

## 3. REBUILDING

### Starting over again in church life

*Nehemiah 2:11-20*

#### **Making gradual progress**

The whole world is entering into a massive rebuilding project following the experience of the coronavirus pandemic. Nothing has been left untouched by the impact of this period of history. Airlines, shops, restaurants, sport and the entertainment industry. So many of the pillars of life have been laid waste. In church life too, we will find ourselves rebuilding our worshipping life, pastoral care, organisations and finances.

#### **– TO TALK ABOUT –**

**Q. What aspect of your church life do you think will be most challenging to rebuild?**

Rebuilding is probably even harder than building. We set to work again with a very real sense of what has been lost. It can feel like we will never get back to where we were before, never mind push on positively into a better future. Heavy hearts accompany the heavy lifting. Just when we feel like we might be getting somewhere. We can experience setbacks along the way. Just being church in a rapidly changing world wasn't getting any easier before the pandemic. Now, we may feel a boulder we were straining to push up hill has just rolled down to the bottom again.

**Let's have a look at the familiar story of Nehemiah starting over again to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem that had been laid waste by the invading army of the Babylonians in Nehemiah 2:11-20. As we do so let's reflect on how it might guide us as we gradually make progress again in rebuilding our church life.**

#### **PARALLELS AND PATTERNS**

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*Read Nehemiah 2:11-20.*

*Do so slowly. Listen carefully. Pay attention to the details. Reflect on how things feel at different parts of the story. Let the story sink into your soul.*

#### **– TO TALK ABOUT –**

#### **PARALLELS**

*Line up the story alongside your recent experience of living through the coronavirus pandemic. Use the questions below to help identify and talk about some parallels.*

Nehemiah returns to his beloved Jerusalem to find it in ruins. The first thing he does is make an inspection of how things are under cover of darkness with only a few others present (vv11-15). He is carefully assessing what needs to happen and where to start the rebuilding.

**Q. How do you find your congregation just now? What has been lost and gained? Where might you start to rebuild – by visiting others at home; addressing financial issues; improving your website and social media communication?**

Having gained a good overview of the situation, Nehemiah is very open with others who will need to share the work of rebuilding (v17). He is not just rebuilding walls. He is restoring confidence in a community.

**Q. What will it look like for our whole congregation to be enlisted and involved in rebuilding church life in light of the coronavirus and lockdown? In what areas might confidence need to be restored?**

Talk about other parallels you can see between the story and our situation today.

**PATTERNS** *Line up the story alongside your recent experience of living through the coronavirus pandemic. Use the questions below to help identify and talk about some patterns for living as followers of Jesus.*

Nehemiah is careful to balance realism and encouragement in what he says to the people. He admits ‘the trouble they are in’, but also shares the encouragement of God’s ‘gracious hand’ in releasing him from the King Artaxerxes’ service and providing for the rebuilding (chapter 2:1-10).

**Q. Which are we more likely to veer towards in our congregation when facing challenges, a lack of reality or a lack of encouragement? What is the impact of that imbalance on our congregation’s ability to rise to challenges?**

No sooner has the work started than a setback occurs in the form of mockery and ridicule at the idea that the people can ever rebuild the walls (v19). Nehemiah counters this by pointing to God and urging the people to keep going (v20).

**Q. What particular challenges to rebuilding your congregation’s life again do you see on the horizon? How has your congregation dealt with setbacks in the past? What might you learn from how Nehemiah deals with them here?**

Talk about other patterns of who God is and how he acts, or lessons that we can learn in living as his followers and his church, that emerge from this story.



## POSSIBILITIES AND

## PERSPECTIVES

### – TO TALK ABOUT –

#### POSSIBILITIES

Take a moment to think about the initial impression this story made upon you as you read it and the discussion that you have just had. What sticks in your mind? What do you particularly sense God prompting you to think more deeply about?

Pause and take a moment on your own, or share with the person next to you, your sense of what God is saying to you or your congregation from your reflections on this story?

#### PERSPECTIVES

Prepare to share with others what impression God has made upon your heart. Do your best to put this into words. Maybe it will be the same as others, maybe it will be different. Pay attention to the conversation that is about to start so that God can deepen and widen the impact of his Word.

Share with the whole group the lessons you think God is teaching you and your congregation through his Word, by his Spirit.

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## PATHWAYS

## TO PURSUE

### – TO TALK AND PRAY ABOUT –

#### *Thinking*

What has reading this story against the background of your experience of the period of coronavirus pandemic caused you to think again about?

#### *Living*

In what specific ways will that make you change the way you live as a follower of Jesus and reshape an aspect of your congregation's life?

#### *Praying*

Pray together for strength to follow through on what God has taught each person and the implications for your life together as a congregation.

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## PROMISE AND

## PRAYER

#### PROMISE

*The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his field. Though it is the smallest of all seeds, yet when it grows, it is the largest of garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds come and perch in its branches.*

Matthew 13:31-32

#### PRAYER

Lord of creation and recreation,  
builder of a kingdom that can never be shaken;  
help us in this period of rebuilding,  
in life and church and world,  
to rediscover the glory of small and slow,  
the beauty of planting and patience.  
Give us faith that frees us from hurry and worry,  
big hearts, generous in giving,  
keen eyes to perceive what you are growing among us.  
In Jesus' name,  
Amen.