

FROM RUINS
TO
REBUILDING

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Lessons from the Book of Nehemiah

BURLISS PARKER



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INTRODUCTION

FROM *RUINS TO Rebuilding* is based on lessons from the book of Nehemiah and can be applied to any area of your life where the enemy, Satan, has attacked and caused havoc or you have experienced an unexpected twist or turn. Maybe it is not a simple twist or turn, but a downright catastrophe. What was once a peaceful existence is now filled with confusion and the endless search for answers. Your mind is filled with questions such as, *Why did this happen?* or, *Where was God when I needed Him?*

Perhaps your spouse has been unfaithful to you, but you have determined to stay together and work through the problems and keep your marriage together. Or maybe your spouse left you and now you are attempting to pick up the pieces of your life. You are trying to raise the children, pay the bills and come up with a plan of what to do next. Or it could be that a poor business decision by you or your

business partner has collapsed your company and you are now filing bankruptcy.

Maybe you are recovering from being hurt during a difficult church situation. You still may be attending the church, but you slip in and out of the church doors, silently suffering. You might have left the church and are now attending another. Or perhaps you are at the other end of the spectrum and are a wounded pastor or a church leader.

It could be that you have been involved in an abusive relationship from which you are now trying to recover and heal. Or maybe you are living with a broken heart because of the sudden death of a loved one or are suffering from the loss of a close friendship.

It could even be that God has given you a vision or a promise and now it seems as if all has been ripped away from you. You feel as if you are now living in the shadows of what used to be.

If any of the above situations apply to you, *From Ruins to Rebuilding* can guide you through the healing process and the journey of reconstructing your life. As we delve into the book of Nehemiah and take a closer look at these issues, we will follow the lessons of rebuilding that are found in God's Word.

Chapter 1

STEP OUT OF THE RUINS

They said to me, “The survivors who are left from the captivity in the province are there in great distress and reproach. The wall of Jerusalem is also broken down, and its gates are burned with fire.”

—Neh. 1:3

THE WORD “SURVIVOR” in Hebrew means “to be left behind to remain; to be left a remnant.” If you are a survivor, you are the one who is left behind to pick up the pieces after the enemy has attacked. You try to hold on to what was left of your life and make sense of what has happened in the situation. These wounds can come from a variety of sources: a broken marriage, a failed business, an unfortunate situation at church, an abusive relationship, the loss of a loved one, the loss of a friendship. In this chapter, we will examine each of these types of wounds and begin to look at the lessons of rebuilding that are found in the book of Nehemiah.

Wounds from a Broken Marriage

If a crisis has occurred in the area of marriage, you may find yourself attempting to bring stability to your home and explain to your children the problem (such as why dad or mom has left). The responsibility for the entire household now falls on your shoulders. You are riding a roller coaster of emotions. Within a matter of moments, you find yourself going from anger to disbelief to depression to confusion.

You may be angry at yourself for not seeing the signs of trouble—the “working late” at the office, the business trips that seem odd but are never questioned, the unfamiliar cell phone numbers and emails. You find it hard to believe that this is happening to you. Weren’t you a good enough wife or husband? You did as God had instructed in His Word. You were faithful in giving yourself to the success of the marriage, but now it has fallen apart and the relationship is in serious trouble. You thought your marriage was strong and indestructible, but the news of the affair or the pornography you found is more than you can handle.

Allow me to relate a recent story told to me by a pastor friend. His small church was struggling and needed help in many areas. A family came in one Sunday to visit the church. On a follow up visit, he discovered that the couple was musically gifted. In a short time, they were leading the praise and worship, and the church started growing.

One Sunday morning, the wife called and said that she and her husband would not be returning to the church. My friend was baffled and asked why. The woman said that her husband’s addiction to pornography had destroyed their marriage. She had tried to keep it hidden, but she could

not take it anymore. Her final words were, “We will be divorcing.”

There was a time when it was primarily the man who left his wife and family in these scenarios. Unfortunately, we have witnessed an increasing number of women leaving the relationship and family. The husbands are the ones left picking up the pieces and raising the children.

I know of one woman who had been married for more than 15 years. Her husband came home one day to find that she had left him and their three children. It was later discovered that she was having an affair. Not only did she divorce her husband, but she also reneged on their bills, forcing her husband into bankruptcy. To this day, the children harbor bitterness toward their mother for what she did to the family.

Wounds from a Failed Business

Crises can also occur in business relationships. Perhaps all was going well in a business venture or partnership that you began. New contracts were coming in. You were adding extra office space, hiring new employees and building a large warehouse.

Then there was a slump in sales, or the market dropped, or the economy slowed. Buyers called and canceled their orders—the slowdown hit them as well. They could no longer pay their bills. You still owe money on the buildings that were completed. The merchandise that fills your warehouses is not wanted, so it just sits. What once began as a promising business venture or new partnership has

turned into a disaster. The company that you poured your life and money into is now gone.

Maybe you were in business with someone whom you thought you could trust, but then found out that he or she had been embezzling funds from the company accounts or abusing his or her privileges. Now the business is in financial ruin. You are trying to make good on the promises that were made or the contracts that were signed, but the task seems impossible. You might have suspected something was not quite right, but you were so busy holding up your end of the company that there was no time to investigate your suspicions. Instead of a having great success in your business, you are now filing for bankruptcy.

Sometimes the problem occurs because believers go into partnership with non-believers. Second Corinthians 6:14 reads, “Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness.” Whether it is marriage or business, the Bible clearly warns Christians not to be connected with non-believers if at all possible. The accounts of broken lives by those who have violated this principle are too numerous to tell. Let’s face it—it’s hard enough at times working with believers!

Wounds from a Church

Anyone who has attended a church for any length of time has undoubtedly been hurt by someone in the church at some time. I have yet to meet someone who has not been deeply wounded in his or her Christian journey.

The wounds might have come from church leaders, pastors, elders, board members or teachers. For instance, many times people of a congregation are asked to embrace the vision of the leader. Some are even pressured by the pastor and church leaders to the point that if they do not agree, they will be forced to leave the church! These leaders fail to remember that the vision of a church is not more important than the people. Jesus died for people, not visions.

Others are hurt because of a conflict with a brother or sister in the Lord. Things are said and done that are unfair, inaccurate and unkind. Instead of resolving the issue, it blows up into a bigger mess, and they end up leaving the church.

I am amazed at the number of hurting people I come into contact with on a daily basis at my church. These people have come to our church looking for a safe haven to nurse their wounds and be healed. Usually, these wounded Christians fall into one of two categories: (1) the walking wounded, or (2) the church abandoners.

1. The Walking Wounded

There are some individuals who come to church every Sunday carrying their hurt and pain in with them. Worse yet, these walking wounded are still hurting when they leave. Those in the church fail to help them address the pain in their life, or, if they do address it, often simply gloss over it without providing them with any real answers for dealing with the issue. Many times, pastors and leaders are so busy with other areas of ministry that these needs are not addressed. A typical pastor does not have the amount

of time needed to counsel and minister properly. So, many times, the needs of these hurting believers are neglected.

2. The Church Abandoners

The second category of wounded Christians are those who have left a particular church and vow that they will never darken its doors again. They may go from church to church, but never find a place to settle. They still love God, read their Bible and pray at home, but they tell themselves that they will never trust a pastor, elder or church person again. They try to heal their own wounds and find their own answers, but this is not always successful.

Hurting believers who are no longer attending a church on a regular basis will create their own standard of a Christian walk. They will devise their own convictions to pacify any sense of guilt they may feel for not obeying God's Word and use an endless number of excuses for the current state of their spiritual decline. They may develop a sense of spiritual pride that tells them that they are just as close to God as they were when they were regularly attending church. Hebrews 10:25 tells us, "Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much more as you see the day approaching." These believers can make all the excuses they want, but the Word of God is clear: They need to belong to a church for spiritual health, healing and growth. A complete healing must take place for these believers to get back on track in their walk with God.

Pastors often find it very difficult to gain the trust of individuals who have been hurt by the church. The pastor

must prove that he or she has no hidden agenda other than their healing. If the pastor's motive is to get another family or tither into church and the hurt is ignored, these wounded Christians will see this and will leave. If, however, the pastor is genuinely concerned for their healing, they will often allow the pastor into their lives, and the healing process can begin. When this occurs, it is exciting to watch these saints believe God again.

In our church, when we have helped people begin and complete the healing process, we have also learned to let them go. Some churches seem to be the healing station for the wounded. Once that has been done, some stay while others move on.

The Wounded Church Leader

Another category of wounded Christian is the wounded church leader. Often, the leader brings this pain on himself or herself. In other instances, the leader is wounded by those in his or her church.

Church Leaders Who Bring Pain on Themselves

One way that leaders bring pain on themselves is through moral failure. I have been serving the Lord for more than 25 years. During that time, I have had the opportunity to serve as a pastor, district superintendent, regional board member, and on our denomination's mission board. Having served in these offices, I have had the unfortunate experience of being called to an emergency board meeting because of the moral failure of a pastor.

In one such meeting, the pastor confessed that he was having an affair with a woman in the congregation. The relationship had been discovered when he called her to find out when and where they would be meeting. She picked up the phone on the last ring, not realizing that the answering machine in the basement had engaged and was recording the entire conversation.

Once behind closed doors, we listened to the story of how the affair began. The pastor told us of the planned rendezvous and the suspicions that his wife had but could not put her finger on. As always, once Satan had trapped him and the woman, the secret was revealed and everything began to fall apart.

A second way that pastors or leaders hurt themselves is through their lack of leadership ability. Pastors can have a vision, but they must also have the ability to follow through on that vision or gather people around them who can. The stress of failing, or a failed vision, will cause leaders to think irrationally. For instance, they might start covering over the financial problems by inflating income or attendance numbers. They may look for ways to rid themselves of the stress—often by turning to the way of the world instead of to God.

A third way that pastors hurt themselves is by setting themselves up as dictators. They demand their congregation's allegiance to themselves in the name of the Lord. Often, these types of leaders manipulate and lie to those following them so that they can get their own way. They may even cover over improper relationships or questionable financial practices by claiming that what they

are doing is for the ministry. Once the people in the church begin to see through this conduct and begin questioning the leader's motives, the pastor may fight back and tell the people that they did not hear from God. Often, they are asked to submit or leave.

I have never met a leader who has had a failure of any kind who began the ministry with the idea of having an affair, taking money, believing that their leadership skills were inadequate, or determining to set themselves up as dictators. The pressure they experience in the ministry or mission field can often lead to their failures.

Church Leaders Who Are Wounded by Those in the Church

My heart goes out to those leaders who have been wounded by people in their congregations, as they have simply tried to obey God's calling in their lives and shepherd the flock God has given them. Whether they are pastoring a church or are denominational leaders, there are and always will be wolves in sheep's clothing. Matthew 7:15-16 says, "Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves...you will know them by their fruits." Examining this verse will give us insights into the motives of some of the people who are in our churches.

"Beware of false prophets ..."

"False prophets" are those who act the part of a divinely inspired prophet. They utter falsehoods under the name of the Lord. They may be people who are already in the

church. They always have a “word from God” for the leader and his or her family. Pastors should especially beware if this is the fourth church they have been to in the last two years—they probably have been asked to leave every other place they have been. The pastor should find out the church these individuals came from and call that pastor. It may save them a lot of heartache.

We pastored our first church in Ohio. One day, I received a phone call from a pastor in the town next to us who told me of a woman and her three sons who had just left his church. He said that she had been to every church in their town and had been asked to leave each church after only a few months. The trouble and pain that her family left in its wake was heartbreaking to hear.

This pastor called to warn me of this family. A few weeks later, the woman and her sons arrived at our church. I did not know who they were until I heard the woman’s name. Immediately, I began to confront her with what I was told. She thought I was crazy, but I wanted to protect the sheep God had given to me. She told me she was a prophetess, but that the pastors of the churches she had attended would not listen to her. She gave me a few examples of what she had said. It was destructive and unbiblical. I asked her to leave and not come back.

The woman and her family went to another church. So I called the pastor and told him what I had done and warned him of her conduct. Unfortunately, he rejected my warning. In three months’ time, she had split his church by getting the people in his congregation to focus on his faults (which is not hard to do, because pastors *are* human). After sowing

the seeds of discontent, the pastor's congregation turned on him. The result was devastating.

Another time, I went to speak at a church that had previously had a man come and conduct a prophecy seminar. A woman in the congregation related this story to me. The man was teaching them how to be prophets. At one of the breaks in the seminar, she overheard one of the participants ask the instructor, "What if I do not have a prophecy for someone who has asked me to give one?" His response was, "If you do not have anything to say, just make something up. They will never know anyway."

This is the conduct of a false prophet. I realize that there are those who legitimately operate in these gifts. But whatever is spoken must be weighed against the Word of God, and only time will tell the accuracy of what was said.

"Who Come To You In Sheep's Clothing ..."

"Sheep's clothing" means "a lamb-like exterior." On the outside, these false prophets appear to be living a godly life. They know what to say and how to act, "but inwardly they are ravenous wolves." "Inwardly" is the place where God sees. He looks upon their motives—the plans that have been formed and what they believe in their secret places. These plans may be hidden from others, but not from God. Eventually, what is inside comes out.

"But inwardly they are ravenous wolves"

A "ravenous wolf" is a robber, or person who extorts. They come in and rob a church's vision, strength, blessing,

joy and purpose. If allowed, they will take everything that God has promised. Oftentimes, churches and pastors are so desperate to increase their attendance that they do not question people about where they have been and why they are at the church. Wolves are cruel, greedy and destructive. They do not come in to help the church but are sent by Satan to destroy it.

We have always had a 90-day rule in the churches we have pastored. This allows time for us to get to know the people that have come in and for them to get to know us. They get to know our vision and direction and determine whether or not they want to join us.

Remember that wolves run in packs. They either come in as a pack, or a leader arises and gathers a pack around himself or herself. How many times have you heard, “I am not the only one who feels this way”? Wolves run in packs and attack in packs.

These wolves can be on your staff, council or church board, or they can be people in the pew. I have heard of accounts of pastors going on vacation, only to return and find that the board had a meeting while they were gone. On their return, they are notified that they are no longer wanted and have 30 days to move out of the church and get a new job.

Church Leaders Who Are Wounded by Those Over Them

Having served as a district superintendent, I know how difficult it is to make decisions concerning pastors and churches. Sometimes this leads to bad feelings or

wounding of the church leader and the congregation. In some cases, pastors and churches remove themselves from denominational covering because they have been hurt by the actions of the leaders of the denomination.

There are advantages and disadvantages of being in a denomination. The advantages are:

1. There is accountability for the senior pastor and leadership of a church. The people in the congregation have someone to turn to who is over the leaders of the congregation if they believe things are getting off track.
2. The church can quickly replace the leadership. When a pastor or lead elder steps down, there is a pool of likeminded individuals who can be called on to fill the leadership positions.
3. The church can accomplish more. Being in a fellowship of churches allows individual churches to accomplish more because they are part of a group. The pooling of resources can support missionary families and men's, women's, youth, children's and other ministries.

An independent church may not have access to these advantages. However, they have other benefits:

1. There is no denomination or group telling the church what to believe or to interfere with its vision or direction it is going.

2. The finances of the church can be directed to the ministries and projects of its choosing.
3. There are no leaders who have influence on the church's future.

Having served in both roles, I can honestly say neither is better than the other. It is a matter of how God is directing each leader and congregation.

To return to my original point, church leaders can be wounded by those over them. Often, the situation involves dealing with a pastor who is greatly loved by the members of his congregation, and even though there was disciplinary action taken because of a moral failure, the congregation wants him to remain the pastor. Unless the failure was sexual in nature, it is unlikely that the denomination will allow the pastor to stay. In most cases, having the pastor remain as a leader is simply not acceptable. If this results in the church pulling out of the denomination, it can leave a bad taste in the mouths of the congregants for organized religion.

Sometimes a church leader will make decisions that will impact the future of pastors to advance up the organizational ladder. Unfortunately, all too often it is not what the pastor knows, but who he or she knows. This scenario is played out behind closed doors. Men and women who are qualified and called to go to the next level of leadership are denied opportunities to advance because they are not in the right circle. Worse yet, those who are promoted have fewer qualifications. Within a short time on the job, their inability to lead becomes apparent, yet they are left in those positions because the leadership will not recognize its mistake and

correct it. The problem with this is that not only does the person in the office suffer, but so do the people he or she is overseeing. As a result, many men and women become frustrated with the politics or denominational leadership and leave for independent church positions (or leave ministry altogether).

James 3:6 reads, “The tongue...sets on fire the course of nature, and it is set on fire by hell.” To “set something on fire” means to destroy or to operate destructively. “The course of nature” means the wheel of life. In other words, the tongue can destroy someone else’s life by changing the course that had been set for him or her by God. James tells us that this kind of destructiveness is from hell, or is influenced by hell.

Yes, God calls people to rise to the next level of leadership that He has prepared for them. But the powers that are in charge make decisions that actually change the course of those individuals’ lives. This leaves them feeling baffled as to what happened. They begin to doubt their ability to hear from God.

Perhaps the person is a strong and outspoken leader, or maybe that individual spoke his or her mind to a leader over him or her. Then, while in a council meeting, the board determines that they do not want such boldness in leadership. Not only is the person shattered because of the outcome of their decision, but something else has happened: the leader has joined the ranks of the “functioning wounded.” The leader still has to go about his or her daily duties, listening to the struggles of others while he or she tries to cope with his or her own disappointment. It is very

difficult to care for and reach out to others in this state of mind, but the leader must carry on.

The truth for those in leadership positions is that regardless of whether the wounds came from people in the church or from a leader over them, they must deal with the issue and receive healing from the events that have happened. If not, the leaders will just carry these wounds with them from church to church or ministry to ministry.

Wounds from an Abusive Relationship

Abusive relationships fall into many categories. We have already discussed abusive church leaders, so we will move on and cover two other types of abuse: (1) verbal abuse and (2) physical abuse.

Verbal Abuse

As we discussed, James 3:6 states, “The tongue...sets on fire the course of nature.” Verbal abuse can change the course of a person’s outcome in life. A child or an adult who has been told that he or she is dumb or stupid has a mountain to climb in life if they are going to accomplish anything in life. The same is true for the person who has been told that he or she is unattractive and that no one would want them.

Physical Abuse

Physical abuse in families, like verbal abuse, often occurs behind closed doors. Only the spouse and children know what is happening. In one church we pastored, a lady called

me to make an appointment, saying that it was urgent. When she entered my office, she began to cry uncontrollably. After praying and waiting for her to calm down, she began to tell me of her husband's violent temper. I was shocked! He was the quietest man in the church. A few weeks later, she called and asked me to come to her house as quickly as possible. Before I arrived, the man had flipped over the furniture in the living room and torn pictures off the wall. The place was a mess.

I came to realize that the man was using his anger to control and intimidate his family into submission. However, as the children grew older and left home, they refused to let his outbursts affect them. Of course, that made him even madder. Now the children only come around when necessary. They have little use for their father.

In many situations, the victim will stand up to the abuser and confront the person with an ultimatum that if the abuse does not stop, he or she will leave or turn the abuser over to the authorities. This works for a while, but most often the person slips back to his or her old ways. However, once the final decision has been made to bring the abuse to an end, the next challenge for the victim will be to recover from the physical, mental and emotional scars. The goal for the person is now to rebuild his or her life. The hardest part of that journey is to somehow learn to trust people again.

Wounds from the Loss of a Loved One

The death of a loved one is one of the most difficult and heartbreaking events you will experience in life. This is true regardless of whether it is a sudden death or you have

witnessed the loved one's gradual decline and suffering from a disease. I remember the morning I received the phone call that my dad had passed away. We had just been with him a few days before while celebrating my parent's thirty-fifth wedding anniversary. Dad was laughing, joking and enjoying the moment. He appeared to be perfectly normal. Then the call came from out of nowhere that he was dead. He had suffered a heart attack at age 61.

Within a three-year period, my grandmother, mother and mother-in-law had died. Grief overload! It took me more than a year to adjust to the void that was left in my life. What a reality check! We all know that people do not live forever. But when it actually happens, it can cause you to rethink what is important in life.

The sudden death of a spouse, child or other loved one is devastating—especially if he or she was a young man or woman whose life was still ahead of him or her. This kind of loss is hard to comprehend. You can struggle with how God could have allowed such a tragedy to take place. Where was He? What was the loved one's spiritual condition at the time of death?

Maybe you have been praying for someone who is dying, asking God to heal them. You have been trusting God to intervene on that person's behalf and believing in Him for a miraculous healing. But to your disappointment, the word comes that the person has passed away. Why did God not answer your prayer? You trusted, you believed, and your faith was engaged with all of the spiritual strength you could muster. You did everything the Bible instructed you to do

when believing God for a miracle. But instead, you found yourself standing next to a casket.

Not only are you dealing with the devastating loss of a loved one, but you are also dealing with the death of a vision. The plans you made for the future will now not take place. I know that my wife and I have made many plans for our future—the direction of our ministry, where we would like to be five years from now, the hope we have and how we think we are going to get there. The death of either one of us would mean a death of the vision, for when the person you are making plans with dies, so does your future with him or her. Yet with time and healing, there will again be a new vision and new hopes.

Wounds from the Loss of a Friendship

The final topic I would like to address before we move on is the wounds suffered from the loss of a friendship. Suffering the loss of a close friendship is extremely difficult. The parting of ways could have been as simple as you deciding to do something different and not including your friend, and he or she took that personally. Your friend may have demanded that you choose a side in the midst of a church split or a relationship that he or she was involved in. Your friend wanted your opinion and you gave it, but it was not what they wanted to hear. Now, perhaps someone you had been friends with for years won't even speak to you. You have tried to speak to the person in an effort to restore your friendship, but they will not even acknowledge your efforts.

The Function of Walls

In each of these scenarios, you will most likely be tempted to blame God or to be angry at Him for allowing these things to happen to you. Why didn't He prevent it? Why didn't He stop this from happening? Why did He let it go this far? Where was His protection? Where was His promise? After the initial shock of what has happened has passed, you will then be faced with the decision of either living in the ruins of what has taken place or gathering the strength to change your circumstances and walk through the process of healing.

In the book of Nehemiah, the children of Israel were faced with the same dilemma. In 586 B.C., the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar marched his armies to the city of Jerusalem. He destroyed the city, pillaged the Temple of God, burned the gates and tore down the walls of the city. The people were led away, which began the period known as "the Babylonian captivity." Then, after a time, a remnant of the Israelites were allowed to return to the city of Jerusalem. One of these returning Israelites, a man named Nehemiah, was given an assignment from God to rebuild the walls and hang the gates.

Walls have only two functions: to keep something out or to keep something in. Both are viewed as ways of protecting. Such walls can be placed into three categories:

1. *Literal walls.* The first category is the literal wall, such as the one Nehemiah was assigned by God to rebuild around the city of Jerusalem. The original walls were built to keep out the Israelites' enemies,

such as the Babylonians. But Nebuchadnezzar set up camp and waited for the people of the city to run out of supplies. The walls that were built to protect them then became a prison. There was no choice for them then but to open the gates and surrender. They had to do this or die.

2. *Spiritual walls.* The second category involves the spiritual significance of building walls. The above example of Nebuchadnezzar setting up camp outside of Jerusalem is a great example of how Satan works out his plans against us. He camps outside of our lives and waits for an opening so he can enter. There may not be a great assault on the wall of protection around us, yet he sits outside, tempting and drawing us to open the gates and drop our guard. Once this is done, he will enter into our lives, seizing the opportunity that we have given him. Then the destruction begins. Just like Nebuchadnezzar, Satan will destroy, if possible, the very thing that kept him out. He will destroy the walls and burn the gates of our lives.
3. *Mental and emotional walls.* The third category concerns the mental and emotional walls that we build to protect ourselves. These walls are meant to keep people out, or at least at a distance. There are reasons why we build such walls. Sometimes it is because we have been deeply hurt and need to protect ourselves from more pain. We want to prevent it from happening again as much as it is in our power to do so. Other times, we put up mental

and emotional walls because close relationships make us feel uncomfortable. We lack the skills or ability to function in a normal relationship or in society.

We all have a protective mechanism that will engage if we sense the need to protect ourselves. The key is to put up the wall as needed and lower it when it is not needed. The wall goes up to stop the enemy, stop the hurt, or to protect ourselves. But if we do not learn to lower the wall or open the gates, we may be keeping out what God wants to do in our lives. We may be keeping out the love of our family who needs access to our heart.

The Decision: Rebuild the Walls or Live in the Ruins

By the time Nehemiah arrived in Jerusalem, 142 years had passed since Nebuchadnezzar's armies destroyed the city. During that time, the Israelites who had returned had chosen to live in the ruins of the broken walls and burned gates instead of taking it upon themselves to rebuild them. The situation had become their reality and a normal part of their lives. They went about their daily routines. They married, raised children and grandchildren, and buried those who had died, all the while living in the shadow of the destroyed walls. This went on to the third and fourth generations.

There are people all around us who have experienced wounds and are now simply existing in the ruins of what has happened. These people are found in our families,

in our place of employment, and in our churches. They have no desire or emotional strength to change their circumstances.

Think of the people you know who are living in the brokenness of what has happened to them. They are accepting the ruins of what has happened as normal. It is now a part of their everyday life. They lack the emotional and physical strength to move from the mindset of living in the ruins to rebuilding the walls that protect their lives from the attacks of the enemy.

Even though walls are simple, they provide a very valuable function. This is why Nehemiah's mandate from God was to rebuild the walls and replace the gates. In the same way, God does not want you living in the ruins of what has happened in your life and believing that brokenness is normal. *It is not normal.* Nor is it where God wants you to remain.

Naturally, after a traumatic event, there will be a season of depression and closing up your spirit emotionally. Yes, you have been deeply hurt. But God does not want you living in the ruins of past hurts or simply adapting to your circumstances and allowing them to become the environment that rules your life. He wants to bring you out of the ruins, help you rebuild your life under His direction, and heal the pain. He desires to come into your life and rebuild it. Only He can take the pieces of what has happened, turn it around, and make you whole again.

You may need to get professional counseling to help you sort through what has happened and assist you in setting new priorities. You will need to immerse yourself in prayer and the Word, bring stability to your home and children,

hang around people who support you and give you strength, and get up and go to work everyday so you can provide for your family and pay the bills. It will be difficult, but if you trust in God, He can lead you through the healing process and begin to rebuild the walls of your life.

It is time for a new vision with a new hope, a new promise and a new purpose. But if you look at your circumstances, shrug your shoulders and tell yourself, *There is no use to try, this is the way life is now and it will never change*, you will never be motivated to get out of the ruins of the past and embrace the possibilities of a God-directed future.

