too preoccupied with

marginal things to love him and obey his commands. During the demanding and
dangerous assignment which lay ahead, Nehemiah found himself constantly
fortified by the faithfulness of a loving God who would never let him down.\footnote{Ibid., 36, emphasis original.}

The church today can move forward with assurance of the formidable task of rebuilding
through strategic planning. This same God of the Old Testament is now proving himself
as a covenant-keeping God through the new covenant that is demonstrated in the person
and work of Jesus Christ.

A second portion of Nehemiah’s prayer involves confession of sin and
repentance: “I confess the sins we Israelites, including myself and my father’s house have
committed against you. We have acted very wickedly toward you. We have not obeyed
the commands, decrees and laws you gave your servant Moses” (Neh 1:6-7). Nehemiah
turns his prayer to the root of Israel’s problems. He sees broken-down walls and charred
gates in direct correlation to the spiritual condition of the hearts and lives of God’s people.
God’s people are reaping the consequences of years of disobedience against God’s Word.
Nehemiah puts himself into this situation, basically saying, “I have contributed to this
problem. There are some things that I did or that I did not do which have contributed to
this ruin. I confess the sins we Israelites, including myself and my father’s house have
committed against you.” Charles Fensham explains,

Of interest is the fact that Nehemiah combined this confession with his own and that
of his family. Nehemiah confessed his involvement in the sinning. This gives his
prayer an honest confession of a sinner. All have sinned, even the supplicant and his
family. In v. 7 the sin which has been committed is described. The commandments
of the Lord were not kept.\footnote{F. Charles Fensham, The Books of Ezra and Nehemiah, New International
Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 155.}
pardon. He knew that all such sin can be fully, immediately and eternally forgiven. The Lord is always more eager to forgive our sins than we are to confess them.\(^7\)

With amazing wisdom and insight Nehemiah concludes that if God’s city and his people were going to experience restoration, there was definitely a need for confession, repentance, and forgiveness before the Lord. Nehemiah is heart-broken over the people of God (the Israelites) and the place of God (Jerusalem). He is broken over his own personal sin and the corporate sin of God’s people. As Nehemiah looks at the people of God, he sees a vast difference between what they were experiencing and what God had promised them. The good news today comes in knowing God is continually sifting through the broken rubble of broken relationships, addictive habits and hidden sins—he is looking for people who are broken. In Psalm 51:17, David wrote, “The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God you will not despise.” God uses the lives of broken people. Confession of sin and repentance are therefore a necessary step spiritually toward successful strategic planning in God’s church. The apostle John wrote, “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9).

In Nehemiah 1:8-10, as he prays, Nehemiah next recalls the promises of God from the Scriptures. Specifically, he is praying Moses’ words from the book of Deuteronomy. In his commentary, Ezra and Nehemiah, Derek Kidner writes concerning this portion of Nehemiah’s prayer:

He knows the threats and promises of Scripture well enough to make a strong, not tentative plea. He draws on several passages from Deuteronomy. Most significantly in verse 10 he quotes the words in which Moses had pleaded for Israel on Mount Sinai (Dt. 9:29), that God would stand by his own (thy servants and thy people) and by the work he had so strenuously begun. At that point Israel had been threatened with extinction; now, it seems, Nehemiah sees the situation as hardly less perilous. Like Moses, he must now stand in the breach with his intercession.\(^8\)

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\(^7\) Brown, The Message of Nehemiah, 37-38.

Praying Scripture to the Lord is one of the most powerful spiritual weapons God has given to individual believers and to his church. There are seasons and periods of time when a local body of believers, after years and years of disobedience, sin, pride, and in rebellion against the Word of God, find themselves in great peril, many times in desperation nearing the brink of extinction. The reality of this extinction, where the church will actually close its doors, is much closer at hand than most Christians are willing to admit. In preparation for strategic planning, there is a great need for the church to pray Scriptures to the Lord together, particularly the promises from God’s Word that he has made to his covenant people. This is precisely the principle Nehemiah employed as he “stood in the gap” on behalf of the children of Israel who found themselves once again in a desperate condition in Jerusalem.

A fourth essential ingredient for effective strategic planning comes also from this first prayer recorded in Nehemiah’s memoirs. In verse 11, he prays, “Give your servant success today.” Nehemiah prays, asking God to give him success in the next steps he will need to take toward making his journey to Jerusalem become a reality. He needed permission from the king, along with the necessary resources before he could embark on this new mission with God.

H. G. M Williamson comments on Nehemiah’s need to gain permission from King Artaxerxes:

Nehemiah was no doubt aware that if he was going to have any success, Artaxerxes would need to overturn his previous decree (Ezra 4:21); to make such a request could be highly dangerous, even for a royal favorite (cf. Esth 4:11-16). He therefore wisely refrains from determining his approach in advance, but leaves God to open the way in an appropriate manner.9

As he prayed for four months, ultimately Nehemiah knew his success with the king, along with the work of rebuilding the walls and people’s lives in Jerusalem, rested entirely in the hands of sovereign God. Allen and Laniak explain,

He asked God to crown with success and approach he was planning to make to King Artaxerxes. This request looks forward to chapter 2, specifically to 2:5,8. But Nehemiah offered this prayer day after day over a period of months, that each “today” might provide the opportunity for the mission he proposed to materialize, so that he could be the agent of God’s will for national renewal as revealed in the Torah. Yet the decision would not lie with the king, who was just a man, but with God, who was in control, as 2:8 will attest. So God’s favor was what was really required. In terms of Hebrews 4:16, he needed grace to help in time of need.10

While the church is in the preparatory stages of strategic planning it would be wise to heed the example Nehemiah has provided. First, seeking God’s timing through prayer cannot be underestimated. There is a second spiritual principle which also holds true for the church today: Successful strategic planning rests solely in the hands of sovereign God. As the church seeks to rebuild through strategic planning, she must cry out to God in prayer, seeking his favor upon their lives and endeavors.

With Nehemiah’s prayer as a scriptural basis (Neh 1:4-11), four essential ingredients have been discussed in preparation of the church’s strategic planning endeavor. First is the need for a proper, biblical view of God—God is high and exalted (v. 5). Second is the genuine need for confession of sin and repentance (vv. 6-7). Third is to recall the promises of God through the medium of praying the Scriptures (vv. 8-10). Fourth is the principle that ultimately success rests in the hands of a sovereign God whose plans will be brought to completion. Success comes only through the gift of God’s grace.


Upon hearing the condition of God’s people and of the city walls in Jerusalem, Nehemiah spent four months praying with intensity and passion. Following this period of prayer, Nehemiah turns to three more vital components necessary for effective strategic planning. First, he must recognize God’s timing and the windows of opportunity he provides. Nehemiah has already demonstrated that God’s windows of opportunity must be discerned through prayer (Neh 1:4-11).

As cupbearer to the king, God positioned Nehemiah for a great window of opportunity to rebuild the city walls and God’s people in Jerusalem. But he had to wait for God’s timing. After four months of prayer, the window of opportunity does arrive:

In the month of Nisan in the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes, when wine was brought for him, I took the wine and gave it to the king. I had not been sad in his presence before, so the king asked me, “Why does your face look so sad when you are not ill? This can be nothing but sadness of heart.” I was very much afraid, but I said to the king, “May the king live forever! Why should my face not look sad when the city where my ancestors are buried lies in ruins, and its gates have been destroyed by fire?” The king said to me, “What is it you want?” Then I prayed to the God of heaven. (Neh 2:1-4)

Mervin Breneman says, “Since ‘Nisan’ spans our March-April, four months had passed since Nehemiah received news from Jerusalem. He had been praying and planning during these four months so that he would be ready when the opportunity arose.” Kidner comments,

The mention of the month Nisan, roughly the equivalent of April and the beginning of the Persian and Jewish year, reveals how long Nehemiah had persisted in fasting and prayer. It was four months since the news had reached him. Now his praying had reached the point recorded in 1:11, the time for action.

Nehemiah finds himself in the presence of the king and he is not going to waste the opportunity God has given him. Now the moment has come, and if he mishandles it there will not be another. In verse 2 Nehemiah says, “I was very much afraid.” Holmgren gives the reason for Nehemiah’s fears:

Ezra 4:12-16 reports that King Artaxerxes had issued a decree which ordered the work on the city walls to be stopped. If this Artaxerxes was the same king whom Nehemiah served in the court, then we can understand Nehemiah’s delay. In such a context, one must lay plans carefully—and wait for the right occasion—before approaching the king on this controversial subject.

It is important to note that during Nehemiah’s four months of prayer and planning he

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12Kidner, Ezra and Nehemiah, 86-87.

discerned God’s timing, looking for a window of opportunity for the king to reverse the
decree he had once given in Ezra 4.

Following Nehemiah’s example, strategic planning in the church first starts
with a season of prayer. Secondly, the church must realize she has been given a window
of opportunity and divinely positioned by God in her corner of the world, therefore
strategic planning must be intentionally and fully embraced.

Even though Nehemiah had been praying for four months, he was not sitting
by idle. He was also intentionally planning. Nehemiah 2:4-5; 7-9 offers helpful insights
for how prayer and planning go together in the strategic planning process:

The king said to me, “What is it you want?” Then I prayed to the God of heaven,
and I answered the king, “If it pleases the king and if your servant has found favor
in his sight, let him send me to the city in Judah where my ancestors are buried so
that I can rebuild it.” I also said to him, “If it pleases the king, may I have letters to
the governors of Trans-Euphrates, so that they will provide me safe-conduct until I
arrive in Judah? And may I have a letter to Asaph, keeper of the royal park, so he
will give me timber to make beams for the gates of the citadel by the temple and for
the city wall and for the residence I will occupy?” And because the gracious hand of
my God was on me, the king granted my requests. So I went to the governors of
Trans-Euphrates and gave them the king’s letters. The king had also sent army
officers and cavalry with me. (Neh 2:4-5; 7-9)

For Nehemiah, every step had been prayed over and planned thoroughly. In his
commentary, Brown affirms the need for both prayer and planning working in tandem
together:

[Speaking of Nehemiah] He believed not only in dependent praying but also in
deliberate planning. Time and time again he had asked the Lord to guide his
thinking as he endeavoured to shape an effective strategy. Ever since he had heard
of Jerusalem’s troubles, Nehemiah had wanted to help and was eager to offer his
best. During the waiting period there was only one skill he could bring to the
prospective enterprise: the careful thoughts of an alert and dedicated mind. Later on
he would use his feet to make the journey, eyes to survey the scene, hands to move
the stones, but initially he could only offer heart and mind.14

Following an extensive period of prayer and waiting, the opportunity to act finally
arrives. First, Nehemiah needs to obtain permission from the king to go rebuild
Jerusalem’s walls. Second, he needs financial support. Third, he needs letters to secure

safe travel. Fourth, he needs lumber to rebuild the city gates, walls, and the home where he would take up residence. Amazingly, the king grants his every request. Nehemiah experiences the divine providence of God. He clearly recognizes that God is divinely orchestrating the entire process. Nehemiah says, “And because the gracious hand of my God was on me, the king granted my requests. So I went to the governors of Trans-Euphrates and gave them the king’s letters. The king had also sent army officers and cavalry with me” (Neh 2:8-9). Nehemiah was absolutely certain that God’s favor was with him. Brown reinforces this truth:

God’s servant is convinced that only God could have brought about such a dramatic change in the king’s mind and his cupbearer’s destiny. The conversation of one Israelite visitor to Susa had initiated a chain of events which was to lead to the complete re-fortification of Jerusalem.15

God was indeed at work, fulfilling the mystery of his divine will and plan. Nehemiah 2:1-9 demonstrates essential principles for strategic planning in the church. Nehemiah prays, plans, and then waits patiently for God’s timing. Once the window of opportunity arrives, Nehemiah steps out in faith and obedience to do what God called him to do. These early faith-filled steps are vital for the church to launch strategic planning in the spiritual manner God has intended.

Next, Nehemiah examines the ministry context in which strategic planning will take place:

I went to Jerusalem, and after staying there three days. 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. There were no mounts with me except the one I was riding on. By night I went out through the Valley Gate toward the Jackal Well and the Dung Gate, examining the walls of Jerusalem, which had been broken down, and its gates, which had been destroyed by fire. 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; so I went up the valley by night, examining the wall. Finally, I turned back and reentered through the Valley Gate. 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. (Neh 2:11-16)

Nehemiah’s journey to Jerusalem took about two months. Upon his arrival in Jerusalem,  

15Ibid., 51.
it seems probable that during these three days he was planning his strategy for building the wall, assessing the leadership of the people, calculating the needed resources, and providing for effective channel of communication.\textsuperscript{16} Once on his mount, Nehemiah goes on a mission at night \textit{with a few men} (strategic planning team) to assess the ministry context, discerning the situation which God had called him to rebuild. While touring the city walls, he immediately sees the devastation and destruction firsthand. Nehemiah’s assessment indicates the damage was extensive. For 140 years, Jerusalem’s broken down walls were a symbol of the spiritual condition concerning the hearts of God’s people. Boice points out several difficulties Nehemiah faced: (1) the task was overwhelming, (2) a history of defeat, and (3) a discouraged group of workers.\textsuperscript{17} This is the reality of Nehemiah’s ministry context upon his arrival in Jerusalem.

Similarly, it is imperative for the local church’s strategic planning team to follow Nehemiah’s example of performing a study and analysis of the church’s ministry context. The analysis must consider an examination of both internal and external factors of the church and her surrounding community.

Nehemiah’s examination of the city’s walls provided ample evidence for much needed change. Through Nehemiah’s leadership, the people were shown the need for rebuilding the city’s walls. Strategic planning would become the vehicle for this project to be accomplished. Breneman emphasizes the importance of timing and of motivating God’s people in strategic planning:

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Nehemiah was able to discern the proper time to present the building project, and he knew how to motivate the leaders and the people. He used four incentives: (1) He identified with the people; he spoke of “the trouble we are in.” (2) He stressed the seriousness of the situation. A leader must be realistic and honestly assess the facts. People will have confidence in such a leader. (3) Nehemiah was committed to
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\textsuperscript{16}Cyril J. Barber, \textit{The Dynamics of Effective Leadership: Learning from Nehemiah} (Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2005), 54.

\textsuperscript{17}James Montgomery Boice, \textit{Nehemiah} (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), 32-33.
taking definite action. (4) He used his personal testimony of God’s grace to assure them of God’s favor on the project (v. 18).\textsuperscript{18}

After sharing his analysis of the ministry context, Nehemiah leads the people to take immediate action. In preparation for such action, Maciariello states,

Coercion was not Nehemiah’s method. His heart was that of a servant; his methods of gaining commitment reflected humility, an essential attribute of servant leaders. He has confidence in the purposes of God and of God’s provision for completing the project. He has a God-honoring vision for restoring the integrity of the city.\textsuperscript{19}

First, buy-in and ownership of the strategic plan by the people is demonstrated as they establish an overarching goal: “Come let us rebuild the wall of Jerusalem, and we will no longer be in disgrace” (v. 17). Secondly, Nehemiah reminds the people of their complete dependence on God to develop and implement a successful strategic plan: “I also told them about the gracious hand of my God upon me” (v. 18). And thirdly, the project required teamwork and a collaborative effort by everyone. They replied, “Let us start rebuilding.” So they began this good work (v. 18). J. I. Packer addresses Nehemiah’s profound leadership qualities:

In his role as pioneer in the reconstructing of Jerusalem, Nehemiah illustrates many of the realities of spiritual leadership in the Christian church. We see in him the zeal for God and love for people, plus the readiness to challenge his challengers and to oppose personal opposition, that every leader needs. We see in him also the true essence of leadership, as an enabling of others to achieve; the real loneliness of leadership, as the leader holds fast the vision of the goal of which his followers are losing sight; and the burning zeal for God that the leader must ever show forth as a model for those he leads.\textsuperscript{20}

Concerning spiritual leadership today, God’s leaders who are tasked with the responsibility of guiding the church in strategic planning would be wise to heed the three principles examined in the Nehemiah 2. First is the need to recognize God’s timing and the windows of opportunity he provides for strategic planning. Second involves the priority of

\textsuperscript{18} Breneman, Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther, 181-82.


\textsuperscript{20} J. I. Packer, A Passion for Faithfulness: Wisdom from the Book of Nehemiah (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1995), 72.
examining the ministry context before launching into the strategic planning process. The third principle emphasizes the need to set measurable goals through buy-in and ownership of everyone involved. Once these three principles are established, teamwork and collaboration begins to evolve.

**Nehemiah 3: Teamwork and Collaboration**

In chapter 3, Nehemiah lists the names of individuals on God’s team who worked in a collaborative effort to begin rebuilding the city’s walls. Nehemiah 3 provides a wonderful model for how seamlessly teamwork and collaboration is intended to occur in the process of strategic planning:

Eliashib the high priest and his fellow priests went to work and rebuilt the Sheep Gate. They dedicated it and set its doors in place, building as far as the Tower of the Hundred, which they dedicated, and as far as the Tower of Hananel. The men of Jericho built the adjoining section, and Zakkur son of Imri built next to them. (Neh 3:1-2)

Brown states the significance of people’s names, along with the accurate record of their work:

In addition to being an inspiring leader, Nehemiah was also a gifted administrator. His graphic narrative is interspersed with lists of names, locations and responsibilities, items from Israel’s life, past and present. He knows the importance and value of accurate records. The lists are not a dull recital of forgotten names; they preserve the story of heroic people who played their part in the continuity of the people of God.²¹

In a similar manner today, God’s sovereign plan continues to be written by contemporary heroes, through whom the principles of teamwork and collaboration are seen as a priority and carry great value toward the advancement of God’s kingdom.

Strategically, rebuilding the city’s walls began at the Sheep Gate, which was the spiritual center of Jerusalem. Williamson states, “‘The Sheep Gate’ was in the northeastern corner of the city wall, and probably derived its name from the sheep that were brought through it for sacrifice in the temple nearby. The interest of the priests in

this section is thus self-evident.” 22 This was a day that the spiritual leaders, the high
priest and his fellow priests, set the example of servant leadership for the people.

Brown elaborates concerning the rebuilding project beginning first at the
Sheep Gate:

That this list should start at the Sheep Gate is markedly symbolic. It is saying, “Put
God first.” This “Sheep Gate beginning” graphically depicts Christ’s mandate to all
his followers: “But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness,” believing that
other things in life “will be given to you as well.” The priests dedicate or consecrate
this first section to the glory of God, and in doing so they exemplify and encourage
the commitment of all. 23

Brown’s comments strike a chord in the hearts of his readers. Indeed, it is God alone who is
worthy of first place in “all things,” for his eternal glory. Noteworthy is the fact that
everyone was involved. The people worked together like clockwork. This was a new
experience for the Israelites. All they had known for many years was ruin and destruction.
Repeatedly throughout chapter 3 are noted the phrases “next to him” worked so and so,
and “next to them” worked others. These phrases represent an amazing portrait of
teamwork and collaboration. The people are working together, side by side, linked arm in
arm and shoulder to shoulder. In other words, there were no gaps in God’s work.
Everyone was involved in an effort to accomplish the same purpose—of rebuilding a
wall! Thus they all shared a common objective. One section of the wall had to match up
with the next section. Teams, various groups, and families partnered together in unity to
do God’s work. People came from all different walks of life, various occupations and
ages. Holmgren elaborates on the collaboration and partnership which occurred from
quite a diverse and varied group of people:

A variety of people from Jerusalem gave themselves to the task of rebuilding:
priests (v 1), Levites (v 17), goldsmiths and perfumers (v 8), officials (vv 9,12), and
merchants (v 32). The list conveys wholehearted commitment on part of Jerusalem’s
citizens. There is a special note that Shallum “and his daughters” (v 12) also worked
on the walls. People from other communities also gave themselves to the task, for

22Williamson, Ezra, Nehemiah, 203.

23Brown, The Message of Nehemiah, 64.
example, people from Jericho (v 2), Tekoa (v 5), Gibeon (v 7), Zanoah (v 13), and Beth-hac-cherem (v 14), as well as other places.24

Likewise in the New Testament, Paul writes about the power of unity demonstrated as people work together in partnership: “I thank my God every time I remember you. In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now” (Phil 1:3-5).

Nehemiah strategically positions team members to rebuild the walls in a place or location for maximum impact and greatest productivity. Each person or family is given the task of rebuilding a section of the wall nearest their home. Nehemiah 3:10 and 23 show evidence of this strategy:

Adjoining this, Jedaiah son of Harumaph made repairs opposite his. . . . Beyond them, Benjamin and Hasshub made repairs in front of their house; and next to them, Azariah son of Maaseiah, the son of Ananiah, made repairs beside his house. house, and Hattush son of Hashabneiah made repairs next to him.

Barber cites one particular dynamic of Nehemiah’s successful leadership:

The first principle of success is seen in the coordination Nehemiah achieved. The clue is found in the recurrence of the phrases “next to him” or “next to them” repeated throughout the chapter. The very fact that these phrases occur so often yields still another truth. Each person knew where he belonged. He also knew where his responsibility lay and what was expected of him. In all their work, there was coordination of effort.25

God’s strategy for rebuilding is much the same today. He positions his church and its members in neighborhoods, workplaces, schools, and communities where day-to-day ministry takes place—which ultimately is for the purpose of rebuilding lives and relationships to make a maximum impact for Jesus Christ. When such life transformation does occur, the primary purpose for strategic planning is being accomplished.

In a summary, the Nehemiah 3 provides a scriptural model of what spiritually healthy relationships are supposed to look like in a church body seeking to rebuild through the process of strategic planning. However, when such progress is being made

24Holmgren, Ezra and Nehemiah, 103.
25Barber, The Dynamics of Effective Leadership, 68.
for the Lord, there also comes the likelihood of intense opposition from the enemy. This is exactly what Nehemiah and his workers experienced next.

**Nehemiah 4:1-9: Overcoming Spiritual Opposition**

Nehemiah and the residents of Jerusalem understood opposition. Throughout Israel’s history, they were a people who had faced relentless opposition from other cities, nations, and cultures. In fact, it was the Babylonians attack on the Israelites in 722 B.C. which had left the city of Jerusalem and its walls in its current state of ruins. Even though God had directed Nehemiah and the people to rebuild the walls and gates around Jerusalem, it certainly did not mean it would be an easy task. Clearly, it was the will of God for the walls to be rebuilt, and yet he did not remove the spiritual opposition. In God’s sovereign will, he will also allow spiritual opposition to come against the church’s strategic planning process and collaborative efforts to rebuild.

Nehemiah 4:1-9 provides insight concerning several tactical ploys Satan will use to either slow down, sidetrack, or to put a stop to God’s work. The good news from chapter 4 is that God also provides several biblical truths, principles, and strategies to help his people gain victory over spiritual opposition when it does come.

The first tactical ploy of spiritual opposition is Satan’s ridicule of God’s people. The enemy’s ridicule comes to the forefront in the first two verses of chapter 4:

> When Sanballat heard that we were rebuilding the wall, he became angry and was greatly incensed. He ridiculed the Jews, and in the presence of his associates and the army of Samaria, he said, “What are those feeble Jews doing? Will they restore their wall? Will they offer sacrifices? Will they finish in a day? Can they bring the stones back to life from those heaps of rubble—burned as they are?” (Neh 4:1-2)

Sanballat was the Governor of Samaria. He ruled the region north of Jerusalem. When he heard about the rebuilding project he got “burning mad,” since the rebuilding project was a threat to his power. Tollefson and Williamson explain this threat in further detail:

> The Jerusalem restoration project threatened both the economic and political hegemony of Samaria as well as the military stability of the surrounding region. In a series of swift and decisive actions, the leaders in Samaria are described as rapidly
escalating the level of opposition from sabre-rattling speeches to the threat of an all-out military attack.26

Sanballat and his associates were much better off politically if Jerusalem and its residents were to remain weak and in ruins. As a messenger of Satan, Sanballat begins ridiculing God’s people. Breneman comments on the underlying principle that triggered Sanballat’s anger:

Sanballat knew that a restored Jerusalem would lessen his influence in the area. Thus he was greatly angered and intent on discouraging Nehemiah’s project, even though he knew it had the approval of the Persian court. Anger will often be the world’s response to God’s work because it challenges worldviews and values. Much of the opposition to the work consisted of psychological warfare. The first opposition came in the form of ridicule, often sufficient to stifle the spirit and work of anyone.27

A second ploy of Satan is mockery. At this point it would be helpful to fast forward to the New Testament. When Jesus Christ was being tried, scourged, flogged, and as he carried his cross to Calvary, he was heavily mocked and ridiculed. People came out of every crack and crevice, motivated and inspired by Satan himself, to mock the Lord Jesus Christ (Matt 27:27-31). One of the chief characteristics of the enemy is that he is a mocker.

As the citizens of Jerusalem worked to rebuild the walls, spiritual opposition came in the form of mockery. This time Satan’s messenger was Tobiah, the Governor of the Trans-Jordan. Nehemiah 4:3 records Tobiah’s words of mockery and opposition toward the work of God’s people: Tobiah the Ammonite, who was at his side, said, “What they are building—even a fox climbing up on it, he would break down their wall of stones!” Brown states,

Tobiah joins in the ridicule, demeaning their efforts. He relieves his annoyance by channeling the bitterness into a sick jokc: What they are building -0- if even a fox climbed up on it, he would break down their wall of stones (3). Kathleen Kenyon’s archaeological excavations on Nehemiah’s walls revealed that they were nine feet thick. Tobiah hoped that his sick humour might cause the builders to cast an


apprehensive glance at their hard work and so activate an avalanche of discouragement.  

The efforts of Sanballat and Tobiah did not seem to make much of an impact on the wall builders. However, when Satan’s methods of ridicule and mockery do not seem to work he further intensifies his efforts.

The third tactical ploy of spiritual opposition God’s people face from the enemy is force. Verses 7 and 8 describe the force of opposition God’s people experienced:

But when Sanballat, Tobiah, the Arabs, the Ammonites and the people of Ashdod heard that the repairs to Jerusalem’s walls had gone ahead and that the gaps were being closed, they were very angry. They all plotted together to come and fight against Jerusalem and stir up trouble against it. (Neh 4:7-8)

The opposition to the strategic plan of rebuilding has increased immensely. The builders in Jerusalem were now surrounded on all sides by mockers, ridiculers, and those who want to use brute force to stop the work of God. Boice brings the reader’s attention to the conditions the workers faced at this point as the opposition intensified:

First, it came at a low point in the people’s circumstances. when they were tired. The people had been working with all their heart, as Nehemiah records (v 6). The wall had reached half its height. But there was still half the wall to go, and the strength and resolve of the people were already beginning to give out. Second, it came from powerful foes. To realize the force of this threat, we need to visualize it geographically. Samaria was to the north. Ammon was to the east. The Arabs were to the south. The people of Ashdod were to the west. In other words, the opposition of Sanballat and Tobiah was now a coalition of those who together entirely surrounded Jerusalem.

When it comes to the work and ministry of God’s church, there will always be Sanballats, Tobiahs, and people of Ashdod who will stand in spiritual opposition to the process of strategic planning and rebuilding. The question is not whether they exist, the question is how would God want his church to respond to them? In the midst of such opposition, Nehemiah once again turns to the spiritual weapon of prayer: “Hear us, our God, for we are despised. Turn their insults back on their own heads. Give them over as plunder in a land of captivity. Do not cover up their guilt or blot out their sins from your sight, for

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28 Brown, The Message of Nehemiah, 73.

29 Boice, Nehemiah, 55-56.
they have thrown insults in the face of the builders” (Neh 4:4-5). He prays for God to handle this problem of evil and spiritual opposition that is coming against him and God’s people. Nehemiah fought his spiritual battles in prayer. Every prayer-focused and spirit-filled church is commanded to do the same. Holmgren offers the following explanation for Nehemiah’s somewhat unorthodox and yet passionate plea to God to overcome his enemies:

The fierceness of v. 5 may startle the reader: “Do not cover their guilt, and let not their sin be blotted out from thy sight” (cf. Jer 18:23). With these words, Nehemiah pleads that the malicious acts against the Jews not be allowed to fade quietly into the past and be forgotten. Let there be no easy “forgive and forget” response to those who have caused so much pain to a struggling community.30

Breneman provides wisdom and insight from the Scriptures concerning Nehemiah’s prayer:

Nehemiah’s prayer has much in common with imprecations in the Psalms and in Jeremiah (11:18-20; 15:15; 17:18; 18:19-23). Such requests seem at odds with the teaching of Christ on loving our enemies. A number of points in response to this issue should be made: (1) Nehemiah’s request, like imprecations elsewhere, was for divine judgment against sin, a clear teaching in Scripture. The prayer in v. 5 for God not to cover their enemy’s guilt was not a prayer against their salvation but for divine justice. (2) It was a prayer for God to act, not for permission to take personal vengeance (cf. Rom 12:19-21). (3) It expressed zeal for God’s work and God’s honor. Nehemiah had no doubts that the building of the wall was God’s doing, so opposition to it was opposition to God.

Christians are under the new covenant and are admonished to love our enemies and to make it our primary concern to lead a wicked world to faith and forgiveness through the message of the cross. Nevertheless, God’s people can ask him to judge injustice and to thwart the plans of those who would hinder God’s work.31

Holmgren and Breneman’s comments are a reminder and provide a healthy balance for Christians and churches, to pray for their enemies—even for those who may violently stand in opposition to the Lord’s work.

Not only did Nehemiah have a heart to pray, but he also had a mind to work. In the midst of spiritual opposition he says, “So we rebuilt the wall till all of it reached half

30 Holmgren, Ezra & Nehemiah, 105.

31 Breneman, Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther, 194-95.
its height, for the people worked with all their heart” (Neh 4:6). When Nehemiah finished praying he got off his knees with a renewed spirit to lead the people to stay the course—to continue doing the work God had called them to do.

As the opposition increased and intensified (from ridicule to mockery to force), Nehemiah steps up his strategy for prayer. Not only does he lead the people to pray, he also posts a watchman day and night: “But we prayed to our God and posted a guard day and night to meet this threat” (v. 9).

Many times in the Old Testament, city rulers and leaders would post watchmen on the wall for several important reasons: First was to warn the city of an enemy attack. Second, the watchman was stationed to keep the enemy at bay. And thirdly, the watchman on the wall accepted the responsibility of praying over the city. The enemy is hurling threats of impending force. In response, Nehemiah does two things: he watches and he prays.

Nehemiah’s example in the midst of opposition is a stark reminder for the church. Strategic planning and the rebuilding of God’s church will be met with ongoing, intense spiritual opposition from the enemy. One of the amazing truths from Nehemiah 4 is that God has given the church everything she needs for gaining victory, to overcome the tactical ploys of the enemy, and to finish strong the work God has called her to do. Reading further into Nehemiah’s memoirs, it is written that miraculously under the divine guidance of God and through Nehemiah’s gifted leadership, the people of God rebuilt the city walls of Jerusalem in just fifty-two days. Two verses in Nehemiah record this amazing miracle: “So the wall was completed on the twenty-fifth of Elul, in fifty-two days. When all our enemies heard about this, all the surrounding nations were afraid and lost their self-confidence, because they realized that this work had been done with the help of our God” (Neh 6:15-16).

The actual physical rebuilding of the wall was completed in a mere fifty-two days—a miracle performed by the hand of God as he chose to work through his people.
However, as important as it was for the city’s walls to be rebuilt, this was only a symbol of the greater work of rebuilding that God desired to do in their lives spiritually.

**Nehemiah 8-10: Vital Signs of Revival**

A study of Nehemiah 8-10 uncovers three vital signs for revival that are essential for the strategic planning and rebuilding God’s church: (1) a renewed hunger for God’s Word, (2) crying out to God in prayer, and (3) demonstrating the commitment of putting God first—by making a covenant with God and his people.

The word “revival” means “to bring back to life.” The Scriptures indicate that revival is something God desires for his people. Spiritually, as the principles of revival are learned and applied, it is God’s heart’s desire to bring his people back to life—referring to a work only God can do in the church. The first vital sign of true revival happens when God’s people develop a renewed hunger for God’s Word.

Brown notes the progression of events following the rebuilding of the city’s wall:

As soon as the building work came to an end, an unusual event took place which was to prove dramatically influential in the spiritual life of God’s people. The work was finished during the late summer month of Elul (6:15), and the next month, Tishri, marked the beginning of the year. The first day of this seventh month was a public holiday known as the Feast of trumpets. So, only a few days after the completion of the building project, hundreds of men, women and children gathered in Jerusalem for a new year celebration in which God’s written Word played a central part. An outdoor public meeting was devoted entirely to hearing the reading and interpretation of Scripture.32

As Ezra the scribe read from the Book of the Law, the people were eager to listen:

All the people came together as one in the square before the Water Gate. They told Ezra the teacher of the Law to bring out the Book of the Law of Moses, which the LORD had commanded for Israel. So on the first day of the seventh month Ezra the priest brought the Law before the assembly, which was made up of men and women and all who were able to understand. He read it aloud from daybreak till noon as he faced the square before the Water Gate in the presence of the men, women and

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others who could understand. And all the people listened attentively to the Book of the Law. (Neh 8:1-3)

Offering insight for the people’s attentiveness to Ezra’s teachings, Lawson states,

Before opening his mouth to teach the Law, Ezra lived a life of obedience, practicing what he preached. But before he practiced and proclaimed the Word, he first set his heart to study it. God’s sovereign hand of blessing was on him (7:6, 9, 28; 8:18, 22, 31) because he was so completely immersed in His Word (7:10). It was Ezra’s all-absorbing commitment to the Scriptures that enabled him to impact his generation. These three aspects of his Word-oriented ministry—learn it, live it, and let it out—formed the solid foundation of his life and ministry, and provide a clear and compelling pattern for all who preach and teach the Word today.33

Through Ezra’s commitment to personally study, teach, and apply the Scriptures, along with a spirit of readiness God had placed in the hearts of the people, suggests why verse 3 says, “All the people listened attentively” to God’s Word. The people demonstrated a genuine hunger for God’s Word. Holmgren writes, “At the beginning of a new era in the history of Israel, the Jews demonstrate their desire to listen to the Torah, which holds out success and life to those who obey its commandments (Josh. 1:7; Deut. 30:15-30).”34 Boice adds,

The people showed extraordinary reverence for the Law, for they rose in respectful silence when Ezra opened the scroll. When he prayed, they responded, “Amen! Amen!” and worshiped God. As the account unfolds, we discover that the reading of the Law led to national revival.35

J. I. Packer states, “In God’s sovereign strategy for world history there are times when the Spirit works with particular power to stir up this motivation, not just in some few individuals but in entire communities, and this was one such time.”36

Nehemiah 8:5-6 says,

Ezra opened the book. All the people could see him because he was standing above them; and as he opened it, the people all stood up. Ezra praised the LORD, the great

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34 Holmgren, Ezra & Nehemiah, 123.

35 Boice, Nehemiah, 90.

36 Packer, A Passion for Faithfulness, 151.
God; and all the people lifted their hands and responded, “Amen! Amen!” Then they bowed down and worshiped the LORD with their faces to the ground.

When Ezra opened the book, the people heard from God and their response was one of worship. Breneman comments on the people’s response to the reading of the Law (v. 6):

This verse makes clear that the respect the people had for “the book” came not because they considered it an object of veneration but because it was their word from God who deserved their praise and worship.

“All the people . . . responded” in a splendid example of unified worship as the leader raised his voice in praise and the people responded. The people responded (1) by lifting their hands in worship and showing a sense of need: (2) by saying, “Amen! Amen!” and thus affirming their submission to the authority of Scripture; and (3) by bowing down to the ground with a sense of humility and submission before God. 37

Nehemiah 8:7-8 indicates that it was the Levites God-ordained responsibility to explain the Scriptures to the people. The Levites role was one of interpreting what Ezra had just read. Likely they gathered the people into smaller groups, “Making it clear and giving the meaning so that the people could understand what was being read.” After the Levites had finished explaining the Scriptures, along with instruction from Ezra and Nehemiah (Neh 8:9-10), the people were moved beyond having only a mere knowledge of God’s Word. They now had an understanding of the Scriptures which would soon progress into the application of God’s Word for their daily lives: “Then all the people went away to eat and drink, to send portions of food and to celebrate with great joy, because they had now understood the words that had been made known to them” (Neh 8:12).

What a difference it makes when people are hungry for God’s Word. Great delight is found in church members who know their pastors and spiritual leaders will take the time to read and explain the Bible so God’s truths may be understood and applied. Therefore, the first vital sign of revival, where the people have a renewed hunger for God’s Word, is necessary for effective strategic planning to occur.

A second vital sign of revival involves the people crying out to God in prayer.

37 Breneman, Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther, 225.
Nehemiah 9:1-3 clearly demonstrates the impact of prayer. Packer comments, “Out of the revival that began at the Water Gate on the first day of Tisri the most significant gesture of response to God’s grace and visitation was still to come. On the twenty-fourth of that month a national day of repentance and recommitment was held.”

On the twenty-fourth day of the same month, the Israelites gathered together, fasting and wearing sackcloth and putting dust on their heads. Those of Israelite descent had separated themselves from all foreigners. They stood in their places and confessed their sins and the sins of their ancestors. They stood where they were and read from the Book of the Law of the LORD their God for a quarter of the day, and spent another quarter in confession and in worshiping the LORD their God. (Neh 9:1-3)

Kidner weighs in on the unique timing concerning the sequence of events recorded in Nehemiah 8 and 9:

The timing of this act of penitence, on the twenty-fourth day of this month, is of some interest, first because it reverses the sequence we might have expected, by putting the fasting after the feasting of chapter 8, and secondly because it allowed a day’s interval between the two occasions. The feast had finished on the twenty-second; those who stayed on were doing so by deliberate choice. As for the sequence. Nehemiah’s quick reaction against a tearful response to the law at its earlier reading (8:9-12) shows that he was profoundly eager to associate God’s will with delight. But now it was equally important to set this delight firmly in contrast to the gall of sin, and to face the facts of the past and the challenge of the future.39

The people were crying out to God in prayer. Fensham explains the passion and intensity of prayer as the people were fasting and wearing sackcloth and having dust on their head (v. 1). This was the general sign of mourning and of displaying the frailty of mankind. Wearing sackcloth symbolized mourning and humility. Reading the Book of the Law (v. 3) made the people realize that they and their ancestors had constantly failed to keep the covenant with God. It is of interest that the congregation did not only confess their own sins, but also those of their ancestors. They felt their solidarity with past generations.40

Nehemiah 9 is a record of the children of Israel specifically confessing and repenting of personal sin, the sins of their families, and the sins of their forefathers. It is the conviction of this writer, that prayer, confession, and repentance are all gifts from God and are vital


39Kidner, *Ezra and Nehemiah*, 120.

signs toward revival among God’s people.

Boice rightly points out that the prayers expressed in Nehemiah 9 are born out of the people’s encounter with the Word of God:

The confession of the people was once again linked to the reading of God’s Law. This happened on the first day of the month (recorded in ch. 8). It happened again here. It was after the priest had been reading from the “Book of the Law of the Lord their God for a quarter of the day” that the people spent the next quarter of the day (three hours) confessing their sin. What I am pointing out here is more than just an observation. There is a necessary link between the two. (1) There can be no genuine forward progress for either a nation or an individual without an acknowledgment of, sorrow for, and a true turning from sin. In other words, nations only move forward in times of revival. (2) But there can be no true sense of what sin is or a knowledge of why it is sinful without a hearing of and response to the Law of God. That is, we will never acknowledge sin to be sin or grieve over it unless we see it as an offense against God, and the only way we will ever see or sense that it is an offense against God is by seeing our actions as contrary to God’s written law. (3) Consequently, revival must be preceded by sound preaching of the whole counsels of God, particularly the Law of God, which we have violated.  

As the Israelites encountered God through his Word, they readily recognized the many years they had lived in sin and rebellion before him. They openly confessed their sins, and yet at the same time, they acknowledged God’s faithfulness through prayer. God had been faithful to them in spite of their sin and rebellion. Their prayer of honest confession before God, led to genuine repentance. Proof of their repentance soon became evident in Nehemiah 10, where they committed together to make a covenant before God.

Nehemiah 10 provides a third vital sign of revival. The last verse of Nehemiah 9 says, “In view of all this, we are making a binding agreement, putting it in writing, and our leaders, our Levites and our priests are affixing their seals to it.” Fensham describes the significance of God’s people entering into this type of covenant:

The author describes here a covenant renewal. After the confession of sin in ch. 9, this approach to solving the problem is understandable. They must come into a new relationship with the Lord. *Made a firm covenant*, literally “We cut a firmness,” which is a surrogate for making a covenant. *Set their seal to it*, literally “And on the seal were our leaders.”

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A covenant is a very serious commitment which signifies a very special, unique kind of relationship. The covenant in Nehemiah was an official sealed document. As a sign of spiritual renewal, God’s people affix their names to this covenant before him. Holmgren explains the scriptural basis for “covenant” in greater detail:

One is surprised to find that the customary term for “covenant” (berith; cf., Neh. 9:8; Ezra 10:3) is not used to describe this covenanting act in 9:38. The one Hebrew term employed here, which must be translated by the use of two English words is ‘amanah. It comes from the Hebrew root ‘aman, which means to be steady or faithful. This same Hebrew root was used of Abraham in 9:8. It is said of Abraham that God found “his heart faithful [a niphal participle of ‘aman] before thee.” Although “a firm covenant” is a good translation of the Hebrew Term ‘amanah in 9:38, it could also be rendered “a faithful agreement.”

The terms of the covenant consisted of four major areas. The first of the covenant realities was the fact that the Israelites made a commitment to be people of the Book. This meant they were fully committed to living their lives by the standard of God’s Word. “All these now join their fellow Israelites the nobles, and bind themselves with a curse and an oath to follow the Law of God given through Moses the servant of God and to obey carefully all the commands, regulations and decrees of the LORD our Lord” (Neh 10:29). Breneman discusses the people’s commitment to the Word (10:29):

Submission to the authority of God’s Word is the unmistakable command here. The postexilic community was experiencing many problems, both ethical and religious. The first step toward solving these problems was a commitment by the whole community to submit to the authority of God’s revelation as found in the Scriptures. The same is true for God’s people today. This commitment to the authority of Scripture must be applied to present situations, for “true religion cannot be merely general principles.” The principles must be applied to specific actions and decisions.

For the church to be effective in obediently fulfilling the strategic plan given by God, they must covenant together before God to be a people of the Book. This means every decision and action taken by the church must flow out of the Scriptures.

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43 Holmgren, Ezra & Nehemiah, 136.

44 Breneman, Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther, 246-47.
A second stipulation of the covenant has to do with leading their homes and families spiritually: “We promise not to give our daughters in marriage to the peoples around us or take their daughters for our sons” (Neh 10:30). The specific issue in verse 30 is the concern for God’s people not to intermarry with foreigners. In the New Testament, Paul addresses this issue in a similar fashion (2 Cor 6:14-7:1). The principle basically instructs Christians not to marry an unbeliever. Concerning the second stipulation of the covenant, Brown elaborates in further detail:

Israel’s problem was that by wrong relationships their distinctive witness would be nullified. God’s destiny for them was that they might be a missionary people, so it was vital that their message not be corrupted. In a culture where they were ceaselessly exposed to neighboring religions, other gods came to have a fascinating attraction for them. There were scriptural, historical, moral and contemporary reasons why marriages with pagan people were disastrous. First, there were clear biblical warnings about the danger of corrupting their faith through an unsuitable marriage. Secondly, there was abundant historical evidence that forbidden marriage alliances of that kind had been disastrous in Israel’s spiritual and moral life. Thirdly, there were moral reasons why the Israelite people were forbidden to marry partners from other nations. Fourthly, Nehemiah and his colleagues were aware from the contemporary scene that it was disastrous for an Israelite believer to marry someone committed to the worship of other gods. Israel had been entrusted with the most wonderful message in the world and nothing was to be allowed to corrupt it.45

Strategic planning and rebuilding involves the people of God placing high value on spiritually healthy marriages and families.

A third term of the covenant indicates the people were committed to obeying the principle of keeping the Sabbath. The following verse describes their Sabbath commitment: “When the neighboring peoples bring merchandise or grain to sell on the Sabbath, we will not buy from them on the Sabbath or on any holy day. Every seventh year we will forgo working the land and will cancel all debts” (Neh 10:31).

Fensham discusses the economic sacrifice the children of Israel were making to keep the Sabbath holy:

In the Ten Commandments, the keeping of the Sabbath as a day of rest which is sacred to the Lord is prescribed (Exod. 20:8-11; Deut. 5:12-15). For a small religious community in a world of heathens who did not hold the Sabbath law, it

became more and more difficult to keep it. The foreign merchants arrived in Jerusalem on the Sabbath and wanted to do business (Neh. 13:16). The way of least resistance was for the Jews to accommodate themselves to these foreign customs. But in this verse the Jews out themselves under obligation to withhold from participating in any transactions on the Sabbath. The sabbath, the holy day.\textsuperscript{46}

Even though Christians today are not under the Sabbath laws of the Old Testament (Gal 4:10), there are Sabbath principles which still do apply. Brown affirms by saying, “God’s provision of this special day in each week is an important ‘paradigm’ or model for believers.” Quoting G.A.F Knight, Brown adds,

Those who emphasize the Sabbath as a creation ordinance are right in reminding us that “all work and no rest” is a recipe for physical and family breakdown. Neither the great world empires nor Israel’s immediate neighbors “ever thought of ‘stopping’ work (as the word means literally) one day in seven so as to give ordinary people, the masses of humanity, a complete day of rest.” It was God’s unique provision not only for his covenant people but, through them, for everyone, so that “those same commonfolk might be taught to possess a God-centered theology.”\textsuperscript{47}

Concerning the fourth area of the covenant, God’s people committed to faithfully support the ministry of God’s church financially (Neh 10:32-39). Interestingly, this section of the covenant is the longest. God makes it unquestioningly clear, that is, the priority of supporting the Lord’s work.

Brown suggests several covenant promises the people were making to “not neglect the house of our God”:

The passage covers an impressive series of promises to support God’s work in a variety of different ways, and suggests a number of insights into the importance of Christian giving. (1) The Israelites recognized the necessity of responsible giving (32, 35). (2) The people responded to God’s Word by obedient giving (32-36). (3) The promise recognized the necessity of obligatory giving. There was nothing remotely optional about the support of God’s work. Everyone was required to give in one form or another. (4) The people also recognized the need for systematic giving (32-35). (5) The reference to the wood offering suggest that proportionate giving played some part in the people’s contributions to the temple (34). (6) These citizens also knew that they were called to sacrificial giving (35).\textsuperscript{48}

\textsuperscript{46}Fensham, \textit{The Books of Ezra and Nehemiah}, 239-40.

\textsuperscript{47}Brown, \textit{The Message of Nehemiah}, 184-85.

\textsuperscript{48}Ibid, 188-91.
The church is made up of the covenant people of God. A covenant states the commitments God’s people are willing to make together as the body of Christ. Boice affirms the need for covenant-making among Christians and churches today:

The very act of becoming a Christian is something of a covenant, for when we repent of our sin and turn in faith to Christ as our Savior, we also promise to follow him and serve him as our Lord. When we baptize we enter into a covenant. When we join a church we make a covenant. Why should other important spiritual steps be any different? Why should we not frequently determine to change for the better—and covenant to do so?

I suggest that you formally covenant to put God first in everything you do: order your marriage or family according to the Bible’s standards, set aside one day in seven to worship and serve God in the company of other Christians, tithe your income for the Lord’s work—and do whatever else God puts it upon your mind to do for him. And make it a lifetime commitment!  

Each of the three vital signs for revival examined in Nehemiah 8-10 provides necessary components toward strategic planning and the spiritual principles essential for rebuilding God’s church. For Nehemiah and the people, the city’s walls had now been rebuilt. Spiritual renewal and revival had also come to God’s people. Next for the Israelites came the time to celebrate the success of the Lord’s strategic plan which had happened in their lives and city.

Nehemiah 12:27-47: The Celebration of Rebuilding through Strategic Planning

As a result of true revival and rebuilding through strategic planning, the outflow of such an experience is that God is worshiped and celebrated by his people as an expression of gratitude for all he has done in their lives. Nehemiah 12:27-47 provides the details of such a celebration. Indeed a new day had dawned on God’s people in Jerusalem:

At the dedication of the wall of Jerusalem, the Levites were sought out from where they lived and were brought to Jerusalem to celebrate joyfully the dedication with songs of thanksgiving and with the music of cymbals, harps and lyres. The musicians also were brought together from the region around Jerusalem—from the villages of the Netophathites, from Beth Gilgal, and from the area of Geba and Azmaveth, for the musicians had built villages for themselves around Jerusalem. (Neh 12:27-29)

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49Boice, Nehemiah, 113-14.
These verses describe religious leaders, singers, and musicians all coming from surrounding communities and regions for a time of celebration and dedication. After years of living in physical and spiritual ruins, God had given his people new life and purpose—in a sense, they were now a repurposed people of God. Williamson explains the significance of this climactic moment in Israel’s history:

The dedication of the newly built wall of Jerusalem is a climax to the books of Ezra and Nehemiah. It marks the last stage in the long process of restoration following the exile, a process which began with the return of the people and the building of the temple, was continued with internal reform on the basis of the Book of the Law and now culminates in a celebration of the rebuilt and repopulated holy city. The account is unique in its emphasis on unalloyed joy; only the account of the dedication of the temple approaches it in this; cf. Ezra 6:16-22.\(^50\)

The next step for the Israelites was to spiritually prepare themselves to meet God in worship. Nehemiah 12:30 briefly describes the process of spiritual preparation and purification as the people offered themselves in dedication to God: “When the priests and Levites had purified themselves ceremonially, they purified the people, the gates and the wall.” Boice describes the dedication process in greater detail:

In Nehemiah 12, the priests and Levites were the first to dedicate (or, as it says, “purify”) themselves, which is fitting since they were the ones who were to conduct the dedication service. We are not told what this work of purification consisted of, but it was probably ceremonial washings of themselves and their clothes, fasting, abstinence from sexual intercourse, and sin offerings. The people were next. They probably merely washed themselves and their clothing, though they may have been asked to abstain from sexual relations too. The gates and wall would have been dedicated by using a hyssop brush to sprinkle them with the blood sacrifices and with water.\(^51\)

Since the church today is made up of a new covenant people, the practice of purification looks much differently than it did in Nehemiah’s day (1 John 1:7-9). The emphasis however is still the same—God calls his leaders and his people to live holy lives. The process of purification as a new covenant people today includes, but is not limited to, the spiritual disciplines of prayer, fasting, confession of sin, receiving

\(^{50}\)Williamson, *Ezra, Nehemiah*, 375.

\(^{51}\)Boice, *Nehemiah*, 129.
forgiveness of sin, repentance, and restitution.

Verses 31-42 describe Nehemiah directing the people to position themselves on top of the city’s walls for a great time of celebration. The newly repaired walls are approximately nine feet thick. Breneman confirms the thickness of the walls: “The walls were wide enough for the processions referred to. According to Kenyon’s excavations, Nehemiah’s wall was nearly nine feet wide.”52 The first choir was led by Ezra the scribe. The second choir was led by Nehemiah himself. Yamauchi describes the procession of choirs:

There were two great processions, starting probably from the area of the Valley Gate (2:13,15; 3:13) in the center of the western section of the wall. The first procession led by Ezra (v. 36) and Hoshiaiah (v. 32) moved in a counterclockwise direction on the wall; the second with Nehemiah moved in a clockwise direction. They met between the Prison Gate and the Water Gate and then entered the temple area (cf. Ps 48:12-13).53

Thousands of people are on top of the wall celebrating, offering their praise and worship to God. There was the sound of musical instruments and singing—every voice and instrument was praising God. Every step the people took, they worshipped. What a celebration! For these two choirs, their destination ultimately was the temple—the house of God.

What God had done in the city of Jerusalem and in the lives of his people resulted in great joy. Nehemiah 12:43 describes the far-reaching impact of this uncontainable joy as it is expressed and released through the praises of God’s children: “And on that day they offered great sacrifices, rejoicing because God had given them great joy. The women and children also rejoiced. The sound of rejoicing in Jerusalem could be heard far away.” While they were still a people who were facing difficult times and challenges, God indeed had changed them on the inside. They were now a repurposed people for God. Holmgren explains their reason for such great joy:

52Breneman, Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther, 266.
53Yamauchi, Ezra, Nehemiah, 756.
Once Jerusalem’s humiliation and pain were known far and wide (Lam. 4:12, 15; Ezek. 26:2); now it is her joy that is “heard far off: (Neh. 12:43; cf. Ezra 3:13). Yahweh “dwell” once again in Jerusalem. Although Jerusalem does not actually have the name given it in Ezek. 48:35 (“Yahweh is there”), it is the sense of his presence among the Jews in the city that produces this happiness. Along with the singing and rejoicing at the dedication of the wall, there must have been also the hope that this was the beginning of Yahweh’s new creation in which Jerusalem would be a center of joy and a city of peace (Isa. 65:17-25) – truly a city like the “Jerusalem above” (Gal. 4:26; Rev. 21:1-4).54

Verse 43 says, “The sound of rejoicing in Jerusalem could be heard far away.”

Fensham comments,

The final consummation of Nehemiah’s work has been reached. The city was protected by a wall and could resist any attempt of the neighboring nations to attack it. This was one of the main reasons for the joy. The other was that people had demonstrated that they could perform a major task as a unit, and this proved to be a great stimulus to their morale.55

After 140 years of living among unfathomable ruins, the long and hard arduous work, both physically and spiritually to rebuild Jerusalem’s holy city, was finally accomplished. Upon the fulfillment of these things in Nehemiah 12: 44-47, the Scriptures explain how the people demonstrate obedience to God out of his abundant provision for them. The people commit to provide financially for God’s servants and toward the work and ministry of furthering God’s kingdom. Allen and Laniak explain, “The joy of worship (v. 43) shifted to the joy of giving to maintain the infrastructure for worship. As a result, the temple staff could do their work for God.”56

The Nehemiah model for strategic planning results in a Spirit-filled celebration; which ultimately leads to a greater obedience and generosity by God’s people. Holmgren says, “It is an idyllic picture of the postexilic community in which laity and clergy perform faithfully the tasks assigned.”57 The good news is that this picture describes a people

54Holmgren, Ezra & Nehemiah, 146.
56Allen and Laniak, Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther, 160.
57Holmgren, Ezra and Nehemiah, 146.
committed to covenant together to fulfill the strategic plan God has for their lives and his church.

Concerning Jerusalem’s newly developed covenant community, Landon says, Nehemiah was able to lead the Jews in Jerusalem to rebuild their city wall and gates and, in the process, rebuild their lives around God's will (Neh 8-12) A faulty vision of reality, fear, greed, and ego-centroism is the tool of the Devil to keep us confused, isolated from others, and unproductive in the Lord's work Recognizing our own part in building a divided society, fearing God more than people who are different from us, depositing our treasures in the local Bank of Heaven, and developing a little bit of practical humility can help us build helpful relationships with God's creatures living in pain and poverty and imitate Nehemiah, a hero of community development. 58

As chapter 12 draws toward a conclusion, Nehemiah uses verses 44-47 to remind his readers that although times of success among God’s people must be celebrated, the work of God must also go on. Boice affirms,

It means that times of rejoicing, though important, are not ends in themselves but are meant to be additional ongoing moments in the lives of those who have given themselves to God. Rejoice in God? Of course! We above all people should in God. In fact, only those who have been redeemed by the Lord Jesus Christ have any real and deep cause for rejoicing. But that is not all we have to do. We have work to do too, and we must get on with it. 59

The same can be said for the church that experiences a great work of God through strategic planning. There is definitely reason for worship and celebration. And yet, in many ways the work has just begun. Hence, the church is called to covenant together for the purpose of fulfilling the unique strategic plan of God he has set forth in the Nehemiah model. In this chapter, the Nehemiah model for strategic planning has been theologically and biblically substantiated and is worthy of every church’s prayers, consideration, and pursuit.

59Boice, Nehemiah, 132.
CHAPTER 3
THEORETICAL AND PRACTICAL ISSUES

Introduction

Current marketplace strategic planning yields a vast array of concepts and principles; many of which bring unquestionable value to strategic planning in the church. In their book *Plan or Die!*, Nolan, Goodstein, and Pfeiffer point out that “strategic planning and strategic management (the day-to-day implementation of the strategic plan) are the two most important, never-ending jobs of management, especially top management.”¹ This statement strongly emphasizes both the priority of envisioning the future through strategy formulation and development, while also taking daily the necessary steps of implementation toward making the plan become a reality.

There are several foundational questions which must be considered at the beginning of this chapter. Those questions include, what is strategy? What is strategic thinking? What is strategic planning? And how are these terms defined in the marketplace? First of all, what is meant by strategy? Finnie defines strategy:

> Strategy is concerned with developing a vision and a coherent set of action plans for making the vision a reality. The vision should be challenging but achievable. It should be instantly understandable and grab people in their gut—since motivated people are the essential element in implementation.²

A second term to define is strategic thinking. According to Birnbaum,

> Strategic thinking is a top-down, “big picture” view of your entire organization. It’s based on a deep understanding of your business. Strategic thinking will lead you to


consider the needs of your customer, the benefits you offer that customer, and the reason your customer buys your products or services. . . . Strategic thinking is now more important than ever before. Success today calls for a far greater level of strategic thinking than it did just a decade ago. In fact, here in our 21st century, strategic thinking has become a prerequisite to success. We’ve seen the business environment become far tougher and far less forgiving of mediocrity.3

As Birnbaum suggests, strategic thinking is vital to the success of every organization. Therefore, business leaders are called to a deep understanding of both the internal and external factors related to the organization’s strategic context. Finally, a third term to define is strategic planning. Bryson provides the following definition: “Strategic planning is a disciplined effort to produce fundamental decisions and actions that shape and guide what an organization (or other entity) is, what it does, and why it does it.”4

Statistics from recent years remarkably demonstrate the great need and priority for strategy, strategic thinking, and strategic planning in the business environment. Mancuso states that “over half of new businesses fail within the first two years of operation—over 90 percent fail within the first ten years. A major reason for failure is lack of planning. The best way to enhance your chances of success is to plan and follow through on your planning.”5 Sullivan also cites planning as one of the top keys for a business to succeed:

A major reason for business failure is lack of planning. Prepare a strategic plan for your business that clearly defines your mission, your present situation, your strategies, and where you want to be in the next three to five years. This plan will be your roadmap to effective decision making.6


As Sullivan has stated so succinctly, a well-thought out and crafted strategic plan will help guide every decision of the business for several years to come. It is understood then that those businesses choosing to operate without such a plan will face a future of impending doom, which likely will mean closing its doors in a relatively short period of time.

This chapter’s focus examines the theoretical and practical issues of strategic planning with the determination of showing the value of marketplace principles for strategic planning in the church. First is the need for understanding that strategic context in the marketplace does greatly assist the church in its analysis of the internal and external factors pertaining to its own ministry context. Second, teamwork and collaboration in the marketplace will be explored. There are many benefits of working together collaboratively as the strategic planning team leads the church toward strategic change. Third, formulating strategy will be examined. The basic principles of formulating strategy in the marketplace help guide the church toward accomplishing its vision, mission, values, goals, objectives, and overall strategic intent and stretch. Finally, a study of successful marketplace strategic planning seeks to engage the entire organization toward implementation and execution of the plan. For the local church, this step affirms the value and necessity of securing buy-in, accepting ownership, and taking responsibility by all members in an effort to execute the adopted strategic plan successfully.

**Understanding Strategic Context**

The business climate is changing at a more rapid pace than ever before. Hence, business strategies also must be ever-changing to give companies a competitive edge and an opportunity for success. Understanding strategic context in the marketplace is paramount to the strategic planning process. In his book *Deep Dive: The Proven Method for Building Strategy, Focusing Your Resources, and Taking Smart Action*, Rich Horwath quotes Nitin Nohria, a professor at Harvard Business School: “The central lesson we can take from business history is that context matters. The ability to understand the zeitgeist
and pursue the unique opportunities it presents for each company is what separates the truly great from the merely competent.”

In its most basic definition, strategic context consists of the external and internal factors that influence a company’s current reality. Offering insight into strategic context, Anderson explains,

What I’ve found over the years is that it’s essential to be clear about where you are starting from before you can think productively about where you want to go. I suggest you spend some time getting a clear sense of your beginning point, your current reality. I call it the “what is.”

It is imperative for a marketplace leader to guide those in the organization to understand the significance of the strategic context in their unique setting. Concerning this issue, Bryson states,

Leaders should help constituents view the organization and the need for organizational change in the context of relevant social, political, economic, and technical systems and trends. They should take a long view backward over the organization’s history and even its prehistory in order to help people in the organization think more wisely about the future. At the same time, they must avoid being captured by that history. They must see history as the interplay of continuity and change, and recognize how best to balance these forces in a given context. They will need insight about how today’s major global developments—such as the global marketplace, the information revolution, the push for democratization and human rights, and the attention to multiculturalism—affect the organization. They must also have an intimate knowledge of the organization in order to make sense of that organization in relation to the broader context.

Anderson and Bryson’s insightful comments are a powerful reminder that there are many factors which must be considered by the company’s leaders tasked with the responsibility of strategic planning. Giving weighty consideration to each of these factors will create a better understanding of an organization’s strategic context.

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8 Erika Andersen, Being Strategic: Plan for Success, Out-Think Your Competitors, Stay Ahead of Change (New York: St. Martin’s, 2010), 46-47.

9 Bryson, Strategic Planning, 298.
External and Internal Analysis

Understanding strategic context is best determined by those tasked with the responsibility of strategic planning as they perform an analysis of the company’s external and internal environment. Strategic analysis is the most time-consuming step in the strategic planning process. However, the time and effort spent in this area of analysis will pay rich dividends for the team’s understanding of context as well as provide the information necessary to eventually ensure a quality overall strategic plan. In essence, the strategic analysis provides the information that forms the database of the strategic plan.

One of the most common strategic analysis tools used in the marketplace for compiling data is “SWOT.” The acronym, SWOT, stands for a company’s strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. In his book *Strategic Thinking: An Executive Perspective*, Cornelis A. De Kluyver provides a statement of what is involved in the SWOT analysis:

SWOT analysis—the sizing up of a company’s strengths, weaknesses, external opportunities and threats—is a helpful tool for generating a summary of a strategic situation. Strengths and weaknesses can include skills, expertise or technical know-how, particular organizational resources, competitive capabilities, or positional advantages or disadvantages defined by such variables as market share, name or brand recognition, or distribution capabilities. Opportunities and threats typically stem from a company’s external competitive environment. The exit of a competitor, for example, may spell opportunity. New regulation or the emergence of lower-cost technologies, on the other hand, may pose threats.¹⁰

In the simplest of terms, during the SWOT analysis phase, the planning team itemizes both good and bad news, that is, they will list (1) internal good news (strengths) (2) internal bad news (weaknesses) (3) external good news (opportunities), and (4) external bad news (threats). Once the company’s strategic analysis compiled, the data provides several key benefits. According to Bryson,

Among the most important is information vital to the organization’s survival and prosperity. It is difficult to imagine that an organization can be truly effective over

the long haul unless it has intimate knowledge of its strengths and weaknesses in relation to the opportunities it faces.\textsuperscript{11}

During the process of understanding strategic context in every organization, one thing is always true: self-analysis is always difficult. Bradford concurs,

It’s easy to talk yourself into thinking you can do things that you can’t, but these delusions will only offer temporary refuge. If you assume your company has strengths, resources, and capabilities that it doesn’t actually have, you’re going to make some really poor strategic decisions. A lot of companies think they’re good at things they’re really not good at.\textsuperscript{12}

Even though an honest self-analysis of the organization may be difficult, this is a step in the strategic process which truthfully many times must be painstakingly endured. In light of seeking to understand strategic context and analysis, Collins states, “You must maintain unwavering faith that you can and will prevail in the end, regardless of the difficulties, AND at the same time have the discipline to confront the most brutal facts of your current reality, whatever they might be.”\textsuperscript{13}

**Urgency and Change**

The results from the strategic analysis provide valuable insights toward gaining a greater understanding of the organization’s strategic context. The purpose of the data gathered during this step is intended to create urgency and a case for change. Finzel defines a case for change as “the rationale you articulate to explain why things are broken, how things are not working right, and the urgency of the risks if solutions are not addressed. It is the first homework of any change agent.”\textsuperscript{14} Finzel adds,

\textsuperscript{11}Bryson, *Strategic Planning*, 129.


\textsuperscript{14}Hans Finzel, *Change is Like a Slinky: 30 Strategies for Promoting and Surviving Change in Your Organization* (Chicago: Northfield, 2004), 139.
Planning for the future is great, but we will never change unless we actually build change processes into our DNA; unless we graft ADHD (Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder) into our organizational synapses. You see, what I’m trying to say through this analogy is that a restless quest for something more, an inability to sit still and sink into the morass of the status quo, is absolutely essential today. We need to be restless, on the move in our quest for change.\textsuperscript{15}

If there were ever a need to create urgency and a case for change, it is in the local church today. Understanding strategic context in the marketplace is a much-needed, intentional process which adds value and greatly assists the church in creating urgency and the need for change. The church strategic planning team’s analysis of the internal and external factors pertaining to their own ministry (strategic) context challenges the church to move beyond the status quo and instead move in a positive direction toward the quest for a better future together.

\textbf{Understanding Strategic Context in the Church}

Understanding the strategic context of the marketplace is a process that adds value to strategic planning in the church, thereby greatly assisting the church in its analysis of the internal and external factors pertaining to its own ministry context. For the church, understanding strategic context involves an analysis of the internal factors, including demographics, life-cycle stage, leadership structure, governance, history, attendance figures, ministry strengths and weaknesses, outreach and in-reach, culture, mission and vision, finances, and obstacles to effective ministry.

The second part of the analysis is external in nature. External factors tell the church what it needs to know about the surrounding community and culture. An external analysis includes demographics, growth trends, opportunities, threats, and competitors. A completed internal and external analysis gives the church an accurate picture of what it needs to know about itself and its community. This is strategic context, and it is crucial information for the church and strategic planning team to gather during the preparatory

\textsuperscript{15}Ibid., 215-16.
stages of strategic planning. Therefore, much valuable information is to be gained for the church who seeks to understand its own strategic context, which involves taking the time and effort to perform an extensive internal and external analysis during the early steps of strategic development.

**Teamwork and Collaboration**

One of the most transformational changes which has occurred concerning strategic planning in the marketplace during the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries has been the transition from top-down autocratic leadership to a more shared leadership model. Finzel states, “The number one leadership sin is that of top-down autocratic leadership. The top-down approach to leadership is based on the military model of barking orders to weak underlings.”16 Finzel adds, “The top-down attitude is defined by people who believe that everyone should serve them, as to believing they should be serving others within the institution.”17 And finally, concerning the top-down leadership style, Finzel says, “Human nature leads all of us to want to dominate others. The top-down leadership style is all about command and control, and is the opposite of empowerment.”18 Even though the top-down leadership style and attitude still prevails in many corporations and businesses around the world, a wise leader sees the value of teamwork and collaboration in an effort to become more effective in their strategic planning and day-to-day work. According to Kouzes and Posner, “Collaboration is the master skill that enables teams, partnerships, and other alliances to function effectively, so leaders foster collaboration by promoting collaborative goals and building trust.”19

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17 Ibid., 32.

18 Ibid., 40.

Teamwork and Collaboration: Research

The research findings of LaFasto and Larson also support the trend that leans toward a more collaborative approach to leadership:

For the past 15 years, social scientists and observers of contemporary life have been commenting on a dramatic change in the ways we do business in both the public and private sectors. The change that has attracted so much attention and commentary is a significant increase in teamwork and collaborative efforts: people with different views and perspectives coming together, putting aside their narrow self-interests, and discussing issues openly and supportively in an attempt to solve a larger problem or achieve a broader goal. Recognizing the strength of this trend, a U.S. Department of Labor report identified teamwork as one of the five workplace skills that should be taught more aggressively in public schools. The report suggests the teaching of these new skills is necessary both for the success of individuals in job settings and for the success of U.S. companies competing with foreign and domestic rivals.20

LaFasto and Larson’s findings quickly lead to the question, “Why is this trend from individual work to a more team-based approach gaining so much momentum?” In an attempt to answer this question, LaFasto and Larson offer the following insight:

We believe that the movement toward teamwork and collaboration is shaped by two societal forces. It is driven by the need to find more effective ways of dealing with complex problems. It is made possible by the increasing social capacities of individuals and collectives to use collaborative strategies when dealing with common problems.21

LaFasto and Larson further explain reasons for the rise in teamwork and collaboration in the marketplace:

The problems that confront us are complex and becoming increasingly so. For an organization to change or refocus its efforts in any significant way—in strategy, in design, or in structure—requires a coordinated effort among hundreds, or thousands, or even tens of thousands of individuals. Such private sector initiatives as improving earnings, boosting customer satisfaction, or competitors using Internet to maximize efficiencies within an industry all require Broad-based collaboration and ownership.22


21Ibid., xx.

22Ibid., xviii.
According to LaFasto and Larson, the many complexities and challenges facing businesses today call for such issues to be addressed and problem-solving discussions to occur through a collaborative and team-based approach.

The collaborative approach also finds overwhelming support from Karl Albrecht, author of *The Northbound Train*. He writes,

> In an organization of any significant size, the executives cannot create the future single-handedly. They must develop the enterprise in a constellation of teams within the overall team if they hope to bring the special talents and resources to bear on the challenge of creating superior customer value and sustaining a competitive advantage in the eyes of its customers.  

These aforementioned trends and insights suggest that a wise marketplace leader will give serious consideration to teamwork and collaboration when approaching the strategic planning process. Every leader needs to understand that research today clearly indicates what a tragic mistake it is to implement the top-down approach to strategic planning, whereby the top-down leader basically chooses to go-it-alone and therefore forces his plans for strategy on others to execute.

Before moving forward with the discussion of teamwork, collaboration, and its value, a definition of what is meant by a “team” is in order. MacMillan offers an excellent working definition: “A team is a group of people committed to a common purpose who choose to cooperate in order to achieve exceptional results.”

MacMillan’s definition beautifully portrays a team as a group of people, committed to work toward a common purpose, in cooperation, and thus should expect to achieve extraordinary results.

**Qualities of Highly Effective Teams**

One of the most favorable qualities of highly effective and exceptional teams is their synergy. MacMillan defines synergy: “Synergy is the state in which the output is

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greater than the sum of the inputs. Synergy says, one plus one equals three, four, even five! The roots of this word are found with the classical Greek word *synergos*, which means “working together.” Synergy combines two Greek words: *syn*-, together + *ergon*, work. Teams working together in a synergistic manner produce results far greater than they could have ever imagined.

Several other factors, qualities, and conditions, which lead to highly effective strategic planning teams, need to be mentioned at this point in the discussion. Collins says of good-to-great leaders,

They first get the right people on the bus, the wrong people off the bus, and the right people in the right seats—and then they figured out where to drive it. The old adage ‘People are your most important asset’ turns out to be wrong. People are not your most important asset. The right people are. Collins insights are extremely valuable to the marketplace leader as he or she chooses team members for strategy formulation and development. To lead the company effectively toward strategic planning—it is absolutely essential for the leader to get the “right people on the bus,” and then through a collaborative effort and focus, the right people “figure out where to drive it.”

Once the strategic planning team has been selected, team members must be clear about the task they have been given. Put very simply and yet directly, MacMillan says, “No task, no team”:

The most critical component in building a high performance team is a clear, common, compelling task. The goal of a high performance team is not merely to get along, but rather to get aligned, and, through that, to get the results! The power of teamwork flows out of alignment between the interests of individual team members and the mission of the team. To achieve such alignment, team members must see the task as: (1) clear—I see it. (2) relevant—I want it. (3) significant—it’s worth it. (4) Urgent—I want it . . . now! and, (5) achievable—I believe it.

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Another critical component challenges the strategic planning team leader to create a collaborative climate for the team to do its work. Every team member must know they are greatly valued and their work is essential to the success of the team’s accomplishments and goal attainment. LaFasto and Larson affirm this aspect of the team leader’s role in the process: “A collaborative climate is accomplished by talking about it, reinforcing it, and guaranteeing it. Most of all, the team leader creates a collaborative climate by demonstrating and modeling it.”

Bryson clearly sees the team leader as the one who champions the strategic planning process:

The champions are the people who have the primary responsibility for managing the strategic planning process day to day. They are the ones who keep track of the progress and also pay attention to all of the details. They model the kind of behavior they hope to get from other participants: reasoned, diligent, committed, enthusiastic, and good-spirited pursuit of the common good. They are the cheerleaders who keep the process on track and push, encourage, and cajole the strategic planning team and any other key participants through any difficult spots.

While the role and responsibilities of the team leader are of utmost importance, so is the work and attitude of each member of the team. In his book *Becoming a Healthy Team*, Stephen Macchia writes, “It’s essential that every team member concentrate on the task at hand and come to the table with his or her own self-interests left behind.”

To develop and implement a strategic plan involves team members who are unselfish, who have no hidden agenda, and who are willing to make sacrifices for the best interests of the team and of the organization’s future.

Bradford also emphasizes the priority of developing a positive culture in which the team can do its work collaboratively:

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29 Bryson, *Strategic Planning*, 303.

A good positive culture in the process is one in which people are excited about what you’re all doing. It punches all the right buttons so people look forward to the process and to the meetings and get excited about the prospects of improved results. A good positive culture is a support for the entire process, making it challenging and fun. It’s also clear that the people on your planning team need to really care about the process. It won’t work if they simply go through the motions. They’d better not check out or you’re in trouble. You want people to believe that this process is really going to work and they need to see that leadership of the company believes in the process. Planning takes effort—and not just the effort of doing the research. It takes mental effort. You’re going to have to think, and to really think right—responsibly—and creatively—you need to care. And so does everybody on your team.\(^{31}\)

Bradford’s comments, which support a positive culture where the team can meet and do its work week in and week out, is an environment which is absolutely imperative. Team members need to know they are valued, feel engaged, excited, and energized, with the belief that the work they are doing is going to make a difference, thus creating a more profitable, desirable, and preferable future together.

C. Davis Fogg summarizes several key components of the collaborative strategic planning team:

Essentially, teams . . . plan, determining their mission, objectives, strategies, programs, and action plans. Organize their efforts by finding the needed human, physical, and capital resources and putting them into action. \^Assign tasks\^ to team members who have the power and resources to get them done or take the responsibility for persuading non-team members to do the necessary work. \^Accept responsibility\^ for accomplishing results.\(^{32}\)

Fogg highlights the essential characteristics of effective teams:“(1) considerable discussion (2) open communication (3) debate, even conflict, on key issues (4) decision by consensus whenever possible, and (5) monitoring, measuring, and correcting of their own team behaviors.”\(^{33}\) Moreover, an effective strategy planning team must demonstrate the ability to solve current and future problems the organization is facing. LaFasto and Larson address three key factors that distinguish good problem-solving teams:


\(^{33}\)Ibid., 257.
The first distinguishing mark of effective problem-solving teams is focus. Effective teams are very clear about what they are doing at each moment of their work. The second factor is climate. The team is relaxed, comfortable, informal, fun, warm. Team members that are good at problem-solving have a way of making their members feel accepted, valued, and competent. The third factor is a property that seems to describe some of the more positive features of all human relationships, from intimate relationships to organizations to governments: open rather than closed communication. If something is interfering with the team’s performance, it gets talked about. People say what’s on their minds. Importantly, however, these discussions tend more toward problem-solving than venting.  

As mentioned previously, strategic planning teams must view themselves as a group tasked with the responsibility of solving past, present, and future problems of the organization.

Finally, one additional factor to consider concerning teamwork and collaboration in the marketplace is the all-important priority of writing and adopting a team covenant. Cladis says,

Covenants in the workplace can help members of a highly dysfunctional group discover a way of working together that is productive and builds good community. In most cases, teams have relational problems not because of a single culprit acting intentionally but because of dysfunctional behavior that goes unrecognized and unaddressed. Covenants help solve this problem by giving team members standards of good group behavior and relationships.  

Although covenants may be a rare commodity among many, if not most work teams in the marketplace, they are a great benefit to teams who do wisely choose to operate under a covenant, that is, one which has been developed and agreed upon by all team members.

The research findings prove there are tremendous advantages of teamwork and collaboration; which far outperforms the “top-down” approach to workplace strategic planning. Fogg affirms the collaborative approach:

Organizations with a team style of management develop better, more implementable plans than do companies that are organized hierarchically, and they accomplish strategic objectives in about half the time. Team-oriented organizations usually have better communication, horizontally, vertically, and between key functions whose efforts must be integrated to get strategic results.
• Better coordination of plans and of implementation tasks.
• Superior personal relationships, enhancing accomplishments on all fronts.

34LaFasto and Larson, When Teams Work Best, 67-69.

35Cladis, Leading the Team-Based Church, 38-39.
• Greater ability to surface and resolve conflicts and key issues quickly.
• Superior process skills.
• The drawing power to bring recalcitrant team members into the fold and the will to throw them out if necessary.
• Excellent peer accountability, the most effective way of holding people responsible for their commitments.36

Teamwork and Collaboration in the Church

The ever-increasing acceptance of the collaborative team approach in the marketplace brings priceless value along with several practical implications for the work and ministry of the church strategic planning team. First is that a collaborative approach provides the team with a sense of empowerment to do the task God has called them to do. The pastor and/or the strategic planning team leader are clearly tasked with the responsibility for setting the tone to ensure the collaborative climate becomes the new norm for how the church operates. Second, as noted in the business world, the increasing complex issues and problems facing organizations are best discussed and resolutions found within a collaborative team effort. The church is increasingly being challenged to address many complex issues as well. These complexities require a collaborative effort by a team of individuals who are willing to prayerfully seek to find resolve together.

A third powerful implication for the church is team synergy. As the strategic planning team works together in a synergistic manner, endowed with spiritual gifts given by the Holy Spirit, and under the Spirit’s direction; the Spirit-filled team will often lead the church strategically to produce supernatural results far greater than they could have ever imagined!

A fourth value of teamwork and collaboration which flows from marketplace strategic planning is the writing and adoption of a team covenant. Agreeing upon a team covenant is highly beneficial to the church strategic planning team. A covenant enables

36Fogg, Team-Based Strategic Planning, 83-84.
team members (1) to know what is expected of them, (2) it provides a sense of accountability, and (3) the covenant principles are deeply grounded in the Scriptures.

**Formulating Strategy**

Whereas (1) understanding strategic context and (2) teamwork and collaboration, are two key pieces to the strategic planning puzzle, formulating strategy is the critical centerpiece of strategic planning in the marketplace. It is at this point in the process of strategic planning when the nuts and bolts are put in place to begin moving the corporate machinery in a set course of direction for its preferred future. Formulating strategy flows out of the results discovered from understanding strategic context and the analysis phase of planning. Perhaps formulating strategy is best illustrated as if putting flesh on the skeleton, framework or structure of the organization. This process occurs as the strategic planning team fleshes out the organization’s vision, mission, values, goals, objectives, and overall strategic intent and stretch.

Concerning strategy formulation, Bryson explains, “The purpose of strategy formulation and plan development is to create a set of strategies that will effectively link the organization to its environment and create public value.”\(^{37}\) Finnie believes that when formulating strategy there should be certain expectations to put forth a strategic plan with longevity in mind:

> A solid strategy should last seven to ten years or longer. The only exception is a turnaround, in which you will want to get the pain over as quickly as possible. Turnaround strategies may take two or three years for a mid-size company and five years for a large company. Once the company has completed the turnaround and figured out how to survive, it needs to develop a long-term, market-driven strategy to thrive.\(^{38}\)

According to Finnie’s observations, the overall health of the organization is one of the factors which greatly determines the longevity of the strategic plan.

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\(^{37}\)Bryson, *Strategic Planning*, 186.

Crafting and Clarifying Vision

The first major step in formulating strategy for the marketplace strategic planning team is to determine vision. In an attempt to define vision, Walcoff offers this definition: “The vision is an attempt, in very few words, to paint a picture of your dream—your company in the minds of your customers, employees and stockholders. It clearly and concisely expresses the vision of your company.”39 In his book Visionary Leadership, Burt Nanus addresses the power of vision: “There is no more powerful engine driving an organization toward excellence and long-range success than an attractive, worthwhile, achievable vision for the future, widely shared.”40

Crafting and clarifying vision is a crucial point in strategy development. If the organization is going to be successful, the planning team must act in advance of the rapid changes occurring in the environment around them. In regards to crafting a vision, De Kluyver states,

In crafting a vision, there are two important lessons worth heeding. First, few organizations have achieved greatness by being all things to all people. Focusing on relatively few activities and doing them extremely well is the hallmark of most successful companies. The second lesson is that most successful companies achieved their leadership position by adopting a vision far greater than their resource base and competencies would allow.41

De Kluyver offers two very beneficial lessons in terms of crafting vision. First is to determine to focus and lead the company to do a few things with excellence. Secondly, strategic planning teams should take the lead in crafting a vision far greater in scope and resources than their companies have ever attempted to reach before. Walcoff explains, “Stretch a little and allow yourself the room to really make this company of yours an exciting and rewarding place to be five years from now.” Then, quoting David Hudson Burnham, Walcoff continues, “Make no little plans, they have no magic to stir men’s

41De Kluyver, Strategic Thinking, 56.
Indeed, great plans most often lead to great accomplishments.

In terms of vision, Kouzes and Posner conclude, “The overwhelming consensus is that, without vision, little could happen. All enterprises or projects, big or small, begin in a mind’s eye; they begin with imagination and with the belief that what’s merely an image can one day be made real.”

**Defining the Mission**

Once the marketplace strategic planning team has crafted a vision, the next task involves developing the company’s mission statement. The mission statement is a short, succinct statement; a brief declaration of purpose, indicating why the company or organization exists. In short, it answers the question, “What business are we in?”

MacMillan identifies six areas of evaluation for consideration as the team develops a mission statement:

1. **Clear**—characterized by single-minded direction,
2. **relevant**—characterized by deep-seated desire,
3. **significant**—the results to the company if achieved as well as the benefits to me are such that the possibility of success creates enthusiasm, initiative, and energy,
4. **believable**—I believe this task/goal is achievable and will pursue it with bulldog tenacity,
5. **urgent**—there is a clear time-value attached to the achievement of this mission, and
6. **overall motivation**—inspires my dedication and commitment.

In terms of developing the company mission statement, the team strives to answer the question, “why do we exist?” or, “what is our purpose?” MacMillan’s criteria for evaluating mission are beneficial to the work of any team seeking to craft such a valuable statement pertaining to the organization’s overall mission.

**Discovering Values**

In tandem with writing and developing vision and mission statements, the

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strategic planning team must also take the deep dive into values discovery. Horwath defines values as

the ideals and principles that guide the thoughts and actions of an organization and define its character. Working together, mission, vision and values provide a powerful directional force for unifying and coordinating actions and decisions to ensure the optimal use of resources. 45

Put in simple terms, values explain who you are—your identity. In essence, they are the DNA of the organization, providing explanation for why you do what you do.

Horwath further explains the importance of discovering and establishing core values within the context of the strategy formulation process:

Because values represent the core beliefs, they are a powerful shaper of an organization’s culture. Values shape the conduct of people in their interactions with customers, suppliers, vendors, and each other. They also provide the benchmark in the daily decision-making process. The chosen course of action must comply with the values in order to be considered a good decision. In order to have their full effect, values should be integrated into all aspects of the company. 46

Goals and Objectives

Once the team has clarified and agreed upon vision, mission, and values, the next step is to develop goals and objectives, thereby preparing the organization for future implementation of the strategic plan. By definition, De Kluyver writes, “Goals are open-ended statements about desirable outcomes. Objectives, on the hand, are more specific and, as a consequence, should be measurable.” 47 Therefore, goals are a general target—What, generally, you are trying to achieve? Objectives have a specific outcome desired—What, specifically you are trying to achieve? The acronym SMART provides strategic planners a helpful reminder for the criteria of an objective: Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-bound.

45Horwath, Deep Dive, 141.
46Ibid., 153-54.
47De Kluyver, Strategic Thinking, 10.
Borrowing from a quote by Bill Copeland, Walcoff says,

The trouble with not having goals is that you spend your life running up and down the field and never scoring. Goals are a snapshot of your company’s future target—the basis for ensuring that you’re just not running up and down the field. They are meant to be milestones to ensure that you’re on the path towards making your mission statement a reality.\(^{48}\)

When it comes to goal-setting within an organization’s strategy formulation, Collins and Porras introduced the concept for having a BHAG (Big, Hairy, Achievable Goal). In their book *Built to Last*, they write,

Like the moon mission, a true BHAG is clear and compelling and serves as a unifying focal point of effort—often creating immense team spirit. It has a clear finish line, so the organization can know when it has achieved the goal; people like to shoot for finish lines. A BHAG engages people—it reaches out and grabs them in the gut. It is tangible, energizing, highly focused. People “get it” right away; it takes little or no explanation.\(^{49}\)

While developing BHAG’s, Collins and Porras offer five helpful guidelines:

1. First, and most importantly, the BHAG must be consistent with the company’s core values.
2. The BHAG should be so clear and compelling that it requires little or no explanation.
3. While the BHAG should fall well outside of the comfort zone, requiring heroic effort and perhaps even a little luck, people in the organization should have reason to believe they can pull it off.
4. A BHAG should be so compelling that it would continue to drive change even if the organization’s leaders disappeared before it was completed.
5. Have a follow-up BHAG since an organization can stagnate once its BHAG is achieved.\(^{50}\)

Once the goals have been determined, next comes the task of plan implementation—or of actually making the strategic plan become a reality. Suddenly, all of the work of formulating strategy now must be turned into action. This happens through the team’s development of objectives and action plans.

\(^{48}\)Walcoff, *The Fast Forward MBA*, 94.


\(^{50}\)Ibid., 111-12.
As stated previously, “Objectives are specific and, as a consequence, should be measurable.” Objectives have a specific outcome desired—What specifically is one trying to achieve?

Further clarifying the purpose of objectives, Bradford states,

Objectives should be stated as results. Objectives are not activities. Rather, objectives are statements of what you want to accomplish. Because you want to accomplish something, your objectives must be specific. Objectives must be stated as specific expected results so that you minimize weasel room. The objectives should ideally contain measurements, which must be quantitative, and be timely. In other words, you have to declare what you do and when you are going to do it—specifically.

In his book *Strategic Thinking: A Four Piece Puzzle*, Bill Birnbaum weighs in on the discussion of objectives:

During many strategy sessions, I’ve stood up and delivered “my little mini-speech” about the importance of focus. In that speech, I encourage the team to set perhaps six or seven or eight objectives. But, at times, they set objectives numbering into the double digits. The problem with having too many objectives is that it causes lack of focus. As a client of our once said, “If everything is important, then nothing is important.” Keep your focus. Keep your objectives list short. Make sure your objectives measure the most important “stuff.”

Concerning the priority of focus, Bradford adds,

Focus is critical to giving your company a chance for big success. So, here’s a critical piece of advice: Find something that is critical to your customers, and define a focus around it such that you can bring more talent, more resources to bear on it than anyone else. So what is your focus? What do you sell? Who are your customers? As things are narrowed, the picture of what you do becomes clearer. You get better at it because you know it. And if you’re not confused by chasing some new rainbow every day, you will get even better at whatever it is that you do well.

**Strategic Intent and Stretch**

The key components of formulating strategy in the marketplace (vision, mission, values, goals, and objectives) must all be aligned with the company’s strategic intent and

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51 De Kluyver, *Strategic Thinking*, 10.

52 Bradford, *Simplified Strategic Planning*, 186.

53 Birnbaum, *Strategic Thinking*, 30, 32.

stretch. De Kluyver explains what is meant by strategic intent and stretch:

Most companies that have risen to positions of global leadership started from modest beginnings with ambitions that were far greater than their resource base and competencies would allow. To get a position of market leadership, a focus on the drivers of competition is clearly not enough; strong leadership determined to realize a clear vision for the future, a strategic intent, is required. Strategic intent does more than paint a vision for the future; it signals the desire to win. It focuses the organization on key competitive targets, and provides clear goals about which competencies to develop, what kinds of resources to harness, and what segments to concentrate on. It also serves as a reminder that true strategic thinking has a long-term focus. A related idea is the concept of stretch. Most companies will not have the resources or capabilities to reach their most ambitious goals. Stretch reflects the recognition that successful strategies are built as much around “what can be” as around “what is.” Ultimately, every company must create a fit between its resources and its opportunities.\(^5^5\)

The term “strategic intent” was first coined in 1989 by Prahalad and Hamel when they wrote,

Companies that have risen to global leadership over the past 20 years invariably began with ambitions that were out of proportion to their resources and capabilities. But they created an obsession with winning at all levels of the organization and then sustained that obsession over the 10- to 20-year quest for global leadership. We term this obsession “strategic intent.” Strategic intent envisions a desired leadership position and establishes the criterion the organization will use to chart its progress.

The concept also encompasses an active management process that includes: focusing the organization’s attention on the essence of winning; motivating people by communicating the value of the target; leaving room for individual and team contributions; sustaining enthusiasm by providing new operational definitions as circumstances change; and using intent consistently to guide resource allocations.\(^5^6\)

As a corporation seeks to revitalize itself in the marketplace, strategic intent is of great significance. Strategic intent must drive the entire corporation, which requires an obsession with winning at all levels of the organization. To summarize, strategic intent benefits an organization in three ways; (1) providing a strong sense of identity, (2) developing a genuine sense of purpose which bonds co-workers and teams together, and (3) creating a compelling picture of the organization’s long-term future.

\(^{55}\)De Kluyver, *Strategic Thinking*, 11.

Formulating strategy is the framework of marketplace strategic planning, which significantly determines the organization’s direction and preferred future. The essential elements of marketplace strategy formulation are of great value as they help guide the church in the proper direction toward accomplishing its vision, mission, values, goals, objectives, and overall strategic intent and stretch.

**Strategy Formulation in the Church**

As mentioned previously, formulating strategy is the centerpiece of strategic planning for the marketplace and for the church. The church strategic planning team is given the responsibility of formulating a five, seven or ten-year strategy; that is, unless the church has been in decline and is seeking a turnaround for the purpose of rebuilding and revitalization. In this case, the team should seek to develop a two or three-year strategic plan.

As a vision is crafted for the church, it is highly recommended that the strategic planning team take into consideration the following: (1) focus the church to do a few ministries with excellence, and (2) lead the church to adopt a vision and strategic plan which stretches its resources and competencies far greater than ever before. These two principles are the hallmark of many successful companies. When put into practice, these principles will help launch the church into a successful, fulfilling, faith-filled future and journey with God.

In determining mission, marketplace strategic planners ask two questions. The first question is “why do we exist?” The second question is “what business are we in?” These are two questions every church needs to ask in their strategic planning process as well. The church’s mission statement simply, and yet profoundly, states the core reason for their existence.

Values discovery is also a key component to every organization’s planning process for the future. In the marketplace, values explain who one is—one’s identity. Values also represent a company’s core beliefs. The concept of discovering values in the
business world also brings significance to the church. One of the tasks of the strategic planning team is to identify and write down the church’s core values based on its scriptural beliefs and then daily allow those values to shape the church’s culture and decisions.

Establishing written goals and objectives are essential in strategy formulation as they set in place the specific outcomes desired for future strategy implementation. Concerning goals and objectives, the church strategic planning team must answer the question, “What specifically are you trying to achieve?” Effective goals and objectives are specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound. The church strategic planning team would be wise to consider at least one BHAG (Big, Hairy, Achievable Goal) as a unifying focal point in which everyone is passionate about and striving together for in unity.

Marketplace strategic intent and stretch provide unique value to a church’s strategic planning process. Churches who commit themselves to strategic intent and stretch, first of all, paint a picture of God’s plan for their preferred future. Second, intent and stretch build a strong sense of identity for God’s people in Christ, along with defining their roles and responsibilities with their community and world. Third, intent and stretch demonstrate that the commitment of the church is one of intense desire or “obsession” to win, which permeates every aspect of church life and ministry. The battle every church must win is spiritual and eternal in nature—which is the battle for people’s very lives and souls. Overall, churches under the spiritual headship of Jesus Christ, who are provided with an abundance of resources and blessings from heaven, have every reason be the world’s leading organization, therefore setting the pace in pursuit of strategic intent and stretch, which involves taking risks and stretching their faith—believing in God for the advancement of His Kingdom.

In summary, strategy formulation provides direction for vision, mission, values, goals, and objectives; all of which bond the church together. At the same time, the
church stretches in its faith and resources, for the strategic intent and purpose of making genuine disciples and followers of Jesus Christ.

**Gaining Buy-In and Accepting Ownership of the Strategic Plan**

At this point, the strategic planning team is in the final, yet all-important stage of their work. The team is now tasked with the responsibility of finalizing a written strategic plan which summarizes their weeks and months of work. Once the strategic planning document is complete, the marketplace planning team seeks to gain buy-in, ownership, and commitment of employees from every level within the organization to begin putting the new plan to work. In their book *The Executive Guide to Strategic Planning*, Below, Morrisey, and Acomb state, “Remember, the purpose of planning is not to produce plans; it is to produce results, and this requires total organization commitment.”

Bradford, Duncan, and Tarcy emphasize the critical need for employee buy-in: “To get anything done in your company, you need to spread the word about your strategy so that everyone in the company understands what you’re trying to do. The most important word to spread is your vision—the sense of where you’re going. You need buy-in.”

Buy-in is the recognition that the plan makes sense and that each employee believes they have an important role to play in its success.

The most common reason a strategic plan fails is lack of buy-in or ownership. If people do not have a stake and responsibility in the plan, it will be business as usual for all but a frustrated few. Thomas Edison famously said, “Vision without execution is hallucination.”

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execute, nothing else matters; not the most solid, well thought-out strategy, not the most cutting-edge business model, not even the most innovative technology could transform an industry.

Therefore, attaining employee buy-in and their accepting ownership of the strategic plan is a vital piece of the puzzle toward effective plan execution and implementation. Hence, wise is the marketplace strategic planning team, who with much foresight seeks to include a cross-section of employees from the onset of plan formulation as well as throughout the entirety of the venture. This shared approach will do wonders in helping employees identify the plan as their own—which means involving them early and often during the process. Keith Spore, publisher of the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel writes,

Getting people involved in the creation and development of the plan is the best thing we have done—they buy-in and feel responsible for it. Not everything you decide to do is popular, but by involving a large group people have a chance to air their differences about strategy and everyone can discover what has merit and what does not.60

While seeking to gain buy-in by everyone within the organization is an admirable goal, the truth is, it is an extreme rarity to have every single person on board. In fact, just because someone says they are on board with the new strategic plan does not mean the person truly is. In a Wall Street Journal article, Marks shares this caution, providing explanation for why some employees may be hesitant or reluctant to buy-in:

After all the downsizings, restructurings, takeovers or major strategic shifts in recent years, the last thing many employees want is more change. They may be angry and distrustful of management. Their self-esteem may be bruised. And they may not feel that they have any stake in their company’s success, given all their colleagues who have been laid off or whose careers have been sidetracked by previous company initiatives. The idea of another transition leaves them cold.

To achieve their objectives, the leaders of these companies need to get their employees to let go of the past and move forward as quickly as possible. This entails two steps. First, they need to weaken support for the status quo—most importantly by acknowledging the difficulties of the past and uncertainties of the challenge ahead, and giving employees the opportunity to express and work through the

emotions that a major transition stirs up. This step also involves convincing employees that change is necessary. Second, after support for the status quo has been weakened, support for a new initiative must be strengthened. Executives can foster enthusiasm by offering a clear, detailed vision of where the company is headed, and sustain it by supporting employees emotionally as they figure out new ways to do their jobs. And on the practical side, executives need to involve employees in establishing new operating procedures.\(^{61}\)

In his book *Change Is Like a Slinky*, author Hans Finzel points to “The Buy-In Curve,” a tool developed by Everett Rodges that measures people’s willingness to change or their resistance to it. Rodges’ “Buy-In Curve” addresses five different ways people respond to change:

1. “Yes!” These are the inventors and innovators. They see the future first: 6 percent.
2. “I’m willing to be convinced.” These are the early adopters. They are ready to jump on the bandwagon right away: 10 percent.
3. “I’ll do a gradual buy-in.” These are the early majority. They follow the crowd when it seems like the right direction to go: 34 percent.
4. “I’m somewhat reluctant.” These are the late bloomers. Once the idea has been mapped out and proven in early beta tests, they are willing to get on board. They are often your valuable process people who want lots of data: 34 percent.
5. “Over my dead body!” These are the laggards and holdouts. They may never get on the program for a new order of things: 16 percent.\(^{62}\)

As a response to people’s openness to change or lack of it, Finzel offers the following strategies:

*Inventors and innovators.* Build on them. They are your foundation for your inner circle of change. They are the idea bank that you harvest for your change strategies. They help you cook up the future.

*Early adopters.* Be patient with the silent majority. There is nothing wrong with following the crowd. This is the great majority of your people who support change once they have been convinced and, more importantly, when they see that others have gone before them.

*Late bloomers.* Don’t burn your bridges with these who will hopefully come along in the long run.

*Laggards and holdouts.* We cannot let a vocal few hold us hostage. At times we need to ask them to get off the bus.\(^{63}\)


\(^{62}\)Finzel, *Change Is Like A Slinky*, 170.

\(^{63}\)Ibid., 171-72.
Therefore, concerning employee buy-in and accepting ownership, Finzel concludes,

The future is coming quickly! Stake out your territory and decide the direction you will take. Once you figure out where you are going, then get on board. In his book, The Northbound Train, Karl Albrecht talks about the concept that is the title of his book. The Northbound Train is the fundamental, driving idea of the business, for which all resistance crumbles. This is the direction you have chosen and no other. This is your northbound train. If you feel like others don’t want to go north with you, there are other trains they can ride. If your particular train is going north, then expect anyone who rides it to commit his or her energies fully to the journey.\(^{64}\)

It is imperative that every employee is on board, fully doing their part to move the company forward in the same direction which the strategic plan dictates. Anyone who is unwilling to do this needs to find another “train” to ride, which is another way of saying that some employees may need to find another company to fully commit their energies. Fogg writes,

You have only three options in dealing with people who can’t cope with change: Move them to jobs where they can productively contribute with necessary retraining, retire them early, or separate them. You need to move them quickly, for you can’t afford to hold back strategy with inadequate change agents.\(^{65}\)

**Strategy Implementation**

Once employee buy-in and a sense of ownership has been secured, strategic implementation follows. Concerning plan implementation, Sterling writes, “Effective implementation of an average strategy beats mediocre implementation of a great strategy every time.”\(^{66}\) Sterling hits the bulls-eye with this powerful and truthful statement. Effective implementation and execution are crucial in an effort to fulfill the goals, objectives, and action plans set forth. Fogg highlights four critical concepts of strategic implementation:

\(^{64}\)Ibid., 122-23.

\(^{65}\)Fogg, *Team-Based Strategic Planning*, 206

Relevance—making the mission, priority issues, and actions that need to be taken relevant to and understood by those who must execute. Resources—ensuring you have the right skills, backed by adequate time and money, available in the right place at the right time. Alignment—making sure that throughout the organization all actions, including ongoing tasks, support the mission and the strategic priorities. Accountability—giving everyone who has a strategic task to perform at any level the ability to win or lose on the basis of how they carry out their charge.⁶⁷

Indeed, Fogg’s four critical concepts are integral to successful implementation of the newly adopted strategic focus and plan. First, those who have been tasked with the responsibility of following through with the day-to-day execution of the plan need to see its relevance and believe it will make a difference. Second, having access to the right resources is also essential. For instance, finances need to be budgeted, allocated, and made available toward plan achievement. Crucial to effective strategic implementation is having the right people with the right skills. Fogg explains,

To execute your plan, you need people with the highest level of leadership, technical, managerial, and teamwork skills. You cannot afford to settle for whoever is available. Effective implementation requires people who are not only technically competent but willing to change and to lead change.⁶⁸

Third, according to Fogg, proper alignment does ensure that the day-to-day actions and tasks by employees are being fully utilized for maximum impact toward accomplishing the company’s strategic plan and focus. Fogg’s fourth critical concept for strategic implementation is accountability. Every employee, team, department, and unit of the organization must be held accountable for their specific tasks and the timeframe in which they are to be completed. Several practical methods for accountability include weekly, monthly, quarterly, bi-annual, and annual meetings for the purpose of staying informed of progress. For various reasons, periodically, course corrections will need to be made, so flexibility, while at the same time still moving forward with strategic execution, is essential.

⁶⁷Fogg, Team-Based Strategic Planning, 206.

⁶⁸Ibid., 208.
Anderson offers several suggestions to organizational leaders for staying strategic day-to-day:

Vision cards: Once you’ve agreed on the core elements of your hoped-for future, print them on a card, and make a copy for everyone. Invite everyone to put their card where they see it often. Strategy screeners: Bring your agreed-upon strategies into day-to-day conversations as a screen for action. This will remind everyone to use the strategies as a guide in making decisions about how to use your time and resources. Tactical check-ins: One way to keep employees strategic is to hold them accountable for achieving the tactics to which they have committed to. A great way to do effective tactical check-ins is to append them to already-existing meetings. Common language: Leaders who are committed to keeping the strategic approach alive often make the effort to include words, phrases, and concepts from their vision and strategy in their day-to-day conversations with people.69

Anderson’s comments serve as a continual reminder that the intent of strategic thinking, focus, and implementation are to drive the decisions and actions of the organization and its leaders, managers, and employees daily. Day-to-day implementation and execution of the plan happens in those companies where buy-in and ownership by employees at every level of the organization has occurred.

**Gaining Buy-In in the Church**

Companies who successfully obtain employee buy-in, and who inspire and empower their employees to follow through with the execution of the strategic plan day-to-day, while holding them accountable for results, are a powerful model and example for the church today. Every church giving consideration to the development of a strategic plan will benefit greatly if they seek to gain buy-in from church members from the very beginning of the process. In his book *Advanced Strategic Planning*, Aubrey Malphurs encourages church pastors and leaders to begin by assessing the church’s readiness for strategic planning and change:

There is power in every organization. The question here is, Are the people with that power supportive of embracing the strategic planning process? These empowered people are the church’s governing board, pastor, staff and any matriarch or patriarch. Ultimately they must support the process if it is to succeed.70

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70 Aubrey Malphurs, *Advanced Strategic Planning: A New Model for Church*
Prayerfully enlisting a strategic planning team of people from various age groups, backgrounds, and ministries within the church, and then asking the church to affirm the team God has chosen, gives a sense of ownership to members. A third essential to gaining buy-in from church members is to ensure that as the plan is being developed, on-going reports and progress are being shared with the entire church through a variety of mediums.

A fourth essential for gaining buy-in is to provide the proposed strategic plan in a written document to staff and key ministry leaders four weeks in advance of final affirmation and adoption by the church, and two weeks in advance to all church members. For successful adoption and implementation, members will need to see it as their plan or idea. In the business world, buy-in is the recognition that the plan makes sense and that each employee believes they have an important role to play in its success. This principle also holds true for the church. Every church member will need to embrace the important role they have to play in the day-to-day and week-to-week successful execution of the plan.

In summary, this chapter’s thesis was to demonstrate how marketplace strategic planning brings value to strategic planning in the church as the principles of understanding strategic context, teamwork and collaboration, formulating strategy, gaining buy-in, and accepting ownership are examined and applied. Therefore, after an examination of the theoretical and practical issues of marketplace strategic planning, it can be affirmed that marketplace strategic planning does indeed bring great value to strategic planning in the church.

In his book Church Unique, Will Mancini captures the very essence of strategic planning while also providing a concise summary of the theoretical and practical issues examined in this chapter:

Until leaders not only embrace uniqueness but celebrate and leverage it, they will miss out on God’s best for their ministry. A better way of leadership includes the disciplines of careful observation, vibrant imagination, and demanding collaboration that forge a unique vision based on what God is uniquely doing in each church’s

and Ministry Leaders (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), 54.
unique context. The answer is in having a vision that oozes, that is original, organic, zeroed in, and extravagant. When leaders start thinking clearly, engaging locally, focusing redemptively, and risking boldly, their church becomes an unstoppable force and an irresistible influence. It becomes a church that prevails not because it is “purpose-driven” but because it is purposeful.71

In conclusion, churches seeking to glean principles for strategic planning from business leaders and experts in the marketplace will involve everyone in the process of developing and executing a strategic plan which is unstoppable, irresistible, and purposeful. The results of such a strategic plan offer the hope of a much better future together for the church, community, and world.

CHAPTER 4
THE FIFTEEN-WEEK PROJECT

Introduction

In order to develop and implement the Nehemiah model of strategic planning to rebuild Light in the Desert Baptist Church in Mesa, Arizona, a fifteen-week project was launched. The project began in August 2013 with the formulation of a seven-member strategic planning team that were prayerfully selected and affirmed by the church body. The project concluded in November 2013 with a completed three-year strategic plan based on the Nehemiah model which was adopted and unanimously supported by the church.

The fifteen-week project was accomplished in three crucial phases. Phase 1 consisted of the two-week preparation period. During the first week of the project, seven church members were enlisted to serve on the strategic planning team for the duration of the project. The team immediately began meeting together during the first and second weeks of the project. In addition to this, during week 2 of the preparation phase, twelve members of the church were given a church ministry analysis to complete (see Appendix 1). The church ministry analysis was a tool the team would later utilize to better understand the church unique ministry context.

Phase 2 of the project, weeks 3 to 14, consisted of the twelve-week project implementation period. Twelve church members were chosen at random and were instructed to complete the church ministry analysis received during the second week of the project. Members were asked to return a completed copy of the analysis to a member of the strategic planning team on or before the next Sunday, which would be the beginning of the project’s third week. The information provided from the completed analyses was compiled by the church’s administrative assistant and the results were later
distributed to the strategic planning team during the fourth week of the project.

On Sunday mornings of weeks 5 to 14, I preached a message series based on the
Nehemiah model for strategic planning (see Appendix 2). At the conclusion of the
Sunday morning message during week 5, I distributed a pre-project Nehemiah
questionnaire to test each church member’s knowledge of the book of Nehemiah (see
Appendix 3). The questionnaire was distributed, completed, and collected the same
morning. The results were tabulated by the church’s administrative assistant on the
fifteenth week of the project. The same questionnaire was distributed as a post-project
tool to measure whether participants had increased in knowledge following the eleven-
week Nehemiah message series.

The strategic planning team also continued to meet weekly during phase 2 of
the project for the purpose of developing a strategic plan enabling the church to discover
its core values, mission, vision, ministry structure, and an intentional biblical strategy for
“making disciples.” In week 6 of the project, church members completed a prayer survey
during the Sunday school hour to determine their personal level of prayer disciplines and
practices (see Appendix 4). The results of the prayer survey were compiled by the
church’s administrative assistant and were given to the strategic planning team and to the
church staff during week 7 of the project. Prayer survey results were examined to
determine what steps might be considered toward incorporating a greater prayer emphasis
into the church’s strategic plan. Church members also participated in a one hour prayer
walk on the Saturday morning of week 12. Following the prayer walk, participants wrote
a brief one-page story describing their prayer walk experience (see Appendix 5).

Upon reaching week 14, church members were challenged to covenant with
God and with one another in faith and in practice to sign and “live out” the scriptural
principles they had learned from Nehemiah’s example (see Appendix 6). Toward the
conclusion of the same worship service during week 14, the church body participated in a
special meeting to consider affirmation of the strategic plan as recommended by the
strategic planning team (see Appendix 9). The newly proposed strategic plan needed at least 90 percent affirmation of the church’s membership to be deemed successful. Upon the church’s affirmation, a strategic leadership team would be tasked with the responsibility of the plan’s oversight and implementation which would begin in January 2014.

Phase 3, which was the project’s final week, contained several target areas which needed to be addressed. First, I preached the final message from Nehemiah series during the morning worship service. Secondly, church members who had participated in 8 of the 11 worship services that included the Nehemiah messages were given the post-project Nehemiah questionnaire to complete (see Appendix 3). The purpose of the questionnaire was to compare how church members had grown in their knowledge of the book of Nehemiah after hearing at least 8 of the 11 Sunday morning messages. The pre and post-project questionnaires were gathered as data by the church’s administrative assistant and the results were utilized as a t-test measurement during week 15. Thirdly, I conducted interviews with 25 church members who had signed covenants during week 14 (see Appendix 7). The purpose of the covenant interviews was to document the various ways members planned to “live out” the covenant in an effort to rebuild Light in the Desert Baptist Church, following the example modeled in Nehemiah’s memoirs.

Four goals were used to determine the effectiveness of the project. The first goal was to provide a biblical framework for strategic planning in the church. Church members grew in biblical knowledge and discovered the principles of strategic planning through a message series from the book of Nehemiah. I taught this series for eleven consecutive weeks during Sunday morning worship services. At the beginning of this series, church members were asked to complete a pre-project questionnaire, which tested their knowledge of the book of Nehemiah (see Appendix 3). The same questionnaire was distributed post-project to measure each participant’s biblical knowledge gained from the eleven-week message series. A t-test for dependent samples was used to determine whether there was a positive statistical difference between the pre-project and post-
project questionnaires. This goal was deemed successful as the t-test clearly proved there were positive statistical differences gained from a comparison of the two questionnaires given during the Nehemiah message series.

The second goal was to implement a comprehensive prayer strategy, which was proven to be an integral part of the strategic planning process. First, church members were invited to complete a prayer survey to determine their knowledge and understanding of both personal and church prayer practices and disciplines (see Appendix 4). The survey was analyzed by the church staff and strategic planning team to develop future prayer strategies and ministries. Secondly, church members were encouraged to participate in a one-hour prayer walk during the ministry project. Following the prayer walk, participants were asked to write a brief one-page story of their prayer experience (see Appendix 5). Each member’s one-page prayer walk story was used to measure application of prayer truths and principles learned from Nehemiah. The goal of implementing a comprehensive prayer strategy was deemed successful if at least three church members agreed to serve for one year as prayer walk team leaders and 50 percent of the participants committed to prayer walk four times during the next year under the spiritual leadership and direction of a prayer walk team leader.

The third goal concerned the development of a strategic plan, which reflected the Nehemiah principles. A seven-member strategic planning team was formed and commissioned with the responsibility of developing a comprehensive strategic plan for the church. Each member of the strategic planning team signed a covenant committing themselves fully to the responsibilities necessary for the completion of the task (see Appendix 8).

A church ministry analysis was completed by randomly selected members from Light in the Desert’s membership (see Appendix 1). The completed analyses provided valuable assistance to the seven-member strategic planning team offering a detailed assessment of the church and community’s ministry context. The strategic planning team
met weekly throughout the ministry project to complete its task of leading the church to
discover its core values, mission, vision, and to develop a ministry structure and strategy
for “making disciples.” During week 14 of the project, the strategic planning team’s goal
was to agree upon a strategic plan and present it to the church body for affirmation and
implementation thereafter. This third goal was measured by a completed strategic plan. It
was determined that the strategic planning team would present the completed strategic
plan; seeking to receive affirmation and support of the plan from the congregation during a
special-called business meeting. The goal would be deemed successful if at least 90 percent
of the church’s membership were to affirm the recommendation (see Appendix 9).

A fourth goal challenged members to covenant with God and with one another
in faith and practice to “live out” the scriptural principles which they had learned from the
Nehemiah model. Prior to the strategic plan being affirmed by the church, every member
was asked to prayerfully sign and commit to a covenant (see Appendix 6). The fourth
goal’s success was measured in part by the number of covenants signed by church
members. The goal would be deemed successful if 75 percent of church members present
signed the covenant.

An additional goal measurement of covenant implementation was utilized. In
this step, a representative group of 25 adults were interviewed for the purpose of hearing
them share practical and life-transforming ways they planned to incorporate the covenant
into their lives. This goal was deemed successful as every adult interviewee shared at
least one practical way they planned to implement the covenant in their lives for the
purpose of rebuilding the church (see Appendix 7).

**Phase 1: Preparation**

The strategic planning team was enlisted and affirmed by the church body
during the week 1 of the fifteen-week ministry project. During week 1, the team met for
the purpose of better understanding their role toward the task of strategic planning to
which they had been called. I served as the facilitator and team leader for the weekly
strategic planning team meetings. It was agreed upon unanimously by team members that the weekly meetings should be held at the church and would be ninety minutes in length.

**Week 1**

**Strategic planning team: Meeting 1.** Light in the Desert’s strategic planning team first examined various definitions of strategic planning from both church and marketplace contexts. The group was then challenged to brainstorm and create their own definition of strategic planning. The team collaborated together confirming the following definition: “Seeking God’s face to develop and implement His plan within our unique ministry context for an exciting, hope-filled future for Light in the Desert.”

Second, the team examined various passages from the Scriptures with the goal of establishing a biblical and theological foundation for strategic planning. Team members discovered that strategic planning is a predominant theme throughout the Scriptures. Passages examined were (1) God’s strategic plan in creation (Gen 1:2:3), (2) Joshua’s strategic plan of crossing the Jordan River (Josh 3:4), (3) Jesus Christ setting the parameters for the impact and scope of strategic planning (Acts 1:8), and (4) Paul’s exhortation of strategic planning (Phil 3:12-14).

Next, I shared an overview of the Nehemiah model for strategic planning, which would guide the team and the church over the next fifteen weeks. The following overview was presented to the team: For the purpose of strategic planning at Light in the Desert, six passages from the book Nehemiah will be examined, developed and then implemented. First, Nehemiah 1:4-11 demonstrates that the biblical principles of prayer are necessary and must precede successful strategic planning in the church. Second, Nehemiah 2:1-20 guides the church to (1) recognize God’s timing and the windows of opportunity he provides for strategic planning and (2) examine the ministry context before launching into the strategic planning process. Third, select verses from Nehemiah 3 demonstrate the need for teamwork and collaboration in strategic planning. Fourth, Nehemiah 4:1-9 examines key biblical principles for overcoming spiritual opposition
which many times occur during the process of strategic planning. Fifth, an exposition of
select verses from Nehemiah 8 through 10 unveils three vital signs for revival; each of
which are necessary for strategic planning in an effort to rebuild the church. Finally, the
sixth passage taken from Nehemiah 12:27-47 examines how God’s people must make it a
priority to affirm and celebrate successful strategic planning.

Fourth, team members discussed the question, “Why strategic planning in the
church?” In a collaborative effort, the team brainstormed and then produced the
following list of ten essential reasons for strategic planning in the church: (1) to discover
the church’s strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats; (2) to develop an intentional
process for “making disciples” in the church; (3) to align the church’s ministries—getting
people and ministries focused and on the same page; (4) to create an environment for
revival and spiritual awakening; (5) to develop and implement spiritually healthy change
which glorifies Jesus Christ; (6) to craft a compelling vision that is simple to grasp and
yet has powerful clarity; (7) to empower the pastor, church staff, leadership, and people
to serve with excellence; (8) to be a greater impact and influence in reaching the
community for Christ; (9) develop a strategy that regularly evaluates and improves the
ministries of the church; and (10) to be fully used by God as a church locally, regionally,
nationally, and globally to share the Good News of Jesus Christ.

Fifth, I reminded the team of the major priorities of the God-given task to which
they had been called. Those priorities include prayer, understanding ministry context,
developing mission and vision statements, identifying core values, setting goals and
objectives, presentation and adoption of a strategic plan, transitioning the church toward
plan implementation, and leading the church to covenant and celebrate the work of God
together.

Sixth, the strategic planning team stated characteristics of effective teams
(characteristics which they desired to emulate in the coming weeks and months of their
work and service together): (1) commitment to the task; (2) value one another; (3) open
and transparent communication; (4) trust; (5) confidentiality; (6) task-focused; and (7) show respect to one another.

Finally, at the conclusion of the first meeting the team members agreed to enter into a team covenant for the process of strategic planning together (see Appendix 8). I explained how a covenant would offer several benefits to the team. First, it helps team members to know what is expected of them. Secondly, it provides a sense of accountability. And thirdly, the covenant principles are deeply rooted in the Scriptures.

Week 2

Church ministry analysis. Following Sunday morning worship, 12 members of the church were randomly selected and provided a copy of the church ministry analysis (see Appendix 1). Members were instructed to complete the analysis and return it to a member of the strategic planning team on or before the next Sunday, which began the project’s third week. Next, the completed analyses were compiled by the church’s administrative assistant. The results were distributed to the team at the beginning of their fourth meeting together, in week 4 of the project.

Strategic planning team: Meeting 2. There was an intentional prayer focus for the strategic planning team’s second weekly meeting. I led the team to examine and discuss four essential prayer principles which came from Nehemiah’s prayer in Nehemiah 1: 4-11

Before looking into the four specific principles of Nehemiah’s prayer, as team leader and facilitator, I provided team members with the following contextual background: The Old Testament book of Nehemiah contains the record of Nehemiah himself leading God’s people to develop and implement a strategic plan for rebuilding of the walls around Jerusalem. But even more importantly, a strategic plan was needed to rebuild people’s lives spiritually. One hundred and forty years had passed by since Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonians conquered Jerusalem, carrying off the Jews into
exile (586 B.C.). The Israelites remained in captivity until 538 B.C. when the Persians overtook Babylon and Cyrus the Great released 50,000 of the Jews to go back to the city of Jerusalem to rebuild the temple under Zerubabbel’s leadership. Then in 458 B.C., God called Ezra to lead a second group of 1,500 people back to Jerusalem to reestablish the worship of God in the temple. The time period of Nehemiah is 445 B.C. and God is preparing Nehemiah to carry out his strategic plan in Jerusalem. I referred the team to the following quote from Edwin Yamauchi, which explains the great need God’s people were experiencing at this point in Israel’s history:

The walls of Jerusalem that had been destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar, despite abortive attempts to rebuild them (Ezra 4:6-23), remained in ruins for almost a century and a half. Such a lamentable situation obviously made Jerusalem vulnerable to her numerous enemies. Yet from a mixture of apathy and fear the Jews failed to rectify this glaring deficiency. They needed the dynamic catalyst of an inspired leader, a man named Nehemiah.¹

Upon hearing the news of the dire situation in Jerusalem (1:1-3), Nehemiah immediately begins to seek the Lord in prayer. Nehemiah had come face to face with a situation that was too big for him to solve alone. I also chose to share a quote from Raymond Brown:

Nehemiah’s immediate reaction to the news of his people’s troubles was to go into the presence of God. Nothing mattered more than entering the Lord’s presence to express his anguish about his people’s needs, confess his inadequacy, reflect on his personal response to the news from Jerusalem, and seek guidance about what might be done.²

I reminded the team that unfortunately a majority of churches also find themselves in less than desirable circumstances, desperately needing to follow the steps of strategic planning to begin the process of rebuilding broken lives, ministries, and relationships. According to the Nehemiah model, the starting place for rebuilding the

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Lord’s church is prayer.

Nehemiah 1:4-11 provides a remarkable pattern of prayer, preparing the people of God for the process of strategic planning. I guided team members to study four essential principles of Nehemiah’s prayer that would prove to be foundational to the strategic planning team’s work in the weeks ahead. First, the team examined and discussed Nehemiah’s high and exalted view of God (2:5). I reminded the team that effective prayer starts with having a high, exalted, scriptural view of God.

A second part of Nehemiah’s prayer was examined and discussed, that being his confession of sin and repentance (1:6-7). The team discussed how Nehemiah viewed broken-down walls and charred gates in direct correlation to the spiritual condition of the hearts and lives of God’s people. As Nehemiah looks at the people of God, he sees a vast difference between what they were experiencing and what God had promised them. Confession of sin and repentance are a necessary step toward preparing a church spiritually toward successful strategic planning. Nehemiah 1:8-10 is the third critical part of Nehemiah’s prayer. The team discovered that as Nehemiah prays, he recalls the promises of God.

I strongly reminded the team that praying Scripture to the Lord is one of the most powerful spiritual weapons God has given to individuals and to his church. At this point in the meeting I stated,

There are seasons and periods of time when a local body of believers, after years and years of disobedience, sin, pride, and in rebellion against the Word of God, find themselves in great peril, many times in desperation nearing the brink of extinction. The reality of this extinction, where the church will actually close its doors, is much closer at hand than most Christians are willing to admit. . . . In preparation for strategic planning, there is a great need for the team and church to pray Scriptures to the Lord together, particularly the promises from God’s Word that he has made to his covenant people.

A fourth essential prayer principle for effective strategic planning was observed by team members from Nehemiah 1:11. Nehemiah prays, asking God to give him success in the next steps. He needed permission from the king, along with the necessary resources to embark on this new opportunity of joining God on mission to rebuild the holy city of
Jerusalem.

As he prayed for four months, ultimately Nehemiah knew his success with the king, along with the work of rebuilding the walls and people’s lives in Jerusalem, rested entirely in the hands of sovereign God. Similarly, as the church seeks to rebuild through strategic planning, she must cry out to God in prayer, seeking his favor upon their lives and endeavors.

In summary, during the strategic planning team’s second meeting, while examining Nehemiah’s prayer (1:4-11) four essential prayer principles were discussed in preparation for strategic planning. First is the need for a proper, biblical view of God—God is high and exalted (v. 5). Second is the genuine need for confession of sin and repentance (vv. 6-7). Third is to recall the promises of God by praying the Scriptures (vv. 8-10). Fourth is the principle that success ultimately rests in the hands of a sovereign God whose plans will be brought to completion. Humbled by Nehemiah’s model prayer, the team concurred that a successful strategic plan for Light in the Desert Baptist Church would result solely as the gift of God’s sovereign grace.

Following a one-hour study of Nehemiah’s prayer, the team concluded the meeting with thirty minutes of prayer together. The team’s prayers were guided by the four prayer principles which had just been examined and discussed.

**Phase 2: Implementation**

**Week 3**

**Church ministry analysis.** The 12 church members who had been randomly selected to complete the church ministry analysis returned it to a member of the strategic planning team on the Sunday morning beginning week 3. Analysis results were compiled by the church’s administrative assistant with the goal of distributing the findings to the strategic planning team for their regularly scheduled meeting in week 4.

**Strategic planning team: Meeting 3.** The strategic planning team’s third
meeting featured two significant areas of discussion. First, through a brief study of Nehemiah 2:1-9, team members gained a greater understanding that God provides windows of opportunity to do a great work for Him. Just as Nehemiah was given the opportunity to rebuild the city walls and gates in Jerusalem, God’s local church is given timely opportunities to pursue God’s plan of rebuilding toward a better, more preferred future together.

The second area of team discussion involved examining the church’s ministry context for strategic planning. To lay a biblical basis and foundation for this discussion, I led the team to study Nehemiah 2:11-20. I explained that once Nehemiah arrived in Jerusalem he went on a mission at night with a few men (strategic planning team) to assess the unique ministry context to which God had called him. While touring the city, Nehemiah immediately sees the devastation and destruction of the city’s walls firsthand. Nehemiah’s assessment indicates that the damage was extensive. More importantly, for 140 years, Jerusalem’s broken down walls were a symbol of the spiritual condition concerning the hearts of God’s people. After sharing his analysis of the ministry context in Jerusalem, Nehemiah challenged the people to take immediate action. In response, the people said, “Come let us rebuild the walls of Jerusalem, and we will no longer be in disgrace” (2:17).

I led the team to see the benefit and value of understanding strategic context in the marketplace, that is, in relation to the team’s work of strategic planning in the church. I further explained that one of the most common strategic analysis tools used in the marketplace for compiling data is “SWOT.” In the simplest of terms, during the SWOT analysis phase, the planning team itemizes both good and bad news, that is, they list (1) internal good news (strengths), (2) internal bad news (weaknesses), (3) external good news (opportunities), and (4) external bad news (threats).

The purpose for the gathered data was intended to create urgency and a case for change. The church strategic planning team’s analysis of the internal and external
factors pertaining to their own ministry (strategic) context creates a challenge for the church to move beyond the status quo; therefore, moving in a positive direction toward the quest for a better future together. A completed internal and external analysis gives the church an accurate picture of what it needs to know about itself and its community. This is strategic context, and it is crucial information for the church and strategic planning team to gather during the preparatory stages of strategic planning. Therefore, much valuable information is to be gained for the church who seeks to understand its own strategic context, taking the time and effort to perform an extensive internal and external analysis during the early steps of strategic development.

The second portion of the meeting focused on the community demographics, which had been downloaded online from the organization MissionInsite. The three reports studied and discussed were a compilation of the QuickInsite Report, the ExecutiveInsite Report, and the Impressions Report. The study area consisted of a five-mile radius surrounding Light in the Desert Baptist Church.

From the QuickInsite and ExecutiveInsite reports, the following twelve observations were made by the team: (1) population within the study area is projected to experience significant growth in the next ten years with an increase from 211,855 to 254,460 or 9.1 percent; (2) the various phases of life expected to experience the greatest positive rate of growth are required formal schooling (ages 5-17), families and empty nesters (ages 35-54), and retirement opportunities (ages 65 and over); (3) overall, the adult education level in the study area is considered high and is strongest in the following three levels of educational attainment: high school graduates (or GED), some college (no degree), and those with a bachelor’s degree; (4) the racial/ethnic mix of the area is very homogeneous. Nearly 77 percent of the people are Caucasian. Just over 15 percent are Hispanic or Latino, and other ethnic groups combined make up the remaining 8 percent. The racial/ethnic percentages are projected to stay the same during the next ten years; (5) in the study area, the average household income is projected to grow from $66,437 to
$70,880 or by 6.7 percent. In the population’s study area, 92 percent live above poverty level, while 8 percent live below poverty level.

From the same demographic data, additional observations were realized: (6) white collar jobs (67.3 percent) outweigh blue collar jobs (32.7 percent), which is basically two to one; (7) according to the data, the top three Mosaic segments are Golden Year Guardians, Suburban Style, and Middle Class Melting Pot; (8) the level of religiosity in the study area is somewhat low. Nearly 41 percent identify themselves as conservative evangelical Christians, 48 percent consider themselves a spiritual person, 17 percent enjoy watching religious TV programs, slightly over 20 percent say it is important for them to attend religious services, and roughly 16 percent say their faith is really important to them.

Final observations from the QuickInsite and ExecutiveInsite reports offer the following insights: (9) concerning annual charitable giving practices of $200 or more, nearly 23 percent of the people in the study area give to religious organizations, 5.9 percent to other organizations, 5.5 percent to social services/welfare and 5.3 percent to educational purposes; (10) of the households with children, nearly 70 percent have a married couple in the home, 21 percent are single mother households, and 9 percent are occupied by single fathers. While a slight decrease is projected of single mother households in the future (2.4 percent), the other household types will experience an increase of 1 to 1.5 percent respectively; (11) the marital status data shows in 2013, 57.9 percent married, 21.9 percent have never been married, 11.1 percent divorced, 7.4 percent widowed, and 1.7 percent separated. Ten year projections show a slight increase of both never married and married (0.2 percent), a slight decrease in divorced (0.1 percent) and in widowed (0.3 percent) and the number of those separated will essentially remain unchanged; (12) average age of the study area is currently 40.99 and is expected to slightly increase to 41.87 over
the next ten years.\textsuperscript{3}

From the Impressions Report, ten community and mood values indicators and ten community inclination indicators were examined. Of the ten community mood and values indicator, concern for the environment, practice of altruism and giving, importance of religious faith, desire to broaden horizons, and the pursuit of personal growth ranked the highest. Receiving a middle ranking were indicators such as drive for affluence, devotion to family, and commitment to career. The lowest ranked indicators were entertainment activities and sense of well-being.

Of the ten community inclination indicators, people in the five-mile study area (1) tend to be somewhat global versus local, (2) somewhat traditional versus progressive, (3) somewhat sociable versus retiring, (4) somewhat indulgent versus being restrained, (5) somewhat planned versus spontaneous, (6) somewhat dutiful versus carefree, (7) are concerned moderately more with security versus fulfillment, (8) mixed concerning a lifestyle of simplicity versus affluence, (9) moderate inclination toward the concern of others versus self, and (10) concerning the inclination of following versus leading, the study area showed mixed results.\textsuperscript{4}

As the meeting concluded, I issued a challenge asking team members to study and examine the three reports further, along with the observations which had been made. In preparation for the next meeting, team members were instructed to be prepared to discuss 5 to 7 ministry implications which might be gleaned from demographics of the community’s five-mile radius surrounding the church. I also reminded the team that the church ministry analysis results would be provided for the next meeting. The community demographics provided by MissionInsight, along with the church ministry analysis would


\textsuperscript{4}Ibid.
prove to be valuable tools to assist the team in gaining a better understanding of the unique ministry context to which God had called them to make a difference for Jesus Christ.

Week 4

Nehemiah message 1: Preparation. Week 4 of the project began preparation and study for the eleven-week message series, “Repurposed” from the book of Nehemiah. The first message was an exegesis of Nehemiah 1:1-3. The message series began on the Sunday, September 8th, which kicked off the week 5 of the project.

Pre-project Nehemiah questionnaire. Copies of the pre-project Nehemiah questionnaire were prepared in advance for distribution to every church member in attendance at the worship celebration on September 8th (see Appendix 3).

Strategic planning team: Meeting 4. Church ministry analysis results were compiled by the church’s administrative assistant and distributed to the strategic planning team at the beginning of their fourth meeting together. After opening the meeting with a season of prayer, the team spent the remainder of their time together reviewing and discussing in detail a compilation report of the participant’s responses to the church ministry analysis (see Appendix 1). Due to time constraints, ministry implications which were to be derived from the community demographics and church ministry analysis were not discussed. However, under my direction, the team unanimously agreed to pray and further study the community demographics and church ministry analysis in preparation for week 5. Each team member was assigned to come prepared to share 5 to 7 ministry implications from the provided research instruments. At this point in the strategic planning process, the team was seeking to answer the question, “In light of the information gathered, what is God saying to us?”
Week 5

**Pre-project Nehemiah questionnaire.** During week 5 of the ministry project, church members were invited to complete a pre-project questionnaire immediately following the morning worship service (Appendix 3). Only church members who were committed in advance to be present for 8 of the 11 weeks of Nehemiah messages were eligible to participate. The purpose of the questionnaire was to test the participant’s knowledge of the book of Nehemiah. The questionnaire consisted of ten multiple choice questions taken from Nehemiah’s book. Church members were asked to identify themselves on the questionnaire by providing a personal “code” word of their choice. The pre-project questionnaire was reviewed by me and the results were later compiled by Light in the Desert’s administrative assistant. The results were then compared with the post-project questionnaire to determine if church members had grown in knowledge of the book of Nehemiah during the message series.

**Nehemiah message 1.** On Sunday morning beginning week 5 of the project, I preached the first message in the eleven-week series, “Repurposed,” from the book of Nehemiah. The message was an overview of the series which focused on the exegesis and application of Nehemiah 1:1-3 (see Appendix 2).

**Nehemiah message 2: Preparation.** A significant amount of prayer, study, and preparation was devoted to the second message in the “Repurposed” series titled, “Relentless Prayer,” and based on Nehemiah 1:4-11. Four key areas of Nehemiah’s prayer were examined. A relentless pray-er (1) recognizes who God really is (1:5-6), (2) repents of all sin (1:6-7), (3) recalls the amazing promises of God (1:8-10), and (4) requests specific help from God for success (1:11).

**Prayer survey.** In preparation for the week 6, a prayer survey was copied and scheduled to be distributed on the following Sunday to all adult church members during the Sunday school hour (see Appendix 4). The prayer survey was utilized as an instrument
to determine member’s knowledge and understanding of both personal and church prayer practices and disciplines.

**Strategic planning team: Meeting 5.** Prior to the strategic planning team’s meeting, each member was instructed to come prepared to discuss the ministry implications for Light in the Desert Baptist Church derived from the community demographics (the five-mile radius around the church), along with the church ministry analysis. From this data, the team sought to answer the following questions: First, what is God saying to the strategic planning team? Second, what is the unique ministry context to which God has called the church to serve? After a lively collaborative discussion, although still a work in progress, the team prepared a summary of possible ministry implications for the church:

1. Based on growth projections for the next ten years, there will continue to be people moving into the area with needs; many in need of a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. The church must respond by addressing the need for outreach ministries, servant evangelism, intentional discipleship, networking with area churches, welcome team ministry, and ministries for first-time guests.

2. The life phase groups which are projected to experience the most significant growth are ages 5 to 17, 35 to 54, and 65 and over. The projections indicate the church must give strong consideration to a multi-generational approach in its ministries. In particular, special attention and emphasis must be placed on ministries to preschool, children, students, parents, empty nesters, and senior adults.

3. Since over three-fourths of the target area is currently Caucasian and projected to remain the same in the future, there will likely be very little ethnic diversity in the church’s make-up, which is a reflection of the community. However, with nearly 16 percent of the population Hispanic, there is a need for Spanish-speaking ministries.

4. Economically the church and target area are made up of middle class individuals and families. Both research instruments seem to indicate a need for the church to teach financial planning and Christian stewardship principles.

5. Of the adults age 25 or older, 70 percent are married and nearly 30 percent are divorced or have never been married. The implications for the church suggest the need to consider ministries for married couples such as marriage and parenting classes, counseling, marriage retreats, family retreats, and date nights with child care provided. With such a large segment of singles in the target area, the church would be wise to address ministries specifically targeted to reach and minister to singles both in the church and surrounding community.

6. With an openness and desire of the people to broaden their horizon and to be stretched globally, missions, innovation, and creativity must be explored.
7. The study area suggests a large percentage of people have a very low sense of well-being. This true but sad reality does provide the church with the opportunity of leading people to a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, with the goal of helping them to discover and experience their new identity in Him.

8. Research findings from the church’s ministry context indicate people have a strong desire to pursue personal growth or to discover ways to make their lives better. The implication for the church suggests the need to help people understand the significance of their personal growth and development in Christ, which points to the priority of an intentional plan for discipleship.

9. People are looking for places to volunteer and are willing to give of their time to opportunities which are meaningful and purposeful. The majority of volunteers prefer to serve and work alongside others in teams. Therefore, the church has a tremendous opportunity to provide a place for people to serve, partnering together with others in meaningful and purposeful ways to impact eternity.

10. According to the church ministry analysis, the primary strengths of the church include Bible-based preaching/teaching, numerical growth and additions to the church membership, warm and friendly atmosphere, music ministry that is growing and in transition, excellent location, and a spirit of servanthood. Team members agreed to pray about and discuss further ways the church can build upon these strengths to help create a better future together.

11. The analysis also revealed the primary areas of improvement at Light in the Desert include a clearer organizational chart and leadership structure, revision of constitution and by-laws, Christian stewardship education, unified vision, prayer ministry, personal spiritual growth, worship services that are being planned and offered with all generations in mind, continued growth in preschool, children’s and student ministries, an expansion of the welcome team ministry (people and responsibilities), the need for building community through small group ministries, renovate the fellowship hall space, community outreach, place greater emphasis on use of the social media, develop an intentional plan for discipleship, follow-up strategy for guests who visit the church, a system for recruiting, equipping, and placing and evaluating volunteers. Concerning the suggested areas for improvement, the team agreed to revisit each of these in future meetings in an effort to best determine which are the greatest priorities to address in regard to the church’s future strategic plan.

**Week 6**

**Prayer survey.** On Sunday morning a prayer survey (see Appendix 4), was distributed to three adult Sunday school classes who met together in a large assembly. Participants were given ten minutes to complete the survey. Following the completion of the survey, I led a time of focused prayer for the church. Results from the prayer surveys were compiled by the church’s administrative assistant and given to me, the church staff, leadership team, and strategic planning team for consideration concerning the church’s future prayer ministries.
Nehemiah message 2. I preached the second message in the “Repurposed” series which was titled, “Relentless Prayer,” based on Nehemiah 1:4-11 (see Appendix 2). Four key areas of Nehemiah’s prayer were shared with the congregation during the Sunday worship service. Nehemiah prayed relentlessly for four months. The four observations which can be made from the text are that a relentless pray-er (1) recognizes who God really is (1:5-6), (2) repents of all sin (1:6-7), (3) recalls the amazing promises of God (1:8-10), and (4) requests specific help from God for success (1:11).

Nehemiah message 3: Preparation. Preparation for the third message in the Nehemiah series focused on the ability to discern and “Recognize God’s Windows of Opportunity,” from the text Nehemiah 2:1-10. According to the Nehemiah text, God’s windows of opportunity are best recognized through prayer (1:4-11), a person’s God-given position (2:1-4), planning (2:4-9), along with God’s providence and provision (2:8-9), and his protection (2:10).

Strategic planning team: Meeting 6. For the strategic planning team’s sixth session, I invited international evangelist Dennis Pethers to facilitate the meeting. Pethers is from the United Kingdom and the founder of Viz-A-Viz Ministries. He has recently become well-known among Southern Baptists based on the curriculum he has written, The Rooftop: A Fresh Vision of God’s Heart for the Lost, which finds its biblical basis from Peter’s rooftop encounter with God in Acts 10-11.5 Pethers has a strong passion, burden, and calling to help churches connect with the never churched or as he says, “Connect with people who don’t know that they don’t know Jesus.” Pethers says, “The never churched don’t know about church, nor do they think about it as something they should do.” Pointing to the community demographics of East Mesa, Pethers reminded the

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team that most people in the culture surrounding the church have a worldview which is impacted by various factors and belief systems. He added, “The majority of people in the church’s ministry context do not have a biblical worldview.”

Pethers asked the team, “What can we do as the church gathered to help us be more effective as the church scattered throughout the week?” He challenged the group to develop the church’s future strategic plan with goals and objectives in mind to intentionally equip and empower church members to live for Christ daily; more specifically, to share Christ during the week. He said the wrong question for the church today is, “How do we get people to come to church?” Instead, the right question which needs to be asked is, “How do we get among the people every day, as the Spirit leads, to build relationships for the purpose of introducing them to Jesus?” Or perhaps another way of asking it is, “God, what are you doing in our community and world, and how can we join you?” Pethers reminded the team of the church’s purpose, which is to join in the mission of Jesus Christ to seek and save the lost (Luke 19:10). From the questions Pethers posed, there was a healthy and productive dialogue among team members.

The remainder of the meeting, Pethers presented the following overview of The Rooftop Three-Step Strategy. Step 1: Encounter—with God. In step one, churches must ask the question, God what do you see when you look at this community? Pethers commented, “Thinking strategically is about seeing things from God’s perspective and encountering his vision.” Step 2: Engage—equip Christians to engage in conversation with people in everyday life. Step 3: Expand—As new people become followers of Jesus Christ, equip them to reach others. Finally, Pethers strongly suggested that the team consider the three-step strategy not as a program, but as a process in life’s journey. From the questions, information, and insights Pethers provided, there was healthy and productive dialogue which occurred among the team.

Week 7

Nehemiah message 3. I delivered the third message in the “Repurposed”
series from Nehemiah’s memoirs (see Appendix 2). As the text was presented (2:1-10), the message was determined to equip individuals and collectively the church body with the ability to discern and “Recognize God’s Windows of Opportunity.” According to the text, God’s windows of opportunity are best recognized through prayer (1:4-11), a person’s God-given position (2:1-4), planning (2:4-9), along with God’s providence and provision (2:8-9), and his protection (2:10). I emphasized that God had given Light in the Desert Baptist Church a divine window of opportunity for strategic planning which must be seized in the pursuit of a better, more preferable future together.

Following the morning worship celebration, I expressed the need for the church to practice the third step in the process of church discipline (Matt 18:17). The application of this third step by the church body came as the result of a church member who had repeatedly caused dissension and a spirit of divisiveness, all of which had created great damage to relationships and to the church’s unity. In each of the steps of discipline as outlined in Matthew 18:15-17, the disruptive member would not repent of his sin, refusing to submit to the scriptural process of reconciliation and restoration. By the church’s affirmative vote and in obedience to the scriptural process of church discipline, the member was removed from the church’s membership rolls. Although this action of church discipline was taken by the church, there remained a spirit of opposition and negativity among a small faction of the church body. The opposition Nehemiah and God’s people had experienced toward the rebuilding of Jerusalem’s gates and walls, now also had a foothold within the body of Christ at Light in the Desert.

**Nehemiah message 4: Preparation.** Study and preparation for the fourth message in the Nehemiah message series centered on Nehemiah’s examination of his ministry context upon his arrival to the city of Jerusalem (2:11-20). The message title was “Recovery: Getting beyond Life’s Ruins.” As Nehemiah examined his ministry context, he saw the devastation and destruction of the city’s walls and gates firsthand. The reality of the ministry context to which God called Nehemiah to develop and implement a
strategic plan was that the city and its people lay in ruins. Four keys for recovery were
gleaned from the text: (1) take time for inspection and examination (2:13-15); (2) admit
the need for change (2:17); (3) refuse to go it alone (2:17-18); and (4) declare success and
victory in Christ Jesus (2:19-20).

**Strategic planning team: Meeting 7.** The seventh meeting’s agenda began to
focus the team toward the process of crafting a mission statement, vision statement, and
to develop a list of core values.

Concerning the mission statement, the team agreed: (1) it must be based on the
Scriptures, specifically rooted in the Great Commission as commanded by Jesus Christ
(Matt 28:19-20); (2) its thrust must be targeted toward “making disciples,” which results
in people’s lives being spiritually transformed; (3) it must answer the questions, “Why do
we exist?” or “What is the church supposed to be doing?”; (4) it must call people to a
sense of urgency, which leads to action and doing; (5) it must be clear—the language must
be clear enough to be understood by everyone both inside and outside the church; (6) it must
be concise—the mission of the church should be able to be stated in one sentence or in
one breath; (7) it must be compelling—which says it is contagious and inspirational to the
one who speaks as well as to the one who hears; (8) it must be catalytic—where others are
motivated to dedication, commitment, and action; (9) it must be contextual—which says
the mission of the church must speak to the cultural relevance pertaining to the church’s
unique time and place in the community and world.

As the team explored the necessary and essential components toward developing
a vision statement, the following conclusions were made: (1) a church’s vision paints a
picture of a better, more preferable future together; (2) vision probes the question, “What
could be?”; (3) a clear vision which is fully dependent on God stirs and motivates people
through faith in Jesus Christ to pray, risk, give, sacrifice, worship, grow, serve, and reach
out to others locally, nationally, and globally; (4) vision provides focus, allowing the
church to do a few things with excellence.
A third topic of team discussion focused on core values. Several crucial observations were made: (1) core values must explain who the church is; primarily the church’s identity; (2) values must speak to what is most important in the church’s life and ministry; (3) values must be non-negotiable or things church members are ready and willing to die for; (4) values must demonstrate shared convictions that guide the actions of the church and are integrated into every aspect of the church’s work and ministry; (5) the core values must be limited in number of four to six.

In preparation for the next week’s meeting, team members were challenged to pray daily, including a one-day fast. The purpose for such an intense prayer focus was two-fold. First, the team needed to hear from God concerning the mission statement, vision statement, and core values he intended for the team to formulate in its strategic plan development. Secondly, it was imperative that prayer be at the forefront in the face of the enemy’s growing opposition throughout the church.

**Week 8**

**Nehemiah message 4.** The fourth message in the Nehemiah series focused on Nehemiah’s examination of the ministry context upon his arrival to the city of Jerusalem. I preached an expository message based on Nehemiah 2: 11-20 (see Appendix 2). The title of the fourth message was “Recovery: Getting beyond Life’s Ruins.” As Nehemiah examined his ministry context he saw the devastation and destruction of the city’s walls and gates firsthand. The reality of the ministry context revealed that the city and its people lay in ruins. Four keys for recovery were gleaned from the text: (1) Take time for inspection and examination (2:13-15); (2) admit the need for change (2:17); (3) refuse to go it alone (2:17-18); and (4) declare success and victory in Christ Jesus (2:19-20).

**Nehemiah message 5: Preparation.** Study and preparation for the fifth message in the “Repurposed” series came from selected verses in Nehemiah 3. The
message title, “Releasing the Power of God’s Team,” provided a scriptural foundation for teamwork and collaboration for strategic planning and in the work of the church. Message preparation in God’s Word also revealed the leadership and organizational structure necessary to best accomplish the work and ministry of the church.

An exegesis of several Scripture passages unveiled four essential principles for teamwork and collaboration: (1) every team member plays a significant role in God’s game plan (Neh 3; 1 Cor 12:27; Rom 12:4-5; Eph 2:10; 1 Pet.4:10); (2) God’s team best accomplishes God’s work—shoulder to shoulder (Neh 3; Phil 1:3-5); (3) God strategically positions every team member for maximum impact (Neh 3:10, 23; John 15:16); and (4) together make the commitment to finish strong (Neh 4:6, 6:15).

**Strategic planning team: Meeting 8.** After seeking the Lord’s wisdom and direction through the spiritual disciplines of prayer and fasting, the team gathered for their eighth meeting together. The purpose of the meeting was to hone in on several key areas of strategic development. First, after much prayer and discussion, the team narrowed a mission statement to two possible options. Option 1—“Reflecting the light of Jesus to the world,” based on Matthew 5:14-16 and 28:19-20. Option 2—“Loving God. Loving Others. Sharing Hope,” based on Matthew 22:37-40 and 1 Peter 3:15. With these two options on the table, team members collectively agreed to pray during the next week, trusting that God would confirm to them which of the two mission statements best answers the question for Light in the Desert Baptist Church, “Why do we exist?”

Secondly, I encouraged the team to further study and research the next step as they begin to develop the church’s vision statement. A third area of discussion centered on the team beginning to identify the church’s core values. A major breakthrough occurred at this point of the meeting. In a collaborative effort, team members agreed to prayerfully identify five core values for the church based on the acrostic, L-I-G-H-T. It was decided that the five core values would flow from the mission and vision statements which would be developed by the team within the coming week. The meeting closed in prayer,
thanking God for the progress which had been made so far in strategic development, with much anticipation believing God would show himself mighty in the coming weeks.

**Week 9**

**Nehemiah message 5.** I preached the fifth message from Nehemiah, “Releasing the Power of God’s Team,” during the Sunday morning worship celebration (see Appendix 2). The following four essential principles and Scripture references for teamwork and collaboration were the key teaching points of the message: (1) every team member plays a significant role in God’s game plan (Neh 3; 1 Cor12:27; Rom 12:4-5; Eph 2:10; 1 Pet 4:10, (2) God’s team best accomplishes God’s work—shoulder to shoulder (Neh 3; Phil 1:3-5), (3) God strategically positions every team member for maximum impact (Neh 3:10, 23; John 15:16), and (4) together make the commitment to finish strong (Neh 4:6, 6:15). Each of points proved to be vital principles for how Light in the Desert would structure its leadership and also serve as a guide for how ministry teams would function toward the future implementation of the soon-to-be developed new strategic plan.

**Nehemiah message 6: Preparation.** Preparation for the sixth message in the “Repurposed” series focused on a concentrated time of prayer, study, and a biblical exegesis of Nehemiah 4:1-9. The title of the message was “Refocus: What to Do When Attacked by Spiritual Opposition—Part 1.” The text revealed a strategy Satan often employs to disrupt the work and lives of God’s people through external opposition. Thankfully, the text demonstrated, from Nehemiah’s example, strategic principles for gaining victory over spiritual opposition.

**Strategic planning team: Meeting 9.** Entering into the ninth week of meeting together, the team’s goal was to finalize the mission, vision, and core values of the strategic plan. Through much prayer and discussion, the following conclusions were reached: *Our mission:* Love God. Love Others. Share Hope. *Our vision:* Light in the Desert strives to be a dynamic, spirit-filled, multi-generational church where we are reflecting the light of

The newly crafted mission, vision, and core values were derived from the team’s prayerful response to the needs expressed through the community demographics and church ministry analysis data gathered from previous weeks. The team moved forward with a much more clear understanding of their unique ministry context. With mission, vision, and core values established, next the team began its focus toward further strategy formulation with the development of goals and objectives.

**Week 10**

**Nehemiah message 6.** The title of the sixth message in the “Repurposed” series was “Refocus: What to Do When Attacked by Spiritual Opposition—Part 1” from Nehemiah 4:1-9 (see Appendix 2). The timing of this particular message was significant as the church was experiencing various attacks and opposition from the enemy throughout the ministry project.

From the text, I first addressed the strategic ploys of the enemy that sometimes come upon God’s people through spiritual opposition, which is external in nature. First was the enemy’s tactical ploy of ridicule (4:1-2), second was mockery (4:3), and third, the enemy’s opposition intensified through force (4:7-8).

Next, from Nehemiah’s life and leadership, I taught the following principles intended to greatly help God’s people gain victory over the external spiritual opposition of the enemy. First, Nehemiah modeled the priority of prayer (4:4-5). Second, Nehemiah refocused God’s people on the work God had called them to do (4:6). A third strategy in the face of opposition was that Nehemiah posted guards on a twenty-four-hour watch (4:9).

I then led the church toward the practical application of the scriptural
principles examined. The worship service concluded with a powerful season of corporate prayer. I also announced that a new weekly time of prayer would be available every Sunday morning from 10:40-10:50. I strongly encouraged adults to participate following the Sunday school hour. An additional opportunity for prayer came a few weeks later through a prayer walk scheduled for November 2nd.

**Nehemiah message 7: Preparation.** In preparation for the seventh message, I prepared an exegesis of Nehemiah 4:10-23. The message title was, “Refocus: What to Do When Attacked by Spiritual Opposition—Part 2.” Whereas external spiritual opposition was addressed in week 6, the seventh message focused primarily on internal opposition that comes from people within the church. With so many churches facing the reality of internal opposition, several principles were examined from the text. The first step was to expose the strategy of the enemy. Secondly, several scriptural truths and life principles were gleaned with the goal of enabling the church to formulate and implement strategy, thereby gaining victory over internal opposition when it arises.

**Strategic planning team: Meeting 10.** Once the team had clarified and agreed upon mission, vision, and core values, the next step was to develop goals and objectives. At the same time, I knew it would be imperative for the team to gain a better understanding of how strategic intent and stretch might apply in strategy formulation. The team first examined and discussed several marketplace definitions for goals and objectives.

For example, by definition, De Kluyver says, “Goals are open-ended statements about desirable outcomes. Objectives, on the hand, are more specific and, as a consequence, should be measurable.” Therefore, goals are a general target—What, generally, you are trying to achieve? Objectives have a specific outcome desired—What,

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specifically you are trying to achieve? The acronym SMART provides strategic planners
a helpful reminder for the criteria of an objective: Specific, Measurable, Achievable,
Relevant, and Time-bound.

In addition, when it comes to goal-setting, the team collaborated on Collins
and Porras concept of having a BHAG (Big, Hairy, Achievable Goal). In their book Built
to Last, they write,

Like the moon mission, a true BHAG is clear and compelling and serves as a
unifying focal point of effort—often creating immense team spirit. It has a clear
finish line, so the organization can know when it has achieved the goal; people like
to shoot for finish lines. A BHAG engages people—it reaches out and grabs them in
the gut. It is tangible, energizing, highly focused. People “get it” right away; it takes
little or no explanation.7

As the strategic planning team further clarified the purpose of objectives, they
looked at the following statement made by Bradford,

Objectives should be stated as results. Objectives are not activities. Rather, objectives
are statements of what you want to accomplish. Because you want to accomplish
something, your objectives must be specific. Objectives must be stated as specific
expected results so that you minimize weasel room. The objectives should ideally
contain measurements, which must be quantitative, and be timely. In other words,
you have to declare what you do and when you are going to do it—specifically.8

After reviewing the definitions and concepts, the team was in agreement and
saw that establishing written goals and objectives were essential in strategy formulation
as they set in place the specific outcomes desired for future strategy implementation.

Still another marketplace term was explored during the meeting. I emphasized
key components of formulating strategy (vision, mission, values, goals, and objectives)
all of which must be aligned with the company’s strategic intent and stretch. Next, De
Kluyver’s explanation of strategic intent and stretch was introduced:

7James C. Collins and Jerry I. Porras, Built to Last: Successful Habits of

8Robert W. Bradford and J. Peter Duncan, Simplified Strategic Planning: A
No-Nonsense Guide for People Who Want Results Fast! (Worcester, MA: Chandler
House, 2000), 186.
Most companies that have risen to positions of global leadership started from modest beginnings with ambitions that were far greater than their resource base and competencies would allow. To get a position of market leadership, a focus on the drivers of competition is clearly not enough; strong leadership determined to realize a clear vision for the future, a strategic intent, is required. Strategic intent does more than paint a vision for the future; it signals the desire to win. It focuses the organization on key competitive targets, and provides clear goals about which competencies to develop, what kinds of resources to harness, and what segments to concentrate on. It also serves as a reminder that true strategic thinking has a long-term focus. A related idea is the concept of stretch. Most companies will not have the resources or capabilities to reach their most ambitious goals. Stretch reflects the recognition that successful strategies are built as much around “what can be” as around “what is.” Ultimately, every company must create a fit between its resources and its opportunities.9

As team facilitator, I further explained that marketplace strategic intent and stretch provides unique value to a church’s strategic planning process. Churches who commit themselves to strategic intent and stretch, first of all, paint a picture of God’s plan for their preferred future. Second, intent and stretch build a strong sense of identity for God’s people in Christ, along with defining their roles and responsibilities with their community and world. Third, intent and stretch demonstrate that the commitment of the church is one of intense desire or “obsession” to win, which permeates every aspect of church life and ministry. The battle every church must win is spiritual and eternal in nature—which is the battle for people’s very lives and souls. God’s people have every reason to be the world’s most cutting-edge organization, leading the way in pursuit of strategic intent and stretch; taking risks by faith and fully believing God toward the advancement of His Kingdom.

In conclusion, I stated that the church strategic planning team is usually tasked with the responsibility of formulating a five, seven, or ten-year strategy. However, since the church has been in decline for many years and is seeking to be a turnaround church through the process of rebuilding and revitalization, the team should seek to develop only a two or three-year strategic plan.

   Toward the end of the meeting the team members were in complete agreement

9De Kluyver, Strategic Thinking, 11.
that the goals and objectives that would be developed in the coming weeks must flow from the team’s newly developed mission, vision, and core values. In addition, the implications from the strategic intent and stretch discussion, along with findings gleaned from the community demographics and church ministry analysis must also be given strong consideration in formulating strategy. Prior to the next meeting, all team members were given the assignment to begin prayerfully developing a list of goals and objectives based on the facts and findings which had just been discussed.

**Week 11**

**Nehemiah message 7.** The seventh message in the “Repurposed” series based on Nehemiah’s memoirs was titled, “Refocus: What to Do When Attacked by Spiritual Opposition—Part 2” (see Appendix 2). The message was based on the text taken from Nehemiah 4:10-23. The text revealed another of Satan’s strategies, which is internal spiritual opposition and it is powerfully designed to create confusion and division in the church.

First, the message focused on the strategies of internal opposition Satan uses inside of the church, that is, among the people of God. According to Nehemiah 4:10, internal opposition of the enemy seeks to deplete strength, distort vision, and deflate the confidence of God’s people who are striving diligently to rebuild.

The second part of the message provided both individual believers and the church body a strategy from God for overcoming the enemy. The four strategies for the overcomer are (1) a common goal (Neh 4:13; Matt 28:19-20), (2) a united focus upward (Neh 4:14), (3) a balanced approach (Ne 4:15-17), and (4) an intentional focus outward (Neh 4:19-22; Phil 2:3-4).

**Nehemiah message 8: Preparation.** Study and preparation for the eighth message of the “Repurposed” series once again found the Israelites in the process of rebuilding the city gates and wall around the city of Jerusalem. And while the work
continued to progress, even in spite of intense spiritual opposition, there were some signs of relational conflict that began to occur. The focal text came from Nehemiah 5:1-13 with the message title, “Resolving Relational Conflict God’s Way.”

Nehemiah 5:1-5 suggests three specific causes of relational conflict. Nehemiah 5:6-13 provides several scriptural principles designed to help guide people in the process of resolving conflict God’s way. Additional study and attention was given to the preparation of the message for the purpose of presenting the plan of salvation, along with a call for people to respond. In particular, there would be an intentional emphasis placed on helping non-Christians find resolve in their relational conflict with God, which the Bible says results as a person chooses to live their life apart from a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

**Strategic planning team: Meeting 11.** The agenda for the team’s eleventh meeting featured a detailed discussion concerning the goals which God intended to become a crucial part of formulating strategy. The team agreed to write goals and objectives specifically under the three focal areas of the church’s new mission, “Love God. Love Others. Share Hope.” It was also determined that the church’s new vision and core values would be integrated into the goals and objectives, that is, within the framework of each of the three focal areas of the church’s mission.

The team decided to first address goals, and objectives would later be birthed from the established goals. After much discussion, the team agreed upon the following goals for the “Love God” section of the church’s mission:

**Goal 1** To provide opportunities for people to experience true God-centered worship.

**Goal 2** To create welcoming environments for people to encounter Jesus’s love.

**Goal 3** To maximize the power of prayer for greater Kingdom growth and impact.

**Goal 4** To help people grow in Christ-like maturity through the daily practice of spiritual disciplines.

**Goal 5** To create a culture of generosity among God’s people which reflects a total Christian stewardship lifestyle.
Following a collaborative approach of determining goals for the “Love God” section of the church’s mission, the team agreed to spend the next week seeking the Lord in prayer concerning goals he might have for the “Love Others” and “Share Hope” portion of the mission. Once goals were agreed upon in these two areas, the next step in formulating strategy involved the compilation of objectives, which would be much more specific and detailed in nature.

Week 12

Nehemiah message 8. The twelfth week of the project began by delivering the Sunday morning message, “Resolving Relational Conflict God’s Way” from Nehemiah 5:1-13 (see Appendix 2). I first addressed three causes of relational conflict which occurred while Nehemiah was leading the people in the project of rebuilding the city gates and walls around Jerusalem. The three causes of relational conflict were (1) a huge famine (Neh 5:2), (2) high taxes (Neh 5:4), and (3) high interest rates (Neh 5:5).

Next from the passage, I shared four principles to help the worshipers understand God’s way of resolving conflict in relationships. The first principle is “I place myself under Christ’s leadership and control” (Neh 5:6-7). Second, “I must seek to resolve conflict privately” (Neh 5:7). Third, “I am instructed to take the next step publicly” (Neh 5:7-11). And fourthly, “I pray and work with the goal of restoration” (Neh 5:12-13). I recommended the book, The Peacemaker: A Biblical Guide to Resolving Personal Conflict,10 to the congregation for further reading on the subject.

I concluded the message with a presentation of the plan of salvation. I addressed those in attendance who, up to this point in their lives, had chosen to live apart from a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. I proceeded to teach that life’s greatest conflict for every person is being separated from God, which is the result of their own

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personal sin. However, I went on to share the good news. Because God is a God of love, he has provided the only way to resolve life’s greatest relational conflict through a personal relationship with Jesus Christ (1 Tim 2:5; Rom 5:6-8; Col 1:21-22; John 5:24).

**Nehemiah message 9: Preparation.** The text for the ninth message in the “Repurposed” series was taken from Nehemiah 6:15-16, where the story centered on the climactic moment of God’s people completing the process of rebuilding the walls and gates around the city of Jerusalem. This event in Israel’s history happened with the help of their God in just fifty-two days. God’s people had indeed witnessed a miracle!

The message title is, “Reaching Life’s Goals: Enduring Principles for Finishing Well.” Preparation uncovered seven enduring principles from Nehemiah’s life both for individuals and the church toward attaining life’s goals and therefore finishing well the work God has called his people to do in his name.

**Strategic planning team: Meeting 12.** During the twelfth meeting, the team worked diligently toward completing goals for the two remaining sections of the church’s mission, “Love Others” and “Share Hope.” The following goals were agreed upon concerning the “Love Others” area:

Goal 1  To develop an intentional process of “making disciples” who are fully committed to Jesus Christ.

Goal 2  To equip, support and encourage families to make their homes the central place for spiritual growth.

Goal 3  To establish team-based ministries for the purpose of training people to discover a meaningful place of service.

Goal 4  To develop specific ministries which are Bible-centered, Christ-focused, needs-based and targeted for people at various stages of life.

Goal 5  To build stronger relationships with community and ministry partners to more effectively accomplish God’s work.

The following goals were agreed upon for the “Share Hope” area:

Goal 1  To develop ministries designed to equip people to more effectively share their faith and hope in Jesus with greater obedience, willingness and freedom.
Goal 2  To create an outward-focused strategy of innovative ministries for the purpose of advancing the gospel.

Goal 3  To purposefully identify and integrate various forms of social media and marketing strategies to promote and further God’s agenda.

Goal 4  To become a more mission-focused church where we intentionally share the hope of Jesus with others around the world.

After having established goals in each the three areas of the church’s mission, the team next had a brief brainstorming session to discuss possible objectives. Although there were no objectives written, the team concluded the meeting on a positive note with every member having a handful of objectives to prayerfully consider and further develop prior to the next meeting.

**Prayer walk.** On the last day of week 12, church members were invited to participate in a one hour prayer walk. The prayer walk was specifically designed for church members to pray over the church buildings and property, along with the option of prayer walking several neighborhoods in preparation for the adoption and execution of the church’s new strategic plan. Prior to the prayer walk, I led a brief training for the participants. Five church members participated in this unique time of prayer. Participants prayer-walked the church property and traveled to various neighborhoods.

Following the one hour prayer walk, participants gathered back at the church for a time of celebration, primarily giving everyone an opportunity to share their experiences. Each participant was then asked to write down their experience with the Lord by completing their own personal prayer walk story (see Appendix 5). Prayer walk stories were compiled by the church’s administrative assistant with the data being used for future quarterly prayer walks in which church members would be encouraged to participate.

**Week 13**

**Nehemiah message 9.** The ninth message of the “Repurposed” series was “Reaching Life’s Goals: Enduring Principles for Finishing Well” (see Appendix 2). The primary text addressed was Nehemiah 6:15-16. Drawing from several Scripture passages
in Nehemiah, I shared seven principles for reaching goals and finishing well.

The seven enduring principles are (1) pray continually (Neh 6:9; Col 4:2), (2) commit to God’s purposes (Neh 2:11, 17; 4:6; 6:16), (3) live passionately (Neh 1:4; 4:13-14), (4) plan thoroughly (Neh 2), (5) rely on God’s power (Neh 2:20; 4:20; 6:9, 16; Rom 8:28-31), (6) include people (Neh 3; Rom 12:5), and (7) be willing to persevere, many times even a great cost (Neh 6:15-16; Phil 1:6). Nehemiah led the people to fulfill these seven principles under God’s leadership, which ultimately led to the rebuilding and completion of the city’s gates and walls in just 52 days. I concluded the message pointing the congregants to the person and work of Jesus Christ who perfectly lived out and embodied each of the seven principles studied.

**Nehemiah message 10: Preparation.** With the city’s gates and walls now rebuilt, next God began to do a work of rebuilding and repurposing his people spiritually. Preparation for the tenth message, “Revival: Can It Still Happen Today?” focused on select passages taken from Nehemiah 8-10.

These chapters revealed three vital signs of revival God desires for his people. First is a renewed hunger for God’s Word (8:1-5). A second vital sign is God’s people crying out to him in prayer (9:1-3). And thirdly, one of the results of genuine revival involves the people making the renewed commitment of putting God first. The message also included preparation for the plan to end the service with a challenge for the people to sign a covenant with God and with one another, thus following the Nehemiah model in which he had led the people to do the same.

**Strategic planning team: Meeting 13.** It was determined the purpose of the team’s final meeting for strategy formulation was basically two-fold. First, was to collaborate toward agreed upon objectives, which would support the stated goals. Second, was to decide the process for how the strategic plan would be presented in a special-called meeting following the upcoming Sunday morning service. To accomplish both of
these agenda items, it was predetermined and agreed upon by the team to prepare and plan for a three hour meeting together.

Following a season of prayer and after much lengthy discussion, written objectives were reached to support each of the stated goals. With the completion of this final step, the team had a three-year strategic plan to present to the church body for affirmation (see Appendix 9). The team agreed to use a shared approach, thereby involving each of the team members to make the presentation of the strategic plan to the church. As a whole, the team felt a shared approach would best communicate to the church body the unified effort of teamwork and collaboration, which had clearly guided the overarching spirit of the strategic planning process. As the meeting concluded, I announced there would be one more team meeting together. Following the upcoming Sunday’s affirmation of the strategic plan by the church, I made arrangements for the team to share a time of dinner and fellowship the following Thursday evening for the purpose of celebrating all God had done. The celebration dinner was planned at a local area restaurant.

Week 14

Nehemiah message 10. The tenth message of the “Repurposed” series held huge significance for the church. From Nehemiah 8-10, I shared three vital signs for revival. I strongly emphasized that revival is for God’s people, for the word revival itself means “to bring back to life.” The message title was, “Revival: Can It Still Happen Today?” (see Appendix 2). According to the Nehemiah model, the three vital signs for revival are (1) the people have a renewed hunger for God’s Word (Neh 8), (2) the people cry out to God in prayers of repentance (Neh 9), and (3) the people commit to put God first (Neh 10). Toward the conclusion of the message, I challenged every church member to sign a covenant before God and with one another (see Appendix 6), which was much the same as what Nehemiah had led the people to do in Jerusalem.

Signing of the covenant. As copies of the covenant were distributed to each
person, I reviewed the seven commitments contained in the covenant. Next, I proceeded to lead the congregation toward a public response during the designated invitation time of the service. As the Spirit led, each member was invited to first sign their name and then place the date on the covenant. After doing this, they were encouraged to bring their signed covenant to the altar and place it there as a commitment, which basically signified before the Lord and their church family that they would seek wholeheartedly to practice, as a lifestyle, the scriptural principles and promises stated in the covenant. This proved to be a very heartfelt and moving time of commitment for the church as many members brought their signed covenant to the altar.

**Strategic planning team presentation.** Immediately following the covenant-making service, members, regular attenders, and guests were encouraged to stay for the much anticipated strategic planning team presentation. I called the special meeting to order and then led in prayer. I thanked the church for their continued prayer for the team over the past thirteen weeks. Following a brief overview of the strategic planning process, team members proceeded to share the various sections of the plan God had given them for the church’s unique ministry context.

Once the plan had been presented in its entirety, I opened up the meeting to the church body for either comments, words of encouragement, questions, or if anyone needed further clarification concerning the plan. After a brief period of discussion, I called for the church to affirm the newly developed three-year strategic plan for Light in the Desert Baptist Church. In an overwhelming response of unity, the church body fully embraced and affirmed the plan. In closing, I challenged church members to look forward with great anticipation as the church would soon begin the implementation phase of the strategic plan early in 2014. The special meeting was adjourned with a time of celebratory praise by God’s people.

**Nehemiah message 11: Preparation.** Preparation for the final message in the
Nehemiah series included an in depth study and exegesis of Nehemiah 12:27-47. The message title was “Repurposed: God’s People Celebrate!” Since the city’s wall and gates had been rebuilt, and God’s people had experienced true revival, they were led to realize that indeed they had every reason to celebrate. And celebrate they did as the sounds of joy were heard throughout the land (12:43)!

**Strategic planning team celebration dinner.** For their dedication and hard work, members of the strategic planning team were shown appreciation as a night of dinner was provided by the church as a gift for all team members at a local restaurant. The night proved to be a wonderful time of fellowship; everyone joining in a celebration for all that God had done through this season of spiritual renewal and rebuilding. Among the team members, there seemed to be a genuine hope and optimism for a better future together, looking forward to the implementation of the newly adopted strategic plan as it would soon unfold.

**Phase 3: Project Completion**

**Week 15**

**Nehemiah message 11.** The final message from the Nehemiah series was titled, “Repurposed: God’s People Celebrate,” based on Nehemiah 12:27-47 (see Appendix 2). From the main text, I unpacked several principles of celebration for God’s people; principles which would prove to be just as relevant and timely for the church family at Light in the Desert as they were in the days of Nehemiah. From the message, I shared with the church body the following celebratory principles: (1) purpose—celebrating who God is and what he has done (12:27-29); (2) preparation—the need for spiritual preparation to meet God in worship (12:30); (3) praise—filling God’s house and his city with praise (12:31-42); (4) power—the far reaching impact of joyful celebration (12:43); (5) provision—a grateful attitude for God’s abundant gifts (12:44-47); and (6) person—worship centered solely on the person of Jesus Christ (12:43).
Immediately following the worship service, members, regular attendees, and guests continued the day of celebration by participating in a Thanksgiving Luncheon together. This special time of food and fellowship, which was experienced in the body of Christ at Light in the Desert, overflowed with joy, gratitude, and a spirit of unity; thus indeed reflecting a people who had truly been repurposed by God.

**Nehemiah post-project questionnaire.** Toward the conclusion of the worship service, post-project questionnaires were distributed (see Appendix 3). Those members who were asked to complete the post-project questionnaire were required to meet two stipulations. First, participants must have completed the pre-project questionnaire, which had been distributed and completed by some members during the first week of the Nehemiah message series. Secondly, participants must have participated in a minimum of 8 of the 11 worship services in which of the Nehemiah message series had been presented. The responses were immediately collected and given to the church’s administrative assistant to begin recording the data. The data was compiled into a t-test for dependent samples to help determine whether there was a positive statistical difference gained between the pre-project and post-project questionnaires.

**Post-project interviews.** I conducted post-project interviews with 25 church members during week 15 (see Appendix 7). The 25 interviewees were randomly chosen from those members who had signed the new church covenant on Sunday morning during the week 14. The purpose for the interviews were to give church members an opportunity to respond to seven questions concerning specific ways they planned to practically live out the covenant which they had made recently with God and with one another. The results were compiled to determine the specifics of how they were planning to apply the covenant principles to their lives.

**Conclusion**

The execution of the fifteen-week project was met with intense spiritual warfare
and opposition. In such times, Scripture provides much encouragement and comfort. The apostle John wrote, “You, dear children, are from God and have overcome them, because the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world” (1 John 4:4). Jesus instructed his disciples about what to do when they encountered trials, difficulties, and troubles from the enemy. Jesus said, “I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world” (John 16:33). In hindsight, just as Jesus had warned, the many schemes of the enemy should have been anticipated, especially when it came to the long and arduous task of rebuilding a local church which had lay decimated in ruins physically, emotionally, and spiritually for quite some time. Satan did not want to see things change. He was more than happy to see the church remain in a state of ineffectiveness, apathy, and hopelessness for many more years to come. The stark reality of encountering such a high level of intensity and opposition from the enemy certainly took its toll on me, my wife, the church staff and leadership, the strategic planning team, and others who have been intricately involved throughout the duration of the project.

The good news is that I cannot thank and praise God enough for providing and preserving the Nehemiah model for strategic planning in the Scriptures. Nehemiah proved over and over again to be faithful to God’s call on his life. He clearly demonstrated a godly example for not only how to respond to opposition, but also to stay the course, thereby accomplishing together with the people, huge and significant God-sized tasks in the face of severe, relentless, and continual mounting threats from the enemy.

As God led Nehemiah to rebuild the city’s walls and gates in Jerusalem, along with the spiritual revival which occurred among the people, all proved to be very timely and priceless truths from God’s Word throughout the project and certainly in the final days of the project’s culmination and completion at Light in the Desert. Chapter 5 will provide data and detailed information that clearly seeks to communicate how the
Nehemiah model was followed and ultimately led to the project’s success—all for the glory of God the Father, Jesus Christ, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Blessed be God who is Three in One.
CHAPTER 5
PROJECT EVALUATION

Introduction
The purpose of this project was to develop and implement the Nehemiah model of strategic planning to rebuild Light in the Desert Baptist Church in Mesa, Arizona. This chapter serves as the evaluative component of the project. The first section contains an evaluation of the project’s purpose. The second section is an evaluation of the project’s goals. In the third section, the project’s goals will be evaluated. The fourth and fifth sections respectively will offer strengths and weaknesses of the project. In the sixth section, several project modifications will be proposed. The seventh section provides theological reflections and considerations related to the project. The eighth section addresses personal reflections. The final section is the project conclusion.

Evaluation of the Project’s Purpose
It is the belief of the author that the stated purpose of the project was met as the fifteen-week period reached its completion. Three major components contributed to the fulfillment of the project’s purpose. The first component was prayer. Throughout the project, key individuals from both inside the church and beyond the local church lifted the project up in prayer. The power of prayer was clearly realized, especially in the face of intense spiritual opposition. The Nehemiah model for strategic planning, which led God’s people and him to rebuild the gates and walls around the city of Jerusalem, was immersed in prayer. Every step of the way the Israelites faced relentless spiritual opposition from the enemy. Without question, prayer was a key strategic component toward accomplishing the project’s purpose.

A second major component toward fulfilling the project’s purpose was the
tireless and faithful work of the strategic planning team. From the project’s infancy stage, the seven-person team showed tremendous determination and commitment; staying focused week after week to fulfil the task to which God had called them. The team was made up of people with a diverse range of ages, gender, and church membership tenure, along with other differences regarding backgrounds, interests, and ministry skills. However, even with these differences in the team’s chemistry, it is what they shared in common, that being first a commonality in whom they were serving (the Lord Jesus Christ), and secondly a common purpose, which ultimately led to the church’s affirmation of the three-year strategic plan. Setting aside personal agendas and being focused solely on God’s agenda, the strategic planning team demonstrated a wonderfully refreshing example of how God plans teamwork and collaboration to function within the context of the local church.

The third component which contributed to the fulfillment of the project’s purpose was the series of messages preached from the book of Nehemiah. The title of the message series was “Repurposed.” The definition of repurposed is to use or convert for use in another format or product. Repurposing happens when one sees something that has very little or no value, or was only worth throwing away, but it is suddenly reused for significant purposes.

Following a period of exile and destruction in which Jerusalem’s gates and walls had lay in ruins for over 140 years, Nehemiah and God’s people discovered that physically, emotionally, and spiritually they were desperately in need of being repurposed by God. After many years of difficulty and struggle, the congregation at Light in the Desert was also decimated spiritually, emotionally, and numerically. This was a persevering group of downtrodden people who were also in great need of God’s repurposing. What the church body was desperately in need of was the purpose for which this project was intended: to develop and implement the Nehemiah model of strategic planning to rebuild Light in the Desert Baptist Church in Mesa, Arizona.
The climactic moment of the entire project occurred on the Sunday of week 14. Following the morning message featuring the topic of revival (Neh 8-10), I led the church to covenant together with God and with one another, in a similar fashion as Nehemiah had led the people to sign a covenant (Neh 10). Seventy-eight percent of members present signed a covenant and brought it to the altar during the invitation time of the worship service. Secondly, during a special-called meeting immediately following the time of covenant-making, the strategic planning team presented a proposed three-year strategic plan to the church. Following the presentation, the church body overwhelmingly affirmed the plan. This was a historic day for God’s people at Light in the Desert Baptist Church. The centerpiece of the project, the signing of the covenant along with the church’s adoption of the strategic plan, greatly hinged upon a mighty movement of God on this day: God indeed showed up. His presence resulted in a new strategic plan, which will serve as a major tool toward accomplishing a better, preferable, and hope-filled future together. Thus, the project’s purpose had indeed been fulfilled.

**Evaluation of the Project’s Goals**

The data and other detailed information provided in this section will provide substantial evidence that the goals of the project were satisfied. Four goals were used to determine the effectiveness of the project. The first goal was to provide a biblical framework for strategic planning in the church. Church members grew in biblical knowledge and discovered the principles of strategic planning through a message series from the book of Nehemiah. This series was taught for eleven consecutive weeks during Sunday morning worship services. At the beginning of this series, church members were asked to complete a pre-project questionnaire, which tested their knowledge of the book of Nehemiah (see Appendix 3). The same questionnaire was distributed post-project to measure each participant’s biblical knowledge gained from the eleven-week message series. To participate in both questionnaires, members had to attend at least eight of the eleven services. Thirty-six members met the stated requirements. A t-test for dependent
samples was used to determine whether there was a positive statistical difference between the pre-project and post-project questionnaires. This goal was deemed successful as the t-test clearly demonstrated there were positive statistical differences gained from a comparison of the two questionnaires given during the Nehemiah message series (t (35) = 7.506, p < .008) (see Appendix 10).

The second goal was to implement a comprehensive prayer strategy, which was proven to be an integral part of the strategic planning process. First, church members were invited to complete a prayer survey to determine their knowledge and understanding of both personal and church prayer practices and disciplines (see Appendix 4). A total of 32 members completed the survey. Next, the survey results were compiled by the church’s administrative assistant and then distributed to the church staff and strategic planning team to discuss future prayer strategies and ministries (Appendix 11). From the survey results, prayer strategies and ministries were incorporated into the three-year strategic plan. Secondly, church members were encouraged to participate in a one-hour prayer walk during week 12 of the ministry project. Five church members participated in the special prayer emphasis. Following the prayer walk, participants were asked to write a brief one-page story of their prayer experience (see Appendix 5). Each member’s prayer walk story was used to measure application of prayer truths and principles learned from Nehemiah. The goal of implementing a comprehensive prayer strategy was deemed successful as all 5 church members agreed to serve for one year as prayer walk team leaders and all of the participants committed to prayer walk four times during the next year under the spiritual leadership and direction of a prayer walk team leader (see Appendix 12).

The third goal concerned the development of a strategic plan that reflected the Nehemiah principles. A 7-member strategic planning team was formed and commissioned with the responsibility of developing a comprehensive strategic plan for the church. Each member of the strategic planning team signed a covenant as a
commitment to faithfully fulfill the responsibilities necessary for the completion of the
task (see Appendix 8).

A church ministry analysis was completed by randomly selected members from
Light in the Desert’s membership (see Appendix 1). The completed analyses provided
valuable assistance to the seven-member strategic planning team offering a detailed
assessment of the church and community’s ministry context (see Appendix 13) The
strategic planning team met weekly throughout the ministry project to complete its task of
leading the church to discover core values, mission, vision, and to develop a ministry
structure and strategy for “making disciples.” During week 14 of the project, the strategic
planning team agreed upon a strategic plan and presented it to the church body for
affirmation. This third goal was measured by a completed strategic plan and was deemed
successful as 97 percent of the church’s membership affirmed the recommendation (see
Appendix 9).

The fourth goal challenged members to covenant with God and with one another
in faith and practice to “live out” the scriptural principles which they had learned from the
Nehemiah model. Prior to the strategic plan being affirmed by the church, every member
was asked to prayerfully sign and commit to a covenant (see Appendix 6). The fourth
goal’s success was measured in part by the number of covenants signed by church
members. Forty-one of the church’s 52 adult members present signed the covenant. The
goal was deemed successful as 78 percent of church members present signed the covenant.
Understanding the challenge of getting people to sign and commit to a covenant, I was
encouraged to see this part of the fourth goal attained.

An additional goal measurement of covenant implementation was utilized. A
representative group of 25 adults were interviewed for the purpose of hearing them share
practical and life-transforming ways they planned to incorporate the covenant into their
lives (see Appendix 11). This goal was deemed successful as every adult interviewee
shared at least one practical way they planned to implement the covenant in their lives for the purpose of rebuilding the church (see Appendix 14).

**Strengths of the Project**

The fifteen-week project contained several strengths which will be mentioned in this section. First, far and above the greatest strength was the utilization of the Nehemiah model itself. Drawing from Nehemiah’s example, the pages of his memoirs are filled with many insightful truths and principles, which are essential for revitalizing and rebuilding the local church through the medium of strategic planning.

A second strength was the prayers of many individuals throughout the project. Once again gleaning from Nehemiah’s life, he was a man who continually demonstrated his need for and his dependence on God through prayer. Before Nehemiah made a move, he sought God’s will and direction in prayer. In the face of spiritual opposition from the enemy, time after time Nehemiah asked God to strengthen him for the task. There were several members at Light in the Desert, and an additional handful of believers from beyond the church’s walls, who put into practice Nehemiah’s model of prayer. In the midst of intense spiritual opposition, which was mostly internal in nature, it is my firm belief that it was these few prayer warriors who attributed greatly to the project’s successful completion.

A third strength was the diverse make-up of the strategic planning team. The hand of God brought together a team representing the various age groups from within the church body at Light in the Desert. From the project’s beginning, team members were solely concerned with discovering God’s agenda and his plan for the church. Seeking God’s face and working together collaboratively, the strategic planning team recommended a three-year plan for Light in the Desert’s unique ministry context, which was to be multi-generational in approach. And in the end, God honored the team’s efforts with the church body strongly affirming the recommendation.

There was a fourth strength for consideration, and that was my commitment to
deliver an eleven-week message series from the book of Nehemiah. The biblical truths and principles taken from Nehemiah are hard-hitting, requiring much self-examination on the part of the hearers. The author of Hebrews says,

For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. Nothing in all creation is hidden from God’s sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give an account. (Heb. 4:12-13)

The message of Nehemiah has been used by God to rebuild and repurpose a people for his name at Light in the Desert Baptist Church.

A final strength to mention was the actual implementation and application of the covenant. First was the exciting reality that of the adult church members present, 78 percent signed the covenant and brought it to the altar during the invitation time of the worship service. This type of signed covenant had never happened before in the church’s history, marking a major spiritual breakthrough! Beyond that, 25 of those adults who signed the covenant agreed to be interviewed. The purpose of the interview was to provide each person an opportunity to share at least one way they planned to live out covenant principles. These application steps will play an important role toward the church’s future effectiveness; especially where everyone needs to be on board, working together as a new covenant people toward the implementation of the new strategic plan.

Weaknesses of the Project

While the execution of the fifteen-week project did have its share of strengths, there were also several weaknesses which need to be addressed. First, while the prayer support of individual prayer warriors was clearly evident, the lack of prayer from the body of Christ as a whole at Light in the Desert was a legitimate concern. To substantiate this concern, only 32 members completed the prayer survey during week 2 of the project. Secondly, a few members spread negative talk and gossip in the midst of spiritual opposition rather than investing their time in prayer in response to opposition from the enemy. And then thirdly, although the prayer walk received much promotion, the 5
members who participated in this prayer opportunity, which occurred during week 12 of the project, was a much lower number than the 20 to 25 people anticipated.

A second weakness was the fifteen-week duration to complete a project of this magnitude. The greatest challenge of the project’s brevity was its impact on the work required by the strategic planning team. While in many cases, depending on the size of the church and other related factors, the process of strategy formulation in a local church is usually six to twelve months in duration or longer. The process at Light in the Desert did appear to be rushed at times due to the time constraints related to the project. Overall, even due to the time limitations placed on the team, the project’s integrity was not compromised.

A third weakness of the project was the in-depth nature of some of the research instruments. In certain cases, the in-depth nature of instruments did lead to a smaller number of participants, or it presented the need to make some other adjustments to gather the necessary research required. For example, where the original proposal was to have 12 members of the church’s leadership team complete the church ministry analysis, due to the document’s length and exorbitant number of questions required to be answered, some of the church leaders were either unwilling to participate or due to time constraints, not able to complete the task. And because of this reality, an adjustment was made for research purposes. Instead, 12 church members were randomly chosen to complete the analysis. The same concern was expressed by a handful of members concerning the prayer survey which contained 37 questions (distributed during the Sunday school hour during week 6 of the project). Several members did not complete the task. Overall, I somewhat have an understanding for the concerns expressed. The concerns that were raised did limit participation from a small percentage of the congregation, however, sufficient research was gathered to maintain the project’s goals and integrity.

**Suggested Project Modifications**

Although all of the project’s original goals were met, there are several project
modifications which need to be highlighted in this section. First and foremost, there must be sufficient time and preparation invested by the pastor, church staff, and leadership team to better assess the spiritual readiness of the church prior to embarking on the journey of strategic planning together. Even though I worked prayerfully and diligently through the appropriate channels of communication, leadership, structure, church polity, and relationships prior to the project’s implementation, additional resources were available which perhaps could have been utilized to better prepare and equip the church for a season of detailed strategic planning together. One of the recommended resources beneficial to the project was Aubrey Malphur’s book, *Advanced Strategic Planning*, which dedicates nearly 25 percent of the book to assessing the church’s spiritual readiness for the strategic planning process.

A second recommendation for project modification is to shorten or abbreviate some of the research instruments to be utilized. Based on this project’s experience, consideration should be given to the following tools: (1) Church Ministry Analysis—although this is a helpful tool for the research and preparation of the strategic planning team, the questions contained within it need to be scrutinized and shortened a bit. One question to consider is, “Which of the analysis questions are absolutely essential and beneficial toward helping the strategic planning team gain insight into their own unique ministry context?” In other words, seek to limit or shorten the analysis for the purpose of receiving only this vital information. (2) Prayer Survey—in a similar manner, prayerfully scrutinize the questions most pertinent to best determine future prayer strategies and ministries. (3) Post-Project Interview—this was a research instrument utilized as a tool to interview 25 adult members, all of whom had signed the church covenant. The purpose of the interviews was to give each adult an opportunity to share at least one principle from the covenant they were planning to live out and apply toward helping the church accomplish its new strategic plan. The following suggested modifications of the post-project interviews should be considered: One option is to have each member of the
strategic planning team conduct several interviews. This approach offers two positive modifications. First, the team shares the work, rather than limiting the interview process to one person. Second, the interviewees may feel greater freedom to be more transparent as they share their answers with their peers, rather than with the pastor. A second option is, if the interviews are still going to be conducted by one person; then the suggested modification is to limit the number of interviewees to 10. Of course, this modification would greatly simplify and lessen the workload of a single interviewer.

This leads to a third project modification. A stronger emphasis toward personal and corporate prayer must be intentionally planned for if the Nehemiah model is to be fully integrated into the process. When incorporating the Nehemiah model for the purpose of rebuilding God’s church, the priority of prayer cannot be underestimated. Spiritual warfare is real, which means opposition, difficulties, obstacles, trials and temptations from the enemy will come. Suggested prayer-related modifications include, but are not limited to, incorporating an intentional prayer emphasis into every worship service, small group, and Wednesday night gathering throughout the project. Consideration should also be given to a 24-hour concert of prayer prior to the project’s launch. To enhance personal prayer and worship throughout the project, weekly or monthly prayer guides should be given consideration and distributed to members accordingly. Finally at the project’s conclusion, an additional prayer modification suggestion is to schedule a night of praise for the church to celebrate all God has done! (Neh 12).

A final project modification involves the all-important area of communication. Members of the strategic planning team must be better utilized throughout the project as a means of championing and communicating the process. Therefore, members of the strategic planning team should be given opportunities to share updates, report progress, receive suggestions and answer questions throughout the process. Appropriate environments for this to occur include, but are not limited to, worship services, small
groups, mid-week ministries, special events sponsored by the church, and events in the community.

**Theological Reflections**

Nehemiah’s memoirs contain a treasure trove of biblical truths for the person, church, or organization striving to seek, to know, and to fulfill the plan of God. The book of Nehemiah is a hidden gem which this author believes needs to be rediscovered and brought back to life again in the twenty-first century among the people of God. Just as it was true in 445 B.C., it is still true today: God desires to rebuild and to repurpose a people for his name. The following theological reflections are a compilation of insights that I learned through personal study of Nehemiah and utilized for message preparation, along with the work of the strategic planning team throughout the project’s implementation.

The “Repurposed” message series based on Nehemiah’s book unveiled numerous theological principles which are worthy of review, consideration, and reflection. The first theological reflection finds its basis in Nehemiah’s “Relentless Prayer” (Neh 1:4-11). Before Nehemiah makes a move toward fulfilling God’s plan, he prays. As Nehemiah prays, he does four things: (1) recognizes who God really is; (2) repents of all sin; (3) recalls the promises of God; and (4) requests specific help from God for success. There is so much to be learned from Nehemiah’s relentless prayer life. One thing that clearly stands out is that he spends four months in prayer and preparation, while the rebuilding project lasted only 52 days! The lesson is that prayer has to be at the forefront, taking precedence, that is, before proceeding with God’s plan.

Second, following a period of saturating God’s plan in prayer, sensitivity to the Holy Spirit’s leading and knowing when the appropriate time to move forward must be considered. Nehemiah had received God’s strategic plan, however, he had to wait prayerfully and patiently for God’s timing. The scriptural principle here calls God’s people to be spiritually in tune to “Recognize God’s Windows of Opportunity” (Neh 2:1-10). A window of opportunity is a relatively brief period of time during which an opportunity
must be seized or it may be lost. Nehemiah seized the moment and traveled to Jerusalem to begin fulfilling the strategic plan of rebuilding the city’s gates and walls that had lay in ruins for over 140 years. The lesson learned from this second reflection principle is that God gives individuals and churches a window of opportunity to do something for him. And it is at that very precise moment in time that God-given opportunities must be seized or they may be lost. This pivotal point in the church’s strategic planning process is to recognize God’s timing. In light of these things, Paul wrote, “Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil” (Eph 5:15-16).

A third theological area of reflection involves the principle of “Recovery: Getting Beyond Life’s Ruins” (Neh 2:11-20). Nehemiah’s arrival in Jerusalem brought him face to face with reality. Everywhere he looked and in every direction he turned, he was met with pile after pile of rubbish and ruin. James Boice points out several difficulties Nehemiah faced: (1) the task was overwhelming, (2) a history of defeat, and (3) a discouraged group of workers.¹ This is the reality of Nehemiah’s ministry context upon his arrival in Jerusalem. The truth is, this was no easy task, but God had called him to lead the people to get beyond the ruins. Yet another lesson learned from the Nehemiah model is the task of leading a church beyond the ruins and difficulties of the past; therefore, guiding them to see a better, more preferable future together. This is precisely the goal of rebuilding a church through the medium of strategic planning. Nehemiah provides four keys for the road to recovery: (1) do take time for inspection and examination; (2) admit the need for change; (3) refuse to go it alone; (4) through faith in Jesus Christ, declare success and victory in the face of opposition.

A fourth theological consideration, which is essential to bring to the forefront, is the wonderful unity of teamwork in the body of Christ. In Nehemiah 3, as Nehemiah

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¹James Montgomery Boice, Nehemiah (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), 32-33.
and the people are working together to rebuild the city’s gates and walls, they beautifully illustrate how God desires collaboration and teamwork toward accomplishing his plan. Nehemiah is at work delegating and, “Releasing the Power of God’s Team.” Pat MacMillan offers an excellent definition of team: “A team is a group of people committed to a common purpose who choose to cooperate in order to achieve exceptional results.”

This is a powerful definition that encompasses the task of the church’s strategic planning team. One of the most favorable qualities of highly effective and exceptional teams is synergy. MacMillan defines synergy:

Synergy is the state in which the output is greater than the sum of the inputs. Synergy says, one plus one equals three, four, even five! The roots of this word are found with the classical Greek word synergos, which means “working together.” It combines two Greek words: syn-, together + ergon, work.

Teams that work together, in a synergistic manner, produce results far greater than they could have ever imagined. This was a proven principle in Nehemiah’s day and the same can be said of strategic planning teams or of ministry teams serving in the church today.

A fifth theological principle which was learned is to “Refocus: How to Respond When Attacked by Spiritual Opposition” (Neh 4:1-23). Throughout the project, the strategic planning team, the church, and I faced intense spiritual opposition. Drawing from Nehemiah’s example, God has provided proven strategies for overcoming both external and internal opposition of the enemy. Those strategies employed at Light in the Desert were (1) prayer, (2) work—stay to the task, (3) watch—watchmen in prayer, (4) focus on a common goal, (5) a united focus upward, and (6) an intentional focus outward.

A sixth theological consideration challenged the church to learn the scriptural process of “Resolving Relational Conflict God’s Way” (Neh 5:1-13). Once again, Nehemiah, along with the teachings of Jesus (Matt 18:15-17), provided the model for

\[ \text{2Pat McMillan, } \textit{The Performance Factor: Unlocking the Secrets of Teamwork} \text{ (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2001), 30.} \]

\[ \text{3Ibid., 25.} \]
resolving relational conflict following God-honoring principles.

Next, the seventh theological principle features Nehemiah and the workers finishing the process of rebuilding the wall. This historic task which was recorded in Nehemiah 6:15-16: “So the wall was completed on the twenty-fifth of Elul, in fifty-two days. When all our enemies heard about this, all the surrounding nations were afraid and lost their self-confidence, because they realized that this work had been done with the help of our God.” From these two celebratory verses, there are critical lessons learned for “Reaching Life’s Goals: Enduring Principles for Finishing Well.” From Nehemiah’s life, he gives seven principles for finishing well: (1) pray continually; (2) commit to God’s purposes; (3) live passionately; (4) plan thoroughly; (5) rely on God’s power; (6) include people; and (7) be willing to persevere, many times even at great cost. These principles were not only beneficial to the strategic planning team, but they are also principles for reaching future goals along life’s journey.

A study of the three vital signs for revival (Neh 8-10), brings to the forefront an eighth theological consideration. Through this study, the church was faced with the question, “Revival: Can It Still Happen Today?” Even though Nehemiah had led the people to rebuild the walls around Jerusalem in just 52 days (a miracle of God), God still desired to do a work in their lives spiritually. It is the desire of God’s heart to bring revival to Light in the Desert and many other churches across the land. Through a study of Nehemiah 8-10, the following three signs for revival were learned: (1) a renewed hunger for God’s Word; (2) cry out to God in prayer; and (3) commit to put God first. The people in Nehemiah’s day experienced genuine revival. And out of the hearts of a revived (repurposed) people came a desire to make a covenant with God and with one another. A similar covenant was made with God and with one another at Light in the Desert.

A final theological consideration involves the biblical principle of God’s people coming together for a time of celebration, “Repurposed: God’s People Celebrate!” (Neh 12:27-47). When God’s people are truly repurposed by him, their response is one of
celebration. The rebuilding of the city’s gates and walls was complete and revival had come. Now it was time to celebrate! Nehemiah offers several key principles which were learned together by God’s people at Light in the Desert. First, the people understood the purpose for the celebration. They were celebrating who God is and what he had done. Second, they took time to spiritually prepare to meet God in worship. Third, their celebration included praise. God’s house and the outlying temple area were filled with the praises of God’s people. Fourth, was the power—the far reaching impact of joy and praise. Fifth, the people responded to God with gratitude and thanksgiving for his abundant provision. And sixth, the focus of the celebration was on God alone. As individual Christians and as the church body, Nehemiah instructs God’s people to celebrate with gratitude and thanksgiving, who God is and what he has done.

As this section draws to a close, it has been my fullest intent to clearly communicate the idea that Nehemiah’s book holds a wealth of theological insights and lessons which were learned throughout the duration of the project. At the same time, these are also valuable lessons that are to be lived out in faith and practiced through life’s journey.

**Personal Reflections**

I am extremely grateful and humbled by the opportunity God has given me of leading the ministry project for the specific purpose of developing and implementing the Nehemiah model of strategic planning to rebuild Light in the Desert Baptist Church in Mesa, Arizona. From its inception, the project has been a passion and calling from God. Therefore, I have poured my life into it for the purpose of seeing his plan come to fruition.

Throughout the project my prayer life has continued to grow immensely. Adding a project of this magnitude into an already busy life and ministry schedule has brought me closer to God, with an even greater dependence on him. My prayer life has also grown as I have witnessed prayer as a powerful weapon and gift from the Lord during an intense period of spiritual warfare and opposition. As the fifteen-week project
began, it was immediately met by opposition from the enemy. The opposition came from an unexpected source. Satan used a church leader from within the membership to stir up dissension and create division among the church body. The issues which came under attack and scrutiny included the process for how the strategic planning team was formulated, casting doubt, and accusations against myself and church staff, both of which were personal in nature as well as ministry related. As the attacks and false accusations intensified, in obedience I followed the steps of church discipline as given in the Scriptures (Matt 18:15-17). This was God’s church and it was under attack: therefore, this was a serious matter. One of my God-given responsibilities as the under shepherd of the church is to protect the flock. This matter had to be dealt with in a public meeting, where the church affirmed my recommendation to have the individual removed from the church membership roll. This marked the first time in nearly 30 years of serving on a local church staff where I had to take a matter of church discipline to a public forum. I was indeed grateful for the support of the church in regards to the action taken. I was also thankful for the gift of answered prayer as the Lord’s strengthening hand came upon my life, family, and church.

A second area of personal reflection focuses on how much I absolutely thrive on the opportunity to serve with others in a team concept where we collaborate and work together toward accomplishing a God-sized task. Light in the Desert’s strategic planning team was wholeheartedly focused on God’s agenda and plan, which created a refreshing environment in which to do God’s work week after week. In the end, the three-year strategic plan that was affirmed by the church became a beautiful example of what can be accomplished for the Lord through teamwork and collaboration.

Third, God has used the Nehemiah project to once again affirm the call on my life to serve the local church. I look forward with great anticipation to the strategic plan’s implementation with my brothers and sisters in Christ at Light in the Desert. My prayer is that God will use the plan to truly rebuild the church; serving together as a covenant
people unto the Lord and making a greater impact for him in our community and world.

Fourthly, by way of personal reflection, I have gained an even greater appreciation for some of the marketplace principles for strategic planning as a means of planning more effectively in the church. Personally, having come from a business background and also in the past having attained an undergraduate degree in Business Administration, it became my personal belief that many marketplace principles would add great value to the process of strategic planning in the church, and this has been affirmed.

**Conclusion**

Originally God planted within me the vision for this project almost two years ago. At that time, I was serving as senior pastor of a church in Savannah, Georgia, while also enrolled in the doctoral program at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. In His divine will God had other plans as to the location and local church where this project would be accomplished. I am grateful for the Lord’s most recent call on my life. In the summer of 2012, God brought my wife and me to Light in the Desert Baptist Church in Mesa, Arizona. My new church family has been supportive of the project’s implementation. In addition, I look forward to seeing the church’s new strategic plan, based on the Nehemiah model, become a reality in the months and years which lie ahead. Rebuild your church, O Lord. Indeed, rebuild your church.

Since that day two years ago, when the vision for this project was first birthed, it has been my continual prayer for God to use the Nehemiah model for strategic planning beyond a single local church. It is my belief that God may indeed choose to use the Nehemiah model for rebuilding and revitalizing churches on perhaps a much wider and larger scale. I was elected president of the Valley Rim Southern Baptist Association of churches at the recent annual meeting. The Valley Rim Association is made up of sixty-five Southern Baptist churches and church plants in the area. Might it be in the future grand plan of God to rebuild and revitalize churches in the association who might possibly benefit from using the Nehemiah model for strategic planning?
And then I am reminded of David Johnson, who was recently elected Executive Director of the Arizona Southern Baptist State Convention. During the recent state convention annual meeting, Johnson rolled out a fifteen-year vision for Southern Baptists in Arizona. The plan has many exciting components and is indeed a God-sized task. One of the components of Johnson’s vision, and now the adopted vision of the state convention, is to revitalize churches. As I broach this idea with a humble heart, there are times which I pray, dream, and wonder, what part, if any, might the Nehemiah model of strategic planning have toward revitalizing and rebuilding God’s churches in the great state of Arizona?

I feel greatly blessed to have had the opportunity to oversee this project. I am also grateful for the gracious privilege God has given me to further pursue my formal education endeavors through the Doctorate of Educational Ministry program at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. From the deepest and inmost part of who I am, with sincerity I appreciate everyone who has made this seemingly impossibility become a reality. In many ways the completion of this project and thus finishing this part of my formal education still seems almost surreal. Above all, I want to thank my personal Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be all the glory. Until he comes, let’s press on.
APPENDIX 1

CHURCH MINISTRY ANALYSIS

Agreement to Participate
The research in which you are about to participate is designed for the purpose of church ministry analysis which will be used in the church’s strategic planning process. This research is being conducted by Darwin Meighan for the purposes of collecting data for a ministry project. Any information you provide will be held strictly confidential and at no time will your name be reported or identified with your responses. Participation is strictly voluntary and you are free to withdraw at any time. By completion of this questionnaire, you are giving informed consent for the use of your responses in this project.

Background Information:

Directions: Please check or fill in your response to each question. This information will be held in strict confidence.

1. Your gender?
   ___ A. Male
   ___ B. Female

2. Your age in years?
   ___ A. 18-24
   ___ B. 25-34
   ___ C. 35-44
   ___ D. 45-54
   ___ E. 55-64
   ___ F. 65 and over

3. Your current marital status?
   ___ A. Single
   ___ B. Married
   ___ C. Divorced
   ___ D. Widowed

4. If you have children, how many do you have?
   ___ A. 1
   ___ B. 2
   ___ C. 3
   ___ D. 4
   ___ E. 5 or more

5. How long have you been a member at Light in the Desert?
   _____ years
6. Did you tithe regularly at Light in the Desert over the last 12 months?
   _ A. Yes
   __ B. No

7. How far do you live from Light in the Desert?
   Approximately _____ miles

Section I – Internal Analysis
Directions: Answer the following questions: (1) Place a check by the multiple-choice questions (2) Fill in the open-ended questions. (3) Some questions ask you to give your opinion using the following scale: SD = strongly agree, D = disagree, DS = disagree somewhat, AS = agree somewhat, A = agree, SA = Strongly agree (4) space is provided for any comments or clarifications that you wish to make.

1. In your opinion, do you believe Light in the Desert is growing, plateaued, declining in attendance?
   _ A. Growing
   _ B. Plateaued
   __ C. Declining
   __ D. Don’t know
   Comment:

2. To your knowledge, financial giving at Light in the Desert is increasing, plateaued, or declining?
   _ A. Increased
   _ B. Plateaued
   _ C. Declined
   __ D. Don’t know
   Comment:

3. If attendance is declining, how much longer can the church survive?
   _ A. One year
   _ B. Two to five years
   _ C. Five to ten years
   __ D. More than ten years
   __ E. Don’t know
   Comment:

4. What would you consider the primary strengths of Light in the Desert?

5. What would you consider the primary areas in need of improvement at Light in the Desert?
6. The church’s leadership does not address needed changes.  
SD    D    DS    AS    A    SA  
Comment:

7. The senior pastor is providing spiritual leadership to the church.  
SD    D    DS    AS    A    SA  
Comment:

8. The senior pastor has strong interpersonal skills.  
SD    D    DS    AS    A    SA  
Comment:

9. The senior pastor communicates God’s Word effectively through preaching and teaching.  
SD    D    DS    AS    A    SA  
Comment:

10. Other staff members are performing their ministries well.  
SD    D    DS    AS    A    SA  
Comment:

11. The majority of people in the church belong to which age group?  
   ___ A. 0-10  
   ___ B. 20-30  
   ___ C. 30-40  
   ___ D. 40-50  
   ___ E. 50-60  
   ___ F. 60 and above  
   ___ G. Don’t know  
Comment:

12. What does the age of the people say about the future of the church?  
   ___ A. Good future  
   ___ B. Average future  
   ___ C. Poor future  
   ___ D. No future  
   ___ E. Don’t know  
Comment:

13. Are there more men or women in the church?  
   ___ A. Men  
   ___ B. Women  
   ___ C. Don’t know  
Comment:
14. What is the average level of education of the people in the church?
   __ A. Masters level or above
   __ B. College
   __ C. Some college and high school
   __ D. High School
   __ E. Don’t Know
   Comment:

15. What type of employment do the majority of church members have?
   __ A. White collar
   __ B. Blue collar
   __ C. Combination
   __ D. Retired
   __ E. Don’t know
   Comment:

16. What is the average annual household income among members?
   __ A. Less than $25,000
   __ B. $25,000-$50,000
   __ C. $50,000-$75,000
   __ D. Over $75,000
   __ E. Don’t know
   Comment:

17. What is the church’s average family status?
   __ A. Married with children
   __ B. Married
   __ C. Single
   __ D. Don’t know
   Comment:

18. List 3 of the church’s greatest needs.

19. List 3 of the greatest expectations people have of the church?

20. The church has a clear vision statement which clearly articulates a preferable future?
    SD  D  DS  AS  A  SA
    Comment:

21. If applicable, what is the church’s vision statement?
22. The church has a compelling mission statement which explains its primary purpose(s) and reason for existence.
   SD D DS AS A SA
   Comment:

23. If applicable, what is the church’s mission?

24. The congregation knows well the church’s mission and vision statement.
   SD D DS AS A SA
   Comment:

25. The church is accomplishing its mission and vision statement.
   SD D DS AS A SA
   Comment:

26. Who is the church attempting to reach out to in the community?
   __ A. Primarily Christians
   __ B. Primarily non-Christians
   __ C. Both
   __ D. Don’t Know
   Comment:

27. The church has a clear strategy for helping people grow in spiritual maturity.
   SD D DS AS A SA
   Comment:

28. The church’s ministries are fulfilling the Great Commission by “making disciples.”
   SD D DS AS A SA
   Comment:

29. The church is reaching lost people from the community for Christ.
   SD D DS AS A SA
   Comment:

30. The church is reaching unchurched people for Christ.
   SD D DS AS A SA
   Comment:

31. The church’s worship is vibrant and inspiring.
   SD D DS AS A SA
   Comment:
32. The leadership team empowers the congregation for ministry.
   SD  D  DS  AS  A  SA
   Comment:

33. People are discovering and using their gifts for ministry in the church.
   SD  D  DS  AS  A  SA
   Comment:

34. The church has small group ministries to meet people’s needs for community.
   SD  D  DS  AS  A  SA
   Comment:

35. What are some of the church’s traditions?

36. Who are the church’s heroes?

37. What is the average tenure of the church’s pastors?
   ___ A. Less than 2 years
   ___ B. 3-4 years
   ___ C. 5-8 years
   ___ D. 8 or more years
   Comment:

38. The church is willing to make whatever changes are necessary to have a more effective ministry for Christ.
   SD  D  DS  AS  A  SA
   Comment:

39. The church faces and addresses its problems.
   SD  D  DS  AS  A  SA
   Comment:

40. The church tends to learn from its mistakes.
   SD  D  DS  AS  A  SA
   Comment:

41. The church does not condone sinful behavior on the part of its people.
   SD  D  DS  AS  A  SA
   Comment:
42. There are some people who are blocking the church from having effective ministry.
   SD D DS AS A SA
   Comment:

43. Are there certain traditions which are hampering effective ministry in the church?
   Comment:

44. Where is the power in the church?
   ___ A. The leadership team
   ___ B. The pastor
   ___ C. Other individual(s)
   ___ D. Don’t know
   Comment:

45. Is the church focused inward on itself or outward toward other people?
   ___ A. Inward
   ___ B. Outward
   ___ C. Both
   ___ D. Don’t know
   Comment:

46. The church has a creative and innovative ministry (regularly comes up with new ideas).
   SD D DS AS A SA
   Comment:

47. The church is teachable (invites constructive feedback and makes necessary changes).
   SD D DS AS A SA
   Comment:

48. To which age group does the church focus it ministries?
   ___ A. 0-10
   ___ B. 10-20
   ___ C. 20-30
   ___ D. 30-40
   ___ E. 40-50
   ___ F. 50-60
   ___ G. 60 +
   Comment:

49. The church normally meets its annual budget.
   SD D DS AS A SA
   Comment:
Section II—External Analysis
Directions: Answer the following questions: (1) Place a check by the multiple-choice questions (2) Fill in the open-ended questions. (3) Some questions ask you to give your opinion using the following scale: SD = strongly agree, D = disagree, DS = disagree somewhat, AS = agree somewhat, A = agree, SA = Strongly agree (4) space is provided for any comments or clarifications that you wish to make.

50. What kind of community is the church located in?
   ___ A. Urban
   ___ B. Suburban
   ___ C. Rural
   ___ D. Don’t know
   Comment:

51. What is age of the community?
   ___ A. New
   ___ B. Old
   ___ C. Somewhere in between
   ___ D. Don’t know
   Comment:

52. Are people moving into or out of the area?
   ___ A. Into
   ___ B. Out of
   ___ C. Static
   ___ D. Don’t know
   Comment:

53. Which predominant ethnic group(s) live in the church’s community?
   ___ A. African
   ___ B. Asian
   ___ C. Hispanic
   ___ D. Anglo
   ___ E. Mixture
   Comment:

54. Chances are good that the church will reach this community for Christ.
   SD   D   DS   AS   A   SA
   Comment:

55. In which type of housing do the majority of people in the community live?
   ___ A. Houses
   ___ B. Apartments
   ___ C. Mobile Homes
   ___ D. Condominiums
   ___ E. Don’t know
   Comment:
56. What are the top three or four needs of the community?

57. What does the community value most?

58. What does the community want most out of life?

59. The community appears to be dying/declining.
   SD  D  DS  AS  A  SA
   Comment:

60. The crime rate for the area is high.
   SD  D  DS  AS  A  SA
   Comment:

61. The people in the community are similar demographically to those in the church.
   SD  D  DS  AS  A  SA
   Comment:

62. With which of the following does the church compete:
   ___ Church or parachurch ministries?
   ___ Cults or religious groups in the area?
   ___ Movies or television?
   ___ Athletics (viewed or participative)?
   ___ Leisure time activities?
   ___ The marketplace (shopping malls, etc.)
   ___ Others?

63. Which of the following represent opportunities for the church to reach people:
   ___ Unchurched people?
   ___ Unreached people groups?
   ___ New people moving into the community?
   ___ Local schools (high school, trade schools, college)?
   ___ International students?
   ___ Armed services facilities?
   ___ Prison/jails?
   ___ Others? Who:

64. Please provide any additional comments that you think would be helpful in the space below and/or on the back of this page.

APPENDIX 2
“REPURPOSED” SERMON SERIES: WEEKLY MESSAGES


Introduction

Good morning. Welcome to “Repurposed.”

Today we’re going to take a brief look, an overview of a brand new message series God has for us as we kick-off the fall months here at LITD. Repurposed. These fall months God is going to be speaking to us from the life of Nehemiah.

When it comes to this word “repurposed,” what exactly are we talking about? What do we mean when we say, “repurposed?”

Repurpose – to use or convert for use in another format or product.

Repurposing happens when you see something that has very little or no value, or you thought was only worth throwing away, but it is suddenly reused for significant purposes.

Show Pictures of 3 – 5 Repurposed Items

Repurposing happens any time something we think is only worth throwing away is suddenly reused for significant purposes.

Repurposed. Now, let’s bring Nehemiah onto the scene. This is exactly what Nehemiah did. He repurposed broken-down walls in the city of Jerusalem. He repurposed a community of faith that was far from God. He repurposed a city that was living disconnected from one another. He repurposed political and social systems. He saw things as they should be and he took action to make things right. Repurposing is about hope. God has some repurposing he wants to do in each of our lives and in his church this fall at LITD. I am thrilled that you have joined us for the journey.

Repurposing is about the hope we have in Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ takes some things we might consider only worth throwing away and he repurposes them for the glory of God. Jesus repurposes people’s lives. He repurposes careers, marriages, families, relationships, education and academic goals, churches, communities, finances and bank accounts. Repurposing is about hope. It is amazing to watch as Jesus transforms and repurposes lives!!!
Prayer

What is Nehemiah most famous for? God used Nehemiah to rebuild the walls around Jerusalem in just 52 days – a miracle!

Let’s dive right in by looking at just three verses today…

**Nehemiah 1:1-3** The words of Nehemiah son of Hacaliah: In the month of Kislev in the twentieth year, while I was in the citadel of Susa, Hanani one of my brothers came from Judah with some other men and I questioned them about the Jewish remnant that survived the exile, and also about Jerusalem. They said to me, “Those who survived the exile and are back in the province are in great trouble and disgrace. The wall of Jerusalem is broken down, and its gates have been burned with fire.”

The time period of Nehemiah is 445 BC. Roughly 140 years have passed since Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonians had conquered Jerusalem carrying the Jews off into exile (586 BC). Why were God’s people taken captive and carried off into exile?

Here’s why: For years and years, Israel had been disobedient and sinned against God. After many warnings, God’s city of Jerusalem was conquered and the people of God were carried off into captivity to Babylon – the consequences of their disobedience and sin toward God.

They remained in captivity until 538 BC, when the Persians overtook Babylon and Cyrus the Great released 50,000 of the Jews to go back to the city of Jerusalem under Zerubbabel’s leadership to rebuild the temple. Then in 458 BC, God called Ezra to lead a second group of 1,500 back to Jerusalem to reestablish the worship of God in the temple.

Now it’s 445 BC, and God is preparing to send Nehemiah to finish the job. Nehemiah’s job was to rebuild the walls around the city of Jerusalem which had been destroyed. The walls had lay in ruins for 140 years!

One of the things I’ve noticed is there is never a shortage of armchair quarterbacks. Have you ever listened to a group of armchair quarterbacks? Brilliant folks. Man, they have all the answers especially on the morning after the game – just ask them, they’ll tell you! Here’s the deal: what we really need in our day is not people who analyze, scrutinize, criticize or just discuss a situation – what our society and culture cries out for is someone who will do something about it; someone who will take action!

What we’re going to discover in this message series, “Repurposed,” is that Nehemiah saw the problem and he took action. Nehemiah had this intense desire to do something big for God. As we enter these fall months of 2013, do you have a desire to do something big for God? I hope you do. God has big plans for this church. God has called me here as your pastor to lead this church to prayerfully seek answers, to solve problems and to take action for Christ here in the East Valley and even beyond the needs of our immediate community.
Nehemiah 1:1 The words of Nehemiah son of Hacaliah: In the month of Kislev in the twentieth year, while I was in the city of Susa,”

Nehemiah’s name means “the Lord comforts.” In Bible times, we’ve talked about this before, names had a significant meaning, Nehemiah was born in Persia. He served as King Artaxerxes’ personal cupbearer (v 11). He tasted the wine to make sure it was safe before the king drank it. He was a close advisor to the king. Nehemiah was in a position highest trust – he proved to be trustworthy, which says a lot about his character.

It was the twentieth year of the kings’ reign – 445 BC. The Jewish month of Kislev corresponds with our December. He is in the capital city of Susa – 300 miles east of Babylon and 150 miles north of the Persian Gulf in modern Iran today.

Nehemiah 1:2-3 Hanani, one of my brothers, came from Judah with some other men, and I questioned them about the Jewish remnant that survived the exile, and also about Jerusalem. They said to me, “Those who survived the exile and are back in the province are in great trouble and disgrace. The wall of Jerusalem is broken down, and its gates have been burned with fire.”

Bad news came from Jerusalem: it was about as bad as it gets… walls flattened, gates burned, morale was low. Instead of a magnificent city, Jerusalem was in shambles.

What’s the big deal about the walls of the city being broken down? Why is this bad news? One of the main purposes of the walls was protection against enemies. It would be like our country not having a military. Or it would be like our cities not having a police force. Without walls, there was no certainty of safety. With no protection, there was limited commerce, which meant limited food and supplies. And over time, this results in a severe famine. This was the Jerusalem that Nehemiah was called to rebuild – a city and a community of people in shambles. The city walls were in many ways symbolic of the spiritual condition of the people.

On-lookers and by-standers would have said of Jerusalem and its people, throw it all away, it’s over, there’s little or no value there. They needed hope – they needed to be repurposed. Soon God would send Nehemiah onto the scene to be used of him for this repurposing project.

At first glance, you may find it difficult to relate to the world in which Nehemiah lived. But a deeper look shows a world not only that we can relate to, but that we live in every day. Nehemiah’s world is our world.

It is now 2013. This is our world. This is our day. What life situations do you see others facing? In what ways do you see people facing situations in life as if their “walls” are broken down and their “gates” are burned with fire? What life situations are you facing where you feel as if your “walls” are broken down and your “gates” are burned with fire?

To rebuild the walls, you must first see the need – see the ruin. Do you see the needs that are around you? Broken hearts, fractured families, lives in chaos. Do you see the value of people’s lives and their eternity? Or do we take the attitude – just throw it all away? We
need to offer people in our world, the hope of Jesus Christ in 2013 – the hope that comes with being repurposed!!!

My Life – My Availability – My Usability for God
(Fall 2013)

Life – the quality that distinguishes a vital and functional being from a dead body (Ephesians 2:1-10)

Availability – handiness: the quality of being at hand when needed (Isaiah 6:8; Acts 20:24)

Usability – serviceability: the quality of being able to provide good service (Ephesians 2:10; Colossians 3:23-24)

Nehemiah – he committed his life to be available and usable for God. Have you made this same commitment? This fall, what is your availability to be usable for God and his purposes? As a church body, how committed are to being available and usable for God?

Three Life Principles from Nehemiah
(for my life and God’s church today)

1st…God has given you a…..

1. Position

The Scriptures tell us about three different positions/occupations Nehemiah held. Each of these are God-given positions for which the Lord planned to use Nehemiah to accomplish his purposes.

Cupbearer to the king – Nehemiah 1:1-2:10
Builder of the walls of Jerusalem – Nehemiah 2:11-6:19
Governor of the city – Nehemiah 7:1 – 13:31

These three positions in Nehemiah’s life were appointed by God himself. Today God has given you a position. You have been positioned by God “for such a time as this” to be used for his purposes.

God has positioned me to serve as the pastor of LITD. God has positioned this church to do a great work for him here in the East Valley and beyond. (Strategic planning).

In the early verses of Nehemiah, we find him in the position of a cupbearer. He tasted the wine and food before it reached the lips of the king. The cupbearer had to be trustworthy.
He was a close advisor to the king. Nehemiah had a God-given position – a cupbearer to the king.

Nehemiah’s dream was in a city called Jerusalem. God had given him the position of cupbearer. But in his heart he longed for another dream. He was consumed with a different, bigger vision. He longed to be part of God’s city, God’s worship, and God’s people. One of my dreams was to come back here to the East Valley and pastor a local church. God allowed that to happen as he positioned me “for such a time as this” 15 months ago. I believe with all my heart God has called me here to be used of him to rebuild/repurpose his church.

One of life’s challenges is to be faithful in your current God-given position, especially when your dream may be somewhere else. For each of us, this is where we learn the secret of contentment for the seasons which God places us. Faithfulness is what God required of Nehemiah as a cupbearer, and God requires the same faithfulness of you in your God-given position today.

We all must ask the question that surely came to Nehemiah’s mind: Is it possible that God has placed me exactly where he wants me for this season of my life? It may not be where your heart, mind and dreams are; but you are right in the center of God’s will for you at this time. Your current God-given position is all a part of his further preparation in your life. It doesn’t mean the dream isn’t right or isn’t God’s will; it could simply mean God is still doing more preparation in you. God must have had to do a lot of work in my life to get me prepared to come back to Arizona – 29 years of preparation!!!

Nehemiah was exactly where God wanted him to be and he faithfully fulfilled his God-given responsibilities. This is a great lesson for all of us. It’s a matter of being faithful where God places you and trusting him with the rest. God honors faithfulness.

In your current God-given position(s), take some time to evaluate your faithfulness.

2nd …..God has given your life……

2. Purpose

God has given you a position. God says, “This is what I have for you at this point in your life.” Your position involves people. He wants to use your life to achieve his purposes. Your position is a significant part of God’s grand plan. You have a part to play in God’s grand purpose, and it directly relates to your God-given position.

In Christ, your life is no longer about your agenda – it is now about God’s agenda, fulfilling his purposes.

Luke 9:23 (Jesus speaking) “If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.”

Galatians 2:20 “I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me…”

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What are purposes of God for your life right now? What about for his church here at LITD? You are not here by accident. We all have been positioned by Almighty God to achieve his purposes. This church has been strategically placed in our corner of the world to fulfill the purposes of God.

3rd…God as placed within you a passion…..

3. Passion

What are you most passionate about? God has placed within you a passion. What fires you up? What cause, ministry or people has God given you a heart for?

What is God passionate about? Whatever God is passionate about are the things we should take notice of and be passionate about. What we see happen here in Nehemiah is a beautiful thing: God’s passions became the passions of Nehemiah’s heart.

1) people

**Nehemiah 1:2a** “…I questioned them about the Jewish remnant that survived the exile…”

What is Nehemiah passionate about? (people). Nehemiah cares. He is concerned. He has a love and passion for God’s people in Jerusalem. How are God’s people doing? What are their needs? How can I serve them? God’s passion had become his passion. Who are the people you are most passionate about reaching for Christ? What needs of people have you burdened? God places within each of our hearts a passion.

2) place

**Nehemiah 1:2b** “…and also about Jerusalem.”

Nehemiah is deeply passionate also about the city of Jerusalem – God’s holy city. Nehemiah’s passion is that Jerusalem might be a city that turns back to God and once again honors him.

The reason we are spending the entire fall focused on strategic planning here at LITD is that we might become more effective at meeting needs and reaching people for Jesus Christ where God has placed us and even stretching our faith and witness for Christ to the ends of the earth.

**Acts 1:8** But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

**Matthew 28:19-20** Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”
May these places God has chosen to take his life-saving message of Jesus Christ also become our passion and heartbeat. So when you think about your life, your availability, and your usability for God this fall…what is that going to look like in your life?

- God is passionate about people and places – about seeing people where he has placed them be transformed by his Word, through personal faith in Jesus Christ. What passion has God given you?

- God has given you a position to accomplish his purposes. How has God positioned you in your family, home, workplace, community, school or church?

- What does faithfulness in your current God-given position(s) look like?

- Faithfulness where you are now is required before you get to go where God ultimately wants you to be. Faithfulness now means fruitfulness later.

- What dreams has God placed in your heart?

Plan of Salvation

We’ve been introduced to this concept of what it means to be “repurposed” here today. Perhaps you’ve had other people say to you at different times, that your life is of no value, or that your life didn’t matter. And you’ve really struggled with, is there any purpose for living?

Listen to what God says about your life. God says, “I love you. This is what I have created you for. Allow God to repurpose your life. God offers you a new repurposed life in Christ Jesus. He will forgive all of your sins. He will give you a new heart and life. He will give you a position of service in his kingdom. He will give your life purpose like you’ve never experienced before. He will place within you a passion for the things he is passionate about. Surrender your life to Jesus Christ today….right now. Make the commitment to make your life available and usable for God.

Introduction

Today as we come to the second message in this new series, “Repurposed,” (Life Lessons from Nehemiah); we’re going to find Nehemiah in what I am suggesting is relentless prayer.

Before we jump ahead…remember, last week, as we looked at the first three verses of Nehemiah chapter 1. Nehemiah received some bad news.

God’s people were “in great trouble and disgrace.” And God’s place, the city of Jerusalem was not any better, “the walls of the city are broken down and its gates had been burned with fire.”

What’s the big deal about the condition of the walls? The walls were the source of protection for the city, so without them it was virtually impossible for those living inside the city to function with much security or safety. The gates were essential for commerce – as a result of the gates burned down, the trading of goods and services became very limited at best. But there is something else – the city of Jerusalem had been a place of hope for God’s people – it was God’s city – it was the center of Jewish cultural and religious life. The city had been in ruins for 140 years and its condition was very much symbolic of the people’s relationship with God.

This news hit Nehemiah like a Mac truck. Deep in his soul he gets this “holy discontent.” This was like his Popeye moment – the moment where he has all he can stands and he can’t stands no more. The city walls and gates lay in ruins. The people spiritually were far from God. And deep in his heart and soul, Nehemiah thought, “Enough is enough.”

Nehemiah is going to be called by God to take action. Remember from last week, he is available and usable for God. He wants to be part of the solution to the problem. But first things first. When he hears the news concerning the condition of God’s people and God’s place, Nehemiah first turns to God in prayer. And that’s a great lesson for all of us. For most of us, when we hear of a problem, we either want to complain about it or criticize the person(s) we think are responsible for it, or we immediately we want to spring into action and fix it. Not Nehemiah – he prayed.

As we journey through this message series, we are going to discover Nehemiah was a man of prayer – he trusted God and he had this incredible dependence on God to do what he said he would do. I want to become more and more a man of prayer. I think the desire of most of us here today is that we might grow spiritually as people of prayer. I pray that we will become a more praying church. (Prayer focus this morning).

Prayer

What an amazing pattern for prayer we learn from Nehemiah’s prayer in chapter one, verses 4-11.
Nehemiah 1:4 “When I heard these things, I sat down and wept. For some days I mourned and fasted and prayed before the God of heaven.”

When Nehemiah hears the news of the condition of God’s people and God’s place, he is literally broken before God. He weeps – the news brings him to tears. He mourns. He fasts – he removes anything in his life that would distract him from hearing from God. He prays – he spends time talking and listening to God. Nehemiah had come face to face with a situation which was too big for him to solve alone. For Nehemiah, upon hearing this news, he spends four months in prayer. (1:1; 2:1).

When I was first contacted by the pastor search committee here at LITD, nearly 18 months ago now, God immediately began to burden me for this church. The church was going through a difficult time and in many ways this became very much personal for me. In 1980, Linda’s dad (who has gone on to be with the Lord) led the construction of the first building just to the east of us here on this property. My dad provided the lumber for the first building. In the spring of 2012, God had left a faithful remnant of people here, but the church was in great need of rebuilding and of being repurposed. From the time I was contacted early last year, I have been passionately and fervently seeking God in prayer on behalf of this church. My prayer: God please use me as one of your people who stands in the gap for your church at LITD. So for me, being called by God to pastor this church is very personal, it’s something I am very passionate about and it’s almost surreal in some ways.

Biblical commentator Raymond Brown states: Nehemiah’s immediate reaction to the news of his people’s troubles was to go into the presence of God. Nothing mattered more than entering the Lord’s presence to express his anguish about his people’s needs, confess his inadequacy, reflect on his personal response to the news from Jerusalem, and seek guidance about what might be done.¹

According to the Nehemiah model, the starting place for rebuilding is prayer. The starting place for us here at LITD this fall is prayer. God is leading us through this Nehemiah message series, “Repurposed,” and he is leading our church through strategic planning. The starting place is prayer. The exciting and challenging future God has for us here at LITD, we are totally dependent on Him.

So let’s look at what God wants us to learn from Nehemiah’s prayer in verses 5-11. For four months, Nehemiah was relentless in prayer.

A Relentless Pray-er.....

1. Recognizes who God really is

Nehemiah 1:5-6a “O Lord, God of heaven, the great and awesome God, who keeps his covenant of love with those who love him and obey his commands, let your ear be attentive and your eyes open to hear the prayer your servant is praying before you day and night for your servants, the people of Israel.”

Look at Nehemiah’s view of God. How does Nehemiah see God? “the great and awesome God.” Nehemiah has an accurate biblical view of God. He has a high and exalted view of God.

This is how Isaiah saw God. “…I saw the Lord seated on a throne, high and exalted, and the train of his robe filled the temple (Isaiah 6:8).

Nehemiah prays to the “Lord God,” which means “he is the holy God who keeps his promises” What is your view of God? How big is your God? Is he bigger than any problem you might face? Is he greater than any challenge you need to overcome?

My God is big. My God is mighty. He holds the world in the span of his hands. He knows every star by name. Billions of stars and thousands of galaxies. My God, Jesus Christ conquered death and the grave – he lives today! He is the one true, living, exalted God. His name is above every other name.

So as Nehemiah is praying, he begins his prayer focused on this high view of God, “the great and awesome God.” It’s as if Nehemiah is saying, “I’ve received this bad news that God’s people and God’s place are laying in ruins, but nothing is too difficult for you God. Since you are “the great and awesome God,” there is hope. We can rebuild. You are a God who keeps his promises and you are a God who does miracles.” This is so incredibly encouraging because this is the same God we worship and serve. Since God is for us, who can be against us? Since God is for us, there is hope. We can be repurposed for God. We can rebuild.

A relentless pray-er recognizes God for who he really is. The pattern of prayer starts first with praise, adoration and where you have a high view of God. It doesn’t start with you or your problem. When you come to God in prayer, start with praise. First, get a biblical view of who God really is. He is great and awesome. He is bigger than your problem. He is greater than any challenge or obstacle you are facing right now or that you will ever face in the future.

“who keep his covenant of love” God is a covenant keeper. (Old Covenant/New Covenant). God is faithful to keep his covenant promises with his people.

In both the Old and New Testaments God is characterized as a covenant-keeping God. The Hebrew word, hesed suggests a quality that honors a covenant through thick and thin, a steadfast love. Regarding God’s covenant love, Brown comments:

God’s love is not fickle and changeable but constant and reliable. He is a faithful God who keeps his covenant of love with those who love him. His people have not always been what they ought to have been, but God has never acted unlovingly towards them. His chastisement has always been purposive, corrective and remedial. He has stood by them during long periods when they were far too preoccupied with marginal things to love him and obey his commands. During the demanding and dangerous assignment which lay
ahead, Nehemiah found himself constantly fortified by the faithfulness of a loving God who would never let him down.²

The church today can move forward with assurance toward the formidable task of rebuilding through strategic planning, knowing this same God of the Old Testament, now is proving himself as a covenant-keeping God through the new covenant in the person and work of Jesus Christ.

Second…a relentless pray-er…..

2. Repents of all sin

**Nehemiah 1:6b-7** “I confess the sins we Israelites, including myself and my father’s house, have committed against you. We have acted very wickedly toward you. We have not obeyed the commands, decrees and laws you gave your servant Moses.”

Nehemiah next turns his prayer to the root of Israel’s problems. He sees the broken-down walls and charred gates in direct correlation to the spiritual condition of the hearts and lives of God’s people.

Did you notice the pronouns he uses? “I confess the sins we Israelites, including myself and my father’s house, have committed against you. We have acted very wickedly toward you. We have not obeyed……”

There are no excuses here. God’s people are reaping the consequences of years and years of disobedience and sin against God’s Word. That’s why the children of Israel had spent 70 years in captivity. They were now reaping what they had sown.

Nehemiah puts himself into this picture, basically saying, “I have contributed to this problem. There are some things that I did or that I did not do which have contributed to this ruin. I confess before you, Lord, the sins of myself and my father’s house.” Here we see the reality of personal and corporate sin – as the church we are all linked together.

You don’t sin in isolation. Your sin and mine negatively impacts others.

So what’s God’s remedy?

**2 Chronicles 7:14** “If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land.”

**1 John 1:9** “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and will purify us from all unrighteousness.”

A relentless pray-er confesses and repents of all sin. Is there personal sin in your life today that God wants you to confess and repent of? Has there been some past sin(s) that

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still has a hold on God fully working here in this church body? Is there sin that’s happening right now within the greater body of Christ here at LITD that needs to be confessed and repented of?

**Psalm 51:17** “The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God you will not despise.”

In our story today we find Nehemiah heart-broken over the people of God and the place of God. In verses 6-7, he is broken over his own personal sin and the corporate sin of God’s people.

As Nehemiah looked at the people of God, he saw a vast difference between what they were experiencing and what God had promised them. That distance broke Nehemiah’s heart.

What is it that breaks your heart? What breaks your heart about your own life? What breaks your heart about your church? What would next Sunday look like if we all truly worshipped before God with broken hearts? God is looking for humility. He wants the things that break his heart – to break our hearts.

The good news is: God is a God who is continually sifting through the rubble of broken relationships, addictive habits, hidden sins – he is looking for people who are broken. God uses the lives of broken people. He restores lives for the purpose of reviving and rebuilding his church.

Thirdly, a relentless pray-er…

3. **Recalls the amazing promises of God**

**Nehemiah 1:8-10** “Remember the instruction you gave your servant Moses, saying, If you are unfaithful, I will scatter you among the nations, but if you return to me and obey my commands, then even if your exiled people are at the farthest horizon, I will gather them from there and bring them to the place I have chosen as a dwelling for my Name. They are your servants and your people, whom you redeemed by your great strength and your mighty hand.”

Nehemiah prays scripture to God. He is praying the words of Moses from the book of Deuteronomy. Nehemiah prays the Word of God, “You promised us that if we rebelled we would be disciplined. We did rebel and we are living under the hand of your discipline. But you also promised that if we turned back, however far we have been scattered, you would welcome us back and bring us home.”

Do you see what Nehemiah is doing? He is speaking to God – God’s own words. He calls on God to act as he promised he would in scripture.

How about you? While you’re spending time in prayer, do you periodically make it a practice of praying scripture to the Lord? Be relentless in that. Pray the promises of God – it will do amazing wonders in your prayer life and in the life of your church.
Praying Scripture to the Lord is one of the most powerful spiritual weapons God has given to individual believers and to his church. There are seasons and periods of time when a church, after years and years of disobedience, sin, pride and in rebellion against the Word of God; they find themselves in great peril, many times in desperation nearing the brink of extinction. The reality of this extinction, where the church will actually close its doors, is much closer at hand than most Christians are willing to admit. In preparation for strategic planning, there is a great need for the church to pray Scriptures to the Lord together, particularly the promises from God’s Word he has made to his covenant people. This is precisely the principle Nehemiah employed as he “stood in the gap” on behalf of the children of Israel who found themselves once again in a desperate condition in Jerusalem.

Fourth, a relentless pray-er…

4. Requests specific help from God for success

**Nehemiah 1:11** “O Lord, let your ear be attentive to the prayer of this your servant and to the prayer of your servants who delight in revering your name. Give your servant success today by granting him favor in the presence of this man.”

Remember Nehemiah’s dream is to go to Jerusalem to rebuild the walls. We talked about this last week, what is his current God-given position? He is a cupbearer to the king. In order to go lead God’s repurposing project of rebuilding the walls in Jerusalem, Nehemiah is going to have to receive permission from the king of the entire empire to go there. His request would require the king to overturn a previous decree (Ezra 4:21).

As Nehemiah prayed for four months, ultimately Nehemiah knew his success with the king, along with the work of rebuilding the walls and people’s lives in Jerusalem, rested solely in the hands of sovereign God.

**Sovereignty of God:** God is the source of all creation and that all things come from and depend upon God; God is in all and is over all (Psalm 24:1).

Your success as a child of God, our success as a church rests solely in the hands of a sovereign God. We must cry out to God in prayer, seeking his favor upon our lives and upon our every endeavor.

God is still looking for people today who are willing to say, “Here I am, Lord. Send me.”

What is God sending you to do? By faith, take the next step of obedience. Trust God for success in the things you put your hand to for him and for his glory. Any ounce of success we experience is a gift of God’s grace.

**Success:** Obedience and faithfulness to do what God calls you to do, regardless of opposition and personal cost.
This is the definition of success that Nehemiah held onto and he lived out in his life. Will you make this the definition of success for each and every day of your life? This is the definition of success we must hold onto as a church family.

Closing

Nehemiah was a man of action, but first he prayed. He didn’t move forward for four months. First, he prayed.

Next week, we’re going to see, that after he prayed, God opened a huge window of opportunity. Finally Nehemiah’s dream of going to Jerusalem would become a reality as God said, “Go!” Nehemiah’s repurposing and rebuilding project began with prayer.

What is the one take-away that God is speaking specifically to you about from Nehemiah’s prayer?

- Recognize who God really is
- Repent of all sin
- Recall the promises of God’s Word
- Request specific help from God for success

As it is every Sunday morning, the front altar is open for you to come and pray.

God will meet you here. Prayers need to be lifted up for marriages, kids, families, the church, a relationship that needs to be restored, for wisdom and discernment on a major decision you need to make, direction at work and so on. Perhaps God is speaking to you right now about receiving Jesus Christ into your heart and life as your personal Lord and Savior. This happens through prayer. Baptism. Church membership.

Focus on prayer this week. Wherever you choose to pray…God will meet you there. Together as a church family, this fall let’s seek the face of God in relentless prayer.
Sermon 3: “Recognize God’s Windows of Opportunity,”
Nehemiah 2:1-10, September 22, 2013

Introduction
In 2006, seven years ago Columbia pictures released the movie, “The Pursuit of Happiness,” starring Will Smith as the lead actor. The movie is based on a true story.

Let me give you a brief summary of the movie: Chris Gardner (Will Smith) is a family man struggling to make ends meet. Despite his efforts to help keep the family afloat through his various sales jobs, Chris’ wife, and the mother of their five year-old son, caves in under the constant strain of financial pressure, to the point where she decides to leave her husband Chris along with their son.

This means Chris immediately becomes a single father. He does everything he can to pursue a better paying job. He finally lands an internship at a prestigious stock brokerage firm. And although there is no salary, he accepts it. He accepts it with the hope at the end of the internship, he will land a job with the company. In a sense, Chris Gardner takes a risk hoping for a better, preferable future.

Toward the end of the movie, after many other hardships and trials Chris faced during the internship program, he does land the job giving him a secure and lucrative career where he is able to provide very well for the needs of his family. For Chris Gardner, the internship program provided the window of opportunity which had eluded him for so long. For Chris, all he wanted so desperately was a window of opportunity.

The most powerful dialogue in the movie: (Chris is speaking to his five year-old son)
“Don’t ever let somebody tell you – you can’t do something. You got a dream – you gotta protect it. If you want something, go get it – period.”

In our Sunday morning message series “Repurposed” here at LITD, we’ve discovered Nehemiah had a dream. Nehemiah received bad news that God’s people and God’s place, Jerusalem, was lying in ruins. Nehemiah has this dream. He’s praying, asking God to give him a window of opportunity, so that he might go to Jerusalem to rebuild the city’s gates and walls which had lay in ruins for 140 years.

Today’s message is “Recognizing God’s Windows of Opportunity.”

Window of Opportunity – a relatively brief period of time during which an opportunity must be seized or it may be lost.

Have you given this much thought and prayer? What window of opportunity has God opened for you? What window of opportunity might God have for our church?

In our story today, we’re going to see that Nehemiah recognizes God’s window of opportunity. And here’s the good news from the Bible for us today: we can take these same principles and truths from God’s Word in Nehemiah to help us recognize and seize the windows of opportunity God has for our lives and his church. At LITD God is giving us a window of opportunity and we must seize it! (redeem the time)
Recognizing and Seizing God’s Windows of Opportunity

Just as God did in Nehemiah’s life, God places windows of opportunity before you. And when the opportunity strikes, you’ve gotta be ready. You’ve got to be ready to strike while the iron is hot! (so to speak). How do you discern whether windows of opportunity are from God?

Write this down this word in the first blank space on your outline…..

1. Prayer

**Nehemiah 1:4** “When I heard these things, I sat down and wept. For some days I mourned and fasted and prayed before the God of heaven.”

If you’re going to discern those windows of opportunity in your life that are from God – it starts with prayer. You talk to God about it. You get a word from him.

Nehemiah had just spent four months in prayer. We looked at Nehemiah’s prayer last week in chapter 1. Nehemiah has given us a pattern of prayer that I hope you practice on a regular basis in your prayer life.

When you pray – expect God to do something. Be ready for God’s answer when it comes. Remember, windows of opportunity are a relatively short period of time in which an opportunity must be seized or it may be lost. So there’s a sense of urgency to it.

Nehemiah doesn’t want to miss his window of opportunity. In order to fulfill his dream of going to Jerusalem to lead the rebuilding project there, Nehemiah needs permission from King Artaxerxes. Nehemiah is praying to the King of Kings for just the right window of opportunity, so that he might ask for the king’s permission to go rebuild God’s people and God’s place in Jerusalem. It starts with prayer.

Write down this second word in your notes today…

2. Position

God had given Nehemiah a position – He is a cupbearer to the king. What is the job of a cupbearer? Before the king eats or drinks, Nehemiah has the responsibility of tasting the food or drink to make sure it is safe for the king. (poison or assassination) As a cupbearer, Nehemiah was also a close advisor to the king. He was a person in whom the king placed a great deal of trust.

After four months of prayer, let’s see what happens next.

**Nehemiah 2:1-4** In the month of Nisan in the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes, when wine was brought for him, I took the wine and gave it to the king. I had not been sad in his presence before; so the king asked me, “Why does your face look so sad when you are not ill? This can be nothing but sadness of heart.” I was very much afraid, but I said to the king, “May the king live forever! Why should my face not look sad when the city
where my fathers are buried lies in ruins, and its gates have been destroyed by fire?” The
king said to me, “What is it you want?”

As cupbearer to the king, God has positioned Nehemiah for this great window of
opportunity.

I want you to notice here, Nehemiah says, “I was very much afraid.” Afraid? Why is he
so afraid? Nehemiah had prayed that God would give him a window of opportunity to
stand before the king, so why is he filled with so much fear?

It’s because Nehemiah did something you weren’t supposed to do according to royal
etiquette. You were to never stand before the king with puffy red eyes and a sad face. It
was obvious that Nehemiah had been crying. No one was supposed to walk into the
king’s presence with their own heartache, their own problems or their own needs. Why
should the king care about anyone else? If you were one of the king’s servants, it was all
about meeting the king’s needs. (prima donna athletes and celebrities – (ex. water bottle
and towel.)

Let me say this also: Back to our story. If the king grew suspicious or distrustful of
Nehemiah in any way, his life would be in danger. He would not only lose his job, but he
could also lose his life. That is why he was “very much afraid.”

Well, what happens next? Let’s look at how God orchestrates this window of
opportunity.

**Nehemiah 2:2** So the king asked me, “Why does your face look so sad when you are not
ill? This can be nothing but sadness of heart.”

For this king to be so concerned is unusual. This really is mind-boggling scenario. What
is happening? God is opening a window of opportunity. God is doing it. Will Nehemiah
grasp this opportunity from God or will he let it slip away and be lost forever? The
answer is: Nehemiah grabs a hold of it. He recognizes God’s window of opportunity.
He’s not going to waste this God moment.

**Nehemiah 2:3-4** But I said to the king, “May the king live forever! Why should my face
not look sad when the city where my fathers are buried lies in ruins, and its gates have
been destroyed by fire?” The king said to me, “What is it you want?”

How do you recognize and seize God’s windows of opportunity in your life? In our
church? First, it starts with prayer. Second, take notice of your God-given position;
because like Nehemiah, God has given you a position. I believe the Bible teaches that
God divinely and strategically positions you for the purpose of using your life for
amazing windows of opportunity.

For example, God positions some of you as fathers or mothers. He positions some of you
as grandparents. He positions you in your career and in your workplace. Others of you he
positions as stay-at-home moms. He positions students in a particular school or
university. He positions us in the neighborhoods in which we live. God is the one who
positions you to make a difference for him through volunteering in your church and in
your community. As a Christian, the Bible says you are spiritually positioned in Christ!
Wow! This means we live our lives from a position of victory!

God has positioned me here as the pastor of this church. These fall months (divine
window of opportunity), God has positioned me under the spiritual headship of Jesus
Christ to lead the process of repurposing and rebuilding his church here at LITD.

God has positioned our church “for such a time as this.” God has given this body of
believers a divine window of opportunity to impact our community and beyond with the
Good News of Jesus Christ. (Community Demographics/Church Ministry Analysis). We
are so blessed. What a window of opportunity God has given us!

Whatever your God-given position might be – you have to be ready – God continues
today in our lives, to open amazing windows of opportunity. Recognize and seize those
windows of opportunity!

Next, write down this word…..

3. Planning

Nehemiah had been praying four months for God’s window of opportunity, but he was
also planning for it. Prayer and planning go together.

Nehemiah 2:4-9 The king said to me, “What is it you want?” Then I prayed to the God
of heaven, and I answered the king, “If it pleases the king and if your servant has found
favor in his sight, let him send me to the city in Judah where my ancestors are buried so
that I can rebuild it.” Then the king, with the queen sitting beside him, asked me, “How
long will your journey take, and when will you get back?” It pleased the king to send me;
so I set a time. I also said to him, “If it pleases the king, may I have letters to the
governors of Trans-Euphrates, so that they will provide me safe-conduct until I arrive in
Judah? And may I have a letter to Asaph, keeper of the royal park, so he will give me
timber to make beams for the gates of the citadel by the temple and for the city wall and
for the residence I will occupy?” And because the gracious hand of my God was on
me, the king granted my requests. So I went to the governors of Trans-Euphrates and
gave them the king’s letters. The king had also sent army officers and cavalry with me.

For Nehemiah, every step has been prayed over, planned thoroughly. He’s very much a
detail kind of guy. There are some of you who are like that. Then you have others on the
opposite end of the spectrum who are an absolute mess, flying by the seat of their pants.
Since God has a sense of humor, many times he puts opposites together (marriage, co-
workers, classmates-projects, church, etc). Nehemiah is not only a man of prayer, he is
also a planner. He’s a detail kind of guy.

First, he has to convince the king to allow him to leave Persia to rebuild the walls in
Jerusalem. Second, he needs financial support. Third, he needs letters to secure safe
travel. The letters were for the people who had previously persuaded the king to stop the
rebuilding project. Fourth, he needs lumber to rebuild the city gates, the walls and the home that would become his residence.

The principle here is: both prayer and planning are both necessary as you prepare to seize God’s window of opportunity. Is your personal life, marked by prayer and planning? There’s a balance there. The divine hand of God and our human responsibility all works together.

Here at Light in the Desert, our ministries involve first seeking God in prayer to understand and know his will and secondly asking him to guide our planning. Strategic planning team. Together, we want to be ready for the windows of opportunity God is going to open up for us as a church family. This means both prayer and planning are absolutely necessary in the process.

Fourth…on your outline…write the words…..

4. Providence and Provision

Nehemiah 2:8b-9 “And because the gracious hand of my God was upon me, the king granted my requests. So I went to the governors of Trans-Euphrates and gave them the king’s letters. The king also sent army officers and cavalry with me.”

God’s hand is divinely orchestrating the whole process. We clearly see here God’s providence as well as his provision. Nehemiah understands this is God at work. Nehemiah prayed. Yes, he had a position. He had spent months using his organizational skills in detailed planning, but right along with this, he completely acknowledges that it is God who is leading the way! God is doing it.

The providence of Almighty God’s hand still moves today in the circumstances, the events and in the lives of his people. When God opens a window of opportunity in your life, you can move forward in obedience with the assurance of his providence and his provision. Where God guides, he provides.

Nehemiah set out immediately, responding in obedience to God’s window of opportunity. Where is it that God is looking for your immediate obedience? God is opening a window of opportunity before you. And in faith, your next step is obedience, trusting God’s hand of providence and his provision. God’s blessing, his supernatural favor is with you. And not only that, he promises to provide for you.

Closing

Nehemiah gives us some very timely principles for our lives and for our church today. Nehemiah had a dream. He longed for God to open the window of opportunity for him to go rebuild God’s people and God’s place in Jerusalem. God’s people needed hope. They needed to be repurposed.
What is your dream?

The Pursuit of Happyness –
“Don’t ever let somebody tell you – you can’t do something. You got a dream – you gotta protect it. If you want something, go get it – period.”

Keep that dream alive that God has placed within you. He is going to open windows of opportunity before you to accomplish that dream. God has given me a dream and a divine window of opportunity to rebuild and repurpose this church. I take my God-given responsibility seriously. As your pastor, I will protect God’s dream and his church. And what God has called us to do….we need to go get it….get after it….period. No excuses.

Window of Opportunity – a relatively brief period of time during which an opportunity must be seized or it may be lost.

What is your current God-given window of opportunity?

Has God has granted you a certain period of time in which you need to seize this opportunity, or it will be lost?

Think about some windows of opportunity. As parents and grandparents, we are only given a window of opportunity with our children and grandchildren. God opens windows of opportunity to share our faith in Jesus Christ with others. God gives you a window of opportunity in your workplace. God will give you a window of opportunity to show kindness and generosity to someone in need. God gives you a window of opportunity to serve him and his church. We need to recognize and seize opportunities or they soon will be lost.

God clearly opens windows of opportunity for his church. What windows of opportunity is God opening for his people here at LITD? Are you praying about that? Church, are you ready to seize all that God has for us?

Ephesians 5:15-16 “Be very careful, then, how you live – not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil.”

You are being wise if you make the most of every opportunity. Wisdom says, “I’m going to seize God’s windows of opportunity.”

Why is there such urgency in this? Why is there such urgency to seizing God’s windows of opportunity? “because the days are evil.”

Nehemiah knew firsthand what it was like to experience evil and opposition.

Nehemiah 2:10 When Sanballat the Horonite and Tobiah the Ammonite official heard about this, they were very much disturbed that someone had come to promote the welfare of the Israelites.
These guys were some real joy-killers. Not everyone was on board with the window of opportunity God had given Nehemiah to repurpose God’s people and God’s place. Nehemiah faced intense opposition all along the way. Why? “because the days are evil.” Satan works and influences people like he did in Nehemiah’s day to oppose the work of God.

During these fall months at LITD, God is repurposing his church. Our theme is “Repurposed,” which means it is God’s will, he is opening a window of opportunity to repurpose and transform our lives and his church for greater purposes and for greater use as servants in God’s kingdom than ever before! That’s incredibly good news! God has an amazing future ahead for his church.

And yet, just like in Nehemiah’s day, here at LITD God’s work is being met with opposition. Why? It’s because we live in a fallen, broken, selfish and sinful world. “because the days are evil.” And because of this, we should never be surprised when there are those who oppose God’s work. There are people our enemy tries to influence, use and work through who are going to try and stand in the way – trying to slow down or attempting to put a halt to God’s work. Joy-killers. (Dennis Pethers – leaders, large crowd, laggards).

So how do we respond to opposition? We follow Nehemiah’s example. We do what Nehemiah did. He prayed and stayed on task doing the work God called him to do. We’re going to see this was his response to opposition all throughout the book of Nehemiah and the repurposing project. He prayed and he kept on working. He didn’t listen to the opposition. He didn’t entertain it. For him, it wasn’t a priority. Instead, he chose to focus on his God and the great work of repurposing the city and God’s people – the work God had called him to do. And that’s what I’m going to do as your pastor and I encourage you to come alongside and let’s rebuild this church and see it repurposed for the glory of God!

The Bible reminds us that if we aren’t ready for the windows of opportunity that are from God, or we don’t recognize them, or if we just flat refuse to seize them in faith and obedience – the evil one is lurking – he wants to see those opportunities lost!

Nehemiah teaches us that God does place windows of opportunity in our path. When the opportunity strikes… you must be ready! When it comes to your personal life and your church, we gotta’ be ready and focused to seize our God-given windows of opportunity! There’s an urgency to it!

**Plan of Salvation/Prayer** (God’s window of opportunity to receive Jesus Christ into your heart and life. My window of opportunity came in 1979. I recognized my need for Christ. I understood the seriousness of my sin. I walked through that window of opportunity and my life has never been the same. Jesus Christ has changed my life and I belong in God’s family forever!}
Sermon 4: “Recovery: Getting Beyond Life’s Ruins,”
Nehemiah 2:11-20, September 29, 2013

Introduction
Sometimes things in life just don’t make sense. You ever find that to be true in your life? I was driving home the other day and there’s a McDonald’s and a Dunkin’ Donuts next to each other. And then there was a sign that said, “Coming soon.....Anytime Fitness.” So you have right next to each other – McDonald’s, Dunkin’ Donuts and Anytime Fitness. I was thinking to myself, Hmmmm....which of these doesn’t belong? Here’s something that really concerns me: It’s when you have in a strip mall a Chinese Food Restaurant that serves a buffet of 150 items, right next to a Veterinarian’s Clinic. Does that concern anyone else or am I the only one who thinks that way or makes the correlation?

Sometimes things in life don’t make sense. On a far more serious note, in recent weeks and months we’ve seen some things that don’t make a lot of sense. Entire towns leveled by tornadoes. 19 young firefighters killed in the Yarnell fire. Colorado floods. And very close to home, we’ve seen people we love lose loved ones to sickness and in horrific automobile accidents. By faith, we know God is in control and that he has a plan, but you just can’t wrap your head around it. You can’t make much sense out of some of this stuff. How do you recover from things like that? Where do you even begin picking up the pieces?

Today God is speaking to us about, “Recovery: Getting Beyond Life’s Ruins.”

In the Bible, Nehemiah finds himself on his way to Jerusalem. The city gates and walls around Jerusalem had been lying in ruins for 140 years. This was God’s holy city. It didn’t make sense. Something was terribly wrong. What caused God’s city to be reduced to a pile of rubble? Was it some kind of storm that had ravaged the city? No, it was war. Under God’s judgment the city came under siege and was destroyed by Babylon in 586 BC. Jerusalem being left in ruins was the result of the continued sin and disobedience of God’s people. They were carried off into captivity. Now it is approximately 140 years later, 445 BC. And a new generation has returned to Jerusalem.

For the most part, much of the temple has been rebuilt. Ezra has been reestablishing worship there. And yet, much of the city still lies in ruins, including the city gates and its walls. The morale among God’s people is very low.

After spending four months in prayer and planning, Nehemiah gets permission from the king to leave his position in Persia to go rebuild the walls of Jerusalem. And as we talked about last week, God is the one who is orchestrating this whole process – the providence of God.

Nehemiah’s journey to Jerusalem took about two months – it was a long and grueling journey. When he finally arrives in Jerusalem, remember this is his dream, he sees the devastation and destruction firsthand.

Our story today we find in Nehemiah chapter 2, verses 11-20. You can begin turning there in your Bible.
When Nehemiah saw the condition of the city firsthand, questions had to cross his mind like, “Can this city and these people ever recover from this? God you’ve called me here for this rebuilding and repurposing project, but where do I even begin to pick up the pieces? How do I help the people get past all of this to become the people you’ve called them to be? How can I help them get beyond the ruins?”

Let me ask you: Is there an area of your life that is in need of recovery? Many people are still trying to recover from financial ruin, trying just to make ends meet. Perhaps you are in the process of recovering from a relationship that has been in ruins. Or maybe you’re here today and you’re in the long process of recovering physically from an illness which left your health in ruins. Or just maybe, you’ve been facing this long intense spiritual battle which has left you in a state of spiritual fatigue and ruin.

Whatever your situation might be, God brought you here today to give you a word of hope and encouragement. God’s Word gives us life principles for recovery. When you have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, you have the strong promise that he is with you and he will help you get beyond life’s ruins.

Prayer

**Nehemiah 2:11-12** “I went to Jerusalem, and after staying there three days I set out during the night with a few men. I had not told anyone what my God had put in my heart to do for Jerusalem. There were no mounts with me except the one I was riding on.”

After two long months of travel, the first thing Nehemiah does is he rests for three days before he starts doing anything else. Is that what you need right now? Rest. Why is that we feel like we always have to be on the go? Go, go, go. In God’s creation and in his Ten Commandments, he made a Sabbath day for his people to rest. God knew we would not be able to go nonstop.

If you’re serious about getting beyond life’s ruins, and getting on track with the road to recovery with God, you must first learn to rest. Nehemiah rested. Some of you have been on a journey experiencing a path of ruin, for a long time and it has left you stressed out, wiped out and just flat exhausted. If you’re serious and committed to a road of recovery, you must first get some rest. Take a day off. Clear your head. Escape from every form of media and technology. Allow Jesus Christ to meet you where you are and renew your strength.

**Matthew 11:28-30** “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”

What does Nehemiah do when he first arrives in Jerusalem? He rests. Recovery begins with rest.
Four Keys on the Road to Recovery

1. Do take time for inspection and examination

Nehemiah 2:13-15 “By night I went out through the Valley Gate toward the Jackal Well and the Dung Gate, examining the walls of Jerusalem, which had been broken down, and its gates, which had been destroyed by fire. Then I moved toward the Fountain Gate and the King’s Pool, but there was not enough room for my mount to get through; so I went up the valley by night, examining the wall. Finally, I turned back and reentered through the Valley Gate.”

Nehemiah goes on a night mission with a few people (strategic planning team) to assess the ministry context which God had called him to rebuild. Nehemiah is touring the southside of the city. He is studying the situation. He’s examining and inspecting the condition of the gates and the walls. He’s wondering, “What do I have to work with? What exactly is the situation? What, if anything is going well? What needs to be improved? What is God saying here? What is going to be involved in helping get these people and this city beyond the ruins – and back on the road to recovery?” Nehemiah’s assessment – the damage was extensive. In some places, his horse could not get through the pile of rubble and ruins. (War Horse)

Bible commentator James Boice points out several difficulties Nehemiah faced: (1) the task was overwhelming, (2) a history of defeat, and (3) a discouraged group of workers. This is the reality of Nehemiah’s ministry context upon his arrival in Jerusalem.

Our strategic planning team has spent the past several weeks studying the ministry context in which God has placed our church. We’ve looked at community demographics within a 5-mile radius around our church. We’ve looked at a ministry analysis of our church. Like Nehemiah, in our unique ministry context we’re also looking to God for answers to questions like, “What exactly is the situation we find ourselves in? What is going well? What is need of improvement? What is an absolute mess or appears to be in ruins? What is God saying to us? What can we do to help this church and our community to experience a better and more preferable future together?” The process of rebuilding, toward becoming a repurposed people for God and getting on the road toward recovery, must include a thorough inspection and examination.

An essential part of recovery in our personal lives is that we need an honest examination also. Over time, our personal gates and walls can begin to break down. And when this happens, we give in to subtle temptations allowing sin to take root and grow in our lives. Left unchecked it will lead you down a path of ruin.

Psalm 139:23-24 “Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.”

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3James Montgomery Boice, Nehemiah (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), 32-33.
The road to recovery is a process where God inspects and examines your heart. A prerequisite to getting beyond life’s ruins; you must ask God to give you a right heart before him. If you were to allow God to examine your heart, what would he find? It’s a matter of facing the facts as they are. Not trying to cover them up or excusing the things we’ve allowed in our hearts and lives that shouldn’t be there – the things that bring ruin – the things which don’t honor God.

In Jerusalem, for years and years, the walls were a symbol of the spiritual condition of God’s people. As Nehemiah is inspecting and examining the walls, there is so much rubble and destruction, he can’t get through. There’s too much debris and devastation. You may be at the place in your life, where you have so much junk built up, and perhaps your heart has become so hardened to the things of God – you may wonder if God can get through all of that. Here’s the good news: if you allow God to do an honest examination of your heart and your life, he can and he will break through all the junk, all the stuff, the addictions, the habitual sin, and all the ruin – and put you on the path toward recovery.

2. Admit the need for change

Nehemiah 2:17 Then I said to them, “You see the trouble we are in: Jerusalem lies in ruins, and its gates have been burned with fire…”

Nehemiah is basically saying to the people, “Look at us, we’re a mess! God has made promises to us – but look at how we live! This is God’s city. We’re the people of God and things ought not to be like this! This cannot continue. This is not right. This is not acceptable. Something reeks around here. Can’t we all agree that things need to change?”

Nehemiah’s examination of the city’s walls provided ample evidence for much needed change. Through Nehemiah’s leadership, the people were shown the need for rebuilding the city’s walls. Strategic planning would become the vehicle for this project to be accomplished. Strategic planning is the vehicle God is using here at LITD to help us understand our need for some things to change.

Recovery involves God’s examination. And perhaps after an honest examination God reveals some things in your life or in your church, things that just don’t measure up against the standards of God’s Word. God says, “Here’s some things that have attributed to the mess you find yourself in.” A second key on the road to recovery is to admit the need for change. If you are serious about getting beyond life’s ruins to experiencing God’s rebuilding, his repurposing, and his healing and recovery this involves admitting the need for change.

3. Refuse to go it alone

Can you imagine Nehemiah rebuilding the walls and taking on the entire city of Jerusalem’s recovery process alone? The repurposing project God has called us to here at LITD and in our surrounding community cannot be done alone. God calls everyone to get on board.
Look what happens next……

**Nehemiah 2:17-18** 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.” I also told them about the gracious hand of my God upon me and what the king had said to me. They replied, “Let us start rebuilding.” So they began this good work.

God’s work is teamwork.

**Peanuts cartoon** – Lucy walks into the room and demands that Linus change the channel on the television, and then threatened him with her fist if he didn’t. “What makes you think you can walk in here and take over?” asked Linus. “These five fingers,” said Lucy. “Individually they are not much, but when I curl them together to make a fist like this, they form a weapon that is terrible to behold.” “What channel do you want?” sighed Linus. Turning away he looked at his fingers and said, “Why can’t you guys get organized like that?”

God’s work is teamwork. The Bible tells us what an impact we can make together as the body of Christ. Nehemiah recognized what a powerful force God’s people could be as a team. We’re going to see the beauty of teamwork and God’s people working together in a collaborative effort in chapter 3. Nehemiah refused to go it alone. Nehemiah told the people that God was with them and that they needed each other. The people all agreed. They said, “Let us start rebuilding.” They desperately wanted recovery – to get beyond the ruins.

The road to recovery in your life, and getting beyond life’s ruins, is not something you can do on your own, thinking if you can just muster up enough willpower and strength, saying something like, ‘I can do it. I’ll git ‘er done!’” No, it’s not like that. First you need Jesus Christ. Second you need other Christians in your life. You need to belong to a church family and be an active member. You need to be a part of a small group on a weekly basis. What we’re talking about is becoming a part of a small group of Christians, where you are connecting in relationships and growing in Christ – where you recognize that not only God is with you, but you have others who will pray for you and help you get beyond life’s ruins so that you might experience all God has for you. There will be times in your life where God allows you to go through times of ruin, and then he brings you to a place of recovery that you might help others who are going through what you’ve already gone through.

4. **Through faith in Jesus Christ, declare success and victory in the face of opposition**

**Nehemiah 2:19-20** But when Sanballat the Horonite, Tobiah the Ammonite official and Geshem the Arab heard about it, they mocked and ridiculed us. “What is this you are doing?” they asked. “Are you rebelling against the king?” I answered them by saying, “The God of heaven will give us success. We his servants will start rebuilding, but as for you, you have no share in Jerusalem or any claim or historic right to it.”
Mark this down. You can count on it. God’s work of recovery in your life will be met with opposition. Sanballat and Tobiah opposed the work of God. Later on, they would get others stirred up as well. These guys were real joy-killers. Every time the people were fired up to do an amazing work for God, these guys tried to douse out the work of God with a bucket of cold water. Nehemiah would have none of this. He led the people in prayer and he called on the people to keep the work of God moving forward. Church, we are going to face opposition. We already have. Opposition makes us stronger. It grows us closer to Christ and closer together as God’s people. Some places in the world God’s work is thriving where there is the greatest opposition. Your enemy is Satan. He doesn’t want you or this church to experience God’s recovery. He doesn’t want you or the church to get beyond life’s ruins. He would be so happy if you or if our church were to stay stuck right where we are. We can’t have that because that is not the will or plan of God for each of our personal lives or for the church.

Just think how long Satan had succeeded with God’s people in Jerusalem – 140 years! For 140 years, generation after generation of God’s people had lived each and every day of their lives in ruins.

Imagine how long Satan would love to keep you wallowing among life’s ruins. That’s exactly where he wants your life to remain. He will try to convince you that in your situation or circumstance, there is no hope of recovery. Your life is always going to be this way. He does the same thing trying to discourage our church family.

And I’m sure to a certain degree, if you think about the lives of the children of Israel, after so many years of living among the ruins, they wondered if there really was any hope. Would anything ever change? Do not let Satan do that to you. Nothing is too difficult when God is in the equation. Jesus Christ is the key to our success. Nehemiah understood that. Do you? If God is for us, who can be against us? Make a commitment in your life and let’s make a commitment together as the Body of Christ here at LITD to get on the road to recovery starting this very moment. Nail it down right here, right now that you’re going to put into practice the truths you’ve heard from God’s Word today.

1. **Do take time for inspection and examination**
2. **Admit the need for change**
3. **Refuse to go it alone**
4. **Declare success and victory in Jesus Christ (over every form of opposition Satan is throwing at you.)**

This side of heaven sometimes life does not make sense. But let’s do this. Let’s pray for and encourage one another as we pursue God’s road for recovery. I fully believe Light in the Desert is a place where together we will see many more people – living in the victory of Jesus Christ – getting beyond life’s ruins. May this be a church where together we celebrate recovery! May the God of heaven give us success!
Sermon 5, “Releasing the Power of God’s Team,”
Nehemiah 3, October 6, 2013

Introduction

Our topic today is teamwork.


As the body of Christ (God’s team) the force we summons is the Lord Jesus Christ. It was Jesus himself who prayed for our unity – that we may be one (John 17).

What are some qualities of a great team? What makes a great team? At some point in our lives (school, work, church, or elsewhere) we’ve all experienced what it’s like to be on great teams, mediocre teams and teams that pretty much stink. As God’s team we’re called to do things with excellence. What makes a great team?

The SPT came up with several qualities of great teams: (1) commitment to the task, (2) value one another, (3) open and transparent communication, (4) trust, (5) confidentiality, (6) task-focused, and (7) show respect for one another. This whole topic of teamwork is big for us here at LITD. If we’re going to become an even more effective church in our future together, fulfilling the mission of Jesus Christ, teamwork is a huge priority.

What is a team? Pat MacMillan offers an excellent definition: “A team is a group of people committed to a common purpose who choose to cooperate in order to achieve exceptional results.”

Today’s message: “Releasing the Power of God’s Team,” from Nehemiah chapter 3.

Remember, we looked at this last week; Coach Nehemiah challenged God’s team to get on the road to recovery – getting beyond life’s ruins. After 140 years, it was time to rebuild! Let’s look for just a moment at Nehemiah’s pre-game locker room speech and then how Team Jerusalem responded:

Nehemiah 2:17-18 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.” I also told them about the gracious hand of my God upon me, and what the king had said to me. They replied, “Let us start rebuilding.” So they began this good work.

Nehemiah basically says, “We have to get after it.” The team responds by saying, “Let’s do it!” This brings us to chapter 3. We’re going to see Nehemiah release Team Jerusalem onto the playing field; and they went out there in supernatural power (God’s gracious

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hand was upon them) and they performed their game plan and strategy with excellence. Team Jerusalem was a great team. It was a dominating performance, as God used them to rebuild the gates and walls around the city in just 52 days!

As you turn to Nehemiah chapter 3, the building of the walls has already begun. You’re going to see a lot of names here. Names are important. Names are important to God. I love what God does here, and he does this in other places in the Bible as well. God is a personal God. In Nehemiah 3, he gives us the names of some of the players on Team Jerusalem. God cares so much about the names of these people, he told Nehemiah to write down their names, along with their contribution to the rebuilding and repurposing process. God made certain these names would be recorded in his Word forever!

Names are important to God. Your name is important to God. He knows your name. He knows every detail of your life. He wants to use your life to make a significant contribution in building up his church. We pray God will continue to add people to his team here at LITD who feel called to edify and build up his church.

**Ephesians 2:21-22** “In him (Jesus Christ) the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.”

What does God’s team look like? In Nehemiah chapter 3, we’re going to see some qualities of what God’s team can do when they are released and tap into God’s supernatural power.

**What God’s Team Looks Like**

1. **Every team member plays a significant role in God’s game plan**

   **Nehemiah 3:1-2** “Eliashib the high priest and his fellow priests went to work and rebuilt the Sheep Gate. They dedicated it and set its doors in place, building as far as the Tower of the Hundred, which they dedicated, and as far as the Tower of Hananel. The men of Jericho built the adjoining section, and Zaccur son of Imri built next to them.”

   The book of Nehemiah clearly shows us, that all of the people were involved in rebuilding project. It starts at the spiritual center of things – the Sheep Gate. “Putting God first.” The spiritual leaders set the example. The key is everyone was involved. This same principle is true for the church today – ministry belongs to the whole church. Every player on Team Jerusalem understood this principle. At Team Light...we believe every single team member plays a significant role in God’s game plan. This is based on the Bible and it is God’s plan for your life and his church.

   **1 Corinthians 12:27** “Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.”

   **Romans 12:4-5** “Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others.”

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**Ephesians 2:10** “For We are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.”

**1 Peter 4:10** “Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God’s grace in its various forms.”

It takes every single one of us doing our part, building up the church and fulfilling the Great Commission – the game plan to which God has called us.

In the book of Nehemiah, we see that everyone is getting involved. People from all different walks of life. People with various occupations. People from all ages. This is the same game plan God has for his church today – God’s team. At LITD, God continues to bring people from various backgrounds, a whole range of occupations, diverse ages, along with a wide array of talents, education, experiences and an array of other diversities.

Every player on team Jerusalem did their part in the huge task of rebuilding the city’s walls and gates. In very much a similar fashion, the work of God’s team at Light in the Desert requires every player’s effort in order for the body of Christ to function effectively. Are you doing your part?

2. **God’s team best accomplishes God’s work – shoulder to shoulder**

When it comes to a football game, you’ll see teammates working together – many times shoulder to shoulder. Team Jerusalem worked together amazingly. They worked together like clockwork. They had never experienced this before. This was all new to them. All they had known was a life of ruin and destruction. They had forgotten what it was like to win.

All throughout chapter 3, you will find the words, “next to him” worked so and so, and “next to them” worked others. These people are working together, side by side, with the same purpose. They are building a wall. One portion of the wall had to match up with the next portion. We see here: teams, groups, and families, partnering together in unity to do God’s work. There is incredible power in working together in partnerships and in teams, to accomplish God’s work.

In the New Testament we find Paul always thanking the people on his team for their partnership in working together to get the message of Jesus Christ out to others.

**Philippians 1:3-5** “I thank my God every time I remember you. In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now.”

One of the most favorable qualities of highly effective and exceptional teams is their synergy. MacMillan defines synergy: “Synergy is the state in which the output is greater than the sum of the inputs. Synergy says, one plus one equals three, four, even five! The roots of this word are found with the classical Greek word *synergos*, which means
“working together.” It combines two Greek words: syn-, together + ergon, work.5 Teams which work together, in a synergistic manner, produce results far greater than they could have ever imagined. The team who worked on the luncheon last Sunday – that’s synergy! The opposite of synergy is what we’ve seen in congress and in our government, which is the refusal to work together. This can also happen in churches, which is pretty crazy and certainly goes against God’s will and nothing much ever gets accomplished.

At LITD, it must be one of our core values that we operate from a team-based ministry. One of the priorities that will come out of strategic planning here at LITD will be the need for developing, training and equipping people to serve on ministry teams. What kinds of teams? Well, we’re not exactly sure yet. We’re still prayerful and in process. Obvious areas God has revealed is the need for: Leadership team. Deacon team. Preschool, children, youth, adults and senior adult teams. We need to expand our Welcome team and our Finance team. There are some new teams which God will reveal to the SPT and to our church body as a whole in the weeks to come. I will say this: Make sure you’re a part of the “Make a Difference Day” Team which God is putting together for October 26th. This fall is an exciting time to be part of what God is doing at LITD!!!

We must see the value of working together. We must see the power in partnership. We must continually place a high priority on building up and adding new members to our ministry teams. We are much more effective and efficient as we work together, side by side, shoulder to shoulder, all with the same purpose. God has called us to build up his church. He has commissioned us to go and make disciples. One of the things we need to be prayerful and mindful of is that people in our community have clearly expressed their desire for wanting to get involved in meaningful volunteer opportunities. As we reach individuals and families in our community for Jesus Christ, my prayer is that they will discover that he offers the most meaningful and impacting opportunities to serve because God uses our lives to make a difference in the lives of others for eternity!

3. God strategically positions every team member for maximum impact

Football coaches strategically position every player according to their size, talents and skills. For instance, you don’t see the quarterback play on the offensive line. You won’t see a defensive lineman at the wide receiver position. And this I am also certain of – you won’t see either team’s punter all of a sudden inserted into the game as a linebacker. Not gonna’ happen!

Through Nehemiah, God strategically positions Team Jerusalem. Nehemiah had the gift of leadership and administration. Let’s look at a couple verses and see how Nehemiah positions his team for maximum impact:

**Nehemiah 3:10,23** “Adjoining this, Jedaiah son of Harumaph made repairs opposite his house, and Hattush son of Hashabneiah made repairs next to him. Beyond them, Benjamin and Hasshub made repairs in front of their house, and next to them Azariah son of Maaseiah, the son of Ananiah, made repairs beside his house….”

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Each person is rebuilding the walls nearest their home. This is God’s design for ministry. God positions each of us strategically where he wants us to be – where he wants us to make a difference as we do God’s work of rebuilding lives for Jesus Christ. Your home, your neighborhood, your workplace, your community, your local church is where your day-to-day ministry takes place. That’s why God has placed you there. God has positioned you exactly where you are to make a maximum impact for him. What are we doing as a church while we’re gathered that will make us more effective when we’re scattered? (which is the majority of the week).

**John 15:16** “You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit – fruit that will last. Then the Father will give you whatever you ask in my name.”

In John 15, Jesus said to his disciples (the players on God’s team), that he had appointed them – he had strategically placed them. Just maybe you need to be reminded of this in your life today. God wants to use your life powerfully. He has released you for ministry, he has placed you, and he has positioned you on his team, so that he might use your life mightily, right where you are. He has given you a playing field. Ask God to show you those lives he wants you to encourage and build up this week. Also, based on your spiritual gifts, passion, abilities, talents, personality, education and experiences – are you positioned in such a way that God can use your life for maximum impact?

4. **Together make the commitment to finish the game strong**

A football game has four quarters. As the players leave the locker room and they are released onto the field, every player must be committed to give it all he has for four quarters. You go hard every play and make sure you finish the game strong. (Finish the drill). There can be no let up. There can be no quit, no matter what the scoreboard may say. You must fight to the end!

**Nehemiah 4:6** “So we rebuilt the wall till all of it reached half its height, for the people worked with all their heart.”

Team Jerusalem gave it all they had until halftime – until half the wall was built. They could have said, “That’s good enough. Let someone else finish it.” But that’s not what happened. The pre-game speech by coach Nehemiah and the team’s response in chapter 2 (let us rebuild), clearly lets us know that they were not just going about God’s game plan half-heartedly or half-committed. They were all in for Jesus. Together they made the commitment to finish the game strong. And what they started on day one, they finished on day fifty-two. Let’s jump ahead and check this out.

**Nehemiah 6:15** “So the wall was completed on the twenty-fifth of Elul, in fifty-two days.”

Team Jerusalem – a victory accomplished by God’s supernatural power.

Team Light – it takes commitment to be on God’s team. Whenever God called you to join this church, you made a commitment to God and to his church. And along the way, what happens is, sometimes you look up at the scoreboard and it appears that the enemy,
our opponent is winning. And believe me, sometimes it does look that way. But we must not let up. God calls us to finish strong. Give it everything you’ve got. Go all in for Jesus. We must rebuild the walls God has called us to rebuild. God is in the process of repurposing his church. It is God’s will and his plan to use this church for far greater purposes than we can even ask or imagine. We are the winning team – the Bible has already told us what is going to happen at the end of the game. As God’s team – we win!

Closing
Names are important. In Nehemiah chapter 3, God lets us see the names of many of the players on Team Jerusalem. Each team member played a significant role in God’s game plan. They worked shoulder to shoulder in partnership. They understood that God had strategically positioned them for maximum impact. And together they made the commitment to finish strong. Team Jerusalem – what a powerful story of God working mightily and miraculously through his people who were released and sold out for ministry! It’s a great picture of what God intends life in the church to be.

In one single sentence, God also recorded a group of men who refused to work.

**Nehemiah 3:5** “The next section was repaired by the men of Tekoa, but their nobles would not put their shoulders to the work under their supervisors.”

Some refused to work. God sees this. He records it. God records the slackers. They are remembered forever for refusing to do God’s work. Names are important. If God were to write a chapter highlighting the building up and repurposing of his church at Light, what would be said of you? Of your name? Of you as a team member? Of your work ethic for Jesus Christ? (Baruch – zealously “on fire” passionately serving God).

As a member of God’s team, God knows your name. God remembers your name. Your name is inscribed in the palm of his hand. The Bible says, you are (1) created for ministry (2) saved for ministry (3) called to ministry (4) gifted for ministry (5) commissioned to do ministry (6) commanded to do ministry (7) prepared for ministry (8) needed in the ministry of God’s church (9) you will be held accountable for ministry (10) you will be rewarded for ministry.

Names are important. Has your name been written down of the roster of God’s team? When it comes to where you will spend eternity, is your name written down in the Lamb’s Book of Life? You can be certain today that your name will be recorded in God’s book forever!

**Plan of Salvation/Prayer** (Jesus Christ – zealously serves you, with great passion he went to the cross for you, call on the name of Jesus)

**Romans 10:13** “For, everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”

Introduction

Whenever you try to accomplish something significant for Jesus Christ you will face strong opposition. Satan never bothers much with half-hearted, half-committed people who are content with going through the motions or who are satisfied with the status quo. But if you are on fire for Jesus Christ, then look out! If you commit yourself to be an obedient and faithful follower of Jesus Christ you will encounter spiritual opposition.

The church that commits itself to God’s Word as absolute truth and to the message of the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ – and that He is the only way to a personal relationship with God and to an eternal home in heaven – will be met with opposition. If you align yourself with a group of godly people (a local church) who boldly are committed to fulfilling the Great Commandment and the Great Commission – look out! Opposition will come.

1 Peter 5:8 “Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.”

Be alert. Be self-controlled. Satan is on the prowl and he would love to devour you. He would love to devour this church and very other Bible-believing, evangelical church. The name Satan means adversary. He wants to steal, kill and destroy. He is committed to opposing God and his people. Because all of these things are true, we need to be ready for opposition and know how to respond to it. As we come to Nehemiah chapter 4, God gives us a strategic plan for dealing with the opposition we face in our personal lives as well as the opposition which comes to the body of Christ.

Opposition does not come in one-sized packages. Opposition takes on a variety of shapes, intensities, pressures, threats, and powers; all of which are designed to slow down, to get in the way or they attempt to put a halt to God’s work.

Nehemiah and God’s people who lived in Jerusalem, they understood opposition. Throughout Israel’s history, they were a people who had faced relentless opposition from other cities, nations and cultures. In fact, it was the Babylonians attack on the Israelites in 722 BC which had left the city of Jerusalem and its walls in its current state of ruins. Though God had directed them to rebuild the walls and gates around the city of Jerusalem, it certainly did not mean the project would be an easy one. (Chapter 3 looks like these are going quite smoothly). Even though it was God’s will for the walls to be rebuilt, he did not remove the opposition.

Even though it is God’s will to repurpose his church here at LITD, opposition comes. In God’s sovereign will he will also allow spiritual opposition to come against the strategic planning process and our collaborative efforts to work together in unity to rebuild his church. And even though it is God’s will for your faith to grow in your spiritual journey with Jesus Christ, there will be times in your life and in this process where it will be met
with opposition. It’s going to happen. Allow the opposition to draw you closer to God, making you stronger in your faith than ever before.

Prayer

**Gaining Victory – A Strategic Plan for Overcoming Opposition**

1. **The Strategy of the Enemy – External Opposition**

The first tactical ploy of spiritual opposition is Satan’s ridicule of God’s people. Let’s take a look at the enemy’s ridicule as it comes to the forefront in the first two verses of chapter 4.

**Nehemiah 4:1-2** “When Sanballat heard that we were rebuilding the wall, he became angry and was greatly incensed. He ridiculed the Jews, and in the presence of his associates and the army of Samaria, he said, “What are those feeble Jews doing? Will they restore their wall? Will they offer sacrifices? Will they finish in a day? Can they bring the stones back to life from those heaps of rubble – burned as they are?”

The enemy’s oldest weapon is a barrage of words (the Garden of Eden).

In the face of external spiritual opposition, we see the strategy of the enemy…it starts with…

1) **Ridicule**

The Bible says, Sanballat – the Governor of Samaria, (he ruled the region north of Jerusalem), when he heard this repurposing and rebuilding project was taking place, he is mad. As a matter of fact, he is “burning mad.” You know it’s that kind of mad when you see red and you can quickly get out of control. What is he so mad about? I’m glad you asked. I’ll tell you why. The rebuilding project in Jerusalem is a threat to his power. He is much better off if Jerusalem and its people remain weak, lying in ruins.

The truth is: our enemy, Satan would love to see LITD not to rebuild or to be repurposed people of God. He would love to see us content with things just as they are. In Sanballat’s case, a restored Jerusalem would lessen his influence in the area. A repurposed people for God would lessen Satan’s influence in our area. And that gets Satan mad. The Bible says Sanballat begins ridiculing God’s people. Ultimately this ridicule, this trash talking is like poisonous venom straight from the mouth of Satan, and he is using Sanballat as his messenger.

Satan does use ridicule against those who take a stand for the Lord. (SPT). If your co-workers, fellow classmates or certain people in the community know you are a Christian, some will become angry and ridicule you. Your commitment to Jesus Christ threatens their godless lifestyle. Anger is often the world’s response to God’s work because it challenges their worldviews and values. Ridicule is one of Satan’s strategies. Many times ridicule alone is sufficient to stifle the spirit and work of God’s people.
Second…opposition many times will also include…

2) Mockery (sarcasm)

A second ploy of Satan is mockery or sarcasm. Let’s see what happens next…..

**Nehemiah 4:3** “Tobiah the Ammonite, who was at his side, said, “What are they building – even if a fox climbed up on it, he would break down their wall of stones.”

Tobiah was the Governor of the region called the Trans-Jordan.

One of the chief characteristics of our enemy Satan is that he is a mocker. The devil’s mouth is full of mockery and ridicule. A word of caution: When you have mockery, ridicule, malice, or gossip come out of your mouth, you’re playing right into the hands of the devil. Why be a part of something so harmful that tears down the work of God and his people? Instead we are called to build up one another in God’s church.

Fast forward to the New Testament, when Jesus was being tried, scourged, flogged, and as he carried his cross to Calvary, he was mocked and ridiculed. Out of every corner and crevice people came, motivated and inspired by Satan himself, to mock the Lord Jesus Christ. (The Passion of the Christ)

But when Satan’s strategy of ridicule and mockery doesn’t seem to work – he takes it up a notch. Next…we see…in Satan’s opposition to God’s work…he uses…

3) Force

The third tactical ploy of spiritual opposition is force.

**Nehemiah 4:7-8** “But when Sanballat, Tobiah, the Arabs, the Ammonites and the men of Ashdod heard that the repairs to Jerusalem’s walls had gone ahead and that the gaps were being closed, they were very angry. They all plotted together to come and fight against Jerusalem and stir up trouble against it.”

Do you see what is happening by the time we reach verse 7? The opposition is mounting. Look at all of the people who are opposing God’s work now! This teaches us that criticism, gossip and negativity rub off – they’re contagious! The builders in Jerusalem are surrounded now on all sides by mockers, ridiculers and basically by those who want to use brute force to stop the work of God. This is getting seriously out of control. Sanballat – the West Bank of Palestine. Tobiah – Jordan. Ashdod – the Gaza Strip. These same forces are still opposing Israel today.

We should not be surprised by this in our own lives. There are always Sanballats and Tobiahs who will oppose you and the work of God in your life. The issue is how do you respond to them? How would God want us to respond? How did Nehemiah respond? What did he do? Look at your notes…..Nehemiah gives us an example for how we’re to respond to opposition in our lives.
2. The Strategy of the Overcomer – Gaining victory over external opposition

1) Prayer

**Nehemiah 4:4-5** “Hear us, O our God, for we are despised. Turn their insults back on their own heads. Give them over as plunder in a land of captivity. Do not cover up their guilt or blot out their sins from your sight, for they have thrown insults in the face of the builders.”

What does Nehemiah do in the face of opposition from the enemy? He prays. Nehemiah as he has done so many times before, once again he turns to the spiritual weapon of prayer. He prays, asking God to intervene concerning this problem of evil and spiritual opposition that is coming against him and God’s people. He’s standing in the gap through prayer. As he prays, you sort of get the sense that he felt like doing something with his hands, he felt like retaliating (do you ever feel like this at times?) – but Nehemiah took those feelings that we all have at times and rather than venting them on the person, he went to God and he poured out his heart in prayer. Every prayer-focused and spirit-filled church is commanded to do the same.

In essence, Nehemiah was praying, “God, let them experience all the hardship we’ve experienced as captives. Give them what we’ve experienced and let’s see how they do with it! To heck with them all!!!”

How did Nehemiah fight against opposition? He went to God in prayer. He fought his battles in prayer. And every godly and great man, woman or student does the same. That’s a great lesson for all of us when we’re faced with spiritual opposition. Rather than just talking about it or entertaining it; pray about it. Prayer is much more powerful and productive than talking about it, entertaining it or engaging it. What are you facing today? Are you facing the enemy? One of the greatest weapons and strategies God has given you for overcoming the opposition of the evil one is prayer.

10:40 – 10:50 LITD Prayer (every Sunday morning)

Saturday, November 2 – Prayer Walk

Not only did Nehemiah have a heart to pray, that’s the first strategy of the overcomer, but he also had a mind to work. In the face of opposition, first you pray. Second, it’s a matter of staying the course. You stay on track with the work God has called you to do.

2) Work

**Nehemiah 4:6** “So we rebuilt the wall till all of it reached half its height, for the people worked with all their heart.”

When Nehemiah finished praying, he got off his knees with a renewed spirit. He was ready to do the work of God – because that’s what prayer does to you and what prayer does in you. This is an amazing truth – you can go into the presence of God in prayer and
sometimes you’re totally wiped out, spiritually exhausted…and you say something to God like… “Lord, I’ve had enough. I can’t take it anymore. The opposition I’m facing from the enemy is too intense. God, I need you to fill me with your power and your strength.”

And what happens is, after spending time being totally honest and transparent before God in prayer like that; what happens is; soon you’re back up on your feet again. God uses your time in prayer with him to renew your mind, body and spirit. He infuses you with supernatural strength and you go out and work and do great things for God like never before. Only God can do that in and through your life. And this is what God did in Nehemiah’s life.

After Nehemiah prays, with a renewed spirit, he says, “Come on, let’s keep mixing the mortar. Hand me another brick. Let’s keep building the wall.” Today, our response as God’s people, in the face of opposition is to say, “Come on, let’s keep building up the church.” God is the one who gives us his strength day after day and week after week to do great things in Jesus’ name.

Rather than listening to the enemy’s opposition, a much better way, a more godly way is to invest our lives in prayer and getting back to the work God has called us to. Satan loves it when God’s people and his church get waylaid by distractions. When God truly repurposes his people, which is his will and desire here at LITD, prayer and the work of God will flourish, bearing much fruit, and ultimately bringing glory to God.

A third strategy of the overcomer…..

3) Watch

As the opposition intensifies (from ridicule to mockery to force), Nehemiah steps up his strategy for prayer.

Nehemiah 4:9 “But we prayed to our God and posted a guard day and night to meet this threat.”

As the opposition increases and intensifies, Nehemiah does two things: he watches and he prays. He prays. But he also posts a guard day and night. The enemy is lurking. The enemy is hurling threats of impending force. Many times in the Old Testament, city rulers and leaders would post watchmen on the wall: 1) to warn the city of when the enemy might attack 2) to keep the enemy at bay 3) to pray over the city.

At LITD, we need a “watchmen on the wall” prayer ministry. (1) to pray against the enemy’s attacks, (2) to keep the enemy at bay, and (3) to pray over the ministry of God’s church and our city. Husbands and fathers, God has called you to be the “watchman on the wall” of your home. As Christians, in the face of opposition, the Bible says we are to watch and pray.

Closing
What is your battle? Where is your opposition coming from? It’s coming from Satan. He is your enemy. He is on the prowl. Where is he opposing you?

**1 Peter 5:8** “Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.”

Nehemiah’s example in the midst of opposition is a stark reminder for the church. Strategic planning and the repurposing of God’s church will be met with ongoing, intense spiritual opposition from the enemy. And wouldn’t you know it? After coming off of an amazing summer together here at LITD, as we were entering into a new season of fall ministries and a focus on Nehemiah, we were met with spiritual opposition. Bamm! In your face!!! It shouldn’t be a surprise to any of us. But church how we respond to the enemy’s opposition is critical. I’m convinced God has some things to teach us on how we’re to deal with spiritual opposition.

One of the powerful truths we learn from Nehemiah chapter 4 is that God has given our church everything we need for gaining victory, to overcome the tactical ploys of the enemy, and to finish strong the work God has called us to do. We pray. We work. We stand watch. And together we can whip the enemy’s tail in Jesus’ name.

Reading further into Nehemiah we find that miraculously under the divine guidance of God’s hand and through Nehemiah’s gifted leadership, the people of God rebuilt the city walls of Jerusalem in just 52 days. Two verses in Nehemiah record this amazing miracle,

Nehemiah 6:15-16 So the wall was completed on the twenty-fifth of Elul, in fifty-two days. When all our enemies heard about this, all the surrounding nations were afraid and lost their self-confidence, because they realized that this work had been done with the help of our God.

We wrestle not against flesh and blood. Yes, Satan uses people. But ultimately, he is the enemy.

God has given you everything you need to gain victory over the devil. The principles we’ve looked at today are the truth of the Bible. This is great news for your life and for the church. If you are God’s child, he is fighting for you in the spiritual realm. He has also given you the full armor of God for daily victory in the spiritual battle – truth, righteousness, the gospel of peace, faith, salvation, God’s Word and prayer (Eph 6:10-18).

You don’t have to fall victim to Satan’s schemes. In Christ, you have everything you need to be an overcomer and in Christ you are positioned to live a life of victory! Put on the full armor of God. You’re in a battle. Fight. Fight for your home and family. And together we must fight as God repurposes and builds up his church.

God’s promise:

**Revelation 21:7** “He who overcomes will inherit all this, and I will be his God and he will be my son.”

Prayer

Introduction
Growing up, who was your greatest opponent? When it comes to this question, some of you may have to think back a few years or so. Growing up, who was your greatest opponent? Was it another group of kids in your neighborhood? Or was it someone always tried to bully you around? Or was it another “clique” at school that just rubbed you and your friends the wrong way? Or perhaps what comes to mind when you think of your greatest opponent growing up – it’s that rival high school. Even now, you still want to crush them.

The Bible says that those who claim to be followers of Jesus Christ; we too, have an opponent. Our opponent is Satan. He is our adversary. He is our enemy. The great news is: Jesus Christ has already defeated Satan through the cross and his resurrection. Because of this, Satan’s time is limited.

Romans 16:20 “The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet.”

However, until that future event, Satan is working like crazy in our world and in our lives, because he knows his time is very short. In the Bible, Peter reminds us of the very real and fierce opposition that we’re up against in the spiritual battle every day.

1 Peter 5:8 “Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.”

Satan is committed to opposing God and his people. Last week we looked at the first nine verses of Nehemiah chapter 4 where Nehemiah and God’s people in Jerusalem are facing intense opposition toward the work God has called them to do – the work of rebuilding the gates and walls around God’s city of Jerusalem.

You’ll notice in your message notes, some of the blanks are already filled in. Some of you are thinking, well thank you very much. The blanks you see already filled in are what we covered last week. Last Sunday we looked at Satan’s strategy of external opposition. This is the opposition that comes from the world and the world system.

1. The Strategy of the Enemy

Strategy #1 – External Opposition

1) ridicule
2) mockery
3) force
2. The Strategy of the Overcomer

Strategy #1 – Gaining Victory over external opposition

1) pray
2) work
3) watch

These are the strategies God taught us last week from Nehemiah 4:1-9 for overcoming external opposition. This brings us to part 2 of, “How to Respond When Attacked by Spiritual Opposition.” Today we’re looking at the strategies God gives to us in Nehemiah 4:10-23 for gaining victory over internal opposition, or the opposition that comes from the inside or from within. We know from God’s Word Moses had to deal with opposition from within – opposition that came from God’s very own people.

Exodus 15:24 “So the people grumbled against Moses….”

Exodus 16:2 “In the desert the whole community grumbled against Moses…”

All throughout the Bible, throughout church history and even to the present day, pastors and church leaders have had to deal with opposition of the enemy that comes from within the body of Christ. This is what Nehemiah experiences next. First he gave us the example of how to overcome external spiritual opposition. Next he’s dealing with internal opposition.

1. The Strategy of the Enemy

Strategy #2 – Internal opposition

This is another of Satan’s ploys. He’s at work trying to discourage God’s people. In chapter 4, we find Nehemiah’s own people are now rising up in opposition, and they’re telling him all the reasons and excuses why God’s work can’t be done.

Nehemiah 4:10-12 Meanwhile, the people in Judah said, “The strength of the laborers is giving out, and there is so much rubble that we cannot rebuild the wall.” Also our enemies said, “Before they know it or see us, we will be right there among them and will kill them and put an end to the work.” Then the Jews who lived near them came and told us ten times over, “Wherever you turn, they will attack us.”

How do you think Nehemiah felt when this opposition starts to come at him from within? (from supposedly God’s people). If you’re in a position such as Nehemiah, you sort of get this sick feeling in the pit of your stomach. He must have been overwhelmed by the feeling of betrayal. I mean, he’s trying to lead the people of God to repurpose their lives and their city, and at first they were all fired up, saying they were with him – but now all of a sudden they have started believing the lies of the enemy. But it didn’t stop there. They were spreading the lies of the enemy among God’s people. They didn’t have all of the methods of communication like we do today like cell phones, emails, texting, Facebook, Twitter and all the other forms of communication and social media. But all of
a sudden, they’re murmuring, grumbling, gossiping and talking behind one another’s backs. And all they want to do now is put down their tools and give up.

Ten times the people of Judah came to Nehemiah, basically saying, “It’s lights out Nehemiah. It’s over. We’re surrounded. It’s time to give up.” Ten times!!! When you’re right in the middle of doing a great work for God, Satan loves to discourage God’s leaders and his servants. When you commit to do a great work for God, there are some days you will find yourself extremely discouraged. And sometimes what makes it so doggone discouraging, is when you get a bunch of negative and bad stuff (opposition) coming at you from those people who ought to be making it a priority to be encouraging one another.

And when this happens, the easy thing to do is give up. How easy it would be for Nehemiah to throw up his hands and say, “I’ve had enough of this. I’m heading back to Persia, to be cupbearer to the king again. So many pastors, church staff members, and church leaders, quit and walk away from God’s work, because of this opposition that comes from within.

I’ve served on a church staff for a long time now. In another six months or so, it will be 30 years. 95% of the opposition that happens to our churches is the kind of opposition God is speaking to us about today. Satan loves it. Satan is right smack dab in the middle of it. I believe this is the greatest issue facing the American church today. Internal opposition is the #1 strategy Satan is using in many cases and it holds back the people of God from doing a great work for him. (Talk about: A Night to Honor Pastors & Wives. The work God has called me to in the VRA).

**Hebrews 13:17** “Obey your leaders and submit to their authority. They keep watch over you as men who must give and account. Obey them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no advantage to you.”

Why does opposition come from within God’s church? The simple answer is: Satan is at the root of it. He gets in the middle of it. He likes to get in all the juicy details that come with it.

I believe many times opposition in the church comes because people:
- Misled (someone in the church either intentionally or unintentionally misleads others)
- Misinformed (an issue of communication)
- Missing out (an issue of commitment)
- Mistrust (an issue of trust)
- Missing the mark (an issue of unresolved sin)

In the New Testament, Paul wrote:

**Ephesians 4:3** “Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.”
God’s Word instructs you and I to do everything we can to maintain a spirit of unity in the church and in the body of Christ. Opposition from within is not just limited to life in a church family. Opposition from can also occur in our everyday lives. It can happen at home. It can happen at work. It can happen in our closest relationships. Right now, are you experiencing internal opposition? Perhaps you feel like throwing in the towel. Even though he had every reason to, Nehemiah didn’t have the words, “quit,” or “give up” in his vocabulary.

There are three things opposition from within will try to do: First, it…

1) Depletes strength

**Nehemiah 4:10** Meanwhile, the people in Judah said, “The strength of the laborers is giving out, and there is so much rubble that we cannot rebuild the wall.”

Many Bible scholars believe verse 10 was actually a song that the people kept singing over and over again. Talk about driving you crazy!!! I wonder what music genre they put these lyrics to?

The physical strength of the builders was depleted. They were burnt out.

“the strength of the laborers is giving out” = “staggering under a heavy load”

You almost get this sense that they were so drained physically that they could no longer carry the bricks, the stones and all of the other types of building materials. They were actually falling down under the load. They were exhausted from doing God’s work. When opposition comes from within, from God’s people, it’s one of the most exhausting things in life to have to deal with. It just zaps you emotionally, physically and spiritually.

You have to be aware of this. One of Satan’s strategies is to deplete your strength. What happens when we are fatigued, exhausted and stressed out? He comes along tempting us, especially in our area(s) of greatest weakness. He wants us to fall. He wants us to give up on the work God has called us to do. Satan is on the prowl looking for the person of God who is discouraged, who is about at the end of their rope – he is looking for someone to devour.

Second…opposition from within…

2) Distorts vision

**Nehemiah 4:10b** “…and there is so much rubble that we cannot rebuild the wall.”

For the builders of the wall, their vision had also become distorted. Instead of being encouraged and seeing how God was answering prayer -- half of the wall had been completed already. All of a sudden, all they can see is this big mound of rubble, and their eyes were also on the neighboring armies that were about to attack them.
Remember the context here. God’s workers were at the halfway point in the project of rebuilding the walls and gates (v 6). Instead of focusing on all that they had done, all they saw was what they still left to do. The initial enthusiasm they had for God’s work when they started, all of a sudden had departed — it had gone away. Instead of being positive and optimistic, they had become negative and pessimistic. Their vision had become distorted. They had taken their eyes off of the Lord. They were focusing on their problems and creating greater issues, instead of focusing on the one who was the answer to their problems.

How about in your life? Are you seeing God’s vision for your life clearly? Or are you so focused on the rubble and the rable that your vision from God has actually gotten skewed and distorted? This is one of Satan’s strategies. He wants you to get your eyes off of God’s plan and God’s vision. He wants your focus to be on the ruins. He wants you to see your problems as much bigger than they really are, instead of focusing on the God who is greater than your problems.

Third…opposition from within…..

3) **Deflates confidence**

The people of God had replaced confidence and motivation for God’s work, with overwhelming doubt, fear and a spirit of defeat. It makes you wonder, what happened to the people of chapters 2 and 3 we read about earlier in Nehemiah? This is one of Satan’s strategies. Satan loves to cast doubt. He loves to deflate the confidence God’s people have in Christ Jesus. What is your confidence and motivation level right now for doing a great work for God? Just perhaps are you at a point where you are now being driven by doubt, fear and a spirit of defeat; rather than the overwhelming confidence and motivation, which once was the driving passion of your life as you poured yourself into God’s work.

Now let’s move again toward the bottom section of your message notes…

2. **The Strategy of the Overcomer**

**Strategy #2 – Gaining Victory over internal opposition**

If you’re here today and your strength is depleted, your vision is distorted, and your confidence has been deflated, here are four things to grab hold of for gaining victory over internal opposition. It starts with sharing….

1) **A common goal**

**Nehemiah 4:13** “Therefore I stationed some of the people behind the lowest points of the wall at the exposed places, posting them by families, with their swords, spears and bows.”

In the face of opposition, Nehemiah led the people to focus and rally around one common goal. Verses 18 and 20 tell us that Nehemiah had a trumpeter by his side always.
Whenever there was trouble, Nehemiah would get his trumpeter to blow the trumpet, and this would rally all the troops around the one common goal they shared. What was their goal? Physically it was to rebuild the walls and gates around the city. Spiritually it was the rebuilding and repurposing of their lives in relationship to God and to one another.

As God’s people here at LITD, we share one common goal. The strategic plan that is in the process of being developed these fall months is designed to unite us around one common goal. The Bible says, our greatest goal is to rally around our Commander-in-Chief Jesus Christ to fulfill the Great Commission. This is the work of God we are called to do until Jesus Christ returns. This is the reason we exist as a church body. This is our common goal.

**Matthew 28:19-20** “Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

When God’s people unite around and live out the Great Commission as a common goal in Christ Jesus he is glorified.

A second strategy for overcomers…

2) **A united focus upward**

**Nehemiah 4:14** After I looked things over, I stood up and said to the nobles, the officials and the rest of the people, “Don’t be afraid of them. Remember the Lord, who is great and awesome, and fight for your brothers, your sons and your daughters, your wives and your homes.”

Nehemiah immediately reminds the people to get their focus back on the Lord. He has to be thinking, “What are you doing consuming your life and your time with all of this negative talk? With all this stuff that wants to tear you down, trying to stop God’s work? Instead look to Jesus – the great and awesome God! Fight for your homes and your families. The opposition is trying to steal, kill and destroy what God has promised you. We are called to put on the full armor of God and fight!”

How about you? Have you taken your eyes off the Lord? Are you looking up, or are you choosing to focus your attention on the opposition? It’s very easy to do. If the focus and priority of your life is anywhere else but on Jesus, you’re going to get really messed up. Could it be that today you need to turn your eyes upon Jesus again? Look up. Turn your eyes upon Jesus. Look full in his wonderful face. And the things of earth will grow strangely dim. In the light of his glory and grace.

Third….Nehemiah teaches us the need for …

3) **A balanced approach**
**Nehemiah 4:15-17** “When our enemies heard that we were aware of their plot and that God had frustrated it, we all returned to the wall, each to his own work. From that day on, half of my men did the work, while the other half were equipped with spears, shields, bows and armor. The officers posted themselves behind all the people of Judah who were building the wall. Those who carried the materials did their work with one hand and held a weapon in the other.”

There must be a balance in the spiritual battle – in doing God’s work. It’s a matter of being prepared to fight and defend our faith – with the sword in one hand (God’s Word), and a trowel in the other – a doer of God’s Word with the purpose of building up God’s church.

**4) An intentional focus outward**

**Nehemiah 4:19-22** Then I said to the nobles, the officials and the rest of the people, “The work is extensive and spread out, and we are widely separated from each other along the wall. Wherever you hear the sound of the trumpet, join us there. Our God will fight for us!” So we continued the work with half the men holding spears, from the first light of dawn till the stars came out. At that time I also said to the people, “Have every man and his helper stay inside Jerusalem at night, so they can serve us as guards by night and as workers by day.”

What is happening? They’re looking out for one another. They had each other’s backs. This is such a crucial part of what it means to belong to a church family. What does your coming week look like? Does your week include helping others? Will your week be spent serving others, or is it wrapped up only in yourself? Are you looking out for others? Do others know that you have their back…no matter what? What about the people in the community and the world around us? What are some things that you are doing personally that show others you care? What kinds of things are we doing as a church family that show we are committed to an intentional focus outward? (Make a Difference Day – October 26, 8:00 am, sign up today!)

**Philippians 2:3-4** Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.

**Closing**

**1 Peter 5:8** “Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.”

Satan devours Christians, pastors, church leaders and churches through opposition from within. The rate at which this happens is alarming. It’s a tragedy. Opposition from within God’s church and among God’s people is a strategy from the devil which depletes strength, distorts vision and deflates confidence. God has a better strategy. God has a better plan. A common goal. A united focus upward. A balanced approach. An intentional focus outward.
1) If you’re living your life apart from Jesus Christ – God has a better plan. 2) If you’re being used of the enemy to cause opposition from within – repent. In the mighty name of Jesus we are going to oppose the work of Satan here. 3) Together as a repurposed people of God let’s reach for the attainment of our common goal. Keep our focus upward on Jesus. Live balanced lives – both studying and applying God’s Word. Live others centered – focus off of self, instead may our focus always be outward to a city and world in need of our Savior’s love.

Prayer
Sermon 8: “Resolving Relational Conflict God’s Way,”
Nehemiah 5:1-13, October 27, 2013

Introduction
Good morning once again! Take your Bible and turn to Nehemiah chapter 5. We are already in our 8th week together in the message series, “Repurposed.”

Repurposed – to use or convert for use in another format or product.

Repurposing happens when you see something you think has very little or no value, or you thought was only worth throwing away, but it is suddenly reused for significant purposes.

Nehemiah was leading the people to repurpose the broken down walls around the city of Jerusalem. He was also there to be used of God to repurpose a community of faith that was spiritually off track with God.

In today’s story the people of God are doing God’s work, rebuilding the walls around Jerusalem. And all of a sudden they find themselves in conflict with one another. This should not be breaking news to you: Conflict is inevitable. No relationship is immune. Conflict in relationships is nothing new. If you look back at Genesis, the very first book in your Bible, after God created the human race it didn’t take long for relational conflict to break out. Because of sin, we live in a world that is fallen, broken, marred and in conflict, and since this is true this has a huge impact on our relationships.

What we find in Nehemiah chapter 5 is the same kind of stuff we deal with in relationships today. We all know what it is like to have strained, fractured or broken relationships. It happens in marriage, families, the workplace, school, church, in our community - everywhere. And here’s something I find to be absolutely startling: I find that so many people are willing to literally throw away relationships - relationships at all different levels, rather than take the time to deal with resolving conflict God’s way. And what happens is: far too many people spend their entire lives leaving behind a trail of carnage from unresolved relationships.

The truth is: God is a God of relationships. God lives in a unique, one of a kind relationship with Jesus the Son and the Holy Spirit. God has created us for relationship. God wants us to experience healthy relationships. He knew we would experience conflict in our relationships. And because he is a God of love, he gives to us principles from the Bible designed to help us restore and reconcile strained, fractured or broken relationships. God wants to repurpose our relationships.

Pray

As the people were rebuilding the walls in Jerusalem they experienced spiritual opposition- that was chapter 4. Next, they are in conflict with one other – that’s chapter 5.

What’s causing all of this conflict? Let’s look at this…several things going on here…
Nehemiah 5:1-5 Now the men and their wives raised a great outcry against their fellow Jews. Some were saying, “We and our sons and daughters are numerous; in order for us to eat and stay alive, we must get grain.” Others were saying, “We are mortgaging our fields, our vineyards and our homes to get grain during the famine.” Still others were saying, “We have had to borrow money to pay the king’s tax on our fields and vineyards. Although we are of the same flesh and blood as our fellow Jews and though our children are as good as theirs, yet we have to subject our sons and daughters to slavery. Some of our daughters have already been enslaved, but we are powerless, because our fields and our vineyards belong to others.

Nehemiah chapter 5 tells us there was a great outcry against their fellow Jews. God’s people were in conflict. Why?

Three Causes of Relational Conflict: (in Nehemiah’s day)

1) a huge famine

Nehemiah 5:2 Some were saying, “We and our sons and daughters are numerous; in order for us to eat and stay alive, we must get grain.”

People had to feed these families just like we do today. And because of the famine, there was not enough food to feed everyone. Verse 3 tells us that the famine was so severe some people were mortgaging their fields, vineyards and homes just to get enough food to eat. It was a serious situation. The lagging economy of which we find ourselves leads to a lot of pressure and conflict in many ways.

2) high taxes

Nehemiah 5:4 Still others were saying, “We have had to borrow money to pay the king’s tax on our fields and vineyards.”

King Artaxerxes was heavily taxing the people in Jerusalem. They were borrowing money and going deep in debt, just to stay current on their taxes. That’s something we can relate to…we all pay our share of taxes.

3) high interest rates

Nehemiah 5:5 “Although we are the same flesh and blood as our countrymen and though our sons are as good as theirs, yet we have to subject our sons and daughters to slavery. Some of our daughters are already enslaved, but we are powerless, because our fields and our vineyards belong to others.”

What is happening here? In these hard economic times, some of the people were forced to borrow money from their fellow Jews to pay their taxes. And those who loaned money to their fellow Jews, were charging outrageous interest. And when the borrower couldn’t pay, the lender was actually taking their children from them turning them into slaves.
These were some of the causes for the conflict they were experiencing in their relationships. A huge famine. High taxes. High interest rates.

The staggering thing is this: those who were taking advantage of others were the people of God themselves. They were trying to make large amounts of money off their own people – they were taking advantage of their own. The rich Jews, instead of helping the poor, and pulling them out of the financial ditch, were actually exploiting them to their own financial advantage. They were living what I consider a compartmentalized faith. What does that look like? Someone who compartmentalizes their faith? On Saturday, they dusted off their faith and went to the temple for worship. But every other day, they were destroying lives and relationships because of their insatiable greed for more. It was this greed in their hearts and lives that was causing conflict, threatening to put a halt to the work of God.

I want you to imagine if this happened in a family. Picture this happening in the church. What would happen among the people? Distrust would enter in. Discouragement would enter in – how could a family member or another Christian do such a thing to you? Doubt would enter in – how can people who claim to know God behave this way? Don’t you agree that it’s stuff like this that can lead to conflict in relationships? It was people that they knew, people that they went to the temple (church) with, people that lived in their city, people that were their neighbors, their friends, their family. The point is: Conflict was a major problem.

What do you do when you find yourself facing conflict with someone? Let’s look at the model Nehemiah gives us for resolving conflict God’s way.

**God’s Way of Resolving Conflict in Relationships**

1. **I place myself under Christ’s leadership and control**

**Nehemiah 5:6-7a** When I heard their outcry and these charges, I was very angry. I pondered them in my mind…

Nehemiah was angry. He was angry because he knew God’s Word was being disobeyed. How? There are many Old Testament passages which tell God’s people what to do when it comes to lending money. First, it is not wrong for a Jew to lend money to another Jew. Second, it did violate Gods Word, it was just flat wrong for a Jew to charge interest to another Jew.

And all of this made Nehemiah angry because he knew God’s Word was being disobeyed. When you choose to disobey the Word of God it will bring conflict into your life and into your relationships. Unresolved conflict greatly hinders the work of God.

It is imperative for each of us to consider this question: Is there anything in your life, or in the life of the church, that is actually slowing down or damaging the work of God? Specifically, is relational conflict getting in the way of God’s work. If so, you must take the time and make it a priority to resolve relational conflict God’s way.
Nehemiah was angry and yet he did not sin. Notice in verse 7 what he does… “I pondered them in my mind…”

He is angry, but he does not lash out in an ungodly or unrighteous anger. What does he do? In the middle of relational conflict, he wisely takes some time to cool down. He doesn’t just go off in a rage, half-cocked. Knowing what we know about Nehemiah, likely he took time to pray about the conflict. God has placed within Nehemiah’s heart and life this desire to see relationships repurposed for the glory of God. The relationships in Nehemiah’s life are of great value to him. Relationships matter. He’s not going to allow relational conflict to go unchecked. He’s not just going to throw away the relationships God had given him. He wasn’t about to get angry and just walk away from the people God had brought into his life.

Nehemiah shows godly leadership, standing on God’s Word seeking to resolve the conflict. The secret is: he places himself under God’s leadership and his control.

This is one of the key steps in conflict resolution. As you seek to resolve a conflict with someone, you must first make sure you are under Christ’s leadership and his control. True conflict resolution must be done God’s way.

2. I must first seek to resolve conflict privately

Nehemiah 5:7 I pondered them in my mind and then accused the nobles and the officials. I told them, “You are exacting usury from your own countrymen!”

Nehemiah privately confronts those who were using their wealth and power to take advantage of others.

The biblical pattern for resolving conflict is…

Matthew 18:15 “If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over.”

When you are experiencing a relationship that is strained, fractured or broken, this is how you begin to deal with lovingly seeking reconciliation and restoration.

1 Corinthians 10:31 So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.

We should never confront someone we’re in conflict with until we can approach them in humility, love, gentleness, after self-examination and until we’re Spirit-led and Spirit-controlled.

Matthew 7:3-5 “Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother’s eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? How can you say to your brother, ‘Let me take the speck out of your eye,’ when all the time there is a plank in your own eye? You
hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother’s eye.

**Matthew 18:15** “If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over.”

Here’s what this means: Let’s be very clear on this. You don’t run to everyone telling them what so and so did to you. That’s gossip. And the last time I checked, gossip is a sin. When you gossip you’re inviting and leading others to sin. You don’t post it on Facebook. You don’t call, email or text everyone in the world. The Bible says to resolve conflict God’s way first you go to the person you are in conflict with. You do this privately, just between the two of you (spouse, co-worker, neighbor, classmate, church member or whomever).

If for some reason the relationship and the situation does not get resolved one on one with the other person, the Bible tells you what to do next…..

**Matthew 18:16** But if he will not listen, take one or two others along, so that every matter may be established by the of testimony two or three witnesses.

This is where you prayerfully bring in two or three others as witnesses. God tells us to enlist the help of others. Each of these steps are to be done in love with the goal of biblical restoration. What if the conflict still cannot be resolved? What’s the next step?

3. **I am instructed to take the next step publicly**

**Nehemiah 5:7-11** I pondered them in my mind and then accused the nobles and officials. I told them, “You are charging your own people interest!” So I called together a large meeting to deal with them and said: “As far as possible, we have bought back our fellow Jews who were sold to the Gentiles. Now you are selling your own people, only for them to be sold back to us!” They kept quiet, because they could find nothing to say.

So I continued, “What you are doing is not right. Shouldn’t you walk in the fear of our God to avoid the reproach of our Gentile enemies? I and my brothers and my men are also lending the people money and grain. But let us stop charging interest! Give back to them immediately their fields, vineyards, olive groves and houses, and also the interest you are charging them—one percent of the money, grain, new wine and olive oil.”

Nehemiah calls for a large public meeting. He’s taking the next step of resolving conflict God’s way.

**Matthew 18:17** “If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church, and if he refuses to listen even to the church, treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector.”

Jesus says, next you deal with the conflict publicly. Church discipline. In the church, this type of meeting takes place with the membership of the church. Every step is done prayerfully, in love and with the goal of restoring and reconciling the relationship for the
glory of God. And although church discipline is difficult to do, it is rooted in the divine 
authority of Scripture. We seek to please and honor God by obeying his Word. Even 
though church discipline usually happens only or rare occasions, God’s Word must be 
fully obeyed.

If the person still refuses to repent and is unwilling to resolve the conflict, then you break 
off fellowship with that individual. Sin and lack of repentance often leads to some 
difficult consequences. It sends a message that a pattern of sinful, destructive behavior is 
unacceptable to the church and to God. You still pray for that person. You remain open to 
the relationship being restored again one day. However, you no longer fellowship with 
that person; nor should the church.

4. I pray and work with the goal of restoration

Always keep in mind, the goal of resolving conflict God’s way is in love, to restore the 
relationship – all for God’s glory.

Nehemiah 5:12-13 “We will give it back,” they said. “And we will not demand anything 
more from them. We will do as you say.” Then I summoned the priests and made the 
nobles and officials take an oath to do what they had promised. I also shook out the folds 
of my robe and said, “In this way may God shake out of their house and possessions 
anyone who does not keep this promise. So may such a person be shaken out and 
emptied!” At this the whole assembly said, “Amen,” and praised the LORD. And the 
people did as they had promised.

Nehemiah was not only seeking for relationships to be restored, he also instructs them to 
make restitution.

Here’s the process we find:

- Quit – the sin (v 10)
- Correct – make right what is wrong (v 11)
- Commit – keep your promises before God (v 12-13)

How about in your life? Is there a sin you need to quit today? Is there something you 
need to correct or to make right? Is there something God is calling you to commit to?

God’s way of resolving conflict in relationships works. Why don’t we see results like this 
more often when people are experiencing conflict in their relationships? Pride is very 
often the number one reason. Honestly we don’t see conflict resolution work often 
because very few people are willing to pray for it and work at it.

As God’s people we must be committed to resolving conflict in relationships squarely 
and courageously. Because if we don’t, church relationships will suffer, families will fall 
into chaos, marriages will die, and cities, along with our nation will be greatly weakened.

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Recommended Book: *The Peacemaker – A Biblical Guide to Resolving Personal Conflict* (Ken Sande)

“Many believers and their churches have not yet developed the ability to respond to conflict in a gospel-centered and biblically faithful manner. Not all of us are called to teach a Bible study, sing in the choir, or work with youth, but all of us are called to ‘go and be reconciled’ (Matthew 5:24) to our brothers and sisters, our friends and family, and the people in our churches and community. God calls each of us to allow his redemptive, transforming love to spill over into our relationships. Therefore, do not let unresolved conflict rob you of the joy healthy relationships can bring.” – Ken Sandes

Closing

At Light in the Desert we must be a people who are committed to resolving relational conflict according to principles God’s Word teaches. In your own life, will you also seek to resolve relational conflict God’s way?

Plan of salvation – Resolving life’s greatest conflict

**1 Timothy 2:5** For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.

**Romans 5:6-8** You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

**Colossians 1:21-22** Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior. But now he has reconciled you by Christ’s physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation—

**John 5:24** Very truly I tell you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be judged but has crossed over from death to life.

Prayer

Song of Invitation

Lord’s Supper
Introduction
We’re going to be talking today about goals.

Most of us have good intentions when it comes to reaching our goals. Our challenge is sometimes we lack the execution which keeps us from reaching those goals. Goals come in all shapes and sizes. There are goals of eating right. Goals to exercise. Weight loss goals. Goals concerning our finances. Education goals. Career goals. Goals in our marriages and in parenting. Spiritual goals. Ministry goals. What are your goals?

What about your life goals? Have you thought about this lately? I’m talking about more than your bucket list. What do you want to accomplish while you’re still here on this earth? What do you want to do for God that really matters? Just how are you going to live your life in such a way to ensure that you finish well the plan God has for you? When you exit this earth, is it one of your life goals that you’re going to leave behind a legacy for God? How do you ensure that your life is actually going to make a difference for eternity?

Nehemiah had the lifelong goal of going to Jerusalem to rebuild the city’s gates and walls. The city had lay in ruins for over 140 years. As we come to Nehemiah chapter 6, after more intense opposition from the enemy, Nehemiah and the people complete the project. The goal of rebuilding and repurposing the walls comes to a completion.

Read Nehemiah 6:1-14

**Nehemiah 6:15-16** “So the wall was completed on the twenty-fifth of Elul, in fifty-two days. When all our enemies heard about this, all the surrounding nations were afraid and lost their self-confidence, because they realized that this work had been done with the help of our God.”

“So the wall was completed.” Here we are at the climactic moment of the wall being built after lying in ruins for 140 years, and Nehemiah says, “So the wall was completed.” I don’t know about you, but I’m sort of expecting more than this. Nehemiah we’ve been studying your book for nine weeks. And we come to this time of great anticipation and expectation, and Nehemiah simply writes, “We built the wall.”

Let me ask the women here today a question. Isn’t that a classic man’s way of saying this? Now if a woman were describing this moment, you would have lots of details included here. “It was a sunny day. The people were happy. We were all drinking latte’s. We painted the walls a taupe (ish) type color. The gates were such and such a color. And this is how we landscaped this area and that area.” You would have all the details. Am I right?

You get the same thing when a baby is born. You ask a woman, “Oh, did so and so have a baby?” A woman is going to give you every minute’ detail; the baby’s precise height
and weight, hair color, eye color, who the baby looks like, the first, middle and last name, every gift the family has received at the hospital, and to the very hundredth of a second, the exact time the baby was born.

You ask a man, it’s like this, “Yea, it’s a baby.” A boy or a girl? “Yep.” That’s it. And this is what we find here in Nehemiah. Not a lot of detail. “We built the wall.” You can sort of imagine him pulling up his pants and sort of tugging on his suspenders saying, “We built the wall.” That’s it. We don’t even know what Nehemiah’s emotional state was at the wall’s completion. He isn’t saying here, “I was really happy. I baked a cake and put a candle on it. I sang a victory song. I bought a hammock and laid in it for a month.” There’s none of this. When I get to heaven, I’m going to make a point to ask Nehemiah, “How did you feel? Overwhelmed? Exhausted? Did you cry? Did you laugh? Did you cheer? Did you do a victory dance in front of your enemies? What happened?” He doesn’t tell us. It’s just a guy thing – no details.

So the wall was finished on the 25th day of Elul in 52 days. So how long did it take to rebuild the wall? 52 days. How many years had the city’s gates and walls been in ruins? Over 140 years. Nehemiah knocks it out in 52 days. How many of you have had a construction worker or a crew remodeling or working on a project around your house for much longer than it was supposed to take? Most of us have. It’s taken almost that long to run an electrical line from the building to the new church sign. Praise God we’re going to have an electrician on the job at 7:00 am tomorrow morning! You wouldn’t have that problem with Nehemiah. He led his crew to rebuild the gates and walls around an entire city in just 52 days. Nehemiah’s crew would slap up a room addition at your house in just an afternoon. With Nehemiah’s crew, you could lay down to take nap one afternoon and wake up a couple hours later with a brand new room addition! (HGTV/DIY network)

How was Nehemiah able to reach this goal, accomplishing the work of God in such a short period of time? “this work had been done with the help of our God.” Nehemiah said “yes” to a God-sized goal, and God did a miracle! This morning get a glimpse of just how Nehemiah reached this goal, by looking at some of the enduring principles from his life; that we might too be a people of God who finish well the work God has called us to do.

Enduring Principles for Finishing Well

1. Pray continually

Nehemiah’s goal was to go to Jerusalem to lead the rebuilding project. Obviously this is a God-sized goal. Do you remember what Nehemiah does on the front end of this project? He prays for four months. Notice this: the work itself took less than two months. Nehemiah spent more time in prayer, than he did in actually doing the work. He understood where the spiritual battle is won. The same is true for your life and for his church today. The battle is won on your knees before God in prayer.

God is going to give you some goals. Understand this: the goals God gives to you are always going to be bigger than anything you can do on your own. You’re going to need God. This is where faith comes in. You’re going to be dependent on God – so pray.
The key to Nehemiah’s success: he was a man of prayer. We’ve seen that all throughout this message series.

**Nehemiah 6:9** They were all trying to frighten us, thinking, “Their hands will get too weak for the work, and it will not be completed.” But I prayed, “Now strengthen my hands.”

We too, have an enemy who doesn’t want us to complete the work God has called us to do. This serves as a reminder to us: We must pray continually believing our work will be done and our goals will be reached only with the help of our God. The God of Nehemiah is our same God today. (Prayerwalk, 10:40-10:50 Sunday mornings).

**Colossians 4:2** “Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful.”

2. **Commit to God’s purposes**

I don’t think any one of us could question Nehemiah’s commitment to the purposes of God. He was “all in” when it came to the repurposing project of rebuilding the walls and people’s lives in Jerusalem.

**Nehemiah 2:11** “I went to Jerusalem…”

**Nehemiah 2:17** “Come, let us rebuild the wall of Jerusalem…”

**Nehemiah 4:6** “So we rebuilt the wall till all of it reached half its height, for the people worked with all their heart.”

**Nehemiah 6:16** “So the wall was completed on the twenty-fifth of Elul, in fifty-two days.”

How about you? Are you committed to the purposes of God for your life? God has an agenda for your life. You were created and saved for God’s purposes.

The wall was completed because of Nehemiah’s commitment to God’s purposes. Imagine what God wants to build and complete through your life, and through an entire congregation of people whose lives are committed to be “all in” for God – to see his purposes accomplished. That’s exciting!!!

3. **Live passionately**

During this message series we’ve certainly seen Nehemiah’s passion for life – and for the things of God.

**Nehemiah 1:4** “When I heard these things I wept. For some days, I mourned and fasted and prayed before the God of heaven.”

We see here Nehemiah’s passion for God’s work and for God’s people.
**Nehemiah 4:13-14** Therefore I stationed some of the people behind the lowest points of the wall at the exposed places, posting them by families, with their swords, spears and bows. After I looked things over, I stood up and said to the nobles, the officials and the rest of the people. “Don’t be afraid of them. Remember the Lord, who is great and awesome, and fight for your brothers, your sons and your daughters, your wives and your homes.”

Don’t you love his passion? That’s Braveheart kind of stuff. There’s no stopping this kind of passion for the Lord. How could anyone be surprised he reached the goal and that the wall was completed? What passion!!!

How passionate are you about reaching your goals? What has God given you a passion for? Someone might say, “I have a passion for chocolate. Or I have a passion for shopping. Or I have a passion for watching sports. Or I have a passion for the Mesa swap meet. I have a passion for the social media. I have a passion for a certain hobby.” I understand your passion, but none of those are the kind of passion we are talking about here. Rather, what has God given you a passion for that could really make a difference in eternity?

For Nehemiah it was this lifelong goal of rebuilding a city and rebuilding people’s lives spiritually. And he pursues this God-given goal with unabandoned passion. God has wired you with a passion. Be prayerful. Be creative. Be innovative. The sky is the limit. Whatever God gives you a passion for, then like Nehemiah, go for it! Let nothing stop the passion for the work of God in your life.

4. **Plan thoroughly**

Much of Nehemiah’s success can be attributed to the time he spent planning. While Nehemiah was praying, he was also planning. We saw this in chapter 2. Nehemiah is a man of prayer, and he is also a planner. He is seeking the plan of God in prayer. Prayer and planning go together.

Who is the planner in your home or marriage? God has this humorous way of putting together couples who are the exact opposite. Many times one spouse is very organized and a planner. The other spouse is the exact opposite – a total mess! It’s impossible to convince a couple of this in pre-marital counseling. But this reality does hit somewhere within the first or second year of marriage.

God has given the church a plan for making disciples – it’s called the Great Commission. From even before the beginning of time, God has had a plan to reach the ends of the earth with the Good News of his Son Jesus Christ. God’s plan will be completed one day. What part are you playing in God’s grand plan of “making disciples?” Another question you must answer is this: How are you planning for life in eternity? God has a plan for your life and he has a plan for your eternity. This involves experiencing life in his Son, Jesus Christ. Have you discovered God’s plan of salvation?

5. **Rely on God’s power**
The miracle of rebuilding the walls was accomplished only by God’s power. Nehemiah clearly understood this.

**Nehemiah 2:20** “The God of heaven will give us success.”

**Nehemiah 4:20** “Wherever you hear the sound of the trumpet, join us there. Our God will fight for us!”

**Nehemiah 6:16** “…this work had been done by the help of our God.”

What goals are you trying to reach, right now, where you need power from above – God’s power?

**Nehemiah 6:9** But I prayed, “Now strengthen my hands.”

Call upon the Lord. You need his power to reach God-sized goals in your life. To accomplish God’s purposes, you need his strength. To complete something significant for God, you need his might. To finish well, we all need the help of our God who is more than able, and who has proven himself to be strong and mighty.

**Romans 8:28-31** And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters. And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified. What, then, shall we say in response to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?

An enduring principle for your life…is to remember that…God is for you. He loves you more than anyone else could ever love you.

6. **Include people**

One of the enduring principles Nehemiah truly understood – I mean he totally gets this - in order to reach your life’s pursuits and the goals that God placed before you, you need other people.

We spent a whole message studying Team Jerusalem. Chapter 3, “Releasing the Power of God’s Team.” Team Jerusalem worked and served side by side, with the same purpose and the same goal – together they were rebuilding the wall, and in the process God was rebuilding their lives spiritually.

**Romans 12:5** “So in Christ we who are many form one body and each member belongs to all the others.”

Who are the people God wants you to surround yourself with? If you’re serious about reaching life’s goals and finishing well, you need to surround yourself with God’s people. I’m not saying this to the point of being this exclusive little group. No, because we do
need to be inclusive in reaching out beyond these walls to our community and to the world faithfully sharing Christ’s love.

What I am saying is you need Christians in your life (small group, prayer group, a Sunday School class, a ministry team) to pray for one another, to support one another, to encourage one another, and to hold one another accountable to reach the goals and accomplish the work God has called you to. You need a church family. Some of you here today, God is speaking to you about becoming a member of this church family. This is a great time to get on board. The holidays are upon us which is always a wonderful time of celebration in the church. Next week LITD’s strategic planning team will unveil the strategic plan they’ve been working on together since mid-August. Thank you for your prayers. The team has worked hard. We’ve also had a lot of fun serving together. Next Sunday we will be seeking the church’s affirmation of God’s plan for an exciting future together.

7. Be willing to persevere, many times even at great cost

The rebuilding in Jerusalem took its toll. There was great cost involved. Sacrifices were made. People worked all day and into the night. They experienced this fierce opposition from the enemy in their face constantly. There was not enough food to eat because of the famine. This was not a project of comfort and convenience. But we do know this. They persevered. They endured. They completed the physical work God had called them to do. God did still have some work to do in their lives spiritually. We will see that next week. What will be said for eternity about this group of people is that they reached the goal that God had set before them. When it came to rebuilding the gates and the walls, they finished well.

**Nehemiah 6:15-16** “So the wall was completed on the twenty-fifth of Elul, in fifty-two days. When all our enemies heard about this, all the surrounding nations were afraid and lost their self-confidence, because they realized that this work had been done with the help of our God.”

The actual physical rebuilding of the wall was completed in just 52 days – a miracle performed by the hand of God as he chose to work through his people. However, as important as it was for the city’s walls to be rebuilt, this was only symbolic of the greater work of rebuilding God desired to do in their lives spiritually.

Where is it that God calling you to persevere? Are you willing to persevere for the cause of Jesus Christ even if it comes at great cost? What sacrifices are you willing to make?

God has been teaching me about so much personally about perseverance in my life. God’s repurposing a church requires perseverance. Pursuing a doctor of ministry is about perseverance – just a few more months to go. One of my life goals is to serve God in ministry on a local church staff for 50 years – 29 ½ years down, 20 ½ years to go! Perseverance is one of the enduring principles for finishing well. The person I know with the greatest perseverance is my wife Linda. She has shown incredible perseverance over the years.
There are some areas in your life where God is calling you to persevere – and sometimes even at great cost. In many ways, anything worth pursuing involves sacrifice, cost, and even many times pain and suffering. God also calls his church to persevere. May it be said of God’s people at Light in the Desert, we rebuilt this church and we were a people who were repurposed - with the help of our God! One day Jesus Christ is coming back. He will bring things to a completion, just as God planned. On a more personal level, God also promises to bring to completion what he has started in you.

Philippians 1:6 “...being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.”

Closing
The Bible says there is one man who lived out to perfection these enduring principles we’ve looked at this morning for finishing well. That man is Jesus Christ. Jesus was a man of prayer. He committed his life fully to God’s purposes. Think about his passion. Talk about planning thoroughly – He is the plan of God. Daily he continued to draw strength and power from God the Father. The amazing this is: he includes you and me in his eternal plan. I know of no greater example of perseverance than that of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. And talk about great cost. He sacrificed his very own life on the cross, so that God’s redemptive plan might be accomplished for you and for me. That’s why Jesus Christ said on the cross, “It is finished!!!” With the reality of the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ, God’s plan of salvation is complete. God’s goal and his plan is that this never ending love of Jesus will find a home in your heart and in your life.

Prayer
Sermon 10: “Revival: Can It Still Happen Today?”
Nehemiah 8-10, November 10, 2013

Introduction

What are some things that quickly get “outdated?” Here are some answers people might give to this question? Clothing. Hairstyle. House. Cars. Technology.

Let’s consider a few more things people might also consider to be “outdated.” God. The Bible. The Church. Marriage. Revival.

Today of all topics we’re going to take a look at revival. Is revival something that is outdated? Is revival one of the ways that God worked at some time in the past? But now would most people say revival is one of those things which is outdated?

And what is revival anyway?

Revival – “to bring back to life”

Revival is for God’s people. God wants to bring his people back to life – his church.

Nehemiah and the people of Jerusalem have just completed the rebuilding of the walls around the city – an amazing miracle of God which occurred in just 52 days! As important as it was for the walls to be rebuilt, this was only symbolic of what God wanted to do in their lives spiritually. Because, even though the walls had been rebuilt, deep down in their hearts, they knew something was missing. Something wasn’t right in their relationship with God and with one another. There was far more to this repurposing project than they could have ever imagined.

These fall months God has been in the process of rebuilding and repurposing his church here at Light in the Desert. We’ve also discovered this is a process in our lives and in the church which has implications far greater than we could have ever imagined. We’ll find that to be true once again today.

Three “Vital Signs” of Revival

From Nehemiah, we’re going to look at three vital signs of revival. When you’re in the hospital you’re always having your vital signs checked. Vital signs tell the doctors and the medical staff some basic things of what’s happening in your body.

These vital signs of revival we’re looking at today tell us a lot about what is happening in our personal lives as well as in our church spiritually.

The first “vital sign” of genuine revival is when God’s people have a....
1. Renewed hunger for God’s Word

**Nehemiah 8:1-3** All the people came together as one in the square before the Water Gate. They told Ezra the teacher of the Law to bring out the Book of the Law of Moses, which the LORD had commanded for Israel. So on the first day of the seventh month Ezra the priest brought the Law before the assembly, which was made up of men and women and all who were able to understand. He read it aloud from daybreak till noon as he faced the square before the Water Gate in the presence of the men, women and others who could understand. And all the people listened attentively to the Book of the Law.

Raymond Brown notes the progression of events following the rebuilding of the city’s wall:

As soon as the building work came to an end, an unusual event took place which was to prove dramatically influential in the spiritual life of God’s people. The work was finished during the late summer month of Elul (6:15), and the next month, Tishri, marked the beginning of the year. The first day of this *seventh month* was a public holiday known as the Feast of trumpets. So, only a few days after the completion of the building project, hundreds of men, women and children gathered in Jerusalem for a new year celebration in which God’s written Word played a central part. An outdoor public meeting was devoted entirely to hearing the reading and interpretation of Scripture.⁶

v. 1 – “all the people came together.” This is about 50,000 people. What do they want? They want Ezra to get the Bible and open it. They want to hear God’s Word. They have this desire and hunger for the Word of God.

Who is this guy Ezra? And where is Nehemiah?

**Ezra 7:10** “For Ezra had devoted himself to the study and observance of the Law of the Lord, and to teaching its decrees and laws in Israel.”

Ezra was a priest, a scribe. He intensely studied the Scriptures. He practiced and applied it in his own life. He taught the Word of God to others.

Now get this: Ezra gives them a six hour sermon. 50,000 people are there. They’re standing in the heat of the Middle East. They’re all crammed close together, and there is no sound system. Not much personal space. A lot of sweat. And God’s people, 50,000 of them are shouting in unison, “We want the Word!” Maybe they even started doing the wave, I don’t know. They’re screaming for the first five books of the Old Testament, the Law. They’re saying, “Bring us Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy.”

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Now let’s be honest. How many of you got up this morning and raced here to Light in the Desert hoping that your Bible study teacher or the pastor was doing some timely teaching from the book Leviticus?

In Nehemiah, God had burdened the people’s hearts for his Word. There’s a desire to learn the Scriptures. There is a hunger to hear God’s Word. They’re crying out for it, “Give us the Bible.” And it is this hunger for God’s Word that is one of the vital signs of revival among God’s people and in the church. At Light in the Desert we have a high view of God’s Word. We are a Bible-believing church. We believe God’s Word is the absolute truth. The Bible contains God-breathed words and instructions for our lives. All of our ministries are centered on the Word and focused on Jesus Christ.

**Psalm 19:7** “The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul. The statutes of the Lord are trustworthy, making wise the simple.”

**Isaiah 55:11** “…so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.”

Whenever you read the Bible, this is God’s voice speaking to you.

Back to Nehemiah chapter 8, verse 3:

**Nehemiah 8:3** “He read it aloud from daybreak till noon as he faced the square before the Water Gate in the presence of the men, women and others who could understand. And all the people listened attentively to the Book of the Law.”

The ears of the people were what? Attentive. They were tuned in to God’s Word. They were listening. They desperately wanted to hear from God. They were attentive. They didn’t decide to skip church and sleep in. They weren’t texting or doing their own thing. They weren’t making lunch plans. No, it says they were attentive. They had this genuine hunger for the Bible. This is one of the vital signs of revival. Right now in your life do you have a hunger for God’s Word like you’ve never experienced before? Every day make it a priority be attentive to God’s Word. His voice is the most important voice you hear each day. He longs to speak to you through the Word. In your daily life, when you have all of these lies from the enemy coming at you, you can be assured that God’s Word is the voice of truth.

**Nehemiah 8:5** “Ezra opened the book. All the people could see him because he was standing above them; and as he opened it, the people all stood up.”

Ezra opened the book. How often are you opening the book to hear from God?

When Ezra opened the book, the people heard from God and their response was one of worship. Breneman comments on the people’s response to the reading of the Law (v. 6).

“All the people… responded” in a splendid example of unified worship as the leader raised his voice in praise and the people responded. The people responded (1) by lifting
their hands in worship and showing a sense of need: (2) by saying, “Amen! Amen!” and thus affirming their submission to the authority of Scripture; and (3) by bowing down to the ground with a sense of humility and submission before God. 7

Nehemiah chapter 8, verses 7-8 indicates that it was the Levites God-ordained responsibility to explain the Scriptures to the people. It seems the Levites role was one of interpreting what Ezra had just read. Likely they gathered the people into smaller groups, “Making it clear and giving the meaning so that the people could understand what was being read.” After the Levites had finished explaining the Scriptures, along with instruction from Ezra and Nehemiah (Neh. 8:9-10), the people were moved beyond having only a knowledge of God’s Word. They now had an understanding of the Scriptures which would soon progress into the application of God’s Word for their daily lives.

Worship Song

Nehemiah gives us a second vital sign for genuine revival.

2. Crying out to God in prayer

Nehemiah 9:1-3 On the twenty-fourth day of the same month, the Israelites gathered together, fasting and wearing sackcloth and putting dust on their heads. Those of Israelite descent had separated themselves from all foreigners. They stood in their places and confessed their sins and the sins of their ancestors. They stood where they were and read from the Book of the Law of the LORD their God for a quarter of the day, and spent another quarter in confession and in worshiping the LORD their God.

Reading the Book of the Law made the people realize that in their own lives, along with the lives of their ancestors, whom had preceded them - they had failed to live according to God’s standards. This led the people to cry out to God in prayer. And this was no ho-hum kind of prayer. As God’s people prayed, they were confessing and repenting of their own personal sins, along with the sins of their family, and the sins of their forefathers. On the twenty-fourth of that month a national day of repentance and recommitment was held.8

Prayer, confession and repentance are gifts from God. They are vital signs to experiencing genuine revival. Stop and think about this for a moment. Who is it that doesn’t want you to approach God in prayer? Who is it that wants you to live your life, day after day, loaded down with guilt, trying constantly to cover up and hide your sins? Who is it that tries to keep you from a life of repentance before God? It’s Satan. And when he succeeds with his strategy in your life – it’s like you’re living in chains,


imprisoned. However, the truth is: it is the desire of God’s heart for you to live your life with incredible freedom in Christ.

**Psalm 32:1-5** Blessed is the one whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. Blessed is the one whose sin the LORD does not count against them and in whose spirit is no deceit. When I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night your hand was heavy on me, my strength was sapped as in the heat of summer. Then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity. I said, “I will confess my transgressions to the LORD.” And you forgave the guilt of my sin.

There is incredible freedom when you come clean before God. This is one of the vital signs for revival – crying out to God in prayer – confessing your sins (agreeing with God about your sin) – and then living a life of genuine repentance. Each one of us has a personal responsibility to do this. But God’s Word also instructs us to do this corporately as the body of Christ.

**2 Chronicles 7:14** “If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land.”

In Nehemiah chapter 9, we find the people of God crying out to him in prayer. They poured themselves out before God. This is the longest recorded prayer in the entire Bible. They prayed. They confessed their sins. The sins of their forefathers had led to their desperate condition – all the years of exile and slavery – all the years they had lived in rebellion against God. They were reaping the consequences of sin. And yet God had been faithful to them. As the people cried out to God in prayer, they recognized and acknowledged God’s faithfulness. The prayer concludes with them saying, “we are in great distress.” They were a desperate people crying out to God in prayer.

This prayer of honest confession before God, led to genuine repentance. From this point on they lived their lives differently.

**2 Corinthians 7:10** “Godly sorrow brings repentance…”

We’re going to see how this godly repentance led to a change of behavior. They made a commitment (a covenant) to live their lives according to God’s Word.

- Worship Song

As God’s Word goes out, what is it that you need to repent of today? And like Nehemiah, do you need to also repent on behalf of ancestors and family members who have come before you? As God repurposes his people here at LITD, what do we need to collectively as the people of God need to repent of? And are there sins of those who have come before

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us, along with sins we are committing now that are holding this church back from all God wants us to become, and all God wants to do through us to reach our community and our world for the great name of Jesus? What would God have us to repent of?

And remember, godly sorrow brings repentance. Godly repentance leads to a change of behavior. That means true repentance means you will live your life differently – the way God has planned for your life. The same thing happens when true repentance occurs in a church family. Things will begin to look differently, the way God had planned for all along. Repurposed.

In Nehemiah chapter 10, we discover the third vital sign of revival. First, God’s had a renewed hunger for God’s Word. Second, hearing God’s Word led them to cry out to God in prayers of repentance. The third vital sign for revival, God’s people clearly demonstrated that things were not going to stay the same. Things around Jerusalem were going to look a whole lot differently.

3. Commitment of putting God first

In chapter 10, the people make the commitment of putting God first in their lives. They’re saying, “We’re going to live our lives in a radically different way than how we’ve been living. We’re going to live transformed lives for God.” They signed their names to a covenant before God. A covenant is an official document. It has been sealed. It has been notarized. A covenant is a very serious commitment. Covenant is a word that is used for a very unique, special kind of relationship.

In the Old Testament, God has a covenant relationship with his people, the nation of Israel. As New Testament Christians, we have a covenant relationship with Jesus Christ. Marriage is a covenant relationship. We live in a culture that continually tries to demean, degrade and lessen God’s institution of marriage. But that does not change anything. What matters is what God’s word says. The Bible says marriage is a special, lifetime covenant relationship between a man and a woman.

Nehemiah 9:38 “In view of all this, we are making a binding agreement, putting it in writing, and our leaders, our Levites and our priests are affixing their seals to it.”

This was there way of saying, “We’re all in on this. We’re serious about putting God first. We’re putting this in writing. We’re willing to sign our names on the dotted line. This is a signed, sealed and delivered document that we’re making with one another before God as our witness.”

Terms of the Covenant:

1) we will be people of the Book

Nehemiah 10:29 “…all these now join their brothers the nobles, and bind themselves with a curse and an oath to follow the Law of God given through Moses the servant of God and to obey carefully all the commands, regulations and decrees of the Lord our God.”
What they’re saying here is, we’re going to test everything by scripture. Whatever counsel we receive from friends, whatever opinions we get from the culture in which we live, whatever the media has to say, we’re going to test that by Scripture and ultimately we’re going to obey what the Bible has to say.

At Light in the Desert, we believe the Bible. It is the absolute truth by which we live our lives. Every decision and action we take must flow out of the Scriptures as our foundation. So today, on November 10, 2013 let us affirm our commitment together as people of the Book.

2) we will lead our homes and families spiritually

**Nehemiah 10:30** “We promise not to give our daughters in marriage to the people around us or take their daughters for our sons.”

The cultural equivalent in our day, they’re saying, “We will not let our daughters marry non-Christians. We will not let our sons marry non-Christians.”

**2 Corinthians 6:14** “Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness?”

One of the greatest responsibilities you have as a parent is to make sure you’re handing off your adult children to a future spouse who loves your son or daughter and who is a committed follower of Jesus Christ.

3) We will obey the Sabbath

**Nehemiah 10:31** “When the neighboring peoples bring merchandise or grain to sell on the Sabbath, we will not buy from them on the Sabbath or on any holy day.”

This commitment came at a great financial expense to them. The declaration they are making is this: The worship of God is a high priority for us. We are going to shut down our businesses so that we can gather together with our church family for corporate worship. We are going to obey the rhythm of life that God has set up for us (Genesis 1-2, because we love him and we believe his commandments are good – he knows what is best for us.

Jesus says the Sabbath was not created so it would rule over us, but rather it is a gift given by God to be enjoyed – to find renewal and refreshment for our lives. Even though Christians are not under specific Sabbath laws of the Old Testament (Gal. 4:10), there are Sabbath principles which still do apply.

How does this apply to you? What is the rhythm of your life? Are you obeying the rhythm God has set up for your life? Do you take a day off? Do you join together with God’s people for Bible study and worship weekly? Do you have a time that is set apart, wholly committed to God out of love, joy and obedience? That’s what these people are saying.
4) we will be faithful to financially support the ministry of God’s church

This is what they are saying in Nehemiah 10:32-39. The people recognized everything they had, had come from God’s generous and gracious hand. So they committed to give back to God cheerfully, sacrificially, and regularly just as he commanded. Together they said, “we will not neglect the house of our God.” It was all a part of this covenant they made with God. This was serious. The Bible says, all of us are commanded to give in obedience to the Lord as a means of financially supporting God’s church.

**Leviticus 27:30** “A tithe of everything from the land, whether grain from the soil or fruit from the trees, belongs to the Lord; it is holy to the Lord.”

**Malachi 3:7-10** Ever since the time of your ancestors you have turned away from my decrees and have not kept them. Return to me, and I will return to you,” says the LORD Almighty. “But you ask, ‘How are we to return?’ ‘Will a mere mortal rob God? Yet you rob me. ‘But you ask, ‘How are we robbing you?’ “In tithes and offerings. You are under a curse—your whole nation—because you are robbing me. Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this,” says the LORD Almighty, “and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that there will not be room enough to store it.”

Last Saturday morning as I prayer walked the church buildings and property, I was so caught up in how generous God has been to us at Light in the Desert. God has provided buildings and land in a prime location that are 100% totally and completely paid for. God has indeed blessed this church and every family in so many amazing ways.

I appreciate those individuals and families who do give financially to the Lord and his church as God’s Word commands. But at the same time, there are very few people here at LITD who are being faithful with this area of their lives. I realize this is not a popular subject to talk about. But I am called by God to preach and teach the truth of his Word and to lead the church to walk in obedience to it. So I will not shy away or apologize for it.

God’s very best for your life and for his church is that the people of God tithe, which means 10% of the income God provides for your home, you give it back to him and his church. God does not force his will on you. God created each of us with the freedom to make choices. The Bible makes it very clear. When you choose to live in obedience to God’s Word, this leads to God’s blessing. But on the other hand, if you make the choice to disobey God’s Word, this leads to a curse. If you choose not to tithe, or withhold giving back financially to God for whatever reason, the Bible says you’re “robbing God.” The Bible calls it for what it is. No sugar coating it. And that choice my friend is a very wreckless, rebellious and dangerous way to live. When it comes to giving to God our time, talents and treasures; let us agree together by saying, “we will not neglect the house of our God.” Instead, let’s be the people of God who make the commitment of putting the Lord Jesus Christ first in all things.

**Closing**

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Revival: Can It Still Happen Today? Yes. Absolutely. Revival done God’s way will never be outdated.

Revival – to bring back to life.

Revival happens when God repurposes a people for his name.

❖ Hand out covenants (explain)

LIGHT IN THE DESERT COVENANT

Based on the Nehemiah model of strategic planning, as members of the Body of Christ at Light in the Desert Baptist Church in Mesa Arizona we are making the following covenant before God and with one another for the purpose of rebuilding his church:

1. We will make the commitment of putting God first
Nehemiah 9:38 “In view of all this, we are making a binding agreement, putting it in writing, and our leaders, our Levites and our priests are affixing their seals to it.”

2. We will be people of the Book
Nehemiah 10:29 “…all these now join their brothers the nobles, and bind themselves with a curse and an oath to follow the Law of God given through Moses the servant of God and to obey carefully all the commands, regulations and decrees of the Lord our God.”

3. We will lead our homes and families spiritually
Nehemiah 10:30 “We promise not to give our daughters in marriage to the people around us or take their daughters for our sons.”

4. We will obey the scriptural principle of the Sabbath
Nehemiah 10:31 “When the neighboring peoples bring merchandise or grain to sell on the Sabbath, we will not buy from them on the Sabbath or on any holy day.”

5. We will be faithful to support God’s strategic plan of “making disciples” by fully utilizing our time, talents and treasures. Nehemiah 10:32-39

6. We will commit to the principle that God’s work is best accomplished through teamwork. Nehemiah 3-6

7. We will commit to building up unity in the body of Christ, seeking to develop spiritually healthy relationships. Nehemiah 5, 8-10

Name:_______________________________

Date:_____________________________
James Boice affirms the need for covenant-making among Christians and churches today:

The very act of becoming a Christian is something of a covenant, for when we repent of our sin and turn in faith to Christ as our Savior, we also promise to follow him and serve him as our Lord. When we baptize we enter into a covenant. When we join a church we make a covenant. Why should other important spiritual steps be any different? Why should we not frequently determine to change for the better – and covenant to do so?

I suggest that you formally covenant to put God first in everything you do: order your marriage or family according to the Bible’s standards, set aside one day in seven to worship and serve God in the company of other Christians, tithe your income for the Lord’s work – and do whatever else God puts it upon your mind to do for him. And make it a lifetime commitment!⁹

And all of God’s people agreed by saying, Amen!!!

Song of Invitation (public decisions/bring signed covenants to the altar – I’m “all in”)

Strategic Planning Team Presentation

⁹Boice, Nehemiah, 113-14.
Sermon 11: “God’s People Celebrate!” Nehemiah 12:27-47,
November 17, 2013

Introduction

What are some of the biggest celebrations you’ve ever been a part of?

Today is a day of celebration at Light in the Desert. We have so much to celebrate! How does it go? Celebrate. Good times. Come on.

Today’s message from Nehemiah, we find God’s people in an all-out, big time, blow-out celebration. Why such a celebration? Well, since you have asked, I’ll tell you why. Remember, God’s people and God’s city of Jerusalem had lay in ruins for 140 years. But now, miraculously the city’s gates and walls had been completely rebuilt in just 52 days. And even more significant is that God’s people have experienced revival – they have come back to life spiritually, returning once again to a right relationship with God and with one another. So there is much reason to celebrate! All they had known for 140 years was a life of ruin. But now they were focused once again on the hope God had given them for an amazing future!

A repurposed people for God has every reason to celebrate! A new day had dawned. Open your Bible to Nehemiah chapter 12.

Prayer

A Repurposed People of God
(Let the Celebration Begin!)

Write this down in your notes………..

1. Purpose – celebrating who God is and what he has done

Nehemiah 12:27-29 “At the dedication of the wall of Jerusalem, the Levites were sought out from where they lived and were brought to Jerusalem to celebrate joyfully the dedication with songs of thanksgiving and with the music of cymbals, harps, and lyres. The singers also were brought together from the region around Jerusalem – from villages of the Netophathites, from Beth Gilgal, and from the area of Geba and Azmaveth, for the singers had built villages for themselves around Jerusalem.”

Can’t you just sense the anticipation building? Spiritual leaders, singers and musicians are coming from surrounding communities and outlying areas for a time of gigantic celebration! God’s people are coming together for a time of dedication. A huge crowd of people who love God are preparing to celebrate who he is and what he has done. God has turned their lives and their city upside down! After years of living in physical and spiritual ruins, God had given them new life and purpose – in a sense, they are now a repurposed people of God.
At LITD, we also know what it is like to be a repurposed people of God. If you are a Christian, in Christ, God has turned your life upside down and even inside out. Because of our sins, the Bible says we were separated from God and headed for a life and an eternity of ruin. However, the Bible says, in Christ, you are a new creation.

2 Corinthians 5:17 “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!”

This is crazy exciting news and truth from God’s Word. This is the Good News: You have been given new life in Christ. As Christians, we have every reason to celebrate who God is and what he has done in our lives. We exist to bring glory to his name, as we offer him the worship of our lives daily. Williamson explains the significance of this climactic moment in Israel’s history:

The dedication of the newly built wall of Jerusalem is a climax to the books of Ezra and Nehemiah. It marks the last stage in the long process of restoration following the exile, a process which began with the return of the people and the building of the temple, was continued with internal reform on the basis of the Book of the Law and now culminates in a celebration of the rebuilt and repopulated holy city. The account is unique in its emphasis on unalloyed joy; only the account of the dedication of the temple approaches it in this; cf. Ezra 6:16-22.10

2. Preparation – getting ready to meet God in worship

Nehemiah 12:30 “When the priests and the Levites had purified themselves ceremonially, they purified the people, the gates and the walls.”

Think of all the time and preparation you put into life’s celebrations. (1) A mom and dad spend nine months preparing for the arrival of their new baby. (2) Five years ago, I remember all the detailed preparations that went into our daughter Melissa’s wedding. As a dad, I wrote the checks and stayed out of the way. Linda and Melissa planned, prepared, and thought through every minute detail. (3) College students spend at least four additional years in formal education preparing to land that first job. (4) We spend many, many years preparing for retirement years. There are many other things in life we prepare for. What is it that you are preparing for now?

In Nehemiah’s day, God’s people are preparing to meet with God for a time of worship and celebration. They know how important this is. So what do they do? They prepare themselves spiritually to meet with God.

James Boice describes this process in greater detail:

In Nehemiah 12, the priests and Levites were the first to dedicate (or, as it says, “purify”) themselves, which is fitting since they were the ones who were to conduct the dedication service. We are not told what this work of purification consisted of, but it was probably ceremonial washings of themselves and their clothes, fasting, and sin offerings. The people were next. They probably merely washed themselves and their clothing. The gates

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and wall would have been dedicated by using a hyssop brush to sprinkle them with the blood sacrifices and with water.\textsuperscript{11}

Since the church today is made up of a new covenant people, the practice of purification and cleansing looks much differently than it did in Nehemiah’s day.

\textbf{1 John 1:7-9} But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin. If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.

What are some steps you take to prepare yourself spiritually to meet God in worship? Or does this even matter?

\textbf{Psalm 24:3-4} “Who may ascend the hill of the Lord? Who may stand in his holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart…”

I just wonder how it might impact our personal and corporate worship of God, if we took the time and some necessary steps to prepare ourselves for worship? What would happen if God’s people on Saturday night we actually got a good night’s rest and we turned off this seemingly never ending flow of media that is always saturating and bombarding our minds. And we woke up on Sunday morning and spent some time in God’s Word and prayer – allowing God to cleanse and purify us from the sin which has crept into our lives during the week? All of this leading us to be more prepared spiritually to meet with God in worship. Do you believe preparation might make a difference?

Spiritual preparation is key. Here’s something else each one of us needs to personally prepare for: What are you doing to prepare for eternity? Jesus Christ is coming back. What are you doing to prepare yourself spiritually for Christ’s return? What are you doing to help others prepare for that day?

\textbf{3. Praise – filling God’s house with the praises of his people}

First, the people understood the purpose for this celebration. Their purpose was to celebrate who God is and what he had done. Secondly, they took the necessary steps to spiritually prepare and purify themselves to meet with God.

Follow along in your Bible, as we read some of the details of this celebration…..

\textbf{Read Nehemiah 12:31-42}

As the celebration begins, try to get this picture in your mind. Nehemiah is directing the people to get up on top of the city’s walls. Praise goes up! As Nic and the worship team lead us every Sunday in the worship of God, collectively our praise goes up as an offering, as a sweet aroma and sacrifice of praise to our Lord, Savior and King!!! That’s

\textsuperscript{11}Boice, \textit{Nehemiah}, 129.
the principle of God’s word here. They walked up the steps to get on top of the walls. What were they doing there? Praising God!!

The walls around the city are at least nine feet wide. Thousands of people are on top of the walls celebrating. There are two huge choirs leading the worship. The first choir was led by Ezra. The second choir was led by Nehemiah himself. They are headed to the temple, the house of God. Musical instruments, singing, every voice was praising God. Every step the people took, they worshipped. What a celebration!

But wait a minute! Thousands of people on top of these walls? Aren’t these the same walls, Tobiah one of Nehemiah’s enemies said of these same walls, that they were so weak they couldn’t hold up, even if just a fox was walking on it?

Nehemiah 4:3 “Tobiah the Ammonite, who was at his side, said, “What are they building – if even a fox climbed up on it, he would break down their wall of stones!”

Tobiah gets in the face of God’s people and he taunts them by saying, one little fox could take down your wall. I just wonder if Tobiah was standing off in the distance watching this celebration of God and the dedication of the walls? Because here is the message for Tobiah on this day: As the thousands of people stood and praised God on the top of that wall, it was like the people were saying as their praises went up, “Take that enemy. Our feet are on the solid rock! On Christ the solid rock I stand, all other ground is sinking sand!”

Light in the Desert must be a place of praise. We are called by God to be a people of praise. God inhabits the praises of his people. But there is something else about praise. When praises are lifted up in this place, we see God in his proper place and it puts our enemy in his place! The same can be said of the praises we offer up to God throughout our personal lives.

4. Power – the far reaching impact of joy and praise

Nehemiah 12:43 “And on that day they offered great sacrifices, rejoicing because God had given them great joy. The women and children also rejoiced. The sound of rejoicing could be heard far away.”

The people were filled with great joy. Who had given them this joy? God did. Holmgren explains their reason for such great joy:

Once Jerusalem’s humiliation and pain were known far and wide (Lam. 4:12, 15; Ezek. 26:2); now it is her joy that is “heard far off: (Neh. 12:43; cf. Ezra 3:13). Yahweh “dwells” once again in Jerusalem. Although Jerusalem does not actually have the name given it in Ezek. 48:35 (“Yahweh is there”), it is the sense of his presence among the Jews in the city that produces this happiness. Along with the singing and rejoicing at the dedication of the wall, there must have been also the hope that this was the beginning of
Yahweh’s new creation in which Jerusalem would be a center of joy and a city of peace (Isa. 65:17-25) — truly a city like the “Jerusalem above” (Gal. 4:26; Rev. 21:1-4).

What God had done in the city of Jerusalem and in the lives of his people brought great joy. They were still a people who were facing difficult times. But God had done a mighty work, changing his people on the inside. They were now a repurposed people for God. This serves as a reminder to all of us: Joy does not come from your circumstances or from anything else. Joy is a gift and an amazing by-product of your relationship with God. Joy in your life flows out of your personal relationship with Jesus Christ. (Galatians 5:22-23; James 1:2-4). Joy is received, not produced. Joy comes not because your circumstances have changed, but because you have been changed by God on the inside. It’s an inside job.

The sound of rejoicing. That’s a good thing. The sound of rejoicing could be heard far away. I wonder what that sounded like? The impact of a joyful people of God is far reaching. This kind of joy in Christ has no boundaries. There are no parameters. Joy in Christ permeates marriages and families. It penetrates our schools, workplaces, neighborhoods and communities. Real joy in the Lord is global in its scope as God’s people carry out the command of our Lord and Savior to fulfill the Great Commission. At LITD, we want to be known as a church that rejoices — a people filled with the joy of the Lord. May resounding joy flow from this place and be heard far and wide!

Joy is powerful and far reaching in its impact for Jesus Christ. No boundaries. No parameters. Imagine how God the Father must feel when the joy of his children, reaches his heart and his listening ear. He loves to hear the rejoicing of his people as it spreads throughout the land.

Nehemiah 8:10 “…the joy of the Lord is your strength.”

Philippians 4:4 “Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!”

5. Provision – responding with gratitude and thanksgiving to our God who gives to us in abundance

Nehemiah 12:44-47 At that time men were appointed to be in charge of the storerooms for the contributions, firstfruits and tithes. From the fields around the towns they were to bring into the storerooms the portions required by the Law for the priests and the Levites, for Judah was pleased with the ministering priests and Levites. They performed the service of their God and the service of purification, as did also the musicians and gatekeepers, according to the commands of David and his son Solomon. For long ago, in the days of David and Asaph, there had been directors for the musicians and for the songs of praise and thanksgiving to God. So in the days of Zerubbabel and of Nehemiah, all Israel

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contributed the daily portions for the musicians and the gatekeepers. They also set aside the portion for the other Levites, and the Levites set aside the portion for the descendants of Aaron.

Joy and gratitude filled their lives. They were in awe of what God had done – his blessings. God is a great provider. A spirit and attitude of thanksgiving filled their hearts and lives. Every gift, every provision in your life comes from the hand of your heavenly Father. He is a generous Father. He is a Father who has provided for you in abundance. He has gone way overboard, meeting far beyond your basic needs. Is your heart and your life marked by a spirit of gratitude and thanksgiving for the abundance God has provided?

As they meet God in worship, the people acknowledge how good loving Father God has been to them. And out of this overflowing joy and abundant provision, the people make the commitment to provide financially toward the work of God’s servants. This is one of the responsibilities of God’s church today – to provide for pastors, staff and those servants, who are called by God to serve the church as a vocation.

6. Person – we worship and celebrate the person and work of Jesus

**Nehemiah 12:43** “And on that day they offered sacrifices, rejoicing because God had given them great joy. The women and children also rejoiced. The sound of rejoicing in Jerusalem could be heard far away.”

Make no mistake about this…..this is a day of worship and celebration to the one, true, living God. He is God alone. He alone is worthy of our worship and praise. God is Father. He is a person. God the Father has chosen to reveal himself to us in the person of his Son, Jesus Christ.

**Hebrews 1:3** “The Son is the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word.”

Jesus is God. Jesus said, “When you have seen me, you have seen the Father.” Jesus is a person. He is Lord and Savior. He is the head of the church. He is the center of our lives and of everything we do. Regardless of what our narcissistic culture says, it’s really not about you. Life and this universe does not center around you. It’s about Him. Every week we celebrate Jesus Christ at LITD. He is the Audience of One. The person of Jesus Christ is at the center of everything.

**Closing**

We’ve seen today a great day of celebration in Nehemiah 12. A repurposed people of God. God performed a miracle in their city, as well as in their hearts and lives. In response to who God is, and all that God had done, the people celebrated. They dedicated their city and their lives to God.

**Plan of Salvation**
Do you know God personally? Have you dedicated your life to God? Has there been a time in your life that you have prayed to receive forgiveness for your sins, and trusted Jesus Christ as your personal Lord and Savior? Jesus Christ is God’s provision for your sins. Jesus Christ is the only way to God. (John 14:6)

**Repurposed – finding new value in something, instead of throwing it away.**

You may look at your own life today and don’t find much value in it. Maybe mistakes, poor decisions, sins and basically trying to do life on your own, has left you pretty much in ruins spiritually, emotionally, relationally and just about every other way you can think of. Perhaps you’ve even given serious consideration to throwing your life away or even ending it somehow. You’re at the end of your rope. This is honestly how you’ve felt for a long time. Listen to this: We’ve all been there. We’ve all had days where we’ve felt like that. This also describes the people in Nehemiah’s day, over 2,500 years ago. The people in Nehemiah’s day had lived in ruins for 140 years. However, they turned back to God, and he changed all of that. He turned their lives around. The Bible says, “we’ve all sinned and fall short of God’s glory.”

Here’s the good news: the Bible also says that you are of great value to God. God created you in his image. God is your Creator. God loves you. And no matter how much you have totally blown it in the past, or even today….you are never beyond the reach of God’s love. Here’s how much God values your life. Jesus Christ came to this earth. He lived a perfect life. One day he died as he sacrificed his on the cross for your sins. And on the third day he rose from the dead. He is alive. He conquered death and the grave. Celebrate Jesus by inviting him into your heart and life today.

**Romans 6:23** “For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Jesus Christ our Lord.”

**Romans 10:13** “For everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”

**Salvation Prayer**

This message from Nehemiah 12 today has really been about one word: celebrate!!! We celebrate Jesus Christ here today and every day of our lives…..and even on into eternity. We also celebrate your decision for Jesus Christ today.

Do you want to hear something really amazing? The very moment you received Jesus Christ into your life…..all of heaven broke out into a huge celebration!!!

Heaven celebrates when one person who has been lost is found. Heaven celebrates when someone who is not feeling like their life has much value, suddenly discovers incredible worth and value found in a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

This is the core of what this message series, “Repurposed” is really all about. Your life and this church are of great value to him. The enemy is going to try to mess you up. He is a liar. He wants to harm you. He wants to destroy you. God’s plans for you are best. Not always the easiest – but he has good plans for you.
Nehemiah uses verses 44-47 to remind his readers that although times of success among God’s people must be celebrated, the work of God must also go on. James Boice affirms this:

It means that times of rejoicing, though important, are not ends in themselves but are meant to be additional ongoing moments in the lives of those who have given themselves to God. Rejoice in God? Of course! We above all people should rejoice in God. In fact, only those who have been redeemed by the Lord Jesus Christ have any real and deep cause for rejoicing. But that is not all we have to do. We have work to do too, and we must get on with it.\textsuperscript{13}

As God’s people here at Light, there is definitely reason for worship and celebration. And yet, in many ways the work has just begun. This holiday season we have the good news of Jesus Christ to share with others in our neighborhoods, workplaces and cities. Be the church where you live each and every day. Share the hope of Jesus. And as God gives you the opportunity to do so invite someone to our worship services or an upcoming event here at LITD.

The point is: As we celebrate, the work must also go on. Together we have affirmed a strategic plan for the next three years which calls us to an even greater work for the Lord. Just as a new day was dawning on the people of Nehemiah’s day, I believe a new day is also dawning here at Light. Thank you Jesus for the work you have entrusted to us to further advance your kingdom. Our hearts are filled with gratitude and thanksgiving. We celebrate you today Jesus. And all God’s people said, “Amen!”

\textsuperscript{13}Boice, \textit{Nehemiah}, 132.
APPENDIX 3
PRE-PROJECT AND POST-PROJECT NEHEMIAH QUESTIONNAIRE TO BE COMPLETED BY CHURCH MEMBERS

Agreement to Participate
The research in which you about to participate is designed to measure your knowledge of the Old Testament book of Nehemiah. This research is being conducted by Darwin Meighan for the purposes of collecting data for a ministry project. In this research, you will answer questions before the project and then you will answer the same questions at the conclusion of the project. Any information you provide will be held strictly confidential, and at no time will your name be reported or identified with your responses. Participation is strictly voluntary and you are free to withdraw at any time. By completion of this questionnaire, you are giving informed consent for the use of your responses in this project.

Personal “code” word ______________________
Date: ______________________

Please answer the following multiple choice questions: (check the correct answer)

In the first chapter of the book of Nehemiah, what was Nehemiah’s occupation?
   __ a. governor
   __ b. carpenter
   __ c. cupbearer
   __ d. military leader

To which strategic plan did God call Nehemiah?
   __ a. to restore worship in the temple
   __ b. to build a statue in honor of the king
   __ c. to build the ark
   __ d. to rebuild the walls around the city of Jerusalem

What did Nehemiah first do when he heard about the strategic plan to which God called him?
   __ a. he fasted, prayed and planned
   __ b. he took a vacation to first get refreshed and reenergized
   __ c. he led a great military victory
   __ d. he prayed asking God for another task

From whom did Nehemiah most receive spiritual opposition?
   __ a. Goliath and the entire Philistine army
   __ b. Sanballat and Tobiah
   __ c. Ahab and Jezebel
   __ d. No opposition occurred Nehemiah’s rebuilding project
How many days did it take Nehemiah to finish the rebuilding project?
__ a. 273 days
__ b. He never finished
__ c. 52 days
__ d. 7 years and a day

Which of the following successfully impacted the development and implementation of a strategic plan in the book of Nehemiah?
__ a. Nehemiah’s leadership under God
__ b. teamwork and collaboration
__ c. prayer
__ d. the revival of God’s people
__ e. all of the above

Which word do you feel best summarizes the book of Nehemiah?
__ a. revival
__ b. disunity
__ c. suffering
__ d. unproductive

Which answer best describes the marks of true revival among God’s people found in Nehemiah chapters 8-10?
__ a. witnessing occurred and large numbers of people came to faith in God
__ b. renewed hunger for God’s Word, confession of sins and repentance, a covenant was made with God and his people
__ c. the poor were fed, people gathered in a large tent for revival services nightly, the lame and sick were healed
__ d. the people met together daily in homes for prayer, worship, fellowship and teaching from God’s Word

What type of agreement did the people sign in Nehemiah chapter 10?
__ a. a military pact with other countries
__ b. a type of declaration of independence
__ c. a covenant
__ d. a death treaty on evil kings surrounding their city

In Nehemiah 12, what sound could be heard throughout the city of Jerusalem as the people celebrated the victory and accomplishment of God’s strategic plan?
__ a. the voices of Ezra and Nehemiah as they instructed the people
__ b. weeping
__ c. long periods of silence
__ d. joy
APPENDIX 4

PRAYER SURVEY: SURVEY FOR ALL
ADULT CHURCH MEMBERS

Agreement to Participate
The research in which you are about to participate is designed to be used as an instrument
to identify personal and church prayer practices and disciplines. This research is being
conducted by Darwin Meighan for the purposes of collecting data for a ministry project.
Any information you provide will be held strictly confidential and at no time will your
name be reported or identified with your responses. Participation is strictly voluntary and
you are free to withdraw at any time. By completion of this prayer survey, you are giving
informed consent for the use of your responses in this project.

Part I
1. What is your age?
   ___ 18-24
   ___ 25-29
   ___ 30-39
   ___ 40-49
   ___ 50-59
   ___ 60-69
   ___ 70+

2. How often do you pray? (check only one)
   ___ more than once each day
   ___ once a day
   ___ a few times a week
   ___ once a week
   ___ a few times a month
   ___ once a month
   ___ every few months
   ___ not at all

3. I most often pray for (check only one)
   ___ myself
   ___ friends
   ___ family
   ___ other

4. Where do you pray most often? (check only one)
   ___ at church
   ___ at home
   ___ while traveling
   ___ at work
   ___ at school
   ___ some other location not listed here
5. I adore/praise God when I pray ___ yes ___ no
6. I confess/ask God for forgiveness ___ yes ___ no
7. I give thanks to God through prayer ___ yes ___ no
8. I ask for things for myself(personal petition) ___ yes ___ no
9. I ask for things for someone else(intercession) ___ yes ___ no
10. I believe God answers prayer ___ yes ___ no
11. Prayer helps me know better God’s will/direction ___ yes ___ no
12. Prayer helps me grow closer to Jesus Christ ___ yes ___ no
13. Fasting is a prayer-related discipline I sometimes practice ___ yes ___ no

Part II

14. More than 25% of our church members are involved in some type of prayer ministry sponsored by the church. ___ yes ___ no
15. Prayer is emphasized as a vital ministry of this church. ___ yes ___ no
16. The church has an emergency prayer chain in place. ___ yes ___ no
17. The church has a prayer team in place that prays during the worship service ___ yes ___ no
18. People in the church are praying for each other at unscheduled times. ___ yes ___ no
19. Overall, when there is a decision to be made by the church, prayer is a key part of the process. ___ yes ___ no
20. The church has a prayer room which is used frequently. ___ yes ___ no
21. The church has a way of letting people know about answered prayer. ___ yes ___ no
22. There is a systematic way in which the church compiles praises and prayer requests. ___ yes ___ no
23. Opportunities are provided for people to pray with a staff person or a prayer partner at the conclusion of worship services. ___ yes ___ no
24. The church has committed prayer warriors in our congregation who are providing a prayer covering for all church ministries. ___ yes ___ no
25. The people of this church are excited about prayer and what they are seeing God do as a result of their prayers. ___ yes ___ no
26. Prayer is seen as the first step in the solution to any problem in the church. ___ yes ___ no.
27. I enjoy praying out loud in a small group with other people. ___ yes ___ no
28. I have read one or more books on prayer during the last year. ___ yes ___ no
29. I have a specific time set aside for prayer each day. ___ yes ___ no
30. I regularly see answers to prayer. ___ yes ___ no
31. I pray regularly for the church staff and leaders. ___ yes ___ no
32. When I am praying, I often lose track of time. ___ yes ___ no
33. It is not unusual for me to wake up in the middle of the night with a burden to pray for a specific person or situation. ___ yes ___ no
34. I would like to see more prayer ministries and opportunities offered by our church. ___ yes ___ no
35. I feel like my prayer life is really growing. ___ yes ___ no
36. When I find myself facing a difficult situation, prayer is my first response. ___ yes ___ no
37. I believe the Holy Spirit intercedes on my behalf when I don’t know what to pray. ___ yes ___ no
APPENDIX 5

PRAYER WALK STORY: TO BE COMPLETED BY ALL PRAYER WALK PARTICIPANTS

Agreement to Participate
The research in which you are about to participate is designed for you to share your prayer walk experience. This research is being conducted by Darwin Meighan for the purposes of collecting data for a ministry project. Any information you provide will be held strictly confidential, and at no time will your name be reported or identified with your responses. Participation is strictly voluntary and you are free to withdraw at any time. By completion of this questionnaire, you are giving informed consent for the use of your responses in this project.

Name _______________________________ Date ______________________

After you have completed your prayer walk, please write a brief story of what you experienced. Please feel free to use the following questions to guide you.

1. Have you ever prayer walked before?

2. In which area(s) did you prayer walk? (church, neighborhoods, community, etc).

3. Which Scriptures did you find most helpful while prayerwalking?

4. What did you notice?

5. Did you talk with anyone?

6. In what ways did you sense God’s presence?

7. Do you believe your time of prayer walking today has been a powerful weapon against spiritual opposition?

8. Would you be willing to participate with other church members in a prayer walk four times during the year?

9. Would you be open to serving for a one-year commitment as a prayer walk team leader? (This would involve providing direction and leadership for 4 prayer walks over the one-year period).
APPENDIX 6
COVENANT: TO BE COMPLETED BY ALL CHURCH MEMBERS

Agreement to Participate
The research in which you are about to participate is designed to be an instrument used for demonstrating your commitment to the Nehemiah model for strategic planning in God’s church. This research is being conducted by Darwin Meighan for the purposes of collecting data for a ministry project. Any information you provide will be held strictly confidential, and at no time will your name be reported identified with your responses. Participation is strictly voluntary and you are free to withdraw at any time. By completion of this questionnaire, you are giving informed consent for the use of your responses in this project.

Based on the Nehemiah model of strategic planning, as members of the Body of Christ at Light in the Desert Baptist Church in Mesa Arizona we are making the following covenant before God and with one another for the purpose of rebuilding his church:

1. We will make the commitment of putting God first
Nehemiah 9:38 “In view of all this, we are making a binding agreement, putting it in writing, and our leaders, our Levites and our priests are affixing their seals to it.”

2. We will be people of the Book
Nehemiah 10:29 “…all these now join their brothers the nobles, and bind themselves with a curse and an oath to follow the Law of God given through Moses the servant of God and to obey carefully all the commands, regulations and decrees of the Lord our God.”

3. We will lead our homes and families spiritually
Nehemiah 10:30 “We promise not to give our daughters in marriage to the people around us or take their daughters for our sons.”

4. We will obey the scriptural principle of the Sabbath
Nehemiah 10:31 “When the neighboring peoples bring merchandise or grain to sell on the Sabbath, we will not buy from them on the Sabbath or on any holy day.”

5. We will be faithful to support God’s strategic plan of “making disciples” by fully utilizing our time, talents and treasures. Nehemiah 10:32-39

6. We will commit to the principle that God’s work is best accomplished through teamwork. Nehemiah 3-6

7. We will commit to building up unity in the body of Christ, seeking to develop spiritually healthy relationships. Nehemiah 5, 8-10

Name (s): 41 of 53 adult members present (78 percent)
Date: November 10, 2013
APPENDIX 7

POST PROJECT INTERVIEW

These interviews will come from a cross-section of adults in the church membership who have completed and signed the church covenant that resulted from the strategic planning process.

**Agreement to Participate**
The research in which you are about to participate is designed as an interview to determine some practical ways you plan to live out Light in the Desert’s covenant with God and with one another in the church. This research is being conducted by Darwin Meighan for the purposes of collecting data for a ministry project. Any information you provide will be held strictly confidential, and at no time will your name be reported or identified with your responses. Participation is strictly voluntary and you are free to withdraw at any time. By participating in this interview, you are giving informed consent for the use of your responses in this project.

Name ________________________________

Date: ______________________

Interview Question #1 In what ways does your life demonstrate God has first place?

Interview Question #2 How often are you reading God’s Word and what is one way you have personally applied it to your life?

Interview Question #3 Name a specific way you are helping your family grow spiritually?

Interview Question #4 What does “observing the Sabbath” principle mean to you?

Interview Question #5 In what ways are you giving of your time, talents and treasures to do your part in ensuring the success of God’s strategic plan for “making disciples.”

Interview Question #6 What/if any ministry team have you committed to be a part of at Light in the Desert Baptist Church?

Interview Question #7 What do you plan to do to build spiritually healthy relationships in the church?
APPENDIX 8

STRATEGIC PLANNING TEAM COVENANT

Seeking God’s face to develop and implement His plan within our unique ministry context for an exciting, hope-filled future for Light in the Desert.

- Give Jesus Christ the praise, honor and glory in everything we say or do
- To promote and embrace the urgent need for Spirit-led change
- To pray for Light in the Desert Church, all team members and the process
- Believe in and passionately and enthusiastically be supportive of the process
- Prepare for and attend all meetings
- Be a team player
- Keep confidentiality on all confidential matters
- Wholeheartedly commit to the 15-week strategic planning process
- Use your spiritual gifts, talents, abilities, education and experiences to fully contribute
- Become a cheerleader, proactively promoting and believing by faith that God is at work providing a hope-filled and preferable future for the church
APPENDIX 9
THREE-YEAR STRATEGIC PLAN LIGHT IN
THE DESERT BAPTIST CHURCH,
MESA, ARIZONA

**Our Mission:**

Love God. Love Others. Share Hope.

**Our Vision:**

Light in the Desert Church strives to be a dynamic, spirit-filled, multi-generational church where we are reflecting the light of Jesus by loving God, loving others and sharing hope with the world.

**Our Core Values:**

- Living in truth daily
- Investing of ourselves generously
- Growing in relationships
- Heart for all generations
- True God-centered worship
**Goals & Objectives**

**Love God**

Goal 1: To provide opportunities for people to experience true God-centered worship.

Objectives:
1. Increase the number of people who are participating in corporate worship by 40% annually.
2. Each year seek to build and grow a more multi-generational worship team (musicians, vocalists, tech support) from within the church’s membership.
3. Network together with other churches several times each year for the purpose of experiencing true God-centered worship.
5. Kidz Worship will be offered for both grades 1-3 and grades 4-6. (2015)
6. Increase the number of people who are participating in personal worship by 25% annually.
7. Offer an additional weekend worship service. (2016)

Goal 2: To create welcoming environments for people to encounter Jesus’ love.

Objectives:
1. Enlist a Welcome Team Coordinator, who will then equip a multi-generational team and put systems in place which will create a more warm and inviting atmosphere. (2014)
2. Update rooms, open spaces and outdoor areas regularly throughout the three year plan to create a more welcome environment for all age groups and ministries.
3. Offer a “Next Step” class monthly for guests following the worship service. (2015)
4. Continue offering the bi-monthly “Discovering Church Membership @ Light” class and luncheon throughout the three year plan.

Goal 3: To maximize the power of prayer for greater Kingdom growth and impact.

Objectives:
1. Enlist a Prayer Team Coordinator who will then equip a team to develop and implement a comprehensive prayer strategy for the church. (2014)
2. Increase participation in corporate prayer by 25% annually.
3. Increase participation in personal prayer by 25% annually.
4. Offer a Life Group once each year with a specific study targeted toward prayer and fasting. (2014-16)
5. Lead the church to participate in quarterly prayer events throughout the three year plan.
6. Network with churches on a regular basis to participate in special prayer and fasting emphases.
7. Develop prayer partners to pray with and provide counsel to those in need. (2015)
Goal 4: To help people grow in Christ-like maturity through the daily practice of spiritual disciplines.

Objectives:
1. Offer a Life Group once each year with a specific study targeted toward a biblical foundation and application of spiritual disciplines. (2014-16)
2. Provide ongoing resources and materials that will both encourage and challenge members to grow in Christ-like maturity.

Goal 5: To create a culture of generosity among God’s people of which reflects a total Christian stewardship lifestyle.

Objectives:
1. Through an annual stewardship emphasis, help people to develop a biblical foundation and to put into practice a total Christian stewardship lifestyle.
2. Provide a clear ministry description and training for the finance team. (2014)
3. Offer a Life Group once each year with a specific study targeted toward biblical stewardship. (2014-16)
4. Provide additional giving options. (2014)
5. Increase the number of giving units by an additional 40% over the three year plan.
6. Increase annual giving to the Cooperative Program, Valley Rim Baptist Association, missions, benevolence, and others offerings. (2014-16)

**Love Others**

Goal 1: To develop an intentional process of “making disciples” who are fully committed to Jesus Christ.

Objectives:
1. Provide additional Sunday morning classes as needed, that offer an intentional bible based curriculum, for all age groups (2014-16)
2. Increase the number of Life Group electives on Wednesday nights for the purpose of adult discipleship which are designed to strengthen spiritual growth and maturity (2014-16)
3. Develop a plan to fully implement Team Kid Ministries for preschoolers and children. (2014-15)
4. Develop a plan to fully implement discipleship ministries for Students, grades 7-12. (2014-15)

Goal 2: To equip, support and encourage families to make their homes the central place for spiritual growth.

Objectives:
1. Provide Life Groups electives on a regular basis which support and encourage families throughout the three year plan.
2. Develop a plan for Men’s and Women’s ministries which are biblically-based and targeted toward meeting needs in the church and community. (2014-2015)
3. Provide opportunities for marriage and family enrichment through seminars, retreats and hosting local events.
4. Develop a resource center with materials for families to use in their homes to enhance spiritual growth and development. (2015)

**Goal 3**: To establish team-based ministries for the purpose of training people to discover a meaningful place of service.

**Objectives**:
1. Lead the church to adopt a scripture-based Constitution and By-laws, lay-leadership structure and a detailed plan to develop these leaders. (2014-2015)
2. Lead the church to call additional Pastoral and support staff, as needed throughout the three year plan, to effectively fulfill the church’s mission.
3. Develop and implement a biblical model for deacons ministry.(2014-15)
4. Develop a volunteer ministry team that will put in place a plan which encourage people discover their place of service.(2015)

**Goal 4**: To develop specific ministries which are Bible-centered, Christ-focused, needs-based and targeted for people at various stages of life.

**Objectives**:
1. Enlist and train team leaders (staff or volunteer) to develop various life stage ministries including preschool, children, students, adults, senior adults and special ministries. (2014-15)
2. Lead the church to provide prayer support, encouragement, and the resources needed for effective ministry throughout the three year plan.

**Goal 5**: To build stronger relationships with community and ministry partners to more effectively accomplish God’s work.

**Objectives**:
1. Develop a community outreach team for the purpose of exploring and developing partnerships within our community. (2014)
2. Develop a ministry partnership team for the purpose of building upon and to further establish a network of faith-based churches and organizations to more effectively accomplish God’s work (2014-15)

**Share Hope**

**Goal 1**: To develop ministries designed to equip people to more effectively share their faith and hope in Jesus with greater obedience, willingness and freedom.
Objectives:
1. Provide Life Groups that train members to effectively share their faith and hope in Jesus throughout the three year plan.

Goal 2: To create an outward-focused strategy of innovative ministries for the purpose of advancing the gospel.

Objectives:
1. Develop an evangelism team with the purpose of creating an outward-focused strategy to reach people for Christ. (2015)
2. Lead Life Groups and/or Bible Study classes bi-annually to participate in missions and servant evangelism projects throughout the three year plan.
3. Increase professions of faith and baptisms by 25% annually.
4. Increase the number of new members by 30% annually.
5. Lead the church to regularly serve as a host site for community outreach events throughout the three year plan.

Goal 3: To purposefully identify and integrate various forms of social media and marketing strategies to promote and further God’s agenda.

Objectives:
1. Enlist a director of social media, who will then develop a team who will identify and integrate various forms of social media and marketing strategies to further God’s agenda. (2014)

Goal 4: To become a more mission-focused church where we intentionally share the hope of Jesus with others around the world.

Objectives:
1. Lead the church to participate in an Acts 1:8 church-wide emphasis. (2015)
2. Develop a mission team for the purpose of intentionally expanding our reach for Christ around the world. (2015)
3. Lead the church to increase our giving to the Lottie Moon Christmas offering and Annie Armstrong Easter offering, by 25% annually.
4. Lead the church to increase our giving to the Cooperative Program, with the goal of 7% of annual revenues by the end of 2016.
5. Lead the church to increase our giving to the Valley Rim Baptist Association, with the goal of 3% of annual revenues by the end of 2016.
APPENDIX 10

PRE-PROJECT AND POST-PROJECT NEHEMIAH QUESTIONNAIRE TO BE COMPLETED BY CHURCH MEMBERS

Agreement to Participate
The research in which you about to participate is designed to measure your knowledge of the Old Testament book of Nehemiah. This research is being conducted by Darwin Meighan for the purposes of collecting data for a ministry project. In this research, you will answer questions before the project and then you will answer the same questions at the conclusion of the project. Any information you provide will be held strictly confidential, and at no time will your name be reported or identified with your responses. Participation is strictly voluntary and you are free to withdraw at any time. By completion of this questionnaire, you are giving informed consent for the use of your responses in this project.

Pre-Date taken: 9/08/13
Post-Date taken: 11/17/13
Total Participants: 36

Thirty-six adults participated in both the pre-project and post-project questionnaire. Since the t-stat -7.506 (or the absolute value of 7.506) is larger than the t critical two tail value (2.030), the teaching intervention made a difference. Since p value is 0.008 and less than p= .05, the difference was not by chance, which means it can be concluded that the teaching of Nehemiah made a significant difference in knowledge gained by the participants.

Table 1. T-test: Paired two sample for means

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<th>Variable 2</th>
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<tr>
<td>Variance</td>
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<td>Hypothesized Mean Difference</td>
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<td>df</td>
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<tr>
<td>t Stat</td>
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<tr>
<td>t Critical two-tail</td>
<td>2.030107928</td>
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</tbody>
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Note. t (35) = 7.506, p < .008
Thirty-six adults participated in both the pre-project and post-project questionnaire to test their knowledge of the book of Nehemiah. Ten correct responses was the maximum number possible each time the questionnaire was given. Higher scores in the post-project questionnaire indicate increased knowledge of the subject matter, which was the desired goal.

Table 2. Nehemiah Questionnaire Results

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<th>Post-Project</th>
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<td><strong>GRAND TOTAL</strong></td>
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APPENDIX 11

PRAYER SURVEY: SURVEY FOR ALL
ADULT CHURCH MEMBERS

Agreement to Participate
The research in which you are about to participate is designed to be used as an instrument to identify personal and church prayer practices and disciplines. This research is being conducted by Darwin Meighan for the purposes of collecting data for a ministry project. Any information you provide will be held strictly confidential and at no time will your name be reported or identified with your responses. Participation is strictly voluntary and you are free to withdraw at any time. By completion of this prayer survey, you are giving informed consent for the use of your responses in this project.

Part I

1. What is your age?
   2= 18-24
   2= 25-29
   2 = 30-39
   2= 40-49
   4= 50-59
   10 = 60-69
   10 = 70+

2. How often do you pray? (check only one)
   20 = more than once each day
   3 = once a day
   7 = a few times a week
   0 = once a week
   2 = a few times a month
   0 = once a month
   0 = every few months
   0 = not at all

3. I most often pray for (check only one)
   4 = myself
   5 = friends
   11 = family
   10 = = other

4. Where do you pray most often? (check only one)
   3 = at church
   21 = at home
   3= while traveling
   2= at work
   1 = at school
   1= some other location not listed here
5. I adore/praise God when I pray:
   28 = yes
   4 = no

6. I confess/ask God for forgiveness:
   27 = yes
   5 = no

7. I give thanks to God through prayer:
   32 = yes
   0 = no

8. I ask for things for myself (personal petition):
   29 = yes
   3 = no

9. I ask for things for someone else (intercession):
   26 = yes
   6 = no

10. I believe God answers prayer:
    30 = yes
    2 = no

11. Prayer helps me know better God’s will/ direction:
    24 = yes
    8 = no

12. Prayer helps me grow closer to Jesus Christ:
    32 = yes
    0 = no

13. Fasting is a prayer-related discipline I sometimes practice:
    5 = yes
    27 = no

Part II

14. More than 25% of our church members are involved in some type of prayer ministry sponsored by the church:
    16 = yes
    16 = no

15. Prayer is emphasized as a vital ministry of this church:
    25 = yes
    7 = no

16. The church has an emergency prayer chain in place:
    5 = yes
    27 = no
17. The church has a prayer team in place that prays during the worship service
   5 = yes
   27 = no

18. People in the church are praying for each other at unscheduled times:
   31 = yes
   1 = no

19. Overall, when there is a decision to be made by the church, prayer is a key part of
    the process:
   30 = yes
   2 = no

20. The church has a prayer room which is used frequently:
   6 = yes
   26 = no

21. The church has a way of letting people know about answered prayer:
   26 = yes
   6 = no

22. There is a systematic way in which the church compiles praises and prayer requests
    27 = yes
    5 = no

23. Opportunities are provided for people to pray with a staff person or a prayer partner
    at the conclusion of worship services:
   26 = yes
   6 = no

24. The church has committed prayer warriors in our congregation who are providing a
    prayer covering for all church ministries:
   18 = yes
   14 = no

25. The people of this church are excited about prayer and what they are seeing God do
    as a result of their prayers:
   19 = yes
   13 = no

26. Prayer is seen as the first step in the solution to any problem in the church:
   31 = yes
   1 = no

27. I enjoy praying out loud in a small group with other people:
   14 = yes
   18 = no

28. I have read one or more books on prayer during the last year:
   10 = yes
   12 = no

29. I have a specific time set aside for prayer each day:
   10 = yes
   12 = no
30. I regularly see answers to prayer:
   26 = yes
   6 = no

31. I pray regularly for the church staff and leaders:
   23 = yes
   9 = no

32. When I am praying, I often lose track of time:
   13 = yes
   19 = no

33. It is not unusual for me to wake up in the middle of the night with a burden to pray
   for a specific person or situation:
   19 = yes
   13 = no

34. I would like to see more prayer ministries and opportunities offered by our church:
   31 = yes
   1 = no

35. I feel like my prayer life is really growing:
   20 = yes
   12 = no

36. When I find myself facing a difficult situation, prayer is my first response:
   23 = yes
   9 = no

37. I believe the Holy Spirit intercedes on my behalf when I don’t know what to pray:
   30 = yes
   2 = no
APPENDIX 12

PRAYER WALK STORY: TO BE COMPLETED BY ALL PRAYER WALK PARTICIPANTS

Agreement to Participate
The research in which you are about to participate is designed for you to share your prayer walk experience. This research is being conducted by Darwin Meighan for the purposes of collecting data for a ministry project. Any information you provide will be held strictly confidential, and at no time will your name be reported or identified with your responses. Participation is strictly voluntary and you are free to withdraw at any time. By completion of this questionnaire, you are giving informed consent for the use of your responses in this project.

After you have completed your prayer walk, please write a brief story of what you experienced. Please feel free to use the following questions to guide you.

1. Have you ever prayer walked before?
   Participant #1: Yes
   Participant #2: Yes
   Participant #3: Yes
   Participant #4: No
   Participant #5: Yes

2. In which area(s) did you prayer walk? (church, neighborhoods, community, etc.).
   Participant #1: Church; when I do the bushes and trees. Neighborhood when I walk dogs.
   Participant #2: LTD church property; Boulder Creek neighborhood; Boulder Creek School
   Participant #3: Church and nearby neighborhood.
   Participant #4: Church and nearby neighborhood.
   Participant #5: Preschool and children’s hall of our church.

3. Which Scriptures did you find most helpful while prayer walking?
   Participant #1: 1 Timothy 2:1-2; Ephesians 2:19; John 3:16
   Participant #2: Isaiah 30:21; 1 Kings 8:54-61; Joshua 1:3; Proverbs 22:6
   Participant #3: Ephesians 6:10-18
   Participant #5: Joshua 1:3

4. What did you notice?
   Participant #1: My spirit was strengthened.
   Participant #2: Our church is positioned in our community to do a great work for God. All generations of people in nearby neighborhoods. An overwhelming spirit of God’s presence.
   Participant #3: Many people living near Light in the Desert church.
   Participant #4: There are lots of wonderful neighborhoods and people.
   Participant #5: God is good. He has already done so much. God is powerful wanting to do more than we can even ask.
5. Did you talk with anyone?
Participant #1: Yes, a young boy and a family getting ready to go out.
Participant #2: Yes, several folds walking in the neighborhood. Boulder Creek was having a community garage sale. People were open to talking – mostly light conversation. Invited two people to church.
Participant #3: Said hello to people we met.
Participant #4: No
Participant #5: No

6. In what ways did you sense God’s presence?
Participant #1: The ability to continue to pray for 1 hour without ceasing, and a peace that surrounded me.
Participant #2: I sensed God’s presence powerfully as I prayer walked in his name. The scriptures were fresh and timely. God quietly reminded me of the people he has entrusted our church/his people to reach for Christ.
Participant #3: God gave us a beautiful day and as we prayed, we could feel the closeness of Jesus.
Participant #4: Oh yes, he was there guiding us along the way.
Participant #5: His peace, his calm, his provision for needs to come.

7. Do you believe your time of prayer walking today has been a powerful weapon against spiritual opposition?
Participant #1: Yes. No matter the outcome, God hears us and he will honor our prayers. Satan does not want us giving glory to God.
Participant #2: Yes. Prayer and reading scriptures. Claiming God’s favor and his blessing while walking boldly in Jesus’ name.
Participant #3: Yes, it can only be powerful and meaningful for our church.
Participant #4: Oh yes
Participant #5: Yes

8. Would you be willing to participate with other church members in a prayer walk four times during the year?
Participant #1: Yes
Participant #2: Yes
Participant #3: Yes
Participant #4: Yes
Participant #5: Yes

9. Would you be open to serving for a one-year commitment as a prayer walk team leader? (This would involve providing direction and leadership for 4 prayer walks over the one-year period).
Participant #1: Yes
Participant #2: Yes
Participant #3: Yes
Participant #4: Yes
Participant #5: Yes
APPENDIX 13

CHURCH MINISTRY ANALYSIS

Agreement to Participate
The research in which you are about to participate is designed for the purpose of church ministry analysis which will be used in the church’s strategic planning process. This research is being conducted by Darwin Meighan for the purposes of collecting data for a ministry project. Any information you provide will be held strictly confidential and at no time will your name be reported or identified with your responses. Participation is strictly voluntary and you are free to withdraw at any time. By completion of this questionnaire, you are giving informed consent for the use of your responses in this project.

Background Information:

Directions: Please check or fill in your response to each question. This information will be held in strict confidence.

1. Your gender?
   6 = Male
   6 = Female

2. Your age in years?
   1 = 18-24
   3 = 25-34
   1 = 35-44
   2 = 45-54
   1 = 55-64
   4 = 65 and over

3. Your current marital status?
   0 = Single
   10 = Married
   2 = Divorced
   0 = Widowed

4. If you have children, how many do you have?
   1 = 0 children
   3 = 1 child
   3 = 2 children
   2 = 3 children
   2 = 4 children
   1 = 5 children

5. How long have you been a member at Light in the Desert?
   2.75 = AVG number of years among participants
6. Did you tithe regularly at Light in the Desert over the last 12 months?
   9 = Yes
   3 = No

7. How far do you live from Light in the Desert?
   8.5 = AVG number of miles among participants

Section I – Internal Analysis

Abbreviations:
SD = Strongly Agree
D = Disagree
DS = Disagree Somewhat
AS = Agree Somewhat
A = Agree
SA = Strongly Agree

1. In your opinion, do you believe Light in the Desert is growing, plateaued, declining in attendance?
   11 = Growing
   0 = Plateaued
   0 = Declining
   1 = Don’t know
Comment(s):
   o The membership has increased by about 75% over this past year.
   o Moved from a deep decline to positive growth in all age groups over the past year
   o Praise God!

2. To your knowledge, financial giving at Light in the Desert is increasing, plateaued, or declining?
   6 = Increased
   3 = Plateaued
   1 = Declined
   2 = Don’t know
Comment(s):
   o While the membership has increased, the giving has not kept pace.
   o Slightly increased, but needs focus, obedience, education, and attention.
   o Praise God!

3. If attendance is declining, how much longer can the church survive?
   1 = One year
   4 = Two to five years
   2 = Five to ten years
   2 = More than ten years
   3 = Don’t know
Comment(s):
   o Do not see a decline.
   o No longer declining – praise the Lord!
   o I do not see the church declining. If it does the longevity, is up to God.
   o I don’t believe attendance is declining.
4. What would you consider the primary strengths of Light in the Desert?
   o The devotion of the Pastor to preach the scripture.
   o The willingness of a small core of people to help out.
   o Bible based church, strong and accurate bible teaching.
   o A friendly and loving congregation … warm atmosphere.
   o Growing music ministry.
   o Growth numerically.
   o Servant leadership (staff).
   o Debt-free building & property.
   o Excellent location.
   o Willingness to serve others.
   o People who have stayed no matter what has happened in the church.
   o People who pray for one another.
   o Youth program – Jim Green and team. (However, all male, need female leadership also)
   o It’s small size … leads to better acquaintances and greater knowledge of church members.
   o Outreach ministry.
   o People – their hearts to see God work.

5. What would you consider the primary areas in need of improvement at Light in the Desert?
   o The continuing growth of the Youth, Children & Preschool ministries.
   o More participation of all generations in worship … special music, praying, etc.
   o We need to be more modern, and reach more young people.
   o Fellowship Hall, Spanish church appearance.
   o Small groups.
   o Increase tithing.
   o Music ministry.
   o Motivate people to help/participate in all ministry areas.
   o Community activities.
   o Church needs to be updated.
   o Modern approach in ministries … social networking.
   o New leadership structure.
   o Greeter/Welcome Team ministry.
   o Prayer – corporate and individual.
   o Newer members becoming involved in all areas of the church.
   o More congregational fellowship.

6. The church’s leadership does not address needed changes.
   5 = SD
   5 = D
   1 = DS
   1 = AS
   0 = A
   0 = SA

Comment(s):
   o There is no leadership (deacons, music ministry, treasurer
   o Leadership does seem to be addressing areas which have been neglected/abused or in need of urgent care.
   o I feel the Pastor and ministry leaders are very supportive in needed changes. Many changes have happened in the last year.
   o There have been a number of changes in the past year … most of them for the better.

250
7. The senior pastor is providing spiritual leadership to the church.
   0  = SD
   0  = D
   0  = DS
   0  = AS
   2  = A
   10 = SA

   Comment(s):
   o Biblical preaching and teaching is one of our strengths.
   o Messages are on target. He is involved with loving and caring for his
     congregation.
   o The pastor is scripture motivated.

8. The senior pastor has strong interpersonal skills.
   0  = SD
   0  = D
   0  = DS
   1  = AS
   3  = A
   8  = SA

   Comment(s):
   o Yes he does!
   o He is always placing himself among the congregation and vesting himself in
     their needs and concerns.

9. The senior pastor communicates God’s Word effectively through preaching and
   teaching.
   0  = SD
   0  = D
   0  = DS
   0  = AS
   0  = A
   12 = SA

   Comment(s):
   o He never strays from God’s word and his message is always thought provoking
     and brings us to a deeper knowledge of God.
   o He preaches the scripture.

10. Other staff members are performing their ministries well.
    0  = SD
    0  = D
    0  = DS
    1  = AS
    3  = A
    8  = SA

    Comment(s):
    o Music ministry doing excellent job!
    o Greatest need: Youth & Christian Ed/Discipleship.
    o We have seen the Youth grow under the leadership of Jim Green. The
      Children’s ministry is growing. Small groups are expanding.
11. The majority of people in the church belong to which age group?
   0 = 0-10
   0 = 20-30
   1 = 30-40
   3 = 40-50
   2 = 50-60
   0 = 60 and above
   6 = Don’t know

Comment(s):
   o It’s changing into the total family as God brings and grows his church.
   o It has shifted younger over the past year.
   o A good combination of all ages.
   o Growing in young adults.
   o Not sure … more mixed ages within the past year. Good representation in all groups.
   o There was a time I would have said 60+. Now the demographics have drastically changed, and I believe we have a diverse group of all ages.
   o New index of younger people. So needed for the church to survive.

12. What does the age of the people say about the future of the church?
   11 = Good future
   1 = Average future
   0 = Poor future
   0 = No future
   0 = Don’t know

Comment(s):
   o We have finally reached a younger group of attenders that will carry the church into the future.
   o Trending toward good, positive future because of what God has done this year.
   o I see great things ahead!

13. Are there more men or women in the church?
   1 = Men
   9 = Women
   2 = Don’t know

Comment(s): N/A

14. What is the average level of education of the people in the church?
   0 = Masters level or above
   1 = College
   7 = Some college and high school
   0 = High School
   4 = Don’t Know

Comment(s): N/A

15. What type of employment do the majority of church members have?
   1 = White collar
   0 = Blue collar
   7 = Combination
   0 = Retired
   4 = Don’t know

Comment(s): N/A
16. What is the average annual household income among members?
   0 = Less than $25,000
   4 = $25,000-$50,000
   3 = $50,000-$75,000
   0 = Over $75,000
   5 = Don’t know

Comment(s): N/A

17. What is the church’s average family status?
   6 = Married with children
   5 = Married
   0 = Single
   1 = Don’t know

Comment(s): N/A

18. Top 3 of the church’s greatest needs.
   o Music ministry that considers the needs of both young and older attendees.
   o A Deacon ministry
   o More members taking part in the church ministries.
   o More outward love toward one another and the community.
   o Financial stewardship.
   o Leadership.
   o Unified vision of the future.
   o Growth minded church body.
   o Update appearance.
   o Sunday School classes/leaders for all ages.
   o Small groups (outside of church)
   o Children’s ministries.
   o Mission statement.
   o Membership.
   o More volunteers.
   o Discipleship.
   o Faith and trust in leadership to keep moving forward.
   o Personal spiritual growth.

19. Top 3 of the greatest expectations people have of the church?
   o A place to belong and to serve.
   o A place where God’s word is preached and taught.
   o A place that cares about the world around them.
   o Growth.
   o Discipleship.
   o Outreach to the community.
   o Safe place.
   o Friendly.
   o Church activities.
   o Fellowship.
   o Meeting each person’s needs.
   o Looking for Christian friends.
   o Strong bible based preaching.
   o To be welcomed and embraced by everyone.
   o Good music.
   o To have a committed Pastor.
   o For the church to grow.
   o Leadership from the Pastor.
20. The church has a clear vision statement which clearly articulates a preferable future?
   0 = SD
   5 = D
   0 = DS
   4 = AS
   1 = A
   1 = SA

Comment(s):
   o Not sure in the works.
   o We are in the process.
   o Desperately needed … there is an urgent need here.
   o To my knowledge the church has never addressed this.
   o Not sure have ever seen a written vision statement, but the message preached
     makes me believe the vision for our church is clear.

21. If applicable, what is the church’s vision statement?
   o To win souls to Christ through teaching, preaching, prayer and fellowship.
   o To reach the lost in our community and build the church with strong committed
     servants.
   o “Letting the light of Jesus Christ shine through us.” – Matthew 5:16
   o Reach as many souls as possible.
   o Provide a church home for the community.

22. The church has a compelling mission statement which explains its primary
    purpose(s) and reason for existence.
    0 = SD
    5 = D
    0 = DS
    3 = AS
    3 = A
    1 = SA

Comment(s):
   o Don’t know if it’s promoted anywhere.
   o The goals and direction our church is reaching for is a mission for salvation.

23. If applicable, what is the church’s mission?
   o Reach out to the community to provide for their needs.
   o To communicate to the lost the love of God for them.
   o To follow the great commission and reach those far and near with the Gospel.

24. The congregation knows well the church’s mission and vision statement.
    1 = SD
    6 = D
    2 = DS
    1 = AS
    1 = A
    1 = SA

Comment(s):
   o Should be posted in a prominent area.
   o I believe it would be hard for someone attending our church, hearing Pastor’s
     message and attending bible study without knowing the churches statement or
     mission.
25. The church is accomplishing its mission and vision statement.
   0  = SD  
   2  = D  
   2  = DS  
   4  = AS  
   2  = A  
   2  = SA

Comment(s):
   o We are working toward those statements, but I do think the church is doing a lot of things right in caring for others.
   o Within 1 year, I have seen our church grow from 40 to over 100 every Sunday. We have many opportunities to serve. I do believe however, we could do more door to door evangelism or church/community events.
   o Somewhat. The church membership has increased.

26. Who is the church attempting to reach out to in the community?
   1  = Primarily Christians
   0  = Primarily non-Christians
   11 = Both
   0  = Don’t Know

Comment(s):
   o Need to do this with more purpose, urgency and intentionality.
   o Of course we want to reach the lost, but we also need to keep each other lifted up.

27. The church has a clear strategy for helping people grow in spiritual maturity.
   0  = SD  
   1  = D  
   0  = DS  
   6  = AS  
   3  = A  
   2  = SA

Comment(s):
   o Somewhat of a strategy … however, not that clear.
   o We have many bible study opportunities for all ages.

28. The church’s ministries are fulfilling the Great Commission by “making disciples.”
   0  = SD  
   0  = D  
   1  = DS  
   6  = AS  
   4  = A  
   1  = SA

Comment(s):
   o Discipleship is a needed area for growth. I see us heading in this direction.
   o The opportunities are there for anyone who chooses to step up and step out.
      However, I feel the church as a whole not just our congregation needs a wakeup call as to what it is to be a true follower.
29. The church is reaching lost people from the community for Christ.
   0  = SD
   0  = D
   1  = DS
   8  = AS
   2  = A
   1  = SA
Comment(s):
   o There needs to be more outreach to our community and the lost.
   o Yes, we are seeing new people come to Christ.
   o We have had some outreach activities, and I believe more will come as we become stronger and more committed to Jesus’ call.

30. The church is reaching unchurched people for Christ.
   0  = SD
   0  = D
   2  = DS
   6  = AS
   2  = A
   1  = SA
Comment(s):
   o I don’t see outreach to unchurched, but I know the heart to do so is there.
   o Yes, we see that in our worship times.
   o I believe we are making an effort. As our church grows in membership, we will hopefully have more workers in the field.

31. The church’s worship is vibrant and inspiring.
   1  = SD
   0  = D
   1  = DS
   0  = AS
   3  = A
   7  = SA
Comment(s):
   o I can’t wait for Sunday to see what God will do next!
   o Worship to me is as important as the message. When I can get to a place where I am worshipping God without even thinking about anyone else but God, I leave church knowing God knows my heart.

32. The leadership team empowers the congregation for ministry.
   0  = SD
   0  = D
   0  = DS
   4  = AS
   6  = A
   2  = SA
Comment(s):
   o Many people are finding their place of ministry.
   o I wish I knew what inspires people to get involved in ministry, but its not just the leadership team that need to empower, it is also the congregation having the desire.
33. People are discovering and using their gifts for ministry in the church.
   0  = SD
   1  = D
   0  = DS
   8  = AS
   2  = A
   1  = SA

   Comment(s):
   o As ministries grow, I believe people will learn to recognize their gifts more.
   o Prayer need in this area.
   o I also feel many more people need to step up and use their gifts.

34. The church has small group ministries to meet people’s needs for community.
   0  = SD
   2  = D
   0  = DS
   8  = AS
   1  = A
   1  = SA

   Comment(s):
   o Needed area for growth.
   o More will come in time.
   o Women’s bible study, Men’s Roof Top, Youth programs, bible studies.

35. What are some of the church’s traditions?
   o Lord’s table
   o Worshipping
   o Reading from God’s word
   o Fellowship
   o Sunrise Easter service
   o Door Greeters
   o Traditional Service

36. Who are the church’s heroes?
   o Jack Parks
   o Older Members
   o Shirley
   o Chris
   o Don
   o Pastor Whitehead and wife, Founders
   o Those who have stayed faithful to the church
   o The core group of people who consistently help out
   o There are no heroes unless we say our Lord is our hero. We are all servants of
     God, lead by a shepherd who is guided by that same God.

37. What is the average tenure of the church’s pastors?
   2  = Less than 2 years
   7  = 3-4 years
   2  = 5-8 years
   1  = 8 or more years

   Comment(s):
   o Sin in several former pastor’s lives has had a negative impact on the church’s
     growth and influence for Christ.
38. The church is willing to make whatever changes are necessary to have a more effective ministry for Christ.
   0 = SD
   0 = D
   0 = DS
   3 = AS
   5 = A
   4 = SA

Comment(s):
   o Sometimes change is hard, but I think most people want to see God move and work.
   o Most people are willing.
   o Change comes hard the older you are.
   o We have already seen this happen.

39. The church faces and addresses its problems.
   0 = SD
   0 = D
   0 = DS
   2 = AS
   4 = A
   6 = SA

Comment(s):
   o Our Pastor and committee members are always ready and willing to face and address all problems.

40. The church tends to learn from its mistakes.
   0 = SD
   0 = D
   1 = DS
   3 = AS
   4 = A
   4 = SA

Comment(s):
   o Not sure about previous year?
   o That is getting better.
   o As far as I can tell.
   o the church has gone thru several trials in the past. But it has learned from these and is now strong and vibrant.

41. The church does not condone sinful behavior on the part of its people.
   1 = SD
   0 = D
   0 = DS
   0 = AS
   7 = A
   4 = SA

Comment(s):
   o It’s being dealt with when needed … firmly, but with love and grace.
   o I believe the church needs to hold all members accountable. We need to be there for them, guide them thru it, but not accept it.
42. There are some people who are blocking the church from having effective ministry.
   2 = SD
   3 = D
   1 = DS
   2 = AS
   3 = A
   1 = SA

   Comment(s):
   o Very few.
   o I believe this was a problem in our church. We have a strong Shepherd and an even stronger Heavenly Shepherd. Our church stands upon the word of God and it will prevail.

43. Are there certain traditions which are hampering effective ministry in the church?
   o Ushers – old fashioned in the way they dress.
   o Yes, somewhat. But working through and overcoming many of these obstacles as God continues to work.

44. Where is the power in the church?
   3 = The leadership team
   6 = The pastor
   0 = Other individual(s)
   3 = Don’t know

   Comment(s):
   o I believe the power is in the hands of God himself. If the Pastor yields to that power, the leadership team will yield and the congregation will yield.

45. Is the church focused inward on itself or outward toward other people?
   1 = Inward
   3 = Outward
   8 = Both
   0 = Don’t know

   Comment(s):
   o Has been a church that is inward only focused … but moving more outward focused.
   o Depends on the situation or issue.
   o We are focused on the lost and evangelizing but we also focus on the family we have.

46. The church has a creative and innovative ministry (regularly comes up with new ideas).
   1 = SD
   1 = D
   2 = DS
   2 = AS
   3 = A
   3 = SA

   Comment(s):
   o The church is always looking for creative and innovated ways to reach others with the Gospel and to challenge those who already know Christ.
47. The church is teachable (invites constructive feedback and makes necessary changes).
   0  = SD
   1  = D
   0  = DS
   4  = AS
   4  = A
   3  = SA

Comment(s):
   o I really believe the Pastor, his wife and the leadership team are always looking for constructive feedback from the congregation.

48. To which age group does the church focus it ministries?
   2  = 0-10
   1  = 10-20
   5  = 20-30
   3  = 30-40
   1  = 40-50
   2  = 50-60
   1  = 60 +
   5  = All

Comment(s):
   o I feel the church tries to meet all age groups.
   o We have ministries for all ages. As the church grows, so will the ministries.

49. The church normally meets its annual budget.
   1  = SD
   5  = D
   1  = DS
   2  = AS
   3  = A
   0  = SA

Comment(s):
   o Math is not my strong point, but I believe since I have been a members this is true.

Section II—External Analysis

50. What kind of community is the church located in?
   1  = Urban
   8  = Suburban
   1  = Rural
   2  = Don’t know

Comment(s): N/A

51. What is age of the community?
   1  = New
   0  = Old
   10 = Somewhere in between
   1  = Don’t know

Comment(s): N/A
52. Are people moving into or out of the area?
   6 = Into
   0 = Out of
   3 = Static
   3 = Don’t know
   Comment(s): N/A

53. Which predominant ethnic group(s) live in the church’s community?
   0 = African
   0 = Asian
   1 = Hispanic
   3 = Anglo
   8 = Mixture
   Comment(s): N/A

54. Chances are good that the church will reach this community for Christ.
   0 = SD
   0 = D
   0 = DS
   3 = AS
   4 = A
   5 = SA
   Comment(s):
     o New Spanish church plant.
     o We need to do more community outreach.

55. In which type of housing do the majority of people in the community live?
   10 = Houses
   2 = Apartments
   4 = Mobile Homes
   1 = Condominiums
   2 = Don’t know
   Comment(s):
     o Mostly homes and mobile homes.
     o There are many mobile homes in the areas. Some that are on their own land,
       other in parks.

56. What are the top three needs of the community?
   o Jesus Christ.
   o Community relationships.
   o Purpose.
   o Hope that things will get better.
   o Love of family and community.
   o Belief that one day they will have a brighter future.
   o Good jobs.
   o Better economy.
   o Youth.
   o Seniors over 65.
   o Spiritual.
   o Economic.
   o Sense of belonging.
   o To know Christ.
   o To know they are loved and safe.
57. What does the community value most?
   - Family
   - Good paying secure jobs.
   - Financial well being.
   - Material things.

58. What does the community want most out of life?
   - A secure sense of belonging.
   - Good jobs.
   - Safe secure homes.
   - Help with their needs.
   - To have their needs met.
   - To have love, peace and joy.

59. The community appears to be dying/declining.
   1 = SD
   5 = D
   5 = DS
   1 = AS
   0 = A
   0 = SA

   Comment(s):
   - I believe the community around the church is a poor community and unfortunately we will always have poor communities.
   - Only the North of LITD.

60. The crime rate for the area is high.
   0 = SD
   3 = D
   3 = DS
   6 = AS
   0 = A
   0 = SA

   Comment(s): N/A

61. The people in the community are similar demographically to those in the church.
   0 = SD
   1 = D
   2 = DS
   5 = AS
   3 = A
   1 = SA

   Comment(s):
   - We do have some from the community attending our church, but I feel we need to do more to reach the majority.
   - The church is becoming more balanced.
62. With which of the following does the church compete:
   2 = Church or parachurch ministries?
   3 = Cults or religious groups in the area?
   7 = Movies or television?
   6 = Athletics (viewed or participative)?
   10 = Leisure time activities?
   5 = The marketplace (shopping malls, etc.)

63. Which of the following represent opportunities for the church to reach people:
   11 = Unchurched people?
   8 = Unreached people groups?
   12 = New people moving into the community?
   10 = Local schools (high school, trade schools, college)?
   3 = International students?
   3 = Armed services facilities?
   4 = Prison/jails?

Others/Who:
   o Mormons
   o Hispanics … starting new SBC church plant
   o Seasonal Residents

64. Please provide any additional comments that your think would be helpful in the space below and/or on the back of this page.
   o People come to church to worship. They want a worshipful experience. Soul stirring messages from the word of God. Music that all ages can participate and worship to. Friendly and caring people. Programs/fellowship for all ages.
   o Our church has had changes over the past year. Most were for the better, some just need a little tweaking.
   o In the short time I have been a member, I have seen many positive changes being made. We have grown not only in size but also in depth and knowledge of our Lord and Savior. Do I believe we need to do more … yes! The church should never stop reaching and growing. If the church feels we have reached our potential, we become complacent and not caring for the world outside our doors. We should continue striving to reach those for Christ.
   We also have a commitment to members within the church. They have a tendency to become comfortable in their surroundings. How do we do that? I don’t know. The churches all around face the same problem. 20% of the people doing 80% of the work. I believe this to be a heart problem. Our love for Christ should motivate us to continue serving till we take our last breath.

However, I don’t think the majority of people have their hearts in the right place. We all face obligations outside of church, families to take care of, time to rest, etc. We need to put our focus back on Christ and what He did for us, what he gave up for us. What He continues to do for us. The congregation needs to step up and out event in the small things. If you don’t have time to serve daily, serve weekly. If weekly is too much, serve monthly. Couple with others to have the commitment filled. Most everyone knows what the needs of their family are. We are a family with the same needs. The central drive for doing things for your family is love. What does the church’s love for Christ show?

*Adapted and used with permission from The Malphurs Group,
APPENDIX 14

POST PROJECT INTERVIEW

These interviews will come from a cross-section of 25 adults in the church membership who have completed and signed the church covenant that resulted from the strategic planning process.

Agreement to Participate
The research in which you are about to participate is designed as an interview to determine some practical ways you plan to live out Light in the Desert’s covenant with God and with one another in the church. This research is being conducted by Darwin Meighan for the purposes of collecting data for a ministry project. Any information you provide will be held strictly confidential, and at no time will your name be reported or identified with your responses. Participation is strictly voluntary and you are free to withdraw at any time. By participating in this interview, you are giving informed consent for the use of your responses in this project.

Date(s) of Interviews: November 11-21, 2013

Interview Question 1  In what ways does your life demonstrate God has first place?

Participant 1  My day starts with prayer and reading the Bible, church is a priority every week, putting God first in my finances.

Participant 2  I have committed my life completely to him as Lord of my life.


Participant 4  Reading my Bible and prayer to start every day. Looking to him for direction in all things. Serving and putting the needs of others first.

Participant 5  On-line daily Bible study, made the decision to listen only to Christian music, attend church more regularly.

Participant 6  Walk and pray first thing in the morning. Read my Bible every night. Share my faith with others.

Participant 7  Joined a prayer group with Christian friends. Go to church every week. Meet needs of others as God leads.

Participant 8  Lead my family in devotions at breakfast. Fully support my church. Pray asking for his direction to make decisions according to his will.

Participant 9  I need to put him first again. Other things have crowded God out.
Participant 10  I belong to Christian Challenge at the college I attend. I use my talents to serve Him. Learning to pray and study the Bible more, but need help with this.

Participant 11  Personal worship. Serving and giving to the church. Volunteer work in our city.

Participant 12  Struggling with this. Busy schedule, but working on it.

Participant 13  I use the social media to share God’s name.

Participant 14  Daily quiet time with God. Active member of the church. Serving on a ministry team.

Participant 15  Honestly I put God first in the beginning. He has not been first in my life quite awhile. The Nehemiah study is bringing me back to the Lord.

Participant 16  Attend church weekly. Read the Bible and pray. Read Bible stories to my grandchildren.

Participant 17  Give money to the church and to mission causes. Read my Bible and pray. Attend Sunday school and church most Sundays.

Participant 18  Talk to God every day. Read the Bible. Give a tithe to the church. Share Jesus’ Love. Serve Jesus through my church.

Participant 19  God first. Family second. Church third. And then my job. Lead a Bible study at work. Strive to live every day for Jesus Christ.

Participant 20  Recognizing what Jesus has done for me, I am striving daily in everything I do to put God first. One practical new way is reading the Bible and praying before any TV, computer or social media.

Participant 21  My husband is not the spiritual leader, so I try to be an example of putting God first. I pray for him and seek ways to serve him as an example of Christ’s love.

Participant 22  Attend church 2 times each week, read my Bible and pray every day, serve in the church and I volunteer in the community.

Participant 23  I recently realized putting God first means in my finances – that was new for me.

Participant 24  I’ve been learning that putting God first is putting the needs of others before mine.

Participant 25  Other things in my life are crowding God out. I plan to start reading the Bible 5 minutes each day after this semester is over.
**Interview Question 2**  
How often are you reading God’s Word and what is one way you have personally applied it to your life?

Participant 1  
Daily, I helped a neighbor who has physical limitations to clean out a closet.

Participant 2  
At least 5 times each week, increased my time in prayer daily.

Participant 3  
Regularly, started a family devotion with my wife and children.

Participant 4  
Daily, slowing down my driving to speed limits.

Participant 5  
3-5 times each week, convicted recently to listen only to Christian music.

Participant 6  
Daily, talked with someone at the store who showed interest in Jesus.

Participant 7  
A few times every week, joined a prayer group.

Participant 8  
Everyday, put a Bible verse on my desk daily to stay focused.

Participant 9  
Rarely, once I awhile I’ll read some on-line. Signed a covenant like in Nehemiah.

Participant 10  
A few times a week, mostly at church and with the college group. Signed up to participate in a mission trip.

Participant 11  
3-5 times each week, keep the covenant in my Bible as a reminder.

Participant 12  
Not often enough, God says to help others, I helped a friend move.

Participant 13  
Just about every day through on-line studies and blogs, shared my faith with a friend.

Participant 14  
Daily, used the Bible to counsel a friend who was going through a hard time.

Participant 15  
Hardly not at all, signed a covenant from the Nehemiah sermons.

Participant 16  
Every day – I look forward to it first thing! Gave to a benevolence offering.

Participant 17  
Mostly every day, took a friend to lunch as my treat.

Participant 18  
Daily, prayed for my pastor and church.

Participant 19  
Yes, thanks for asking, I read the Bible every day. Taught a men’s Bible lesson at work.

Participant 20  
About 5 times per week, honored my husband by submitting to a major decision we needed to make in our home and family.

Participant 21  
Daily, I’ve recently started memorizing Bible verses to apply them as God leads.

Participant 22  
Daily, I took the lead in a fall community event to get to know others – looking for more opportunities to share my faith.
Participant 23  Occasionally, signed a church covenant, giving financially to God.

Participant 24  Fairly often, need to set time aside daily, gave to the need in the Philippines.

Participant 25  Rarely, very busy with work and school, not sure?

**Interview Question 3**  Name a specific way you are helping your family grow spiritually?

Participant 1  Through prayer.

Participant 2  I buy Christian books and give them to family members.

Participant 3  Praying for them and keeping my priorities of God first and family second.

Participant 4  Praying for them.

Participant 5  Encouraging them to find a church, share my new love for Christian music.

Participant 6  No family close by, but I do pray for them.

Participant 7  Pray and look for moments to teach God’s Word.

Participant 8  Trying to follow the example of Jesus Christ in my words and actions.

Participant 9  Not very much, but I want to. I need some direction.

Participant 10  I pray constantly for them, praying specifically for salvation.

Participant 11  Trying to be a godly example to my brother and sister.

Participant 12  Not sure how until I get myself straightened out.

Participant 13  Post Bible verses and Christian websites, etc on Facebook.

Participant 14  I pray for my family every day.

Participant 15  Rough background, family relationships are not strong. Maybe God can use me to start praying about this?

Participant 16  Pray for my children and grandchildren, read Bible stories to them when I babysit.

Participant 17  Bought a Bible for my niece who was recently baptized.

Participant 18  One of the most important things I do is pray God’s protection over my family every day.

Participant 19  I ask God to help me be a godly husband and father daily, pray for my family.
Participant 20  Look for teachable moments to talk about God’s Word, for my husband and myself to be unified as parents as we raise our children.

Participant 21  Pray for my husband’s salvation, look for ways to honor him, be patient as God works in our marriage and home.

Participant 22  I’m single with no other family in the area. I do pray for my family.

Participant 23  Through prayer sometimes, but I need to pray more.

Participant 24  Praying and I talk about God to them especially when they are facing a difficult time.

Participant 25  I’m pretty busy, but I do sometimes remember to pray for my parents and sister.

**Interview Question 4  What does “observing the Sabbath” principle mean to you?**

Participant 1  God instructs us to make one day holy and set aside specifically for him.

Participant 2  The Sabbath is a day of rest, getting focused on God and worshipping him.

Participant 3  A day for rest and worship for the entire family, God knows our needs.

Participant 4  We’re not to be legalistic about it, but God set it up this way for us to get recharged and reenergized and to stay focused on his plan.

Participant 5  Not sure, this is new to me. But I know it is supposed to be a time of day to Worship God, I think?

Participant 6  It means for me there is one day out of the week, where the rhythm of the day is more worshipful and restful.

Participant 7  It is a day to get caught up on rest and make sure things in my life are right with God.

Participant 8  Rest, special time with family, worship God with my church family.

Participant 9  Make sure God knows he is most important to you, whatever that looks like?

Participant 10  Worshipping God with my college group and church.

Participant 11  Slowing down one day out of the week to rest and worship Jesus Christ.

Participant 12  Sort of confused by this, but I think it means we are to worship God and rest.

Participant 13  This is how God set things up. I work and have a regular schedule to do things six days a week, but the seventh day is for God. Not sure I explained this right?
Participant 14 Every day is holy and made by God. But one day a week is especially set aside for rest and spiritual renewal which happens through worship.

Participant 15 Need to know more about this. I know we’re supposed to slow down from our busy lives and take time to worship God.

Participant 16 I worship my Lord and Savior and make it a day of rest.

Participant 17 A much needed day of rest and worship of my great God.

Participant 18 Sunday is the day Jesus was resurrected. This is the Sabbath day for myself and for many Christians to rest and worship—to get recharged for the week.

Participant 19 A day God has given to us in our weekly schedule that is much different from other days in the sense that we focus on him through rest and worship.

Participant 20 A special day in our week where we break away from the norm to hear from God, worship him and get reenergized for a new week to make a difference for him.

Participant 21 The Sabbath is a great day of worship and Bible study with my Lord and church family, but it is also a difficult day because my husband does not honor the Lord’s Day.

Participant 22 This is a good time in my life where God has been speaking to me about returning to a regular practice of the Sabbath principle. I’m only partially observing this principle but plan to commit to it fully as God leads.

Participant 23 Rest and worship, but would like more information on how to apply this principle.

Participant 24 A day God has planned for me and others to worship him, get refreshed spiritually and overall get refocused for a new week.

Participant 25 I know this is one of the things I signed on the covenant, but not sure what it means?

**Interview Question 5** In what ways are you giving of your time, talents and treasures to do your part in ensuring the success of God’s strategic plan for “making disciples.”

Participant 1 Through faithful church attendance and participation. I help coordinate special events. I support the church with regular tithes and offerings.

Participant 2 Children’s ministry, give financially to support Light in the Desert’s ministry.

Participant 3 Attend weekly church ministries, serve on the Leadership Team, tithe weekly.
Participant 4  Active member, oversee outreach and mission ministries, provide financial support.

Participant 5  Not currently serving, but interested in getting involved in the worship team, give financially but not as consistent as I should.

Participant 6  Weekly involvement in the church’s ministries, not currently serving in an official capacity, but open to it. Give monthly.

Participant 7  I pray for the church, would like to further develop prayer ministry. I give regularly to support the Lord’s work through the church.

Participant 8  Coordinate events for men’s ministry, use my gifts of administration and organization, give 12% currently of our household income to the church.

Participant 9  Not very involved yet, but plan to get more involved, would like to know more about what the Bible says about finances.

Participant 10  Worship and Bible study, active in sharing my faith and about the church among college students, would like to consider more leadership to grow a college ministry, give to the church as God has commanded.

Participant 11  Active in all aspects of the church’s ministry, serve in hospitality and benevolence ministries, give tithes and special offerings consistently.

Participant 12  Frequently attend worship services, help with building and grounds occasionally, not an active giver financially.

Participant 13  Love this church and want to support it more! Will keep these areas in prayer, would like to serve in the church’s media ministry or to advance social media.

Participant 14  I am a faithful member to Light in the Desert. Serve in the youth ministry, give at least 10 percent of my income to God’s church.

Participant 15  Ready to get involved at all levels, I want to know how my time, talents and treasures are needed to make the church stronger.

Participant 16  God has given me a love for little ones, so I faithfully serve the preschool ministry, have been a committed tither in obedience to the Lord for years.

Participant 17  Consistent involvement in the church, have served in the church’s prayer ministry for the past two years, regular giver to the Lord’s work.

Participant 18  Adult Bible study leader, have my family involved in the church ministries weekly, absolutely on board with total Christian stewardship.

Participant 19  Serve as a men’s ministry leader, active member, give consistently as the Lord commands.

Participant 20  Faithful member and totally supportive of the direction God is leading, Children’s Church leader, regular givers.

Participant 21  Love my church family and am involved every week, help serve through hospitality and decorating, give regularly but not necessarily a tithe.
Participant 22  Involved in the church’s ministries, would like to serve to start a divorce care Ministry, give sacrificially to the Lord’s church to impact globally.

Participant 23  Becoming a pretty consistent member (at least lately), not currently serving, however very interested in doing what I can to help fulfill our new strategic plan, I’m recently on board with this whole giving thing!

Participant 24  I feel God is leading me to join the welcome team in the future since I am outgoing and enjoy getting to meet new people, currently giving at a good level, But I am praying about increasing it for the new year.

Participant 25  Other commitments keep me from strong involvement in the church, not sure when I will be able to serve, I signed the covenant but can’t do all of it right now.

**Interview Question 6  What/If any ministry team have you committed to be a part of at Light in the Desert Baptist Church?**

Participant 1  I have been coordinating special events. Under the church’s new strategic plan, I would like to serve on the community outreach team.

Participant 2  Children’s ministry team. I want to help teach and reach children for Jesus.

Participant 3  Currently serve on the church’s Leadership Team, feeling led to coordinate the new welcome team.

Participant 4  Want to be used of God to develop a mission team.

Participant 5  Plan to set up a time to talk with our worship leader about joining the worship team.

Participant 6  No ministry yet. Looking at the new plan, I am interested in outreach.

Participant 7  See the need to develop a prayer team and ministries focused on prayer.

Participant 8  Praying about serving as a deacon if the opportunity comes.

Participant 9  No team yet. I’m interested in learning more. Have a passion for and relate well to students.

Participant 10  College ministry.

Participant 11  Continue to serve in hospitality, but also want to join the welcome team.

Participant 12  Feel the Lord is leading me to stay active with the building and grounds team.

Participant 13  Per the strategic plan—help develop the church’s outreach through social media.

Participant 14  Youth ministry.

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Participant 15  Seriously, community outreach interests me.
Participant 16  Preschool ministry team.
Participant 17  Excited about new direction to serve on the prayer team.
Participant 18  Teach adult Bible study classes and Life Groups.
Participant 19  Men’s ministry, lead them to become more mission focused.
Participant 20  Kidz Worship leader, want to see it grow to have two groups.
Participant 21  Hospitality and decorating teams.
Participant 22  Start a ministry to encourage divorced adults.
Participant 23  I like what the welcome team is all about, ready to get involved there.
Participant 24  Welcome team, sign me up!
Participant 25  Can’t serve right now, I like the team idea though.

**Interview Question #7  What do you plan to do to build spiritually healthy relationships in the church?**

Participant 1  Encourage others whenever possible.
Participant 2  Do my best to teach children and help parents to grow godly families.
Participant 3  Re: strategic plan – create welcoming environments to share Jesus’ love.
Participant 4  pray more, talk and worry less.
Participant 5  join a team, be part of a team of people to do God’s work.
Participant 6  Reach more people to grow a stronger church and better relationships.
Participant 7  Grow and build a prayer ministry to pray for others.
Participant 8  Serve people’s needs and pray for them.
Participant 9  Spend more time getting to know people outside of church time.
Participant 10  Reach out more to people of different ages, especially senior adults.
Participant 11  Lead others to reach out more to our weekly guests.
Participant 12  Serve on my team, working alongside my brothers and sisters in the Lord.
Participant 13  Help people interface more with the social media.
Participant 14  Desire to see healthy relationships with students and their parents.
Participant 15  Spend more time with people to get to know them outside of church.
Participant 16  Love the preschoolers so parents will also see the love of Jesus.
Participant 17  Make myself available as God leads to pray with others.
Participant 18  Teach God’s Word faithfully to make disciples.
Participant 19  Train and equip men to be the spiritual leaders of their homes.
Participant 20  Invite people from our church to our home more.
Participant 21  Meet ladies occasionally for coffee or lunch.
Participant 22  Send cards and notes of encouragement.
Participant 23  Reach out to people who are new to the church.
Participant 24  Help people feel welcome, to find a place where they feel they belong.
Participant 25  Be at church to spend time with others when I can.
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**Articles**


ABSTRACT

DEVELOPING AND IMPLEMENTING THE NEHEMIAH MODEL OF STRATEGIC PLANNING TO REBUILD LIGHT IN THE DESERT BAPTIST CHURCH, MESA, ARIZONA

Darwin Lance Meighan, D.Ed.Min.
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2014
Faculty Supervisor: Dr. Shane W. Parker

The purpose of this project was to develop and implement the Nehemiah model of strategic planning to rebuild Light in the Desert Baptist Church. Chapter 1 explains the ministerial context of Light in the Desert Baptist Church. In addition to a historical overview of the church, there is an analysis of the community demographics gathered from within a five-mile radius surrounding the church. The rationale for the project is also explained in this chapter. In addition to addressing the limitations and delimitations of the project, this chapter also explains key definitions, which are necessary for understanding the methodology of the project. Finally, the project’s intended goals are specified, along with an overview of the methodology that was used to obtain those goals.

Chapter 2 explains the biblical and theological basis for the project. This section consists of a detailed study and exegesis from Nehemiah’s text. Six passages were examined: Nehemiah 1:4-11; 2:1-20; 3; 4:1-9; 8-10; and 12:27-47. The focus of this chapter is to provide a biblical and theological foundation from the book of Nehemiah for the purpose of strategic planning.

Chapter 3 considers how current marketplace strategic planning concepts and principles bring unquestionable value to strategic planning in the church. Principles of understanding strategic context, teamwork and collaboration, formulating strategy,
strategic intent and stretch, and gaining buy-in and accepting ownership of the plan were examined in this section.

Chapter 4 provides a detailed step-by-step process along with the methodology utilized for the project’s implementation. In essence, this section contains a weekly analysis of the project’s development with the goal in mind that it be used for future replication.

Chapter 5 is an evaluation of the project. In this section, the project is evaluated based upon the goals set forth in chapter 1. This chapter determines if the development and implementation of the Nehemiah model of strategic planning is an effective resource for rebuilding Light in the Desert Baptist Church.
VITA

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Diploma, Gilbert High School, Gilbert, Arizona, 1979
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