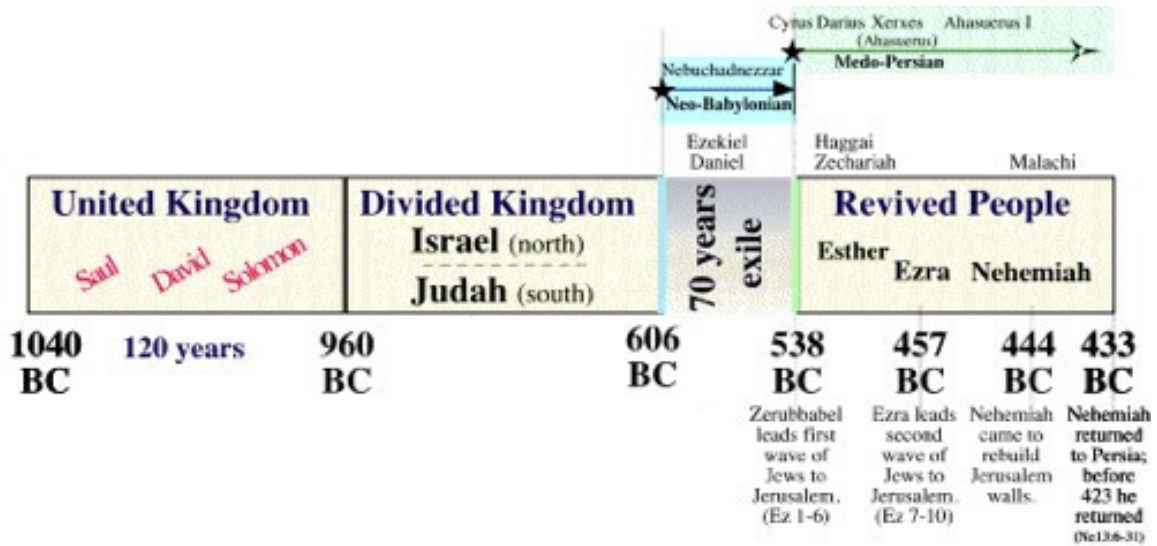




The Pathway To Significant Influence (Nehemiah 2:1-20)

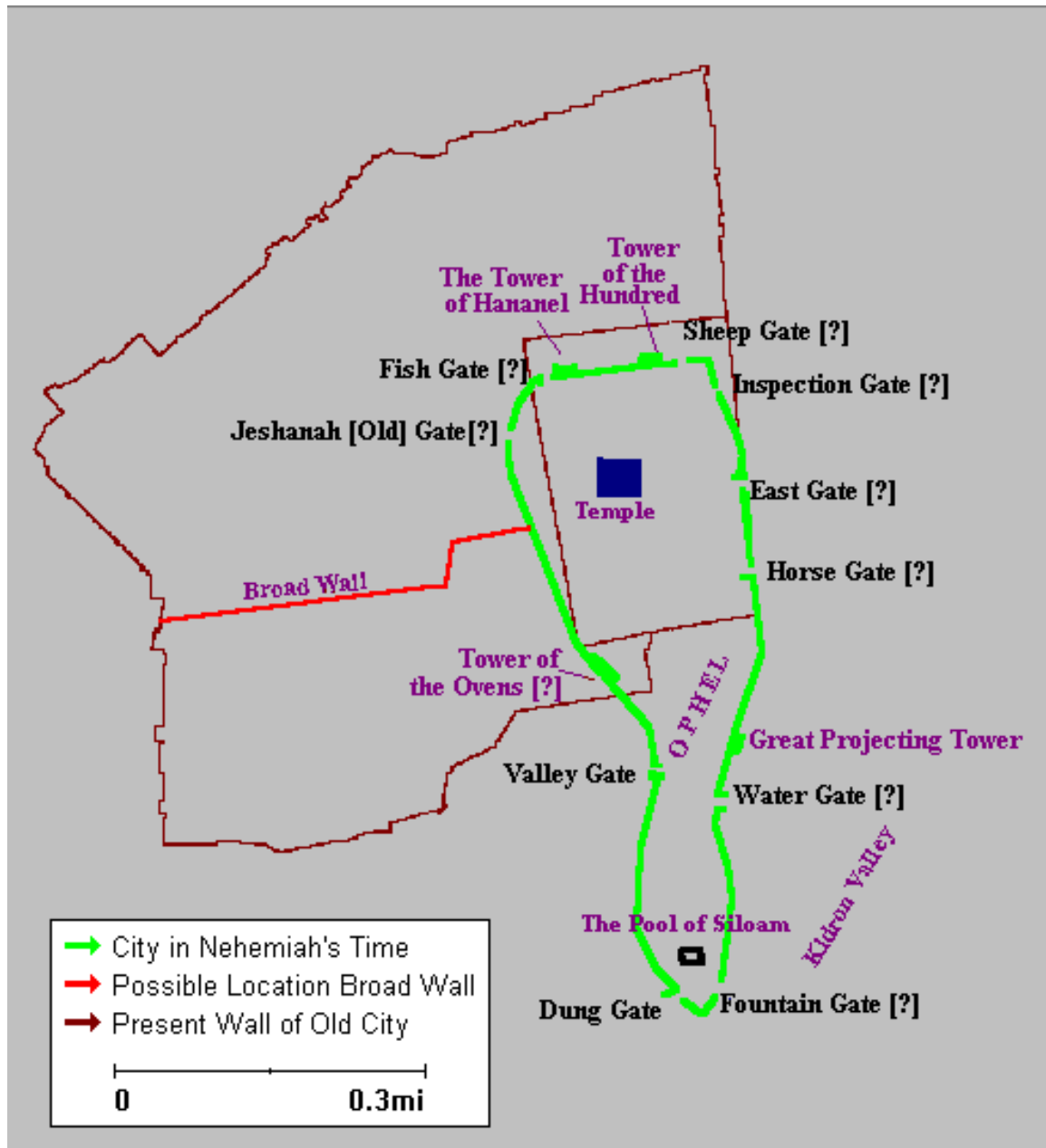
I. INTRO

- A. A mother took her young son shopping. After a day in the stores, a clerk handed the little boy a lollipop. "What do you say?" the mother said to the boy, to which he replied, "Charge it!"
- B. That's some pretty significant influence...We're talking today about **The Pathway To Significant Influence**.
- C. This is the fifth sermon in our series on Nehemiah: God's Work, God's Way, For God's Glory.
 1. We have talked a lot about influence. We have identified *influence* as the MOST basic definition of *leadership*.
 2. What we have said about *influence* and *leadership* is that every person on the planet would like to have more influence in their own sphere of relationships – be it in the home, or in the marketplace, or in our neighborhood, or coaching your child's soccer team.
- D. By way of review:
 1. In week one we took a historical look at the time period leading up to Nehemiah. Here's what that looks like in timeline form:



Three little known facts...
<input type="checkbox"/> Esther is the only book in the Bible that does not mention God by name.
<input type="checkbox"/> Artaxerxes is Esther's step-son.
<input type="checkbox"/> Susa is about 800 miles from Jerusalem and would have taken about two months to travel to Jerusalem.

2. In week two we segued from Nehemiah hearing and weeping over the condition of the people in Jerusalem to a sermon on the Sanctity of Human Life.
 3. In weeks three and four I spoke about The Making of a Leader and then The Prayer Life of a Leader.
 4. For all four of those sermons we mined from the rich vein of chapter one.
- E. Today we finally graduate into chapter two! (And I can tell you that we can now pick-up the pace a little bit.)
1. What we see in chapter two is that if we are to serve God realistically, we must learn to wait on Him, to work with people, and to wrestle wisely with problems.
 2. We see in chapter two that Nehemiah asks the king's permission to go to Jerusalem, the king saying yes, and Nehemiah making the move.
 3. Chapter two tells us about, The Pathway To Significant Influence (or Leadership).
 4. Before we read the text here is a map of the city boundaries during Nehemiah's time:



F. I will read chapter two, then pray, and then we will see how Nehemiah models significant (or effective) influence: *“And it came about in the month Nisan, in the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes, that wine was before him, and I took up the wine and gave it to the king. Now I had not been sad in his presence. ² So the king said to me, “Why is your face sad though you are not sick? This is nothing but sadness of heart.” Then I was very much afraid. ³ I said to the king, “Let the king live forever. Why should my face not be sad when the city, the place of my fathers’ tombs, lies desolate and its gates have been consumed by fire?” ⁴ Then the king said to me, “What would you*

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request?" So I prayed to the God of heaven. ⁵ I said to the king, "If it please the king, and if your servant has found favor before you, send me to Judah, to the city of my fathers' tombs, that I may rebuild it." ⁶ Then the king said to me, the queen sitting beside him, "How long will your journey be, and when will you return?" So it pleased the king to send me, and I gave him a definite time. ⁷ And I said to the king, "If it please the king, let letters be given me for the governors of the provinces beyond the River, that they may allow me to pass through until I come to Judah, ⁸ and a letter to Asaph the keeper of the king's forest, that he may give me timber to make beams for the gates of the fortress which is by the temple, for the wall of the city and for the house to which I will go." And the king granted them to me because the good hand of my God was on me. ⁹ Then I came to the governors of the provinces beyond the River and gave them the king's letters. Now the king had sent with me officers of the army and horsemen. ¹⁰ When Sanballat the Horonite and Tobiah the Ammonite official heard about it, it was very displeasing to them that someone had come to seek the welfare of the sons of Israel. ¹¹ So I came to Jerusalem and was there three days. ¹² And I arose in the night, I and a few men with me. I did not tell anyone what my God was putting into my mind to do for Jerusalem and there was no animal with me except the animal on which I was riding. ¹³ So I went out at night by the Valley Gate in the direction of the Dragon's Well and on to the Refuse Gate, inspecting the walls of Jerusalem, which were broken down and its gates which were consumed by fire. ¹⁴ Then I passed on to the Fountain Gate and the King's Pool, but there was no place for my mount to pass. ¹⁵ So I went up at night by the ravine and inspected the wall. Then I entered the Valley Gate again and returned. ¹⁶ The officials did not know where I had gone or what I had done; nor had I as yet told the Jews, the priests, the nobles, the officials or the rest who did the work. ¹⁷ Then I said to them, "You see the bad situation we are in, that Jerusalem is desolate and its gates burned by fire. Come, let us rebuild the wall of Jerusalem so that we will no longer be a reproach." ¹⁸ I told them how the hand of my God had been favorable to me and also about the king's words which he had spoken to me. Then they said, "Let us arise and build." So they put their hands to the good work. ¹⁹ But when Sanballat the Horonite and Tobiah the Ammonite official, and Geshem the Arab heard it, they mocked us and despised us and said, "What is this thing you are doing? Are you rebelling against the king?" ²⁰ So I answered them and said to them, "The God of heaven will give us success; therefore we His

servants will arise and build, but you have no portion, right or memorial in Jerusalem."

II. BODY

A. Here's what we learn about influence (i.e., leadership) in Nehemiah 2:

1. **Influencers face their fears (v. 2)**
2. **Influencers know they will face opposition (v. 10; 19-20)**
3. **Influencers familiarize themselves with the facts (vs. 11-16)**
4. **Influencers are truth-tellers (vs. 17-20)**
5. **Influencers come alongside – with vision and a testimony of God's faithfulness (vs. 17-18)**

B. We will look at them one at a time:

1. **Influencers face their fears** (v. 2)

- a. We need to ask the question, "Why was Nehemiah afraid?" (The Hebrew word does not indicate it was a holy or reverent fear.)
- b. There are three possible reasons:
 - 1) People were not supposed to be downcast in front of the king; the idea was that the king's very existence was supposed to be a reason for great joy – and he could have someone killed in an instant.
 - 2) In Ezra 4:20, we're told that it was Artaxerxes who stopped construction on the temple because the enemies of Ezra told Artaxerxes that the Jews were rebellious.
 - 3) Nehemiah was normal – just like you and me...
- c. We see in the text Nehemiah's response to his own fear:

1) Nehemiah prayed (v. 4)

- a) While this was a "flare prayer," we see from chapter two that Nehemiah had already developed a strong rhythm of prayer.
- b) Remember our Nehemiah Prayer Initiative (NPI)...

2) Nehemiah planned (vs. 5-8)

- a) Notice that Nehemiah fought his fear through having planned VERY WELL. He knew EXACTLY who, what,

when, where, and how the walls and the gates needed to be rebuilt.

- b) Prayer and planning are not at odds with each other. Nehemiah shows the biblical balance of waiting on God in prayer as well as thinking and planning about what he would do when God opened the door. (Staff meetings?)

2. **Influencers know they will face opposition** (v. 10; 19-20)

- a. Opposition probably isn't the favorite word of anyone in this room. I would much rather deal with and respond to words like "friendship," "kindness," "harmony" or "happiness."
- b. Most of us probably think that our lives should be free from opposition. Here's what some churchgoers think: Jesus suffered so I won't have to.
- c. Let's look to the text to see if we can spot a repeating pattern...
- 1) Notice the end of v. 8: *"...The good hand of my God was on me."* --Nehemiah 2:8 (NASB) Then we read in v. 10: *"When Sanballat the Horonite and Tobiah the Ammonite official heard about it, it was very displeasing to them that someone had come to seek the welfare of the sons of Israel."* -- Nehemiah 2:10 (NASB)
 - 2) Now notice the end of v. 18: *"So they put their hands to the good work."* --Nehemiah 2:18 (NASB) Then we read in v. 19: *"But when Sanballat the Horonite and Tobiah the Ammonite official, and Geshem the Arab heard it, they mocked us and despised us and said, 'What is this thing you are doing? Are you rebelling against the king?'"* --Nehemiah 2:19 (NASB)
 - 3) So, when does strong opposition come? The text tells us (twice) that opposition comes when the *"good hand of God is upon us"* (v. 8) and when we put our hands *"to the good work"* (v. 18).
- d. There is a true story of John Wesley, the founder of the Methodist denomination and circuit-riding preacher, who was riding along on his horse one day when he realized he had gone two full days without experiencing any noticeable persecution.

- 1) No one had falsely accused him, slandered him, threatened him, or ridiculed him. This lack of visible and experiential persecution caused great concern for Wesley and he wondered if he had somehow lost favor with God.
- 2) Desiring to search his heart for what he may have done wrong Wesley got off his horse, knelt down behind a bush and began to pray. Soon afterward another man was riding down the same rode and heard a strange noise and threw a rock into the bush that hit Wesley on the head, who began to rejoice and praise God that the Lord's favor had not departed him.¹
- 3) *"Indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted"* --2 Timothy 3:12 (NASB)

e. Notice that Neh's integrity was questioned in v. 19: *"But when Sanballat the Horonite and Tobiah the Ammonite official, and Geshem the Arab heard it, they mocked us and despised us and said, 'What is this thing you are doing? Are you rebelling against the king?'"* -Nehemiah 2:19

- 1) Nehemiah knew he had the king's permission but chose to confront the men who opposed the rebuilding saying, *"The God of heaven..."* --Nehemiah 2:20.
- 2) A godly influencer must have the discernment to know when to work with people and when to confront and oppose them.

3. **Influencers familiarize themselves with the facts** (vs. 11-16)

- a. Without the facts, there can be no good decision.
- b. Notice in vs. 11-16 that Neh, after three days in Jerusalem, got up in the middle of the night, took a few men (v. 12), and went out to personally inspect the broken down walls and burned gates.
 - 1) A good financial planner will want to know EVERYTHING about your finances in order to develop the very best plan.
 - 2) A career coach or corporate headhunter will want to know everything about a client's academic and vocational life.

¹ David White. *The Times to Come Have Come: Hope and Help in Troubled Times*, AuthorHouse 2009: 50.

- 3) For a church in crisis, an accurate assessment of existing issues is needed before improvements can be made.
 - 4) Until the current situation is accurately portrayed there will be no thriving.
- c. In the best-selling business book *Good To Great* by Jim Collins,² addresses a single question: Can a good organization become great, and if so, how?
 - d. Collins identifies eight key takeaways. Number three says companies that are trying to become great must force themselves to confront the brutal facts and difficulties in order to address them and at the same time they must maintain belief that they will prevail.
 - e. He says three things must happen to confront the brutal facts:
 - 1) Create a climate where the truth is heard.
 - 2) Get the data.
 - 3) Embrace the Stockdale Paradox: "Never confuse faith that you will prevail in the end with the discipline to confront the most brutal facts of your current reality, whatever they might be." -Vice Admiral James Stockdale
 - f. Here are two verses (one from the OT and one from the NT) that say basically the same thing:
 - 1) *"He who gives an answer before he hears, it is folly and shame to him."* --Proverbs 18:13 (NASB)
 - 2) *"Take pains with these things; be absorbed in them, so that your progress will be evident to all. ¹⁶ Pay close attention to yourself and to your teaching; persevere in these things, for as you do this you will ensure salvation both for yourself and for those who hear you."* --1 Timothy 4:15-16 (NASB)

4. **Influencers are truth-tellers** (vs. 17-20)

- a. Not only do we need to confront the brutal facts, but we need to be willing to be truth-tellers at the appropriate time and in the appropriate way.

² HarperBusiness 2001.

1) And notice in v. 17 Neh says: *"You see the bad situation we are in..."* --Nehemiah 2:17 (NASB)

2) He uses the word "we."

b. Here's what the NT tells us: *"But speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ."* --Ephesians 4:15 (NASB)

c. Last summer when we were making our way through the Beatitudes I added a sermon on *Practical Peacemaking – Speaking the Truth In Love – Part 2* (June 20-21) that you could go back and listen to or download the notes. I spoke of four practical ways to speak the truth in love:³

- 1) Speak the truth completely
- 2) Speak the truth consistently
- 3) Speak the truth lovingly
- 4) Speak the truth tactfully

5. **Influencers come alongside – with vision and a testimony of God's faithfulness** (vs. 17-18)

a. Influencers come alongside with vision: *"Then I said to them, 'You see the bad situation we are in, that Jerusalem is desolate and its gates burned by fire. Come, let us rebuild the wall of Jerusalem so that we will no longer be a reproach.'"* --Nehemiah 2:17

b. Influencers come alongside with a testimony of God's faithfulness: *"I told them how the hand of my God had been favorable to me and also about the king's words which he had spoken to me."* --Nehemiah 2:18a

c. And here's what happened: *"Then they said, 'Let us arise and build.' So they put their hands to the good work."* --Nehemiah 2:18b

d. *"Where there is no vision, the people perish..."* --Proverbs 29:18, (NKJB)

C. Here is the essence of Nehemiah's strategic influence:

³ Adapted from a sermon by Rick Warren.

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1. Nehemiah knew how to work with an unbelieving king to gain his respect through competence on the job as well as being tactful and sensitive.
2. Nehemiah knew how to relate to demoralized people (i.e., believers). While intellectually they believed in God and His covenant promises, they had lost hope.
3. Nehemiah courageously confronted his enemies and spoke truth to power.

III. CONCLUSION

- A. What does it mean for *"the good hand of my God was on"* us?
- B. Six times in Ezra (7:6, 9, 28; 8:18, 22, 31) and four times in Neh (1:10; 2:8, 18, 20) we see something like: *"...The good hand of my God was on me"* -- Nehemiah 2:8c, or *"The God of heaven will give us success"* --Nehemiah 2:18 This is the guiding principle, the major theme of both Ezra and Nehemiah.
 1. When God calls us to do something, and we respond, His good hand will be upon us to accomplish the task.
 2. God never gives us anything to do that He will not empower us to accomplish.
 3. We may initially feel daunted by the weight of our call, whether it is to parent our children, to work at a particular job, to witness to our neighbor, or teach a Sunday school class – yet when we are sensitive to God's calling and we respond in joyful obedience giving ourselves over to prayer, we can be assured that God's good hand will be upon us.
 4. Ephesians 2:10 reminds me that when God begins a good work in us, He will complete it: *"For we are His workmanship [poiēma⁴], created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them."* --Ephesians 2:10 (NASB)
- C. This is the pattern of the gospel: God delivers and we gratefully respond. God acts in marvelous mercy and we respond accordingly out of hearts transformed by grace.

⁴ The same word we get our English word *poem* from.

Additional Notes

Sanballat (governor of Samaria to the north), **Tobiah** (ruled the Ammonites to the east), and **Geshem** (the leader of the Arabs to the south) were regional governors (probably) serving under the king of Persia. It was in their best political interests to keep Jerusalem in ruins. They used various ploys in their attempt to disrupt the work of rebuilding:

- They sought to harm Nehemiah (Nehemiah 6:2)
- They sought to intimidate him with false reports (verses 5–6)
- They sought to deceive him with false prophets (verses 7–13)
- They sought to influence the nobles of Judah (verses 17–19). [Eliashib the high priest in Jerusalem was related to Tobiah (Nehemiah 13:4) and one of his grandsons was the son-in-law of Sanballat (Nehemiah 13:28).]

Asaph was the keeper of the king's forest or "park." The forest (or park) from which the timber was to be supplied has been identified by some with the forests of Lebanon, by others with the well-wooded "plain" abounding in olives and sycamore trees near the coast (see 1 Chronicles 27:28). Present day scholars incline to identify it with "Solomon's Garden" at Etan (or Etam), described by Josephus (Ant. VIII. 7.3) as richly wooded and well watered – and about six or seven miles south of Jerusalem. The "pleasure-grounds" of Solomon may have been handed down as "royal domains." The name Asaph suggests that "the keeper" was a Jew, which would favor the view of the forest being not far from Jerusalem. --Cambridge Bible

P.A.S.S. Questions For KHC Life Group Leaders

Sermon Dates: Feb 6-7, 2016

Sermon Title: The Pathway To Significant Influence (or Leadership)

Sermon Passage: Nehemiah 2:1-20

P - Participation (get everyone involved in the dialog)

1. Other than the Bible, is there a book that has had a significant influence on you? Tell us a little bit about it.

A - Application (makes it personal)

2. How can we guard ourselves from disappointment and cynicism when things do not go well in our service for God?
3. When do we cross the line from proper planning to excessive planning? Or conversely, when do we cross the line regarding being "Spirit-led" and failing to plan? What factors can we watch out for in each?
4. How can a person who does not seem work well with people learn this essential skill and become a significant (positive) influence? What steps would you advise?

S - Scripture (thinking biblically is a learned behavior! :-)

5. How can you know when to be diplomatic and when to confront boldly? What guidelines should we follow? (Check out Jesus' various interactions with people in this regard.)

S – Sharing (aim for a time of honest reflection, authenticity, and transparency in a safe atmosphere modeled by you).

6. What would it look like for you to put in the time and energy necessary to be "prayed-up and planned-up" in your life?
7. What are your key obstacles?