

Introduction

- Boys at summer baseball - Weights, running, etc. all in preparation for 20 games in January - getting ready for the moment they take the field.
- 2008 - Beijing Olympics - Michael Phelps won 100m butterfly by .01 seconds - a race decided by a fingertip - hours and hours of disciplined training to swim a race that typically takes about 50 seconds for an elite swimmer.
- Are you ready for the opportunity that God places before you? It may be that God opens a door of ministry for you - ministry to your neighbors, specific evangelistic opportunity at work or school - or to answer the call to go on a short-term mission trip, to step into leadership, address something broken in your family, your church, or your own life. Are you ready to walk in faith when God opens the door of opportunity?
- For some, when the opportunity comes, we won't seize the opportunity because of fear, passivity, or lack of preparation.
- [Nehemiah 2](#) - The story of a man who was ready to step forward in faith in God's time so that he could be a blessing to his people.
- I want to walk through this passage and help you to live ready to walk in faithful obedience to the Lord. I want to show you four ways from this passage that you can live ready to respond when God opens the door.

Prepare while you wait. (vs. 1)

- [Nehemiah 1](#) - In the month of Chislev, Nehemiah got the news that the walls were ruined. He immediately turns to God in prayer. Prayer was his first response, not his last resort.
- In the first chapter, a short recorded prayer, but Nehemiah prayed and fasted for days. He asked God to give him favor before the king.
- However, he didn't go before the king until the month of Nisan. For four months, he waited for an opportunity to make a bold request of the king.
- Nehemiah knew if the walls were going to be rebuilt, it would have to be with the permission of King Artaxerxes. So, he waited on the right time, trusting the Lord for an opportunity to speak to the king.
- The text doesn't tell us exactly what Nehemiah did while he waited, but he kept serving the king with integrity. Surely, he kept praying. The burden for Jerusalem didn't go away, but in the waiting, God was preparing Nehemiah, and he was sovereignly at work in Artaxerxes' life so that he would respond favorably.
- Waiting time is not wasted time. And, waiting on the Lord doesn't mean doing nothing. It means being faithful until God opens the next door.
- For you, you might be ready to act on a burden or a desire, but God desires you to wait. Maybe there's a tough conversation you need to have, but it's just not wise to have it today because you're too angry to have the conversation. For some, it's a call to ministry or significant leadership, but today is not the time. God is still shaping your character. Maybe you are facing a major decision about your future, your career, your family, but there's not clarity yet. Wait.
- In a season of waiting God is working. Keep praying. Keep serving. Keep preparing. In seasons of waiting, think about your heart, your head, and your hands.

- **Heart: Where do I need to grow in Christlike character?**
- **Head: Where do i need to grow in the knowledge of the Lord?**
- **Hands: Where do I need to grow in my abilities to serve the Lord?**

Move courageously in God's timing. (2:2-5)

- After four months of waiting, God opened the door for Nehemiah to speak.
- vs. 2 - Nehemiah entered the presence of the king with a sad face. Nehemiah had never done this. In the ancient world, in the king's presence, you always put on a joyous face. There was joy in the presence of the king! Nehemiah risking his job and even his life by walking into the king's presence with a frown on his face.
- vs. 2 - Nehemiah's sadness does not go unnoticed. King questions him. "I know you're not sick. Why are you sad?"
- vs. 3 - Nehemiah's honesty: "I was overwhelmed with fear." You would have been afraid too... Standing in front of one of the most powerful men on the planet not certain how he would respond.
- But, fear doesn't stop Nehemiah from walking in faith. "Jerusalem is in ruins, why wouldn't I be sad?"
- The king's response: "What do you want?" Now's the opportunity. God has opened the door for this conversation and for Nehemiah to make a bold request of the king.
- vs. 4 - Nehemiah's immediate response was to pray. He'd already been praying for months, but he offers a short prayer likely asking God for the right words to say in the moment. Nehemiah wanted his words to reflect God's will.
- The request was bold and courageous: "Send me to Jerusalem to rebuild the city." Would the king of the Persian empire want Nehemiah to

rebuild a city that might later rise up and rebel against him? This was a huge request!

- vs. 6 - With the queen at his side, the king asked, “How long will you be gone?” Nehemiah assured the king that he would return to the king’s service...
- How do you move in this kind of courageous faith?
- **Embrace your affinities.** Your affinities are those desires that God has placed in your heart that line up with His Word, prayer, and wise counsel. Last week, we said one mission yet different burdens. Some burdened for international missions. Others, for the unborn. Others, burdened for the state of families or for church planting. We don’t all have the same burden (Nehemiah had a burden for the walls of Jerusalem), but we have the same mission.
- **Know your abilities.** Your abilities may be different than mine, but those abilities can be used bring about change in those places where you are burdened. You have gifts, experiences, resources, relationships, and perhaps training that has uniquely shaped you for ministry in that area where God has given you a passion. For me, I have the ability to communicate God’s Word clearly, and I have a burden for preaching the truth of God’s Word.
- **Seize the opportunity.** When the opportunity arises to act on your burden with the abilities God has given you, seize it. Nehemiah had access to the king, and he seized the opportunity. When the opportunity arise to serve in the area of your passion, seize it.
- Don’t pass up the opportunity because of fear or because you don’t think you’re ready. If you’ve prayed, know how you can help, and God has opened the door, walk through that door with confidence.
- When your affinities, abilities, and opportunities come together, that likely the place God is calling you to action.

- What makes body of Christ powerful is when we pursue the individual passions God has given us for the sake of His mission.

Plan under the good hand of God. (2:6-8)

- Nehemiah knew exactly what to request of the king. For four months, he had been praying, but he had also been planning.
- [Proverbs 16:9](#): “The heart of man plans his way, but the Lord establishes his steps.” It’s good to plan trusting the Lord to give you direction and wisdom as you plan.
- It is evident Nehemiah planned. He requested letters (think passports). He requested a letter written to Asaph, the keeper of the forest, so that he could have access to the lumber needed to rebuild the gates, the fortress by the temple, the walls, and a home for Nehemiah.
- The king granted Nehemiah’s request. God was sovereignly at work in the heart of the king giving favor to Nehemiah so that ultimately God’s plan would be accomplished in Jerusalem. vs. 8 - “For the gracious hand of my God was on me.” Nehemiah quick to recognize that God was at work.
- Nehemiah had bold requests, but these bold requests had been thought out and planned by Nehemiah.
- Nehemiah’s careful planning should challenge us:
- **Be careful of prayerless planning.** What gets us in trouble is trying to move ahead of God without seeking his will - when we set the calendar, create the strategy, or take the next step without seeking the Lord. Or, an attitude of, “God bless my plans” rather than, “God what do you desire from me?” Have you prayed? Searched the Scripture? Sought wise counsel?
- **Be careful of passive spirituality.** Beware of an over-spiritualized mindset that says, “I’m just going to pray and trust the Lord” without any

desire to actually act in faith. E.g., “I’m going to trust the Lord for my neighbor’s salvation” with no plan to share the Gospel with your neighbor. Or, “I’m praying for my family” but no plan to lead your family in worship, disciple your children, or have intentional conversations.

- **Be determined to put prayerful plans into action.** Wise to have a plan for your spiritual growth. How are you going to intentionally grow? What books are you going to read? What mentoring relationships are you going to seek out? Or, a plan to reach your friend with the Gospel. “I’m going to invite to lunch, get to know his/her family, and take time to invest in their lives.”
- Pray because everything depends on God, but plans wisely and obey faithfully.

Work faithfully despite opposition.

- vs. 11-20 show wise and determined leadership. Nehemiah makes the 900 mile journey to Jerusalem. Imagine the excitement when people see Nehemiah show up with an infantry and cavalry.
- However, Nehemiah doesn’t announce the plans (vs. 12). Instead he investigates and assesses. He doesn’t want to get the hopes of the people up until he has an opportunity himself to see the broken walls.
- In the cover of night, so not to draw attention to himself, he inspects and assesses. He continues to plan. Officials wondering where he had gone because Nehemiah had kept to himself what he was doing (v. 16).
- Only after closely inspecting the walls does Nehemiah report to the people the plan.
- God uses Nehemiah to stir the people to action: “You see the trouble we are in.. Come, let’s rebuild Jerusalem’s wall, so that we will no longer be a disgrace” (vs. 17).

- vs. 18 - Nehemiah reported to the people how God had been at work. The people agreed to join Nehemiah in the work.
- However, there was opposition. vs. 10 - Sanballat and Tobiah greatly displeased when they heard Nehemiah had come to help Jerusalem. vs. 19 - Sanballat, Tobiah, and Geshem accuse Nehemiah and Israel of rebelling against the king. The surrounding enemies did not want Israel to succeed.
- Vs. 20 - While Nehemiah had received permission from the king to return to the land to rebuild, Nehemiah knew that ultimately he was in Jerusalem under God's authority and power. And, the enemies of Israel would not stop God's work.
- In these closing verses, some good reminders for us:
- **Opposition is not evidence of God's absence.** God has been at work in Nehemiah's life. Nehemiah was convinced of that. Sanballat, Tobiah, and Geshem despised and accused Nehemiah, but the same God who was with Nehemiah in the king's palace was still present when the critics began to speak.
- There is always an enemy that wants God's work to fail. When life is hard, it does not mean God is absent. You want to ask, "God where are you?" He's present, so keep serving.
- **Opposition is often evidence of faithful obedience.** Nehemiah was not opposed because he was doing something wrong. He was opposed because he was doing God's will. When you attempt great things for God, expect critics. If you're running into a lot of opposition for serving the Lord, it's likely evidence that you are striving to obey the Lord. Keep serving!
- **Opposition must not distract us from God's work.** Nehemiah doesn't get into a long argument. He doesn't let the mockery discourage him. Instead, he answers with confidence. 'The God of heaven is the one

who will grant us success...” That’s faithful service despite opposition. Opposition is not going away, but it does not have to distract us. We can keep serving. We can keep trusting. We can keep doing the work God has called us to.

- For you: Keep seeking discipleship opportunities. Keep praying for family and friends. Keep living on His mission.
- Aren’t you thankful that Jesus was not distracted by opposition? He faced more opposition than you and I will ever experience.
- Nehemiah was welcomed by his people. Jesus was rejected by His people. The One who came not to rebuild walls but to rebuild hearts was rejected by the very people He came to save. But, Jesus didn’t let the opposition distract Him from the mission. He went to the cross and died for His own people who rejected Him. At the cross, Jesus died for rebels, for critics, for those who opposed Him. In His dying breaths, Jesus said, “Forgive them, they don’t know what they’re doing.”
- He died only to rise again so that we might have new life through faith in Him and repentance of our sins.
- There’s an invitation for you to respond to the Good News of the death and resurrection of Jesus, to have new life, and join Jesus in His work to build His Kingdom on this earth as it is in heaven.