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Living in HisStory: Revealing the true wonder of who God is
Living Your Calling
Nehemiah 1-6
March 18, 2018, Ryan Davis

Good morning everybody!

I want to take a moment and welcome you to Campbell River Baptist Church! If you are new here, we are honoured to have you with us this morning, and if you're a regular attendee, then we're very glad that you could join us as well!

My name is Ryan Davis and it's worth noting that I'm not typically who you would see standing up here on a Sunday morning, as many of you already know. However, on this Sunday I do get to stand up here and share God's Word with you; which is exciting!

If you haven't been with us for very long, we have been going through a huge series as of late. We are covering an overview of the Bible in a little over a year and a bit, and we've been at it for seven months already. Sometimes we cover great spans of time in a sermon, and sometimes we slow down and take a look at individual moments that God used to shape and mold his plan for redemption and salvation.

Now today we are going to be digging into the book of Nehemiah and I'm going to do my very best to cover the whole book of Nehemiah in one go, so bear with me and know that I'm only going to have time to draw attention to certain key concepts that come up in the book and that for you to truly grasp the beauty and fullness that the book of Nehemiah has, you will have to go and read it for yourselves! And believe me, if you haven't read this book, it is well worth the read!

It's worth noting that it is really easy when we read a book like Nehemiah to go through it and only see it in its historical context. What I mean is, we focus on the physical material that is being presented by the book and we process it as events of the past. Maybe, sometimes, we might pick up on what God was doing, way back then, but more often than not, stories like this one are so far disconnected from our lives today that we miss what God wants to say to us through them. We miss the impact that they can have on our day to day lives here in 2018.

The book of Nehemiah is all about following God's call; it's about revival and renewal. It's the story of how the faithfulness of Nehemiah and a few other people led tens of thousands back into a right relationship with God.

It's interesting timing for me with preparing this message. I normally speak with the youth, and just a few weeks ago we were talking about this idea of how do we find God's calling in our life.

I'll start with one of my personal favorite verses which is found in the book of Micah:

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Micah 6:8 (NLT)

O people, the Lord has told you what is good, and this is what he requires of you:

to do what is right, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God.

You see following God's call on your life is not about discovering the one, end all be all task or job that only you can do for God. Rather, God's call on all our lives is to "do what is right, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God."

In saying that, I believe that each person here is designed uniquely. In 1 Corinthians 12:29-30, the apostle Paul talks about how God has specially designed His church.

Paul says this,

[3]

1 Cor. 12:29-30 (NLT)

29 Are we all apostles? Are we all prophets? Are we all teachers? Do we all have the power to do miracles? 30 Do we all have the gift of healing? Do we all have the ability to speak in unknown languages? Do we all have the ability to interpret unknown languages? Of course not!

I believe what Paul wrote in Romans 12:6-8 when he teaches that God has given us different gifts.

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Romans 12:6-8 (NLT)

6 In his grace, God has given us different gifts for doing certain things well. So if God has given you the ability to prophesy, speak out with as much faith as God has given you. 7 If your gift is serving others, serve them well. If you are a teacher, teach well.

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8 If your gift is to encourage others, be encouraging. If it is giving, give generously. If God has given you leadership ability, take the responsibility seriously. And if you have a gift for showing kindness to others, do it gladly.

Paul is talking about how we need to recognize that God is calling us to take seriously the gifts that he has given us and to use them to the best of our abilities in our life, whatever that may be.

So we can see that God gifts each person very uniquely, and I also believe he puts unique burdens in our hearts in order to spur us on into action for His kingdom work.

Let me explain what I mean by that.

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With the Youth we looked at how if you combine what you are good at (in other words, how God has uniquely gifted you) with how God has burdened your heart (what makes you restless or keeps you up at night, what do you see in the world around you that needs to change). If you combine those things, you can find ways to impact the world around you for God's kingdom.

We get to witness that very thing happening in the book of Nehemiah. God puts a huge burden on Nehemiah's heart and he gifts Nehemiah with a very specific role, and all Nehemiah can do, is submit it before God and then act in faith.

We are going to see that God gifted Nehemiah very uniquely, and because of Nehemiah's faithful answer to the call God placed in his heart (do what is right, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with God), Nehemiah led Israel back to God.

Now let's look at the book.

Historically, the book of Nehemiah takes place at a really interesting time. Jeff did an amazing job at explaining all this last week, so if you want to hear a more in depth explanation of some of this check out last week's sermon. Israel, God's chosen people, had been living in captivity for around 125 years leading up to the opening of the book. Because of their unfaithfulness and their propensity to move away from God, God let King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon overrun Jerusalem, breaking down its fortified city walls and burning its city gates. After the conquest, Nebuchadnezzar took Israelite people into captivity in Babylon.

Around 70 years later the province of Babylon fell to the Persian empire and the Israelite people that had served Nebuchadnezzar became servants to a new line of kings for around another 55 years. During all that time, a very small remnant of Israel managed to stay behind in Jerusalem and had survived the exile. They lived in the war-torn shell of Jerusalem. The city around them was broken and crumbled, burned and decayed.

Nehemiah 1:2-11 sets the stage for us.

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Nehemiah 1:2-11 (NLT)

² Hanani, one of my brothers, came to visit me with some other men who had just arrived from Judah. I asked them about the Jews who had returned there from captivity and about how things were going in Jerusalem. ³ They said to me, "Things are not going well for those who returned to the province of Judah. They are in great trouble and disgrace. The wall of Jerusalem has been torn down, and the gates have been destroyed by fire."

⁴ When I heard this, I sat down and wept. In fact, for days I mourned, fasted, and prayed to the God of heaven.

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⁵ Then I said, "O Lord, God of heaven, the great and awesome God who keeps his covenant of unfailing love with those who love him and obey his commands, ⁶ listen to my prayer! Look down and see me praying night and day for your people Israel. I confess that we have sinned against you. Yes, even my own family and I have sinned! ⁷ We have sinned terribly by not obeying the commands, decrees, and regulations that you gave us through your servant Moses.

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⁸ "Please remember what you told your servant Moses: 'If you are unfaithful to me, I will scatter you among the nations. ⁹ But if you return to me and obey my commands and live by them, then even if you are exiled to the ends of the earth, I will bring you back to the place I have chosen for my name to be honored.'

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¹⁰ "The people you rescued by your great power and strong hand are your servants. ¹¹ O Lord, please hear my prayer! Listen to the prayers of those of us who delight in honoring you. Please

grant me success today by making the king favorable to me. Put it into his heart to be kind to me.” In those days I was the king’s cup-bearer.

Back at the start, I said that I believe God places unique burdens on our hearts in order to spur us into action for his kingdom work. These are the things that keep us up at night, these are the things that make us restless, these are situations we hear of that make us say “AHH!! I wish someone would just do something about that.” This is the kind of burden we see befall Nehemiah. He was so moved by what he heard that he mourned for days.

When I read that passage the first time, what seemed strange to me about the whole situation was ‘why?’ Why was Nehemiah so touched, so moved by this situation? Nehemiah would not have known anyone back in Jerusalem. He wasn’t there when it fell. He never saw the glory of the city in its prime.

In fact, Nehemiah wouldn’t have known any other life apart from the one he lived as an exile in Persia, as cupbearer to the king. The exile that happened to his people, happened around 120-150 years before he heard about the state of the city of Jerusalem and the remnant living there.

Nehemiah lived a plush life in the palace serving the king, but upon hearing that the home of his ancestors was in ruins, he breaks down and mourns and prays for days. It almost seems like the burden on his heart was supernatural, or was put there for a reason: to spur Nehemiah into action.

Now let’s look at one of the ways God so wonderfully gifted Nehemiah. It may not look like the type of gifting we would normally think of, but God gifted Nehemiah with his place as cupbearer to the king.

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Nehemiah 2:1-6 (NLT)

Early the following spring, in the month of Nisan, during the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes’ reign, I was serving the king his wine. I had never before appeared sad in his presence. ² So the king asked me, “Why are you looking so sad? You don’t look sick to me. You must be deeply troubled.” Then I was terrified, ³ but I replied, “Long live the king! How can I not be sad? For the city where my ancestors are buried is in ruins, and the gates have been destroyed by fire.”

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⁴ The king asked, “Well, how can I help you?” With a prayer to the God of heaven, ⁵ I replied, “If it please the king, and if you are pleased with me, your servant, send me to Judah to rebuild the city where my ancestors are buried.” ⁶ The king, with the queen sitting beside him, asked, “How long will you be gone? When will you return?” After I told him how long I would be gone, the king agreed to my request.

Nehemiah goes on to ask for letters from the king for safe travel, for supplies and for building materials, all of which the king gladly provides.

It’s easy to think of Nehemiah’s position as just a job, but without that ‘job,’ without that daily audience with the king, Nehemiah would never have had the ability or position to make such an audacious request.

Think about it: Nehemiah is essentially a slave, an exiled captive, and yet he has such high standing with the king that he gets support and supplies to leave and go re-build the fortified city of his ancestors!!

This is the moment where we see God's gifts and the burden of the heart meet, in order to reveal God's calling on Nehemiah's life. But we've reached a bit of a crossroads in the story. You see up to this point, Nehemiah has recognized that God wants him to do something. Now, for Nehemiah, it's going to take great faith and endurance to walk forward and pursue what God is calling him to do.

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This is a broken wall! Now, who here would know where to start, if you were tasked with fixing it? Who here would want to take charge and figure out how to lead a crew to see this project, this wall rebuilt? I have done some construction, but I would not want to be the one who was asked to go and rebuild this wall.

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Let's look at what Nehemiah was tasked with. Biblical historians say the walls of Jerusalem during Nehemiah's time were 4,018 meters (2.5 mi) long, their average height was 12 meters (40 feet) and the average thickness was 2.5 meters (8 feet thick)! The walls contained 34 watchtowers, seven main gates open for traffic and two minor gates.

Remember that Nehemiah was a cupbearer, not a stonemason. So imagine how insurmountable the task of rebuilding the walls would have seemed to him if he were not looking at that task with faith and confidence that this was God's plan and that God had a way.

The same goes for us. As we move from recognizing God's calling on our lives into active pursuit and engagement with Kingdom work, we will inevitably find ourselves pushed outside of our own natural abilities and limits. We will be stretched and we will feel uncomfortable and we will have to learn how to lean into God and persevere.

Now, as the book of Nehemiah continues, we see Nehemiah inspect the walls. He comes up with a plan of action as to how to move forward and work begins on rebuilding Jerusalem. But as Nehemiah moves forward with what God has called him to do, opposition rises up against him.

This is a theme we have seen all throughout the Bible so far. Satan is actively working against God's people and God's plan. For Nehemiah, the opposition took the form of three political enemies who saw what was happening in Jerusalem and felt threatened by it.

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Nehemiah 2:19 (NLT)

19 But when Sanballat, Tobiah, and Geshem the Arab heard of our plan, they scoffed contemptuously..

[16]

Nehemiah 4:1-3 (NLT)

Sanballat was very angry when he learned that we were rebuilding the wall. He flew into a rage and mocked the Jews, 2 saying in front of his friends and the Samaritan army officers, "What does this bunch of poor, feeble Jews think they're doing? Do they think they can build the wall

in a single day by just offering a few sacrifices? Do they actually think they can make something of stones from a rubbish heap—and charred ones at that?”³ Tobiah the Ammonite, who was standing beside him, remarked, “That stone wall would collapse if even a fox walked along the top of it!”

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Nehemiah 4:11 (NLT)

¹¹ Meanwhile, our enemies were saying, “Before they know what’s happening, we will swoop down on them and kill them and end their work.”

You see, the opposition to what God wants to do is fierce! It was fierce in Nehemiah’s day and it is fierce for us today as well.

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1 Peter 5:8 (NLT)

⁸ Stay alert! Watch out for your great enemy, the devil. He prowls around like a roaring lion, looking for someone to devour.

In the case of Nehemiah, despite the many, many attempts to intimidate him, to distract him and to discredit him from the work that was set before him, Nehemiah was alert and ready for the coming attacks. He persevered through it all and eventually, the walls around Jerusalem were completed and the gates were rehung.

He was able to overcome great obstacles and adversities and his enemies were eventually silenced without him ever having to actually fight them himself.

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Nehemiah 6:16 (NLT)

¹⁶ When our enemies and the surrounding nations heard about it (wall was finished), they were frightened and humiliated. They realized this work had been done with the help of our God.

Because of Nehemiah’s faithfulness and obedience to what God had called him to do, the Israelite remnant that had been living in “great trouble and disgrace” was now secure and safe and because of what they saw God do through Nehemiah, they repented and returned to God’s Word.

The book of Nehemiah is an amazing example of what it looks like to live out God’s calling, but we don’t want to simply see that it went well for Nehemiah and the Israelites way back then. We need to take what happened then and apply it to our lives today.

The same God that gave Nehemiah the burden for change, the same God who provided a cupbearer a way to rebuild 4018m of walls, gates and towers around Jerusalem, the same God who silenced Israel’s enemies and provided safety and security is the same God that works in our lives today.

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Hebrews 13:8 (NLT)

⁸ Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever

The first thing we need to do is learn to recognize the God-given gifts in our lives. I think this is difficult for a lot of us to do because it feels self-centred or arrogant to say you are good at something. But if you are giving glory to God by saying that these attributes, these skills and blessings come from him, then it can be a form of worship. You are recognizing they are his gifts to use for his Kingdom glory.

The second thing we need to do is recognize the burden that God is putting on our hearts. I'm not saying burden in the sense of a crippling load or exhausting task. In fact in Matthew 11, Jesus Himself says His burden is light.

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Matthew 11:28-30 (NLT)

28 Then Jesus said, "Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. 29 Take my yoke upon you. Let me teach you, because I am humble and gentle at heart, and you will find rest for your souls. 30 For my yoke is easy to bear, and the burden I give you is light."

Although Jesus is saying his burden is light, he is still saying there is a burden. The burden I'm talking about is one like Nehemiah felt. It was a burden that made him "pray and mourn for days", It was a "sadness" that even the King of Persia recognized. It is a burden that brings us to the foot of the cross and leads us to respond to God.

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Isaiah 6:8 (NLT)

Then I heard the Lord asking, "Whom should I send as a messenger to this people? Who will go for us?" I said, "Here I am. Send me."

Once we have seen how God has blessed us and once we have recognized how God is moving our hearts we need to learn to personally step out into the work God has for us and to faithfully pursue God and his kingdom. Then we will be leading others to become committed followers of Jesus Christ.

This concept of following God's call may seem really daunting to some of us here today. I think some of us fear that God's call on our lives is going to be some booming voice from the clouds that tells us to "move to Madagascar!" "plant a Church!" "solve world hunger!" but I don't think that's the case for most of us. I think it's simpler than that.

I know that my life was changed by a small group of men back in Winnipeg, who responded to the burden that God put on their hearts when a scrawny new guy walked into their church building back in 2009.

I came to know Jesus Christ personally because a few men answered the restlessness on their hearts and began to build into my life. They spent time with me, they prayed for me, they put up with me when I was rude and arrogant and they picked me up when I fell. God called them to surround me with love, to build into my life and because of their faithfulness, my life was changed.

So today, as we head out for lunch, and as we step back outside into our lives, let's take some time and ask, "What is God calling us to?"

I believe Jesus summed it up very concisely when he said,

[23]

Matthew 22:37-39 (NLT)

***'You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind.'*³⁸ This is the first and greatest commandment. ³⁹ A second is equally important: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'**

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That's because God's call is not a needle in a haystack. It's not some super specific role or task for us to complete. It's learning how to walk with Jesus and it's learning to become better at loving people into his kingdom.



Living in HisStory: Revealing the True Wonder of Who God Is
Living Your Calling
Nehemiah 1-6
Week of March 18, 2018

Objective of this study: To discover more about God's call on your life.

[Remember, the main goal of each Growth Group is to allow God's Word to change your heart so that others would see Jesus in you and be likewise changed to be like him. He wants to change the world through us]

Worship (5 – 10 minutes)

1. Sing a song or two of praise and thanksgiving to God.
2. Spend five minutes in silence asking God to prepare your heart for how he wants to speak to you.
3. After the five minutes have someone interrupt the silence and read **Psalm 100** meditatively to the group. Pause after each phrase letting God speak to you. **Did anything “jump out at you”?**

Welcome (5 minutes)

What keeps you up at night?

[It's really important when doing this study that we each think about ourselves specifically and ways we need to grow, not how Christians in general need to grow. Do the hard work of letting the Holy Spirit speak to *your* heart.]

Word (30-45 minutes)

1. What stood out from the sermon?
2. As we go through this study about "Living Your Calling" there are 4 key themes that relate to God's call: gifts, burden, opposition, and beneficial results. Keep these in mind as you proceed...
3. Read Nehemiah 1-2:20; 4:1-3, 6:15-16
 1. Describe the various characters in this narrative. What were they feeling? What motivated their choices and actions?
 2. What kind of opposition did they get? How did the Israelites respond? How did Nehemiah respond?
4. What has been your idea of “calling”?
 1. What do the following verses have to say about how God wants us to invest our lives? Micah 6:6-8; Matthew 22:37-39; Matthew 11:28-30.

Work (30-45 minutes)

Sermon Quote: “How [has] God uniquely gifted you? And how [has] God burdened your heart (what makes you restless or keeps you up at night, what do you see in the world around you that needs to change)? If you combine those things, you can find ways to impact the world around you for God's kingdom.

1. Break into pairs and discuss:

1. What do you see as your God-given gifts? Think about your strengths, skills, and even circumstances and opportunities (like Nehemiah's circumstances of having an audience with the king).
2. What has God burdened your heart about?

Sermon Quote: "As we move from recognizing God's calling on our lives into active pursuit and engagement with Kingdom work, we will inevitably find ourselves pushed outside of our own natural abilities and limits. We will be stretched and we will feel uncomfortable and we will have to learn how to lean into God and persevere."

2. Have you experienced what the above sermon quote describes? How did it affect your feelings? How was God faithful to you?

3. Read Nehemiah 7:1-2 and 8:1-3. What were the beneficial results of Nehemiah's response to what God put on his heart?

4. What beneficial results have you experienced because someone responded to God's call?

5. How have you seen someone else benefit because YOU responded to God's call? How did that affect your heart?

Sermon Quote: "Because of Nehemiah's faithfulness and obedience to what God had called him to do, the Israelite remnant that had been living in "great trouble and disgrace" was now secure and safe and because of what they saw God do through Nehemiah, they repented and returned to God's Word."

1. Spend the rest of the time praying for each other. **Praise God together for how he works, and how he allows us to partner with him to accomplish things in his kingdom.**

2. Here are some things you can pray about for the church:

A. That, as a church, we would actively and purposefully engage in the mission of Jesus in Campbell River.

B. Our church board and staff as they lead us to live out the mission of Jesus

C. River Kids ministry as they reach out to kids in our community.

D. **Our missionary of the month:** Sandy Ewan in South Sudan

E. **Our missionary of the week:** : **Grace & Gene Fox**, International Messengers

F. **Local CR church:** Quadra Island Bible Church