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Peninsula  
Church

...to make and mature more followers of Christ

*Break My Heart for What Breaks Yours*

Nehemiah 1:1–11

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*series: Nehemiah: Rebuilding Your Broken World*

Have you ever prayed a prayer where you have cried out to God, "Disturb me, Lord"? This week I found a prayer written by Sir Francis Drake, the British explorer who is famous for circumnavigating the globe back in the 16th century. He is the same Drake behind Drakes Bay north of San Francisco. I never thought of Sir Francis Drake as a man of God. I don't think the Spaniards did either. But his prayer, "Disturb us Lord," disturbed me this week.

Disturb us, Lord, when we are too well pleased with ourselves, when our dreams have come true because we have dreamed too little, when we arrive safely because we have sailed too close to the shore.

Disturb us, Lord, when, with the abundance of things we possess, we have lost our thirst for the waters of life; having fallen in love with life, we have ceased to dream of eternity; and in our efforts to build a new Earth, we have allowed our vision of the new heaven to dim.

Disturb us, Lord, to dare more boldly, to venture on wider seas where storms will show your mastery; where losing sight of land, we shall find the stars. We ask you to push back the horizons of our hopes; and to push into the future in strength, courage, hope, and love.

To phrase it another way, have you ever cried out to God in a prayer that started out, "Break my heart for what breaks yours"? You have probably sung that phrase if you come to our worship services, but has it ever been your personal and intentional prayer?

We begin a new summer teaching series in the book of Nehemiah called, "Rebuilding your Broken World." What do we mean by broken world? There are seasons in our lives where God calls us to especially take notice of the brokenness in our world. And seeing that brokenness, he calls us to become disturbed by what we see. There are many in this place who know first hand that God compels to do something, anything to try to right a wrong, to fix an injustice, to save a victim because we know that seeking to rebuild a broken world comes from the heart of God.

One of my joys as Community Life Pastor is to visit Community Groups and hear about what God is doing. This past year I visited one group that formed because they sensed God's call to come together because God had disturbed them with all the injustices they saw in their outer world. They were not compelled to simply come together to discuss the injustices, but they wanted

to become available to God to become part of the solution to the injustices they saw. In this Nehemiah series God may want to disturb some of us to engage our outer broken world.

As a Community Life Pastor, I also enjoy hearing how God works in our inner world. Our Men's Fraternity meetings recently ended for the summer and I was touched in one of our end-of-the-year sharing times. A man stood up and shared that he was having big time personal heart issues. He honestly shared about his broken inner world and the consequences of sin and poor choices he had made. And then he gave thanks that his Men's Frat table mates all had each other's cell phone numbers and he could text his mates when he needed the strength that came with prayer for his inner world. In this Nehemiah series, God may want to disturb some of us to engage our inner world.

So let's dig into Nehemiah: Our map shows the entire region of Nehemiah's time, which was about 450 years before Christ. At that time most of the known world was ruled by two nations, the Medes and the Persians. It was called the Medo-Persian Empire. The Persians were bigger so sometimes the Medes got left off the headlines.

If you remember, 500 years before this was the high point of Israel's history. David, a godly king, was on the throne for 40 years. David expanded the nation in both size and influence. But things went downhill from there. After his son, King Solomon died, Israel was split into two kingdoms. The Northern Kingdom had 10 tribes and was called Israel. The Southern Kingdom had 2 tribes and they were referred to as Judah. Because of Israel's disobedience the Assyrians conquered this northern kingdom of Israel and the 10 tribes were scattered.

The Southern kingdom saw all this happening to their northern neighbors yet they still continued to rebel against God. Then in 586 BC, about 130 years before Nehemiah, King Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonian Army captured Jerusalem and destroyed it. They knocked down the walls and burned the temple. The Jews were forced into slavery again. Many were taken off in chains into exile in Babylon, 1000 miles away.

But God didn't forget about his people. He allowed the Persians to take over the Babylonians and then God moved King Cyrus of Persia to allow some of the Jews to return. So about 50 years after the destruction of Jerusalem, the first wave of Jewish immigrants returned to Judah and they began rebuilding the

Temple. In 516 BC, about 70 years before Nehemiah the Temple was rebuilt.

Over those next 70 years more immigrants came to Judah and tried to rebuild the city around the temple. Also, King Cyrus of Persia died, and a couple of other kings came and went, and then Artaxerxes became King. Artaxerxes had two famous Jews—Ezra, who was a Jewish prophet and priest, and Nehemiah, who was the cupbearer or food taster of the king—serving in his royal court. So Ezra returns to Jerusalem first and teaches God's word to the people and led them in worship. But the walls of the city remained in ruins and the city remained unprotected.

And here is where we pick up the story. The year is 445 BC, Nehemiah is in Susa, which is Artaxerxes' winter palace. He is 800 miles from Jerusalem, serving Artaxerxes.

**The words of Nehemiah son of Hakaliah: 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 had survived the exile, and also about Jerusalem (Nehemiah 1:1-2).**

Remember, Nehemiah had a great job as long as no one tried to poison the king's food. He lived in a palace, had a cushy job with everything he needed. Yet something wasn't right in his spirit. He questioned the men. The word "questioned" means "to inquire or demand" an answer. He sought them out for a first hand report. We see that Nehemiah asked them two questions. He wanted to know about the people in Judah. How are they doing? He had never been to Jerusalem but he knew about his ancestors being led out of the holy city in chains.

He also asked about the city of Jerusalem. It's been said that the true Jew never completely forgets Jerusalem. He wanted to know about the people and he wanted to know the condition of the beloved city. But we shall see that these simple questions of concern led Nehemiah on a journey to rebuild a broken world.

### **Rebuilding Your Broken World Starts with a Concern**

It's easy to live uninvolved or unexamined lives, as Drake said, "sailing too close to shore," apathetic with no vision to change anything in our lives or to use our lives to make a difference in the world. Whether it's a concern for the state of your inner world or for the state of your outer world, any positive change begins with a concern. Some of us need to start asking and get concerned.

**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" (v. 3).**

Look at Nehemiah's response to the awful report he received.

**When I heard these things, I sat down and wept (v. 4a).**

The bad news moved from Nehemiah's head into Nehemiah's heart. He not only sees the need, he now feels the need. His response is passionate. He is touched. He is brokenhearted. A person with vision to rebuild a broken world has a breaking heart. He or she is outraged at the difference between what is and what could be.

### **Rebuilding Your Broken World Requires a Breaking Heart**

So I ask you: What injustice? What travesty? What immorality do you see in your outer world? What evil makes you sit down and weep? What makes you angry? We are never used of God until God has opened our hearts and made us feel deep sorrow over the needs around us.

In the same way, a vision to change anything in your inner world also requires a passionate response. Change doesn't happen until we pound the table and say enough, till we look deep inside and respond, "Rise up o man or woman of God, be done with lesser things." I refuse to be in bondage! I refuse to keep sinning. I give up. I've tried and failed so many times. I surrender. I need God's power because I am weak. I really do want to change! Tell me what to do God. Nehemiah then shows us exactly what to do to rebuild your broken world.

**For some days I mourned and fasted and prayed before the God of heaven (v. 4b).**

Don't miss this. We will learn in chapter 2 that he mourned, fasted and prayed until April; four months before he took action.

### **Rebuilding Your Broken World Requires Persistent Prayer**

Nehemiah knew this problem was way too big for him. To see the vision to solve this problem required prayer, lots of it. We will see that this time of prayer prepared him for what was to be ahead.

In the next few minutes we are going to look deeper at Nehemiah's prayer. As we study this prayer, my prayer is that we don't get too caught up in the study of how Nehemiah prays. Instead get caught up in prayer. These verses don't say that when Nehemiah wanted to rebuild his outer world he talked about prayer. It says Nehemiah prayed.

**Then I said: "Lord, the God of heaven, the great and awesome God, who keeps his covenant of love with those who love him and keep his commandments, 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" (verses 5–6a).**

### **Recognize God for Who He Is**

Remember who Nehemiah's boss was? His boss was Artaxerxes, the greatest and mightiest king on earth. But compared to God, Artaxerxes was a flash in a pan. So here is Nehemiah in the king's

palace in Susa, and his concern was far off—Jerusalem, two cities—one rich and the other poor, one strong the other weak, one proud, the other broken. But when we recognize God for who he is, we have the proper perspective of what is most important. When we recognize God for who he is, it puts us in the mindset of recognizing that we are praying to a God who can rebuild our broken world.

**I confess the sins we Israelites, including myself and my father's family, 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 (verses 6b–7).**

## Repent of Sins

I'm struck by this part. Nehemiah, far away from the happenings in Jerusalem, saw himself as part of the problem. You would think he would be blaming his ancestors but instead he looks within and blames himself as well. It is so easy to blame others for our problems, isn't it? Nehemiah is saying, "Lord, I am wrong. I not only want to be part of the answer, I confess that I'm part of the problem."

The language reveals a high level of intensity. Day and night, overwhelmed over his sin, he confesses. Like Psalm 88:1: **"Lord you are the God who saves me; day and night I cry out to you; turn your ear to my cry."** I see honesty. It's implied here, but confession means specific confession. He identifies his own sins and the sins of the Israelites and confesses them and receives forgiveness for them and then repents; he turns a new direction back toward God.

If you are here today and God is disturbing you about rebuilding your inner world, it is especially important to realize that you must be honest. When we are not honest with God darkness doesn't come to light. But when we are honest with God in confession and express we are fed up and desire to turn a new direction into the light, then we hang on to God to make that turn because we can't do it on our own. It's when we hang on to God as we make that turn of repentance that we are then flooded with God's amazing grace, mercy and forgiveness.

1st John 1:9 says, **"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness."** If you are here today and God is disturbing you about rebuilding your outer world, it is also important to confess. For me this week I needed to confess my apathy toward the injustices around me, I needed to confess my selfishness to want what I want when I want it, and I needed to confess I can judge others who are suffering in this world because of what I judge to be poor decisions I assume they made that put them there and then abandon any sense of responsibility to help. Nehemiah could have easily responded: They are reaping what they are sowing, it isn't my problem. But Nehemiah let God disturb him. Let God disturb you.

We learn here that Nehemiah owned what he did wrong, and then he moved on. He didn't wallow. Look at how in the next three verses he expresses confidence in God's promises.

**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" (verses 8–9).**

I'm going to tell you right off the bat, God likes it when we remember his promises and count on them.

**They are your servants and your people, whom you redeemed by your great strength and your mighty hand (v. 10.)**

## Remember God's Promises

It's an awesome thing when we face something broken in our world that we can go back in history and remember God's faithfulness to fulfill his promises. Nehemiah based his prayer upon God's past dealings, and he saw in past history a mirror that reflected back to him God's future plans.

In the same way I encourage you to see God's promises that will unfold this summer through the book of Nehemiah as a mirror reflecting God's future plans for you to rebuild your broken world. Someone calculated that there are over 7000 promises in the Bible. The better we know the Word of God, the better we'll be able to pray with confidence in God's promises.

**"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." I was cupbearer to the king (v. 11).**

Nehemiah knew that God would keep his promises. He was now ready to make a commitment to be involved.

## Request Specific Help

Can you see the progression after God disturbed him? His concern led him to a broken heart, which led him to prayer. While he was weeping, fasting and praying, he expressed how great God is. Then while focusing on his great and awesome and holy God, he was reminded of his own wickedness and he cried out in confession. Then after owning his own sin he prayed boldly with confidence in God's promises, and that led him to a commitment to get involved.

I want you to pull out the little card that is in the bulletin. I want to challenge you as we begin this series in Nehemiah to spend the closing few minutes in our service to pray. I challenge you to pray over your broken world.

I trust that the Spirit of God brought to your attention something that disturbs you. It might be in your inner world. It might be in your outer world. God's son, Jesus Christ our Savior, came and lived and gave up his life so that our broken worlds could be rebuilt. He is in the business of using prayer to rebuild broken worlds wherever they are.

I want you to understand that when you pray, that our Savior Jesus Christ sits at the right hand of God as our high priest. He intervenes on our behalf. He is powerful and he is personally invested in each one of us so much that he died for us and has a plan for us that includes rebuilding what is broken. Hebrews 4:16 says, *"Let us approach God's throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need."*

We can have a variety of excuses for not asking God to break our hearts for what breaks his. It's not a pleasant thing to look inside and see our broken inner world. It's hard to look inside and see our greed, our anger, our addictions, our troubled marriages, our workaholicism, our prejudices, our unconfessed sin, and our unforgiveness. Our pattern may be to try to remain undisturbed. We may be tempted to ignore God today and say:

- I don't want to change; I'm managing the broken parts of my world okay. I've limped along for a long time, I won't change now. I have my own plan.
- I have failed so many times before, God isn't powerful to me. I don't believe his promises are for me; maybe for you, but not for me. I've learned to live with disappointment, even despair.

- I like being in control. God's never been in control in my life. I wouldn't know how to surrender control to God even if I wanted to and I don't want to.
- I'm afraid of what God might require of me if I let him into those dark parts of my heart.

And that outer world... in those quiet reflective moments, we see the injustice, the exploitation, the evil, but we may incline to ignore God and make excuses and respond with:

- I can't let myself be disturbed. I am afraid of what God might ask of me.
- I have other responsibilities; this injustice is for someone else not as busy as I am.
- I am not equipped to get involved. I will defer to someone else who must be more skilled than I am.
- I'm afraid. Chuck Swindoll said, "Knees don't knock when we kneel on them!"

All I can say is, go to prayer.

God loves you too much not to disturb you. Lay out your broken world before God. Trust that persistent prayer will clear away the fog and give you a vision to see what's broken through God's eyes. Trust that persistent prayer will give you your next step that captures God's vision for your broken world. Let prayer calm your fears and prepare you for action. I don't know about you, but after praying, I am more prone to trust God to do the rebuilding.

*This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.*