March 20/21, 2010

Your Work Matters: The Relationship Challenge

Nehemiah 1-6

Your Work Matters Series

Pastor Mark Kremer

It has been our hope and desire over these weeks, as we talk about work life, to be of help to you, to equip you and prepare you for work—the world that you live in five days a week or six days a week, whatever that is for you. The messages are a part of that but around this series we are also launching a new ministry called WorkLife that will be an ongoing resource for our entire body. Hopefully God will use it out in the community as well to continue to draw attention to the principles that really make work and our work successful—and how to do it God's way. We want to strongly encourage you to take advantage of the resources that are available to you.

If you open up your *Loop* today to the inside, there is again a reminder of some of those things. The main thing that I think I'd really like to encourage you to do is to sign up today for our twice weekly e-mail coaching sessions that we would send to you (whatever e-mail address you want us to) every Tuesday and Thursday—just a word of encouragement. You know we come out of the services here on the weekend excited and wanting to live this truth that we hear about and sing about. But by the time you get to Tuesday and the realities of work and the people we work with and all of those things come to bear, we tend to just lose our edge a little bit. And so this is a way on Tuesday and Thursday of getting that little encouragement—a reminder of the principles, a couple of questions to think about; it's very brief but it's very, very helpful. You can sign up in two ways this morning to get that: One is to text the number that is listed there—27138 is the phone number and you can just text it; you can do it right now if you want. Text to that number; just put LBC, your first and last name and your e-mail address and hit send. It's just that simple, and you'll get it; you can even stop at any time if it isn't helpful to you but we think it's really helpful. I look forward to those coming to my e-mail on Tuesdays and Thursdays. There are several hundred people already receiving those and they have mentioned how helpful it's been to them. There's also a whole host of online resources that will just come right up to you from that: assessment tools to figure out where you are struggling; there are Bible studies, videos, articles; there are things that will be helpful to you in your work life. And we want to be there for you 24/7 as you deal with the various issues that you have in work. So I encourage you to take advantage of that. One other way that you can sign up is to tear off the little flap that is on your *Loop* each week, put your name, e-mail address and "work life" and you can just drop that off at the WorkLife tables that are on both the 100 and 200 levels this morning. So you can text or drop that off or you can go on line as well. There are also some books out there that we highly recommend related to a number of areas around work and you can check out those resources at the table. Our memory verse related to work is on the tables as you leave today. There is a new verse today that we are going to work on over these next two weeks and I encourage you to take that as well.

Probably one of the biggest challenges that we face at work is the people that we work with. And you know the people in our work environment come in all different shapes and sizes and attitudes and issues and some are easy to get along with; some are extremely difficult; some come with all kinds of personal issues and challenges and it's kind of a field of landmines that we walk through as it relates to relationships at work. Maybe your workplace looks a little bit like this one. Take a look. (Skit)

Jacob: Uh, uh, uh.
Lydia: What are you doing?
Jacob: Hey Lydia, boxes. About to fall. A little help? Lydia?
Lydia: I think you're cute. No way. I think you're pretty? I like you. Nu-uh. JK. Just kidding. Okay that is so not right.
Jacob: Hey, Ethan.
Lydia: AYSOS
Jacob: Hey, Ethan, how about some help? Hey buddy?
Ethan: AYSOS? You know that's half the problem with you kids these days. That phone is more important than even your co-worker Jacob needing any help.
Lydia: Who's Jacob?
Ethan: You don't even know how to communicate with people anymore. Everything is in a stupid code like your sending out military secrets or something.
Ethan: Don't mean to bother either one of you, but …
Ethan: What is AYSOS mean anyway?
Lydia: "Are you stupid or something."
Jacob: What did you say? You know that's another problem with you whippersnappers these days. You have no respect for your elders.
Lydia: What is your problem?
Jacob: My problem is you thinking I have a problem.
Woman: Some lady apparently thinks that she can buy something
Jacob: Could use some help here.
Woman: She apparently thinks she can buy something that doesn't have a price on it. I told her that Corporate hadn't given me a price so I can sell it because I don't know what to charge her. And then she says she's been all over the city looking for these Zuzu pets for her grandson she watches on Thursday morning. And then she storms out as if I did something wrong. I pay attention to details, Ms. Rude needs to work here for a day and deal with people like herself. I'm just saying.
Lydia: Girl, please. TMI.
Jacob: TMI? Would you put away that stupid phone for five minutes? What do you think it's attached to your hip?
Lydia: Yeah.
Jacob: Everybody your age thinks you are as important as a brain surgeon, you ever notice that? Well I got news for you. Nothing coming on there is worth a hoot. Oh look somebody's texting me. They said hi, LOL. Wow! I'm important! Well how about this. TGIF, SOS, AM/FM, RSVP, FYI, Google, PSAT, ACT, PS2, PS3, PSP. Well I've got one for you, WDUPATSCPFE. Why don't you put away that stupid cell phone forever? AARP.
Lydia: Okay, let me think about this for just a second. If I put my phone away, how are my friends supposed to know what I am doing at work?
Woman: Well honey when I was your age we didn't have cell phones, we just went to our job all day and then we talked to our friends when we got home and the phones, they were connected to the walls.
Lydia: What?
Ethan: Momma.

Well the world of work is a crazy place—full of crazy people, people like you and me, right? In fact you know work primarily is about people. Bill Heatley who wrote one of the books that is out at our WorkLife table—a great book called *The Gift of Work* said this: "Work is about people, not indirectly but directly and in all aspects. It is performed with people, done by people and for people. There is no work as we know it without people." Now you may be in a job that isn't

engaged with a lot of people but that's still true—that work is really all about people and it's a challenging world. It's challenging to know exactly how to deal with all the people that we face in our work situation. There are people that are easy to get along with, that we really enjoy being around. There are people that we kind of wish would go on vacation or get sick a little more often. There are people who do their very best and give their best effort and there are people who just sort of not care at all about what's going on and all of those people are thrown together. The problem we have with relationships at work is that we didn't choose those relationships. They were chosen for us. I mean we walk into the workplace and we are surrounded by people and are engaged in working with people and for people and most of the time we didn't have much say in who those people were or are. So what's the key to working with people and doing what God wants us to do when it comes to the relationships at work?

You know one of the things we have a major problem with at our house is losing the keys. Nobody can ever find the key. We had the problem this morning when Mitchel was going to drive me over here to church and we couldn't find the keys. There seems to always be a key problem at our house. I think the same is true for our knowing how to deal with the people we work with—knowing how to relate well with them. Is there a key that unlocks those doors of relationship that would allow us, with excellence, to do it well and to actually see God do something significant through the relationships we have at work? Well I think there is a key and I think there is someone who could help us—who modeled the use of that key. So I invite you to open your Bibles this morning to the book of Nehemiah, an Old Testament book. If you don't know where Nehemiah is you can start at Psalms and work your way backwards through Job and Esther and then you'll come to the Book of Nehemiah.

Now, if you have not read this story or read through this book, it is a narrative story of one of the greatest accomplishments or feats—really a construction project that was undertaken by Nehemiah—one of the greatest really in human history. It's an amazing story that's full of all kinds of principles related to leadership and relationships and how to get something done. I think this book holds for us the key—Nehemiah holds the key—that will work for you and me, probably the most important thing that we would possess so that we can live and do our relationships at work well. This book was written about one hundred fifty years after the Israelites were carried off into captivity. Nehemiah was in Susa, the capital, at least the winter capital of the Persian Empire, which is the kingdom that dominated the world at that particular time. Nehemiah probably had never been to Jerusalem or to Israel but it was a burden on his heart, the home of his ancestors. The Jewish people and the city of Jerusalem were interconnected and how they were doing affected the city and how the city was doing affected the nation of Israel. It was their capital city and they were intertwined together. So Nehemiah is a servant to the king of the Persian Empire. Some eight hundred miles away, Susa is where modern day Iran is. He's in that particular place but his heart and his burden is for the city of Jerusalem and that's where the story opens.

Verse 1:

> **The words of Nehemiah the son of Hacaliah. Now it happened in the month of Chisley, in the twentieth year,** [Referring to the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes' reign] **while I was in Susa the capitol, that Hanani, one of my brothers, and some men from Judah came; and I asked them concerning the Jews who had escaped and had survived the captivity, and about Jerusalem. And they said to me, "The remnant there in the province who survived the captivity are in great distress and reproach, and the wall of Jerusalem is broken down and its gate are burned with fire."** (*NASB, Nehemiah 1:1-3)

Nehemiah's calling—was to see Jerusalem and the nation of Israel restored. So it was natural for him to inquire what the state of the city was, when some people came from there. I think what brought some particular focus to this particular moment was there were several points along the way in this one hundred fifty year period where the people tried to rise up and rebuild the city and made attempts to re-establish the city of Jerusalem and to re-establish the nation, but those attempts continued to fail. And I think this report comes back and basically it's another failure and so Nehemiah is considering the fact that the people are in misery; they are being taunted, which is what the word **...reproach** means. The wall was broken down—the wall of the city of Jerusalem was some two or two and a half miles around—and it was literally destroyed. And so there was no protection; there was no place, no security for the people; there was no place of commerce and business and security and so the people were in misery and reproach, in a very bad situation.

Now what is Nehemiah's response to that particular work situation that he felt pretty passionately about? It was the work to which he felt he was called and I think his response here is the key for you and me when it comes to our work and our relationships at work.

Notice in Verse 4:

> **When I heard these words, I sat down and wept and mourned for days; and I was fasting and praying before the God of heaven.**

Nehemiah's very first response was to go on his face before God...and he stayed there for a considerable about of time. It wasn't just one of those prayers where he said, "You know, God, help the people that are in Jerusalem." He was deeply moved and he was deeply affected by this report and he desperately wanted to see something happen. So his first response was to cry out to God and to stay on his face before God, seeking Gods' help and direction into this situation.

Verse 5 tells us what he prayed.

> **And I said, "I beseech You, O Lord God of heaven, the great and awesome God, who preserves the covenant and lovingkindness for those who love Him and keep His commandments, let Your ear now be attentive and Your eyes open to hear the prayer of Your servant which I am praying before You now, day and night, on behalf of the sons of Israel Your servants, confessing the sins of the sons of Israel which we have sinned against You; I and my father's house have sinned. We have acted very corruptly against You and have not kept the commandments, nor the statutes, nor the ordinances which You have commanded Your servant Moses. Remember the word which You commanded Your servant Moses, saying, 'If you are unfaithful I will scatter you among the peoples; but if you return to Me and keep My commandments and do them, though those of you who have been scattered were in the most remote part of the heavens, I will gather them from there and will bring them to the place where I have chosen to cause My name to dwell.' They are Your servants and Your people whom You redeemed by Your great power and by Your strong hands. O Lord, I beseech You, may Your ear be attentive to the prayer of Your servant, and the prayer of Your servants who delight to revere Your name, and make Your servant successful today and grant him compassion before this man." Now I was the cupbearer to the king.**
> (Vs. 5-11)

Now when you read through Nehemiah's response to this situation and his prayer, you see a

number of things. First of all he worships God. He acknowledges that God is...**the great and awesome God**. God is the great delivering God. God's the one who established the nation of Israel to start with. God's ...**the one who redeemed them and called them up by His strong hand.** And he worships God. And Nehemiah submits himself to God. He puts himself before God in a position of humility and he confesses his sin and the sins of his fathers, acknowledging that the situation that they are in is because of sin. It is because of their own sin and disobedience to God. But he also reminds God of God's promises. He exhibits real trust in God. God has promised to do things if people will trust Him and seek Him and follow Him, that He would bless them and establish them and He would cause Jerusalem to once again be established as a strong and safe and secure place. It's the place where God chose to have His name identified with the people of earth and the nation of Israel. And here Nehemiah is crying out and asking God for help, asking God to show him what to do, to give him wisdom to know how he can be involved in the situation, how he could engage the king, the ruler, to solve this problem.

You see I think this is the key for the relationships and the work that we have—that we come before God in an attitude of humility and invite Him into our work life and into the relationships and into the people situations where we find ourselves. And even though this is an incredibly big construction project, that when we think of Nehemiah we think of him rebuilding a wall really from beginning to end. This is a story about people that Nehemiah needed to relate to the king. He needed to know how to get the king engaged. He needed to know how to pass through the territories between the kingdom of Susa and where Jerusalem was. He needed to know how to get the leaders that were there *on board*. He needed to know how to call all of the people around him to join him in rebuilding the walls. He needed to know how to deal with the enemies who would want to destroy the work that he was going to try to do. There were all kinds of people that he faced and Nehemiah knew there was only one place where he could get the wisdom and the help and the strength in order to pull off his work. And that was from God Himself. So he takes an attitude—a position of humility and brokenness before God—inviting God to give him direction and wisdom so he knows how to go about what he's being called to do.

Nehemiah not only spends an extended period of time here; in fact Nehemiah continued to stay on his face. What we learn in Chapter 2 and Verse 1 is that for four months he did nothing but just pray and seek God's face—continually asking God to help him, to show him, to make clear to him what he ought to do and how he ought to go about doing it. And then again and again and again, as you read through this story—and I hope you will take the time to read through this entire story because it's really a fascinating story—again and again in the moment when he didn't know what to do or a situation arose that was beyond his ability to know what to do, he prayed and cried out to God again and again and again—in the spur of the moment or for an extended period of time. I mean every step of the way Nehemiah invited God to lead this effort, to go before him, to show him the way. He was humbling himself in the knowledge that he desperately needed God's help. And I think the true test of humility is demonstrated in our prayer life. Prayer is that position of humility before God. It's that thing we do that signifies and demonstrates that we really are dependent on God, that we are really trusting God, that we are seeking God, that we are really inviting God. We are placing ourselves under Him; we're asking Him to speak to us and lead us and guide us. And that's exactly what Nehemiah was doing here. It's no wonder that this was one of the great success stories from the work world ever written in human history, because every step of the way Nehemiah was inviting God to lead out and he was following. I think that's exactly what the key is for you and me in our

work relationships and in our work in general—that we would take an attitude of humility and cry out to God. "God, help us in our work; help us to know how to relate—how to relate to those above us, how to relate to those who we lead, how we relate to those who work beside us. Show us, God, how to do that." This attitude of humility and submission before God is the key I think, to living our relationships in life well, in particular those when it comes to work.

You know it's interesting, when I think about my prayer life over the years, I would say probably one of the areas that I have neglected to bring before God is my work. We pray about our family; we pray about our finances; we pray about the other things that are very close to us, but how often do you and I bring our entire work situation—and all the people that we work with—before God and invite Him to speak to that—to invite Him to lead us, to show us what to do, to acknowledge that we don't oftentimes know what do? We don't know how to deal with the various kinds of people that God puts into our life. How desperately we really do need to go out into our work every day, filled with His power and His energy and His life, connected to God so we know what to do in those situations. What a tragedy it is when we go out in our own strength without having consulted with God, without having asked God to speak in, without submitting ourselves to God. Then we are out there on our own trying to make things happen, trying to solve problems, trying to get along with people who at times are very, very difficult. I've done it both ways and I can tell you I would much rather now invite God to be a part of my work life and commit all of the relationships and all of the things that happen with people in my work to God and ask Him to lead me and guide me in that so that I go out with His energy and His wisdom, power and strength. And that's what Nehemiah did. I think it's the key; it's the secret, if you will, to knowing how to navigate through the minefield of relationships that we face in our everyday life.

Notice from Chapter 2 some of the results of that submission and humility in Nehemiah's life. It began to show itself as the story unfolds.

Chapter 2, Verse 1:

> **And it came about in the month of Nisan, in the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes, that the wine was before him, and I took up the wine and I gave it to the king. Now I had not been sad in his presence. So the king said to me, "Why is your face sad though you are not sick? This is nothing but sadness of heart." Then I was very much afraid. And I said to the king, "Let the king live forever. Why should my face not be sad when the city, the place of my fathers' tombs, lies desolate and its gates have been consumed by fire?" Then the king said to me, "What would you request?" So I prayed to the God in heaven. And I said to the king, "If it please the king, and if your servant has found favor before you, send me to Judah, to the city of my fathers' tombs, that I may rebuild it." Then the king said to me, the queen sitting beside him, "How long will your journey be, and when will you return?" So it pleased the king to send me, and I gave him a definite time. And I said to the king, "If it please the king, let letters be given me for the governors of the provinces beyond the River, that they may allow me to pass through until I come to Judah, and a letter to Asaph the keeper of the king's forest, that he might give me timber to make beams for the gates of the fortress which is by the temple, for the wall of the city, and for the house to which I will go." And the king granted them to me because the good hand of my God was on me. And I came to the governors of the provinces beyond the River and gave them the king's letters.**

Now the king had sent with me officers of the army and horsemen. (Vs.1-9)

One of the things I think that Nehemiah's humility enabled him to do was to get understanding. I think when we are humble, then we are able to be learners. I think we are able to understand what needs to be done and, because of Nehemiah's heart of humility, God began to reveal and lay out the plan for Nehemiah—that he ought to be prepared to share with the king when the right moment came along. And Nehemiah was patient. He waited until God opened the door and just at that right moment, that right opportunity came for him to speak to the king. But he was prepared for that moment; he got understanding and he had a plan laid out. He knew what was going to be required for this project and he gave the king a scenario of how it needed to play out and what he was going to need and he gave him a time period. So all of that time spent before God—seeking God's help and wisdom and input—allowed him to understand what needed to be done. And he went out understanding that and then, when he got to the city of Jerusalem, after that long trek as we read in Verse 11, he continued to seek understanding.

> **So I came to Jerusalem and was there three days. And I arose in the night, I and a few men with me. I did not tell anyone what my God was putting into my mind to do for Jerusalem and there was no animal with me except the animal on which I was riding. So I went out at night by the Valley Gate in the direction of the Dragon's Well and on to the Refuse Gate, inspecting the walls of Jerusalem which were broken down and its gates which were consumed by fire.** (Vs. 11-13)

And he goes on to walk us through the next verses, all the way around the walls he inspected. Again was his humility of mind, not charging ahead thinking that he knew what to do, but putting himself in a position of seeking understanding so that he would be wise in how he went about this project. He continued to seek to understand what he was up against and how God wanted him to proceed. And then in Verse 17 he begins to talk to the people there in Jerusalem—the people who were in misery, the people who were being taunted, and he said to them:

> **"You see the bad situation that we are in, that Jerusalem is desolate and its gates burned by fire. Come, let us rebuild the wall of Jerusalem so that we will no longer be a reproach." And then I told them how the hand of my God had been favorable to me, and also about the king's words which he had spoken to me. Then they said, "Let us arise and build." So they put their hands to the good work.** (Vs. 17-18)

Nehemiah not only sought to understand the physical situation—the lay of the land, the state of the wall and what was going to be required—but, because of his humility, he was able to understand where the people were coming from and what it was going to take to engage them in this work. These are people who had tried several times to rebuild the walls but without success. And when people experience failure again and again and again, they are very reluctant to follow and to try something again. A lot of times that's why people are the way they are at work. They've tried to do the right thing and it hasn't worked out again and again and they've just kind of given up. It requires a real humility and seeking after God to really know how to motivate people, how to work with people in a way that will engage them in their work. And Nehemiah got that wisdom. Part of what God revealed to him was the fact that he needed to position himself right alongside them. He said, "Let us rebuild; we will arise." Nehemiah didn't come in as the one who was going to crack the whip and whip them all into shape and say, "Hey come on now, get this done." But he said, "Let *us.*" He engaged them in a sense of

community, reminding them that God was with them; God had blessed them. God had set this particular project up to be a success and how every step of the way God had made this thing come to pass. They could do it; he convinced them that they could do it and...**they said, "Let us arise and build."**

Nehemiah's humility I think gave him a tremendous amount of understanding. It's the kind of understanding that you and I desperately need if we are going to succeed in our work life. We need to understand the situation we're in; we need to understand the people we work with and for. That understanding only comes when we have an attitude of humility before God and we're asking Him to give us understanding and insight into the people we work with.

You know I can remember a number of times along through my life being very frustrated with the people I worked with—just difficult people—and wondering, "*What in the world is the deal with this guy or this gal*? *Why is it that they are so difficult*?" It came to me a few years back that one of the things that would be really helpful is that I would seek to understand the people around me and how they ticked and what their story was. And the more I understood about them, the better I was able to understand why they were the way they were, why they responded the way they responded in the situations they were in. I got inside of other people and sought to really understand them. I was able to know how more wisely to deal with them—because everybody has a story. Everybody reacts and responds and is the way they are for a reason. It comes out of their experience; it comes out of their hurts; it comes out of their drives and ambitions and I need to understand that if I'm going to work alongside people, I need understanding. You and I must understand the people and situations we're in if we are going to be successful at navigating through the minefields of relationships. We need to try to really listen well and understand the people and the situations we are in. I think that only comes about with an attitude of humility. If I'm going to try to get understanding, I'm taking the position of a learner, of a student. I'm trying to gather information so that I can be effective. And that's exactly what Nehemiah did very wisely, flowing out of that attitude of humility.

I think there's a second thing we see that humility produced here in this chapter and that is a deep respect for people. Nehemiah respected the people. He respected the king that he worked for. He honored the king in the way he approached him. He knew what that king was going to want to know and understand. He knew there was a right time to approach him and he waited patiently and he honored the king. He honored his boss; he respected him. He respected the people—the kings of the land between Jerusalem and Susa. He honored and respected the people of Judah itself and that deep respect came out of his humility, of understanding that these people had value and worth and deserved to be treated well and rightly. And Nehemiah sought his very best to do it. Humility should produce both understanding and respect for others which makes the world of work and relationships just so much easier to navigate.

Now Nehemiah engaged these people; they had a mind to work and Chapter 3 is really one of those remarkable chapters. We're not going to read it because it just talks about every single family who took a different section of the wall. It was really a masterful way that Nehemiah organized the rebuilding of the wall. Each family—which would be a fairly extended family—would take a particular section and it goes through family by family, all of these sections that they took and exactly what they did. I mean *all* the people in it! And they worked hard; they worked together; they worked in a way that was really a powerful experience for them together. It was a community building experience. It was really owed to the wisdom of Nehemiah—that he understood what needed to happen. But we get a little hint in Chapter 2, both in verse 10 and

verses 19 and 20, that there was trouble. There were difficult people in that work environment and it really comes to a head in Chapter 4. Look at Chapter 4, Verse 1:

> **Now it came about that when Sanballat heard that they were rebuilding the wall, he became furious and very angry and mocked the Jews. And he spoke in the presence of his brothers and the wealthy men of Samaria and said, "What are these feeble Jews doing? Are they going to restore it for themselves? Can they offer sacrifices? Can they finish in a day? Can they revive the stones from the dusty rubble even the burned ones?" And Tobiah the Ammonite was near him and he said, "Even what they are building—if a fox should jump on it, he would break the stone wall down!"** (Chap. 4:1-3)

Their first tactic...and we see these two names again and again in Chapter 4 and again in Chapter 6—again and again and again. These were the difficult people. These were the enemies. These were the challenging people who tried to disrupt the work and tried to discourage the people. Here they try the tactic of mocking—just making fun of the people who are working and saying, "You know even if you could rebuild this wall, which we don't think you can do, a fox would jump on it and it would fall down. I mean you are unable to do this." But Nehemiah had, because of his humility, the wisdom and the courage to face those enemies and speak to them and deal with them in the right kind of way. Notice how he responds to them in verse 4:

> **Hear, O God, how we are despised! Return their reproach on their own heads and give them up for plunder in a land of captivity. Do not forgive their iniquity nor let their sin be blotted out before Thee, for they have demoralized the builders.** (Vs. 4-5)

Nehemiah's first response is to go back to God. He said, "God, you see what they're trying to do? You step into this situation; You deal with them. I'm called to keep rebuilding; I'm called to keep working but, God, You deal with these enemies. You confront them." And that was probably the right thing to do, because they were just mocking. But notice it gets a little more heated in verse 7:

> **When Sanballat, Tobiah, the Arabs, the Ammonites, and the Ashdodites heard that the repair of the walls of Jerusalem went on,** [and that they didn't stop, that they weren't discouraged] **and that the breaches had begun to be closed, they were very angry. And all of them conspired together to come and fight against Jerusalem and cause a disturbance in it.** (Vs.7-8)

Now they are threatening physical violence. Now they are trying to cause a disturbance. In fact Verse 12 tells us that the Jews who lived near these people came and told them ten times, "*They're coming to fight against you. There's going to be a rumble on the job site. Things are going to get ugly.*" Well what did Nehemiah do in that situation?

Verse 9:

> **But we prayed to our God** [again this attitude of humility, of seeking God's help in every situation] **and because of them we set up a guard against them day and night.**

The rest of Chapter 4 goes on to talk about how Nehemiah organized them so that there would be guards who would be standing to make sure that the people who were working would be safe, that they had guards at night, that ultimately—when the threat got so severe that they put a weapon in everybody's hand and a tool in the other hand and they fought—they were prepared to fight and work side by side. Nehemiah had a trumpeter stand near him and he said, "Wherever you hear the trumpet sound, rally to that place and we'll fight against them if they come against us." His humility allowed him to wisely respond to threats, to difficult people, in a way that was the right thing to do for everybody and protected the people so they would not be damaged or hurt.

Ultimately their plot failed and the work went on. Go over to Chapter 6 where they tried several more tactics, this time aimed specifically at Nehemiah. In verses 1 and 2 they tried to distract Nehemiah saying, "*Hey Nehemiah let's go have a meeting. We need to have a meeting,"* —trying to get Nehemiah distracted from the work. Nehemiah refused to go. Then they created some false accusations—made up some lies about Nehemiah in the hopes to discourage him, to cause him to stop, causing trouble among the people, and again Nehemiah answered wisely and continued to pray that God would just make the truth known. And finally they came up with a scheme to try to get Nehemiah to sin—to get him to go into the temple where he shouldn't go—so that he would sin, so that he would be diminished as a leader, destroy his credibility. But Nehemiah discerned from God that it was a lie and it wasn't what God wanted him to do. So he refused to go in.

I think that humility that Nehemiah had, again allowed him to respond rightly in the face of difficult people and enemies. Humility allows us to have the wisdom to know that there are always going to be challenges; there's always going to be difficult people and God will give us what we need if we humbly seek Him and ask Him to be involved in those relationships. We ask Him for help; He'll show us the way, working through those difficult things.

And finally in Chapter 5 Nehemiah faces this problem of poverty and injustice that was happening among the people. The people come to him and they talk about the extreme trouble they are in—that they are being overtaxed; they are having to sell off their land; they are not able to eat because there is famine; they are having to sell their children into slavery and it's not because of the other nations around them. It's because of their brothers, because of the other people within the nation. There was a great injustice; there was corruption going on. The governors who had preceded Nehemiah had taken more than their share for themselves. They had sought to win at the expense of the people they were leading and serving. So there was all of this injustice and unfairness.

Notice in Chapter 5, Verse 6, Nehemiah's response:

> **Then I was very angry when I heard their outcry and these words. And I consulted myself and I contended with the nobles and the rulers and said to them, "You are exacting usury [**which means an extraordinary, wrong amount of interest] **each from his brother!" Therefore, I held a great assembly against them.**

And he challenged them and he called them out on their injustice. He asked them to stop doing what they were doing because God was with them and because he invited God into his situation, they listened and they responded and the injustice was stopped. Nehemiah set a personal example of doing the right thing. He says that he didn't take more than his fair share,

that he didn't get rich at the expense of others. He applied himself to the work; he worked alongside the people and he actually cared for the poor among them out of his own resources. He fed more than a hundred people at his own table, just to set an example of doing the right thing.

You see humility leads us to the do the right thing, to act justly and fairly in the workplace. That humility resulted in this work being accomplished in an amazing way.

Chapter 6, Verse 15:

So the wall was completed on the twenty-fifth of the month Elul, in just fifty-two days.

That's an amazing thing, that in fifty-two days—in less time than Nehemiah actually spent praying to start with—the work was accomplished. And I think that work was accomplished primarily because of this one key: the humility of Nehemiah's heart. He was humble enough to invite God into this work situation and, because he was humble before God and he cried out to God, and he sought God, and he invited God into his work life, God provided him the understanding he needed, the respect he needed, the wisdom and courage to deal with enemies and difficult people he needed and the ability to do the right thing—to act justly and fairly.

I think that's what you and I all want in our work life. We want to do the right thing. We want to make a difference. We want to encourage the people around us. We want to be successful in how we relate to people. We want to be a part of something that is bigger than us. We want God to show up and be a part of what we're doing; we want Him to be involved in the relationships. But that requires one key thing from us: humility—the humility to acknowledge that we cannot do this on our own. We need God's help. We need it every day, in every relationship, in every situation. We need to be on our faces before God, inviting Him into our workspace, into our work relationships, trusting Him, waiting on Him to show us exactly *what* we need to do and *how* we need to do it and *when* we need to do it. And we need to understand this morning that we have a God who wants to be there. He wants to be there with us and for us and make us successful in carrying out the work that He's called us to do.

Our Father, I pray that daily we would invite You into our work life and relationships, that we would bring each person that we work with before You, each situation, that we would humbly acknowledge that we need you in our work life. We cannot do it on our own. And I pray that we would today get a new vision through Nehemiah's life of what one person can do, the difference they can make in so many other lives, if we will humbly invite You into our workspace. In Jesus' name, Amen.

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Lincoln Berean Church, 6400 S. 70th, Lincoln, NE 68516 (402) 483-6512
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WorkLIFE
your work matters

YOUR WORK MATTERS:
The Relationship Challenge

Nehemiah 1:1-6:15
Pastor Mark Kremer
March 20/21, 2010

REVIEW

Reflecting the goodness and excellence of God in all that we do is an important witness to His presence and power in our lives. Just as God is holy we are to be holy in all we do. Just as God's work is done with skill, our work should reflect his excellence.

- What skills do you need to continue to develop so your work will be done with excellence?
- What character qualities are you working with God to address so your work will be done with integrity?
- How are you developing your work skills (specific actions you are taking)?
- How are you strengthening your integrity (specific steps)?
- Who have you invited to help you grow in these two areas?

ENGAGE

What are the relational challenges you face in your work life? Are there people in our work life who are difficult for you deal with? Why?

How would you describe the relationship you have with your boss? Your co-workers? The people you manage or supervise? Your customers (the people you serve)? Are your work relationships honoring to God and respectful of others? Why or why not?

Read Colossians 3:22 – 4:6. What are the key principles related to working with others from this passage? How are you living these principles in your work environment?

Read Nehemiah 1:1 – 2:20; 4:1-6:15. How did Nehemiah invite God into his work life? Why was it important for Nehemiah to walk closely with God in his work life? How would this story have likely turned out if Nehemiah had not acknowledged and submitted to God in his work?

How did Nehemiah model respect for authority? Do you respect and honor those in authority over you? What can you do to be respectful even when you feel they don't deserve it?

How did Nehemiah show respect and care for those he led? Do you show respect or disrespect for your colleagues and those you lead?

How did Nehemiah deal with difficult people (enemies, trouble makers) in his work? What can you learn from Nehemiah that would help you deal with difficult people (even enemies) in your work?

What changes do you need to make so that your relationships at work honor God and respect the individuals you work with? What sinful habits, attitudes and character qualities need to be put off? What character qualities of Jesus need to be put on?

MEMORIZE Colossians 4:5-6 "Conduct yourselves with wisdom towards outsiders, making the most of the opportunity. Let your speech always be with grace, as though seasoned with salt, so that you will know how you should respond to each person."