

So today we're finishing up the message series called the Divine Direction. Over the last several weeks we've been taking a look at where God is calling us and how we might follow after God in our everyday lives. And today I believe that perhaps just maybe that God might be calling you to something new, something different. And the thing about something new is that we have to step away from what's old. That we have to move from what was familiar and secure and safe to something that is maybe unfamiliar and maybe a little bit riskier and maybe not something that we're used to.

When it comes to something new in our lives, oftentimes what the challenge is, is the very beginning that gets us stopped, but it's the start that stops us. And I don't know about you, but sometimes when you see a picture of someone else that does something that you would like to do, that you aspire for, that you think, "Oh man, that's amazing." Maybe it's an ability that they have, a skill that they have. Maybe it's athletic achievements, something that they've done. And you think, "Oh man, I could never get there." And so we just never start. And sometimes I know that's true for me, I see a picture of something and I'm like, you know what, I could never, I can't see exactly where we're going to go, so I'm just not going to start. The thing is that you'll never finish something that you don't start. You'll never finish something that you don't start.

So today we're going to take a look at the story of Nehemiah in the Old Testament. And I do want to remind you a little bit about this story. The story of Nehemiah is, well, the backstory is this, the people of Israel had been called by God to live in a particular way to worship at a particular place. They built a temple and a city there in Jerusalem. And God says, "I want you to live in this way." And unfortunately, they don't do that.

The same story that's today is the same story as it was then. God calls us to live faithfully and the people turn away. They miss out on what God has in mind for them, and part of that story at this particular case is that that God allow the Babylonians to come in and they destroy the city of Jerusalem. They tear down the temple, they destroy the city walls, and the place where God's home was to be on earth is in ruins. And not only that, but most of God's people are in captivity. They've been taken into exile from the place that they had called home into a place that's a foreign land.

And it's decades later, it's 140 years later when a small remnant is allowed to come back to Jerusalem and try to rebuild the city, but the thing is it's not going very well. They're discouraged, they're embarrassed, they're humiliated, that they're really not making progress. And so that's the story. That's the context of what's happening when Nehemiah comes on the scene. Now, Nehemiah is in ... he's in Babylon, and he's actually working for the king. He's not even in Jerusalem, and yet he says, you know what? This is not okay with me. How things are, is not as it should be. This is God's place. We are God's people. As long as I'm alive, I'm not going to stand for this. We need to do something about this situation. The city wall is being destroyed. It's not what God called us to. The temple, not being a place for God to live, it can't be.

Nehemiah has a burden about what God has in mind. A divine burden is what Nehemiah has. He has this in mind for the city of Jerusalem, for the temple there, and I believe that God's still places divine burdens on us today, and maybe some of you have a divine burden. Something in your life where you look at it and you say, you know, this is just not right. That things are not as they should be in my family, in our community, in the surrounding area. And then you say, somebody has got to do something about that, and then sooner or later you may realize maybe that someone is me. I wonder, do you have a divine burden in your life? This tug on your heart.

Part of what I believe is that when we feel a burden about something and maybe God leading us in the direction that God would have us to go, sometimes a divine burden reveals God's divine direction. Your divine burden, that which your heart aches on behalf of God often reveals something that God might want you to do. And I don't know what it might be for you. I don't know what it might be for you particularly, or what it might be for this congregation, but I believe that there's something that God has placed on your heart and on our hearts together.

So what do you do when you have this kind of burden? How do you respond to this tug, this desire that things might be differently, a little bit more like a God's kingdom? Well, let's go back to the story of Nehemiah. You see, Nehemiah wasn't really the least likely guy to go back and rebuild the walls of the city to secure the city of Jerusalem. You see, he wasn't a general contractor. He didn't know much about construction. His job at the time was a cup bearer and we don't have cut bears as much anymore, but the job of a cup bearer was to taste the wine before it was served to the king. And you might think, hey, that's a pretty good gig. But actually, it wasn't really a great gig because the idea of the cup bearer was to find out if the king was going to be poisoned. And so the cup bearer ended up dead. Well, the king wasn't going to have any of that to drink.

And so Nehemiah, he wasn't really prepared for it. He didn't have the resume for it and yet he has this burden, this sense that God is calling me to do something. And so what did he do first? Well, he began to pray about it. He took this divine burden that he had and he offered it to God and he prayed a powerful prayer. You can read it in the beginning of Nehemiah in the very first chapter, I just want to summarize it for you. Nehemiah says, "God, you are God. You are the great God of Heaven, and please listen to my cry. Pay attention to what I'm saying to you today." He recognizes that you know what? We have messed up. I have sinned, the people, we have turned away from you and we need your forgiveness. But God, please remember your promises, the promises that you made to our ancestors and give me success as I go before the king today.

You see, Nehemiah goes before the king and he asks for permission to go and go back to the city of Jerusalem and he says, King, I know this sounds crazy, but I want your permission. I'm asking for your blessing, that I might go back to the city of Jerusalem, travel 850 miles and begin this project of rebuilding the walls of the city. What was needs to be again. I feel God calling me to do that. Could you give me your blessing, King? Can you imagine going before the one who was in charge of nearly every detail of your life and asking something like that. An audacious question that you might say, but the King is moved by God and says, yes, you can do it. You have my blessing to go and rebuild the walls.

It's a huge task that Nehemiah is beginning, that he's asking for it. And what is it in your life, when you are thinking about starting something big, how do you start? And for you it might be ... it's something big is particular to each person. It's really something that's significant to you. Maybe it's starting a new business, maybe it's paying off a debt, maybe it's rebuilding a relationship that's broken down, maybe it's doing something here in the life of the church. I don't know what it might be for you, but something big is something that's significant for you. Really, there's no criteria for that. And remember, for so many people, it's the start that stops them. When God has a burden in your life, has a place to burden in your life that God may be leading you in the direction. You have an idea for something big, don't let the start stop you.

The first thing to do is to take it to God in prayer, and then the next thing is to just start small. To have the faith to start small. We hear these words in Zechariah 4:10, "Do not despise these small beginnings.

For the lord rejoices to see the work begin.” Don't be ashamed of starting something small because the lord rejoices to see the work begin. Imagine if you will, a child that's learning to walk. They're cruising along the edge of the furniture, they're getting pretty mobile. They can crawl, no problem just about anywhere you could imagine, and then they start to start thinking about taking that first step.

You can see it in their eyes perhaps, and then they take one small halting step and what do they do next? Of course they fall, right? That's how it goes. And what do you not do as an adult? What you don't do is say, well, guess you took one step and that's it. You're never going to learn how to walk. Now, what do you do instead? You say, this is awesome. It's amazing you took your first step. Keep going, keep at it. And this is the idea that I believe that God has for us. When we take the first step in something that God has called us to do, God cheers is on. And even if we fall down, God cheers us up to keep going and to start small. How do you do something big? You start small and God cheers us on.

In fact, when you think about Nehemiah and you fast forward to the end of the story, we know that the walls of the city are rebuilt, that Jerusalem is secured. And sometimes, we skip from the beginning to the end and say, well, Nehemiah had that burden and the city walls were rebuilt, but there's really a lot in between. If you go to the end of the story and you see that the walls were rebuilt and the city of Jerusalem is secured, but what happened before that is they were working hard on the city walls. It was a big effort and what happened before that is the scripture tells us that they had a weapon in one hand and their tools and the other because of those that might come to attack them. And if you go back a step before that, we see that they're still working hard there on the walls, and if you go back before that, you see that someone had the courage to place the very first stone in the wall.

And if you go back before that, you see that Nehemiah has rallied the people to try to do something that they believe couldn't be done. And if you go there for that, you see that Nehemiah has gone to the city, gone to Jerusalem at night to take notes and figure out what needs to be done. How is this going to work? And if you go back before that, you see him waiting on God. And before that, this 850 mile journey from Babylon and back to Jerusalem, 850 miles. That's a long trip. And before that, what did he do? Well, he had to pack his bags.

If you want to do something big, start small. Put your toothbrush in the bag. I don't know if Nehemiah had a toothbrush, but he had something for the journey. That there was some small step that he started, that began when he had this divine burden in a far distant land to go to a place that seemed nearly impossible for him to accomplish a task. He had the faith to start small. This is what he did in the scripture passage for today. Listen to these words again, “So I said to them, “You see the trouble that we're in? Jerusalem is in ruins and its gates are destroyed by fire. Come, let's rebuild the wall of Jerusalem so that we won't continue to be in disgrace.” I told them that my God had taken care of me and also told them what the king had said to me. “Let's start rebuilding”, they said they eagerly began the work.”

Nehemiah didn't know the details. He didn't know exactly how the work was going to be accomplished. He didn't know how it would play out, but you don't have to have the faith to finish. All God calls us to as the faith to start. You don't have to have the faith to say, well, I can see how we're going to rebuild the city of all of the walls all the way to the end. You just have to have the faith to set down the first stone or before that to pack your bags for the journey. You just have to have faith to begin. You may have a divine burden today or God may give you one in the future. Take it to God in prayer. Have the faith to start small, and then what do you do? Well, you just take the very next step and you start small

and you keep taking steps and God will guide you and direct you. God will watch over you and you take step after step after step and soon, the work is accomplished.

Just another example from my own life, one of the things that I enjoy about the season is putting up the holiday lights. And so we have Christmas lights that we put on our home and I went in a new home this year and so I didn't know exactly how that was going to work, but I've got these great clips. There's little plastic clips are about like this and they clip onto the gutter and they hold the light just so and I got up on the roof and I thought, well, I'm just going to have to get up there and see how is this going to work. And it was a little bit steeper than what I was used to, but I had the supplies with me and I saw the problem here was, we had gutter guards which we didn't have before and so these clips aren't going to work in the way that I thought they were going to.

And so as kind of stuff where one of the machine goes first I thought, wow, that's sort of going to work except the lights are right there where the snow is going to melt or, or freeze up and I don't want it to be a fire hazard here. So I thought, well, I'm going to screw it in somewhere else and I won't be able to put everyone in, but they eventually made their way up and I put them up, I had them along one edge of the house and I had them clipped in one way. And then I dropped them in, I stepped out of my hands and prrrr. They just all fall off the edge of the house. Okay. Well I need to try again. I'm not going to give up. The odds are, I got back up, but there's a little bit different loop where I clipped them in this time and when I left this morning they were still up on the house. But we'll see how they go for the rest of the time.

But here's the thing, the end goal was having the lights up. And they're not up in the way that I had pictured for them. They didn't work in exactly the way that it was going to, but they were up and we made it. I just had to get on the roof and just get started. But before that even, the first thing it had to do was to get those things out of the basement and bring that toad upstairs. And they sat there for a day before finally getting on the roof.

So the point is this, that it wasn't a divine burden to put the lights up, but when there is a divine burden life, there's some small that step that starts. You don't have to see exactly how it's going to end or how you're going to accomplish it, but what you do when God invites us to it just take the very first step in faith, and then step after step after step. God walks with us into the way that God would lead us both as individuals and as a congregation to do things far beyond we might ask or imagine. In ways that can only be done through the power of God. So whenever you feel God's divine burden, take it to God in prayer. Seek God's wisdom and then had the faith to start. To take the very first step, and the good news is, is that God walks with us every step of the journey, and will lead us in the divine direction.

Will you pray with me? God we give you thanks for the opportunity to follow you. And God, there are things in our life where we're uncertain about. That maybe you're calling us to you, but we don't know how it's going to end, and so we ask that you would help us to have the faith to start, to take the very next step, and trust that you walk with us. Help us to follow after you, in Jesus' name, Amen.