



Hometown

Part 1 – Seeing the Needs of the People

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How many of you are grateful that you planted your garden last weekend? We thought *Oh it's April; this is the time to plant a garden*, so we got that going. Anyway... I got out this morning to take the sheets off the garden and it was still 30 degrees! So, you all were still sleeping, the 11:00 service, but you're up now and we are here.

We are starting a new series today out of Nehemiah. I encourage you to bring your Bible during this series or have it on your phone or whatever device you may have. Don't judge people if they are at their device; they're not playing poker or card games; they're scrolling through the scripture.

We're in Nehemiah, looking at the rebuilders of broken walls and lives. If you weren't here last week, we wanted to call this series *Build the Wall*, but we decided that was not the series title appropriate for this and as we read today, we wanted to call it *Build the Wall and Make Babylon Pay for it*, but we're not going there with the series. We are calling it *Hometown* and we want to grow our hearts for our community.

For me, this series has been floating around this church since about last June. Last June, we were invited to be a part of a group meeting. I was invited to go on our behalf to meet with other leaders in our community. There were business leaders, ministry leaders, church leaders, community leaders. It was this simple of a task: Let's find a way to stop the breakdown of the family in Stone and Taney Counties. It was a small vision, a small plan. I was invited to be a part of it, obviously as the pastor of Woodland Hills Family Church, but then also with my passion for marriage.

We gathered in a room, starting in June. I have to be honest with you. I'm one of those ready, fire, aim guys. Who else is ready, fire, aim? A lot of you are ready, aim, fire. Some of you are ready, aim, aim, aim, and you think about things and think about things and maybe don't get started on stuff. I went in this room thinking it was exciting. Here's where we had to start. We had to start with what's the problem? Why is the family breaking down in Stone and Taney Counties?

The group was commissioned for Stone and Taney Counties, but understand that our church family here goes all the way up to Springfield, Missouri, and down to Harrison, Arkansas and east and west is about the same. So, we say this is a series for Southwest Missouri and a little bit of Arkansas; that's what we're calling that the Hometown Series.

Wherever you live, we want you to have a heart for where you live. I love when someone gives a big vision, a big goal. Let's stop the breakdown of the family in Stone and Taney Counties.

We gathered in this room. Some said, "If you want to stop the breakdown and support the family in Stone and Tandy Counties, we've got to have **better quality jobs** so families can provide for themselves. We can't have \$9.00 and \$10.00 an hour jobs be the primary jobs available to people." So, there were people there passionate about building up our economy. Get bigger and better businesses in here and blow up the economy and people will be able to take care of it.

Another group was for poverty. "**Let's just feed people.** If we would meet the physical need first, then we can address the spiritual needs." Some were passionate about **ending homelessness** in Stone and Taney Counties. "Let's move the people out of the hotels." In Branson school district alone, there are 550 homeless students. "Let's go after the hotels."

There were other leaders in the room that the passion that they had was to get people **off drugs** and help those struggling with **alcoholism**. "Let's just get rid of alcoholism. Let's take care of drug abuse." So, recovery center leaders.

The conversation, as everybody shared their passion, started to grow. You can't get a job if you can't pass the drug test. Then if you get a job, but you're making \$9.00 an hour and you were on disability making \$743.00 a month, how are we going to encourage people to go take work for \$2.00 to \$3.00 an hour.

I'll be honest with you; I started to get overwhelmed. I walked out of the first meeting going, "Well it ain't ever going to happen; we're done." Because then it would come around to me and I'd say, "Well, my passion... I'll tell you why the family is breaking down. It's because we don't honor marriage anymore. Husband and wives are saying, 'We'll love the kids, but not each other.' If parents start loving each other and the kids, this is going to change everything. You can't afford divorce because when you divorce, now, on your \$9.00 - \$10.00, you're trying to sustain two households. It's doesn't work; I've done the math."

So, around this room... I started to get overwhelmed. Then I started to get frustrated because you also have in this room... Here's what happens. I want everybody to see it from my point of view, and all God's people said... Amen. You want people to see it from your point of view, and all God's people said... Amen. So, all these passions are going. You can ask our elders. They would ask how it was going. Travis Brawner, part of our teaching team, was one of the first ones I called. He goes, "How did it go?" and I'm like, "I'm done! I'm quitting the group? We ain't gonna get nowhere!"

I have to be honest with you. I've sat through more meetings where we talk and talk and do absolutely nothing. And I have a core fear of wasting time. We were going down the same road. There was another guy in the room and his passion is prayer. "Get everybody praying together." I have to be honest with you. By August, I was so fed up and frustrated and it came from being overwhelmed. Some of you visiting our church today must be thinking, *He's an angry little preacher. He was very frustrated.* I'm just trying to take you on this journey because I'm hoping I'm coming out of this a year later.

Here's where it started to change for me a little bit. I walked into the room towards the end of our meeting together and I looked at people and I'm like, "Not only does this guy have a passion for prayer, he has a passion to get churches and para churches together." In June, I was like, *Good luck with that.* Pastors can develop a distain towards para-church leaders. Para-church leaders can develop a distain towards pastors, "You guys don't do it right. You're not passionate about helping these people, so we're just going to start our own thing." I'm like, *Good luck with that.*

That was June but, as I stepped back into the room a few meetings in, I realized everybody in there has a different passion and here's what I know, and I'm convinced of this. Every passion that's in this room, I believe was given to this person by God. It started to change everything about my outlook on this.

God's given you a passion, he's given you a burden for people. I'm looking around this room. There are people in here... If you went to Pure Joy, let me see your hands. There are women in our community that have been given a burden for women. Some have been given a burden within that group for moms. Within that group, some have been given a burden for single moms.

Last month I had the opportunity to join MOPS... I have to say I didn't join MOPS; I was there to speak to them. That would be on the news real soon, I can tell you that. Like I was telling the women in the restroom earlier, I said, "I worry about y'all. You've got to be careful. There are a lot of perverts out there." Anyway... Paul Harris, if your watching, thank you for that joke. I'm giving attribution. You're like, *That is a Paul Harris joke.*

So, a passion for women, a passion for moms, a passion for young moms. There are people here who have a passion, a burden... I believe God has given them the burden for teen moms. God's called them to help teen moms. First, talk them into having their child. "Give birth to this child and we'll help you." Think about that.

People in here have a passion for college students. In the first service, we had a lady who has given 60 years of life not just to college students, but to international college students. As I think about how God gives people a burden, I'm wonder for you right now, what's your burden? What's your passion?

I realize now in this room of people... And I think it's true in this community... It blows my mind to think about it. If you're not familiar with the National Day of Prayer, the National Day of Prayer is next month. I'm told that the largest gathering in the whole country on the National Day of Prayer is right here in Branson, Missouri. Second to that is Springfield, Missouri. If we're that committed to prayer, I'm just, in my heart and mind, going, "God, you've got to be up to something. There's got to be something that we are going to be able to see families thrive." That's our goal: we want to see families thrive. But, if we get in this room and everybody has their passion, or you could even call it self-interest, as you run ministries and organizations, if we're not careful, we begin judging and getting on one another.

Throughout a lot of the summer, I had an attitude. It's the same attitude I had when I was building my house eleven years ago, trying to find skilled laborers to work on the house. I see some of you are laughing and if we're not careful, we'll develop an attitude.

Do you know what the goal of this series is? It's that you and I... This is what we want for everybody in here. We want to have a **hometown heart, not a hometown attitude**. We want a heart for our community and the people of our community. Throughout this series, we want you posting pictures of your family out in front of the I ♥ Branson sign. Don't you love driving by this and seeing the tourists posing in front of it. They're so excited to be here and you're like "Oh, brother, whatever, we're going on about our business." They're taking pictures of King Kong and the Ferris Wheel. If we're not careful, especially if you've lived here for a while, we can become complacent about the needs of our town. Wherever you live, Springfield down to Harrison, Crane, Kirbyville, Taneyville, Bradleyville, Blue Eye, Branson West, Reed's Spring, Kimberling City, do you see the needs of your hometown?

To jump into this, we're going to be in Nehemiah 1. It's this great book about the rebuilding of the walls and the lives of the children of Israel and the walls of Jerusalem. We're going to jump right in to Chapter 1: 1. You'll see the primary author being Nehemiah. ***1 The words of Nehemiah son of Hakaliah: In the month of Kislev in the twentieth year...*** It's very important to keep that date in your mind because between Chapter 1: 1 and Chapter 2: 1, there are four months between these two. As we are going to see today, Nehemiah is weeping and mourning and fasting and praying for the needs of his people and for the brokenness and the broken-down walls of Jerusalem that are in disarray. It's four months between him hearing about the need and him approaching the king. He was a cupbearer to the King Artaxerxes and he approached him to ask permission to go rebuild the walls. So, four months take place and you'll see that in the timeline.

...while I was in the citadel of Susa, 2 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. We'll see that in the history in just a second. He's going to ask them two questions. He wants to know how the people are doing and how the city is doing. "Tell me about the people and tell me about the city." Why is Jerusalem important? It's because Moses told the people, in Deuteronomy, what God promised to the people. God told the people to "seek the place that you're Lord God will choose from among all your tribes to put his name there for his dwelling," and this would end up being Jerusalem.

Around about 1,000 BC, so almost 3,000 years ago, King David – you can read about this in 2 Samuel 5 – conquered Jerusalem from the Jebusites and it became the capitol city. That was about 1,000 BC. About 400 years later, Nebuchadnezzar would charge in, destroy the city, take the people captive to – here's where I wanted to go with that first original title – Babylon. Then, after 586 BC, Jerusalem is destroyed. Around 538 BC, Jews began returning to Judea. They began returning to the homeland.

Where we pick up in this book, 444 BC, Nehemiah goes to Jerusalem. We'll see next week that he asked permission from the king to go back. This is very important because when you're studying the Bible, you see Nehemiah is in the middle of the Old Testament and you may think this is a chronological order. Nehemiah is at the end of the historical books. He's in line with the end of the scripture which is Malachi. If this gets the timeline going in your head a little bit here, there are 400 years of silence between the Old Testament when Malachi sets down the pen and when we meet John the Baptist. We call it the intertestamental period. So, this is around the time that Nehemiah comes in to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem.

In 444 BC, he goes to Jerusalem and the wall is complete in 443 BC. He gets a burden for the people, he gets a passion for the people, a passion for the city. He asks permission and he goes back. The reason we look at Nehemiah as such a great leader is because he organizes, plans, and completes the wall within 52 days. This is a big project, a massive feat. A date I can't put on here is a date sometime in the future about Jerusalem.

Isaiah the Prophet prophesied when he said, In the last days, **3 Many peoples will come and say, "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the temple of the God of Jacob. He will teach us his ways, so that we may walk in his paths." The law will go out from Zion, the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.** – Isaiah 2: 3 He is speaking here of when Jesus Christ will reign in Jerusalem during the Millennial Kingdom. Jerusalem is at the center not just of the children of Israel's history, but at the center of all of history. So, if you hear Jerusalem being talked about on the news, I just want to encourage you to turn it up a little bit. Lean in and listen to why a conversation about Jerusalem is on the news right now because it's at the center and it's where Christ will reign.

Let's go back to Verse 3 of Nehemiah after he asked the them to tell him about Jerusalem, about the city, about the people. **3 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."**

Here's the response that Nehemiah grips him in the heart with. **4 When I heard these things, I sat down and wept. For some days...** The argument would be made because when you read the beginning of Chapter 2 – and we'll see that next week – the king asks Nehemiah, "Why is your face so sad because you're not sick, what's going on?" It's because he's in this season of mourning about the people and about the city.

I mourned and fasted and prayed before the God of heaven. One of the things we're going to do, during this season and starting right now, is to ask you to become aware of the needs in your city, in your town, in your community where you live. You begin to see the needs, but don't just see the needs because I think about all the other people who heard the news that Hanani brought back to Nehemiah. He told other people, you know that. How many of them heard what was going on in Jerusalem and said, "Oh, that's too bad" "Oh, I hate to hear that" and then went on with their day? People who heard the news who had never even been to Jerusalem. "That was over 140 years ago that it was destroyed, and my grandparents and parents ended up here and I'm here, but I hate to hear what's going on back there." But, when Nehemiah hears it, he begins to mourn. He begins to weep. He begins to fast. He begins to pray.

When I talk about this meeting and I talk about the problems of our community and how we solve them and how we be a church that meets the needs, how we be an influence in this community, I become overwhelmed. I believe I now have a burden for the people that I never had before, honestly. That's embarrassing to say, but I had a great desire and need knowing the community of Branson. "Let's plant this church and see what God does here." But, when you really begin to understand what's going on in the community, it should birth in you a passion, a burden for the people. I've been so overwhelmed... I haven't been four months trying to figure this out, it's been going on a year where I'm still seeing it and

going “We’re not one step closer to solving the homeless problem in our community. We’re not one step closer to really building up a big economy where people can find jobs at \$15.00 to \$20.00 an hour.” Then again, I have to say I’m not here to solve all the problems. God, what to you have for me to do. That’s what we want you to begin asking. “God, what is it you have for me?”

For Amy and me, we’re committing this week... I’m not going to give you the day because we’re not a legalistic church and I’m not giving you a 12-step program on how to do this. But, Amy and I are going to be fasting a praying. I told her this week I feel like I’ve been doing a lot of weeping and mourning and whining, but we need to bring in strong the fasting and praying part. So, Amy and I are going to take a 24-hour period this week to fast, asking the Lord what we do with the burden he has given us. I want you to join us.

Some of you have never fasted before. We have some in here who been on a 40-day fast, others have done a day fast. Again, **fasting is not about the stomach; it’s about the heart.** My encouragement to you is to pick a day this week or during this series, where you begin to fast. John Piper wrote a whole book on fasting and the first line of the book is, “beware of books on fasting.” I thought that was a pretty good way to lead out because people can get very legalistic about this and the way it goes down.

We did an all-campus fast when I was at Liberty University. I just remember the judgment that came upon the people that were walking into the dining hall that day. I remember telling my friends, “He could be diabetic, I don’t think we should be judging him right now.” The point of fasting isn’t to make a big show out of it. It’s to say, “Lord, I have to draw closer to you during this season in my life.”

David Platt and Francis Chan say this about fasting, “Abstaining from food or other things...” For some of you, maybe you’ll start your fasting and praying by giving up technology for a full day. Some people just gasped. “How will I know what my friends are eating?” Can I be honest with you? I think you’ll ruin the whole point of a fast if you brag about it on social media. But, some of you are going to start with technology and give up the phone and the devices for a full day.

Amy and I are doing a food fast. We’re going to give up food for a day. When those hunger pangs set in, we’re going to get together and go to the Lord, pressing in.

“Abstaining from food or other things for a period of time is not an end in itself but a means to cause us to learn about and increase our love for Christ.” – David Platt and Francis Chan

I like what Pastor John Piper says: *“Fasting is an intensifier of spiritual desire.”*

I’ll be honest with you. thinking about fasting this week, I’m just going, “Oh, we’ve got to pick a good day. It can’t be date night. I mean we’re not going to sit there and pray on date night; I want to eat.” If you’ve had a Pour House burger lately, you’ll know. I’m sitting there thinking how we can start this fast so that it will be as convenient as possible for us. We’re missing the whole point. As your pastor, I’m asking this church family for the needs of this community... We’re asking the Lord now.

This is one of those series. It's a weird series for me to start because we don't have a plan for you. We don't have the solution. It's not like, "By the way, out of all these meetings for the last year, we got the plan..." I don't have that. You're like, "You're doing a series on Nehemiah and you ain't got a plan?" I know; we're hoping we get one by Chapter 2 and Chapter 3. I'm sitting here going, "Lord, Lord..." But, if there's anything out of this series, I've heard clearly from the Lord, "Fast and pray." Fasting is an intensifier of spiritual desire.

Calvin put it this way, "*The sacred custom of all ages has been for pastors to exhort the people to public fasting and extraordinary prayer.*" If you get nothing out of the rest of the message today, if you don't know what your passion is or what you have a burden for, if you don't know what you're called to do, weeping and mourning and fasting and praying is a great place to be.

To give you the breakdown of this book and to kind of show you the progress of the book, but also what we want to see happen in our community, it starts with a need. This is awareness. This is knowing what's going on. I've been having conversations with police officers and fire fighters and the mayor and hotel owners. I'll just call them and be like, "Hey, I know you have people living in your hotel, I want to know what we can do, what would help, what would make sense." It's like this fact-finding mission and just trying to understand what's really going on in our community. I've been meeting with drug and alcohol recovery center leaders and if I see one out in public, I jump on it and start asking them questions. I'm just understanding the need. Out of the need... When we see the need is when that burden begins to form.

I'm looking around the room right now at just... It's just fascinating to me. I know people that not only have a passion for evangelism... I talked to a guy a couple of weeks ago. His passion is to reach people in Egypt and India. He said, "Ted, I've been all over the world, but God has given me a burden for the people of Egypt and India."

One of the men we ordained, Brad, is sitting right there. God has given Brad Hutchcraft a passion for Native Americans. He's given so much of his life to that. You see the need and you're like, "God, what are you doing?" As you weep, as you mourn, as you fast, as you pray, this need then turns to burden and it can become a vision. What's possible? "God, what are you calling me to do?" My passion is marriage ministry. Within marriage ministry, I have friends who their passion is crisis marriage. I have one friend that his whole passion is working with blended families and couples who remarry and helping them do that well. I watch how God uses us.

Earlier this summer, it was like sitting around the room going from "Why don't you all think like I do" to realizing God has given us all a different burden. We just have to find out how we bring it all together, that's it.

Then out of a vision, you develop a plan. Here's what we're going to do. I believe we're right here, right now with what we've been looking at for the last year. We ain't here. We're getting there. We may have it by next week. I don't know. This week, my focus is fasting and prayer. "Lord, continue to grow this burden into a vision."

And then out of plan you have commitment. How many of you know someone that they saw the need, they had a burden for it, they had a vision and a plan, and, at the first sign of opposition, they quit? We're going to see opposition in this book as they're rebuilding the wall. It's one of my favorite word pictures from the Book of Nehemiah. It's the picture of a man standing there with a spear in one hand and a trowel in the other. He has to continue to rebuild the wall while he fights off people. Some of us see this great need, have a passion for it, and the first person that comes to you and says it's never going to work, you give up. Some of you know business that see the need in this town for a certain business and they have a burden to do this. They get a vision for it, but they put no plan together and year later, the business fails. You didn't have a plan. You didn't have a strategy for working it out.

We're going to see the vision and the plan come to the surface next week in Chapters 2 and 3, as Nehemiah goes out during the night to inspect the walls and then he gets to work and then he's got to be committed to the project once it starts and fin people off. Keep the work going. Don't stop doing this to do this. We have to do both.

Verse 5... Some of you are thinking I've got a real attitude. I want you to know I'm still processing all of this. I'm still praying, "Lord, give us something." Honestly, I'm waiting for Jack Herschend to change his name to Nehemiah. Jack will you just stand up and tells us what we're all supposed to do. Point your finger in directions we're supposed to go and we'll do it! I'm ready for that. But, maybe turning my direction to the Lord and his plan for our community is where each one of us should turn.

5 Then I said: "Lord, the God of heaven, the great and awesome God, who keeps his covenant of love... One of the things we'll see in Nehemiah that is true of our heavenly Father is that he is continually restoring his people. He's continually calling his people back to him. ...with those who love him and keep his commandments, 6 let your ear be attentive and your eyes open to hear the prayer your servant is praying before you day and night..." This isn't a meal prayer. "Father thank you for this food. In Jesus name, amen." This is day and night. "I can't even think about food right now because, Lord, I need you." You think sometimes we make the mistake when we pray? Instead of God hearing from us, "I need you," he hears, "here's what I need." If all your prayers are petitions, I pray this week you start with fasting and praying, an intensifier of your faith.

Maybe your prayer this week is, "Lord, I don't know how to resolve this relationship or reconcile this relationship with my son or my daughter. I don't know how to do that. I'm going to fast today for wisdom on that, for direction on that." ***"...for your servants, the people of Israel. I confess the sins we Israelites..."*** Watch the personal responsibility in this. ***"...including myself and my father's family, have committed against you."***

This is where I had to get in about August, coming into these meetings, after telling the elders, "I'm out. I'm done. We ain't going to get nothing done," I had to get to "Father, I confess before you my sin, my pride, my arrogance, to say, 'We've got to start with marriage. We can't start with drug recovery. We can't start with prayer (I don't know why that would pop into my mind) in these meetings. We can't start with the homeless problem. We can't start with this, that, or the other; it starts with marriage, getting people to honor marriage.' Lord, may I walk into this next meeting with a heart and a passion for

confession, confessing our sins one to another, to say, 'Hey, God gave you the passion you have, run with it. He gave me the passion I have, I'm going to run with it, and I'm going to let God work it out.'"

The first half of this book is called *Hometown*, the series title so far. The second half of the book is called *Homeland* because we're going to turn it around on Memorial Day to a nation that prays, a nation that honors God's word, a nation that turns back to God as we move from the first half of the book to the restoring of the city to the restoring of the people. As we do that, he's confessing that the problem with Jerusalem... They don't need more funds. They don't need a better plan or strategy. They need to start with weeping, mourning, fasting, and praying. And he is now confessing before his heavenly Father.

7 "We have acted very wickedly toward you. We have not obeyed the commands..." This is why we are in the situation that we're in. This is why the people are disgraced. ***"...decrees and laws you gave your servant Moses."***

8 "Remember the instruction you gave your servant Moses, saying, 'If you are unfaithful, I will scatter you among the nations...' We just said that in 586 BC, Jerusalem was destroyed and they were taken out. ***9 '...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.'"***

10 "They are your servants and your people, whom you redeemed by your great strength and your mighty hand. 11 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."

So, what do you do when you see a great need? I've spent most of the year thinking about the problems of our community and being overwhelmed. What's your response when you're faced with a great need and you interpret that as a great work? There's so much to be done, let's do a little multiple-choice test here on Sunday morning.

When there is great work to be done, you are a) overwhelmed and do nothing. You see the need and your like "There's too much to do, I'm just one person," and you walk away. b) inspired but do nothing. "I heard that story today at church and that really hit me hard, but I went to lunch and on with my day and nothing really came out of it." c) "I was inspired, I got started, but then at the first sign of opposition, I quit. Somebody told me it couldn't be done and they are probably right. Somebody told me the way I was doing it was wrong and I know they're right, so I'm just going to stop doing it." Hopefully, we're moving towards d) inspired and get the job done, staying faithful to the Lord.

So, here's the prayer as you begin seeing the need this week. This is all the prayer we want you to have, and this is how we want you to begin it. **"Father, give me the eyes of Jesus to see the needs of people."** As I heard an author say a couple of months ago, I don't want to cross the street to get away from people that Jesus spent his time with. Maybe let me stop now. Instead of crossing the street to get away from this person, let me stop and now ask him/her to tell me their story. "How did you end up in Branson?" You were struggling with drugs and alcohol, they sent you to a treatment program down

here, you lasted three or four days, they had to let you go out of the program, and you found yourself in a hotel. Now you're in a hotel and you have no job... You hear this story repeated and repeated. Is God giving you a burden in any sort of way to meeting the needs of those in this community?

I admit to you that I've been overwhelmed, and I don't want to be the spoiler alert for those of you who read Oswald Chambers, *My Utmost for His Highest*, but if that's you, would you raise your hand? I'm going to read April 13, so on Friday, just move on or you read it again for reinforcement. It's out of Psalm 55: 22.

We must recognize the difference between burdens that are right for us to bear and burdens that are wrong. We should never bear the burdens of sin or doubt, but there are some burdens placed on us by God which he does not intend to lift off. God wants us to roll them back on him— to literally “cast your burden,” which he has given you, “on the Lord....” If we set out to serve God and do his work but get out of touch with him, the sense of responsibility we feel will be overwhelming and defeating. But if we will only roll back on God the burdens he has placed on us, he will take away that immense feeling of responsibility, replacing it with an awareness and understanding of himself and his presence.

Many servants set out to serve God with great courage and with the right motives. But with no intimate fellowship with Jesus Christ, they are soon defeated. They do not know what to do with their burden, and it produces weariness in their lives. Others will see this and say, “What a sad end to something that had such a great beginning!”

“Cast your burden on the Lord....” You have been bearing it all, but you need to deliberately place one end on God's shoulder. “...the government will be upon His shoulder” (Isaiah 9:6). Commit to God whatever burden He has placed on you. Don't just cast it aside but put it over onto him and place yourself there with it. You will see that your burden is then lightened by the sense of companionship. But you should never try to separate yourself from your burden.

This should give all of us a huge sigh of relief. God's got this.

A few weeks ago, we decided to move our garden. We had three raised boxes, 8' x8'. I built them four years ago in a shady spot in our yard. That's when I realized gardens need sun to grow. Nothing that first year. I told the kids we were doing a garden again this year and our daughter was a little skeptical. “You guys have tried this like four times, haven't you?” “Yeah, but we've got it figured out now.”

The boxes are made out of 2" x 12" and they were pretty easy to move. We moved them clear across the yard, but then we had all the dirt still there packed into these three boxes. I told the kids, “I'm going to pay you for every wheel barrel, not by the hour. I'm going to pay you by the wheel barrel to move the dirt from where it was to the new box.” “How much are you paying us, Dad.” “You get a quarter a wheel barrel.” I'm just kidding. It was may more generous than that.

Then they got excited when they heard the amount and they were on it. But, I only have one wheel barrel. We're not a rich family. We've only got one wheel barrel. Now they got kind of into it of who

was going to start. Carson goes, “She can have it. I’m just going to fill up a big plastic storage tub and drag it across the yard.”

I said, “Yeah, I don’t think so. Carson, that will be 100 pounds.” The dirt is wet. It’s been rained on and it’s soaking wet. “This thing will weight over 100 pounds and you can’t drag it. Even with me helping you, I don’t know if this thing will hold 100 pounds. Just wait for the wheel barrel.”

Now, our wheel barrel is 22 years old. We bought it when we got married. So, at any moment, I know these wooden handles are just going to snap right off of it. But, the tire... The original tire is dry rotted, but it holds air for about an hour and a half, which is plenty. I don’t know how much wheel barreling you do around your house, but all I have to do is get the compressor turned on... We are wealthy enough to have a compressor... I’m just kidding’; that’s a joke.

I inflated the tire and I forgot to tell the kids they only had an hour and a half. By the time Carson gets it, the tire is 100% flat. I forgot I should go out there and air it up. He’s filling up a wheel barrel full of wet compost and dirt. I didn’t get to see him doing it. I wish I had it on video that I could go, “Hey, watch this video of Carson. We hit behind some trees...” He’s pushing this wheel barrel. We put it in this area that used to be a playground, so it has pea gravel that thick. Have you ever tried to push a wheel barrel through pea gravel? Have you ever tried to drive a golf cart through pea gravel? You get bogged down. He takes five wheel barrel loads with a deflated tire through pea gravel. He comes in the house and he’s so worn out. I said, “What’s going on?” And then I realized the tire is completely flat. Part of me said I should have inflated it and the other part of me said, “Thank you, Father, for letting him learn things the hard way.” I’m trying to get responsibility into my kid. I went out there and inflated the tire and I go, “Look how much easier that is.”

Do you know why I’ve been so frustrated since the start of these meetings and talks in June. It’s because I’ve been that guy pushing a deflated wheel barrel through pea gravel. That’s what Oswald Chambers is trying to say. Cast your burden on the Lord and join him there. As you do that, can I just encourage you... Again, they are just lessons I’m learning as well through the text. Don’t judge others when they don’t share their burden. God’s placed a burden on you, get after it.

The other one we say around here quite a bit is “Do for one what you can’t do for all.” I heard the story second hand this week of a lady in our church who saw this mom in need. One person, mom in need. As she thought about the need of this mom, it started growing in her a burden for this mom. As this burden was growing for this mom, as she prayed for this mom, she began to get a vision of what she could do to help this mom. I believe she’s now, as I’ve heard the story, kind of in between that vision and planning. She trying to figure out ways of helping her. She’s putting the plan together. That’s “do for one what you can’t do for all.”

We’re not building a wall around Branson and making Springfield pay for it. That’s not what we’re asking you to do. We’re asking you how you are going to live out the burden that God has placed upon your heart. Even before that, starting this week off with Hometown, I pray that you would have a burden for your hometown, that you would have a heart, not an attitude for the place that you live.

Chapter 1 ends with this line. I read it for weeks and thought that was just an interesting place for it. At first, I wrote it off as a transition between Chapter 1 and Chapter 2 when Nehemiah said, “***I was cupbearer to the king.***” It’s a whole chapter on weeping and mourning, fasting and praying, and Nehemiah crying out to God for the people of Israel, and he ends the prayer by saying, “I was a cupbearer to the king.” We’ll see this next week in Chapter 2 with King Artaxerxes.

Let me just tell you what cupbearer to the king means. It means he had the comforts of the palace. He had access to the king. Why would he leave to take on such a task? Here’s where we’re ending with “I was a cupbearer to the king.”

We all may have compelling reasons to stay where we are, but what if God is calling us to do something else? Nehemiah had the access. I also believe in “I was a cup bearer to the king” there is a messianic message in that Jesus Christ left his exalted position to come and identify with us. He is our High Priest and he understands our weakness because he chose to leave to come to die on the cross. As we celebrated the resurrection last week, he is the risen savior. It means that our sins are forgiven, our faith has great purpose, our preaching is not useless, and we know those who have died in the Lord are with the Lord and we will see them again one day. “I was cupbearer to the king.” There is so much in that.

I was with a friend this week who was sharing with me some of the struggles he has at work. He’s been at this place for a very long time. I had just one goal. I wanted to speak a blessing over him and I wanted to picture a special future for him. My friend is a very competent, very talented individual. I was even so bold to ask him how much he made. When he told me how much he made, I go, “I just want you to know I truly believe, because of who you are and what God has placed in you, that you don’t need to worry about your family. God is your ultimate provider. I truly believe there are hundreds of jobs that you could take.” He loves his job.

I told him... This was yesterday. I said, “Now wait a second. Tomorrow a point is going to come up on the screen and you’re going to think I put it there for you. I want you to know that was there by Wednesday. I’m not speaking this directly to you, but the story we’re sharing right now... This is the sacred echo, this is how God works. I told my friend, “You have a lot of compelling reasons to stay where you are. What if God is calling you to do something else? What if there is a burden he’s going to place on your heart that you don’t even know yet?” I’m asking you this week to become aware, mourn, fast, and pray.

Two things as we close out. Become a student of your hometown. Start asking questions of every person you meet. Call people. Call random people. Call leaders. Don’t just elect officials into city position, find out what they’re doing and what they’re passionate about and what the plans are for the town. Go to business leaders and don’t just go into a restaurant and enjoy the food. Ask to talk to the manager. Ask, “How can I pray for you today?” Ask your waitress/waiter. There are so many different questions that we should be asking. I don’t think the point... As I started to become aware of what was going on in our town and how the crime is kind of going up... The chamber right now is like, *Stop saying all this*. I never locked my car in Branson until I started becoming aware last June. Now people are like, “Why are you bringing all your stuff into the restaurant to meet?”

“I don’t want it stolen out there in the car.” I don’t think that was the main point of what I was supposed to get out of our meetings this summer. I think the main point was to become a student, to become aware of the need, but then this last part is to ask God, ask the Lord for a way to serve your hometown.

We don’t just want to be inspired and do nothing. We want to be inspired and get the job done. As you fast, as you pray this week, would you ask the Lord to give you the eyes of the Lord to see the needs of people and then ask for discernment and wisdom for all of us. We’re still asking how can we stop the breakdown of the family in Stone and Taney Counties? We’re grateful for this church as we continue to bring the Good News of Jesus to those all throughout Southwest Missouri and a little bit of Arkansas. I ask that you would join me in praying that this week.

Father, it’s in the name of Jesus that we thank you for our time today and for the message of Nehemiah that when we see need that we would sit down and take the time to mourn, to fast, to pray. And we as a church family are asking for wisdom, for discernment. There are things we are going to need to say no to, things we need to say yes to.

Develop the burden in each one of us. As we each are burdened for people to bring the Good News of Jesus to them whatever stage or season of life they’re in, whatever people group we may be talking about. For some, the burden they have may not even be in this hometown. You may be calling them to missions work far outside of this town to another continent, to another country. I pray that they would be open to that.

With all of the compelling reasons people may have to stay here in Southwest Missouri, you may have a plan for them somewhere else. May their mourning and fasting and praying reveal your plan for them this week. We want to be close to you through this whole process and that’s the goal of our whole first message on this today.

We’re grateful, Lord, for what you continue to do in our lives and in our families. We ask that you go before us. It is in the name of Jesus that everyone agreed and said... Amen.