

Steps To Developing A Vision

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[0 : 01] Take your Bibles and turn to Nehemiah, Nehemiah. As I mentioned two weeks ago, at the start of 2024, people have set goals for physical or financial health.

They've set goals to spend more time with family or friends. They've set goals to spend more time reading the Word and in prayer. Maybe even set goals to be in attendance at a church on Sundays, whatever.

We all have goals and desires that we take advantage of the new year to set and to seek out. We know as New Year's resolutions, and so I pray that whatever your resolution may be, that among them will be the seeking God in the Word and in prayer and to be in fellowship with the saints. And these are all things that I also have thought about personally. I want to get in better physical health. I desire to spend more time with family, and I desire to spend more time in the Word and in prayer.

I have, you know, as, quote, my job to be in the Word and prepping lessons and sermons, which I absolutely love and enjoy. But there's something different and special about just personal edification and time in the Word.

[1 : 38] And we talked about that a little bit yesterday at the men's prayer breakfast as we're in Psalm 119 and just seeing, you know, seeing how we can read Scripture for personal edification.

And it really is a blessing. Another thing that I have thought about as a pastor that I'm praying over and thinking about often is the future of First Baptist Shapley.

I am concerned for the people, all of you. I pray for you regularly. I try to keep up and follow up with prayer requests and happenings in your life.

I try to get to know you on a personal basis. And as I think about the future of First Baptist Shapley and people in the corporate world would give the term visioning or, you know, being a visionary or thinking about the future of the business and what we expect to see in the next five to ten years. I also am giving that thought and prayerful consideration. The one thing I can tell you for sure is that I am not a prophet. I do not know. I cannot see five years from now or ten years from now and say this is definitely what this church body in this place is going to be like.

[2 : 55] Nobody can. We can set goals and have desires. But ultimately, as I mentioned two weeks ago as we were in Isaiah 6, the most important thing to me as the pastor of this church and the most important desire I have for you as the congregation is that we are all hearing from the Lord, that we are all in the Word of God and seeing what His desire is for us, His desires are for us.

As I mentioned a couple weeks ago, we looked at Isaiah's experience in Isaiah 6 and how he was called to a less than a desirable ministry, that he was to proclaim a message to a deceitful people who would grow increasingly insensitive of the things of the Lord.

And really, when you think about the ministry of the church in the New Testament, what we are called to proclaim and the life that we are called to live, there's not much different between what Isaiah had and what we have.

The message of truth in a culture where people are going to grow increasingly insensitive and hostile to the message and the messengers. And it's with this fact in mind that we must, as a church, build a vision and set goals for the future.

And the old saying is, if you aim for nothing, you'll hit it every time, right? And so we don't want to aim for nothing. We want to have an aim and a purpose. What is the purpose of First Baptist Shapley?

[4 : 29] What is our goal? What is our... Where do we see ourselves? How do we see ourselves going about, for lack of a better word, our business? These are things that we need to be thinking about.

Yes, leaders need to be thinking about this. The elder board is thinking about this, praying about this. You know, and I pray that any leader in any ministry is given thought and prayerful consideration about the ministries that they are head over.

And I'm going to put it this way, the congregation, all of you are very integral in this very discussion, right? Because while you have leaders, we are not puppeteers.

We do not pull the strings and make things happen the way we think it needs to happen. We are a body. We are the body of Christ. All of us, individual members of this one organism.

And we all contribute to the body of Christ. We are all contributors. And we all serve different functions. And we all have different abilities.

[5 : 37] And so we all need to have input in this very matter. Now, I'm not calling this now or ever during a worship service, are we going to have like a business meeting and how are we going to do this?

What do we see and all that? But we all have eyes and ears. We all have burdens and passions. And we all have abilities that God has given us for the purpose of where we're at and for the good of this church moving forward for the glory of God.

So I want you to keep that in mind as we go the next few weeks to talk about this topic of vision and the future of the church and the fact that you are a part of it.

You are a very important part of this because I'm only one man. Ken Joy is only one man. Ian is only one man. Josh is only one man. Yes, we constitute, okay, we're four people on a board, right? We are the elected elders in the church. But we are still only human. We don't see things perfectly. We don't hear things perfectly. We don't perceive things perfectly.

[6 : 47] So my encouragement to you, and this isn't even part of what this is about, but it's very important to me to make sure you know, you need to talk to us. And we need to have a conversation about the future of First Baptist Chapel and what God is leading this church to do.

Today, in Nehemiah 1, I'd like to evaluate what I believe to be steps to developing a vision. What do we need to do? What are the steps we need to take in order to have a vision that is God-honoring and biblically consistent?

To give a little background, Nehemiah takes place somewhere between 445 and 430 B.C. during what is known as the post-exilic time period. So to give you an idea of the post-exilic time period, you've got to get to the exile itself.

The southern kingdom was taken captive by the Babylonian Empire under the leadership of King Nebuchadnezzar in 586 B.C. And the Babylonian Empire was defeated by the Meadow Persian Empire around 538 B.C., at which time a decree by King Cyrus of the Persians, he issued a decree for the Jews to return to Jerusalem.

So this is about 50 years later, after the Babylonians have taken the southern kingdom captive, have cleared out the temple of all of its worldly assets, and now they are being let go back to Jerusalem and to rebuild and to repopulate it as the Jewish people.

[8 : 28] And that takes place over a course of three waves of returning exiles over the course of the next hundred years. Nehemiah is on the end of that third wave, or part of that third wave.

And so we're going to go ahead and read Nehemiah 1 and see what steps we can take or what steps we need to take in the development of a God-honoring, biblically consistent vision for First Baptist Shapley.

Chapter 1, verse 1, Nehemiah. The words of Nehemiah, the son of Hakaliah, now it happened in the month of Kisleb in the 20th year, as I was in Susa the citadel, that Hanani, one of my brothers, came with certain men from Judah, and I asked them concerning the Jews who escaped, who had survived the exile, and concerning Jerusalem.

And they said to me, the remnant there in the province who had survived the exile is in great trouble and shame. The wall of Jerusalem is broken down, and its gates are destroyed by fire.

Verse 4, As soon as I had heard these words, I sat down and wept and mourned for days. And I continued fasting and praying before the God of heaven. And I said, O Lord God of heaven, the great and awesome God who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love Him and keep His commandments, let your ear be attentive.

[10 : 01] In your eyes open, to hear the prayer of your servant, that I now pray before you day and night for the people of Israel, your servants, confessing the sins of the people of Israel, which we have sinned against you.

Even I and my father's house have sinned. We have acted very corruptly against you and have not kept the commandments, the statutes, and the rules that you commanded your servant Moses. Remember the word that 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 your outcasts are in the uttermost parts of heaven, from there I will gather them and bring them to the place that I have chosen to make my name dwell there.

They are your servants and your people, whom you have redeemed by your great power and by your strong hand. O Lord, let your ear be attentive to the prayer of your servant and to the prayer of your servants who delight to fear your name and give success to your servant today and grant him mercy in the sight of this man.

Now, I was cupbearer to the king. So, a lot happening here in Nehemiah 1 that can go under the radar.

[11:30] But what are the steps that I believe are present that we can learn from, principles we can apply in our own lives and in the body of this church?

First, in verses 1 through 3, there's the need, the step to observe the current situation. To observe the current situation.

We see here that Nehemiah says that there is a report offered from some observers that Nehemiah is cupbearer for the king. He had no opportunity to visit Jerusalem and he wanted to know how things were going there in Judah.

So, Nehemiah is in the capital city and Jerusalem is a bit away. And he did not have the privilege and opportunity to depart to go there himself.

And some men from Judah gave a discouraging report. They said that there is great trouble and shame in this city of Jerusalem. The people are overwhelmed with the current state of things and they're a mockery to other nations.

[12:36] The fact is Babylon completely decimated the city in 586 BC and it was not until 538 BC that the Jews were permitted to return to the city and live there.

So, consider that. That you have this army, this empire coming in. Flattens your city, your walls. Destroying your temple. Taking all the assets you have in there. It's basically unlivable at that point. And then it sits for 50 years before you can go back and start cleaning things up and rebuilding things. And so, that's why you can understand it's taken about 100 years or so to get to the point where they're at.

They're starting to build things up a little at a time. You can read the book of Ezra. Also provides information. Ezra and Nehemiah were contemporaries and they give this background information as to what happened or what was going on with the Jews as they were returning and building it up. And so, little by little, they started piecing things back together. So, around 515 BC, they completed the rebuild of the temple which was inferior to what Solomon had built at least in the eyes of those who had seen the original.

[13:49] In 458 BC, more Jews returned under the leadership of Ezra himself and there was a spiritual revival in the land. However, the wall was still broken and the gates were still burned.

So, with a broken wall and burned gates, there's no defense for the city. It basically is open to intrusion. It's open to anyone coming in and destroying and taking things over.

And that's why they are ultimately, it's a shame to the people of Israel. It's a shame to the inhabitants in Jerusalem. And ultimately, it's a shame to their God, Yahweh.

Because at that time, in ancient times, nations identified with their gods. And so, when, so for instance, so when King Nebuchadnezzar went in in 586 BC and wiped out Jerusalem, it wasn't just a win for Nebuchadnezzar and his people, but it was a win for the God of Nebuchadnezzar who showed that he was more powerful than the God of the Jews, of the Israelites.

And so, the fact that this city is still left unprotected shows that their God has no pleasure in them. Their God is not concerned about protecting these people.

[15:12] So, the bottom line here is as they observed the situation, as Nehemiah is informed of what's going on, he realizes there's still work that needs to be done.

And there are still people, you'll find out in Nehemiah 2, that are still very much against that work being done and who are going to present problems.

Because nothing is easy. When it comes to, you know, God's people, the work is not easy. It's always, there's always opposition, either from within or from without.

So, the observation of the situation, Nehemiah saw that the walls, you know, it was a shame to God and His people. And so, as we pursue the purpose for this little mini-series, my question to you is, what observations do you make about the current situation of First Baptist Chapel?

I'm not looking for hands or a response right now, but I'm happy to have conversations. And if it's something maybe you haven't thought about, maybe it's something you will think about.

[16:34] You will pray over and have these conversations so as we move forward, we can see the work that needs to be done and do it. So, observe on the current situation.

That's step one. Step two, verse four, reflect on the current situation. Verse four, as soon as I heard these words, I sat down and wept and mourned for days.

Nehemiah was not happy about the report. He was not happy to know the situation. And so, he mourned. He wept. He prayed. He fasted. He was before the Lord.

All he could do was weep and mourn. And sometimes, that's the case in churches. All you can do is weep and mourn and pray and call out to God. When matters are overwhelming and discouraging, sometimes all you can do is cry and mourn the situation.

Think about, you know, people who have the death of a family member or a friend. Or learning about your own terminal disease. Or being let go from a job that you love and you've worked at for years.

[17:48] All these situations and many, many more that we endure as human beings can be times in our lives that we are overwhelmed and we don't know what to say.

We don't have the words to say. Sometimes all we can do is cry and mourn and call out to God. I shared with you this morning about my best friend's sister, Sierra.

Basically, a sister of mine who has been dealing with tumors, brain tumors in her head for 10 years or so.

And they just found out on Wednesday that it has hatched to her brain and she's got two to four weeks to live. I'm absolutely devastated at that news.

And, you know, I feel like all I can do sometimes, all I feel like doing is just crying and mourning and calling out to God. And I'm sure you've had situations like that or have or maybe are in that situation yourself.

[19:00] And it's okay. It's okay to mourn. It's okay to cry. It's okay not to have the words to say.

Genesis 23, 2, we see that Sarah died in Kiriath Arba and Abraham went in to mourn for Sarah and to weep for her.

It's all right. David, in Psalm 42, 3, wept over his own hopelessness. He said, my tears have been my food day and night while they say to me all day long, where is your God?

My tears are my food day and night. He's crying so much, so abundantly. He feels like that's all he's eating. He's pouring down his face. Genesis 27, verses 3 and 8.

We see that Esau, or 38, excuse me. Esau wept over his loss of a blessing. Right? Esau said to his father, do you have only one blessing, my father? Bless me, even me also, oh my father.

So Esau lifted his voice and he wept. The blessing in that culture at that time, it was so important, especially for the firstborn. And Jacob got it and Esau is just weeping bitterly about his lost opportunity.

[20:15] In response to the news from Jerusalem, Nehemiah fasted and prayed to the Lord for answers. And that's a good practice for those who are seeking God's direction and blessing.

That's a good practice for a church that desires to be blessed by God because we are serving Him and doing as He has called us to do and is directing us to do.

In Acts 13, verse 3, after God called Barnabas and Saul as missionaries, we see that it reads exactly when they had fasted and prayed and laid their hands on them, they sent them away.

The church fasted and prayed for direction, fasted and prayed for Saul and Barnabas specifically and prayed over them and sent them away.

Acts 14, verse 23, in order to choose leadership for local churches, it says, when they had appointed elders for them in every church, having prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed.

[21:21] The church fasted and prayed for the leadership that would be over them. Do you pray for your leadership?

Do you pray for the leadership of this church? Are you concerned about this church body to pray?

Do you have a concern for this church in our ministry and the people who are in charge in charge who are over you to lead and guide?

reflect on the situation. Don't just observe what's going on and where we're at. Reflect on it. Pray. Call out to God for direction.

And finally, verses 5 through 11, because every good sermon has three points. And hopefully, this is a good sermon, so this has three steps. Observe the situation, reflect on it, and pray for an improved situation.

[22 : 24] situation. That's verses 5 through 11. I won't read again the prayer of Nehemiah, but this is a tremendous discipline.

I encourage you to pay attention to the prayers in Scripture. And so, the prayer of Nehemiah, we see first, it's a prayer that was offered in view of who and what God is.

Consider the, in verse 5, O Lord God of heaven, the great and awesome God who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love Him and keep His commandments.

Think about the attributes that I brought out in just that verse, just that sentence of prayer from Nehemiah. First, he identifies, you know, who and what God is, right?

He's great and awesome. And those two words alone, I could probably do a sermon series through the course of 2024 talking about the greatness and the awesomeness of God.

[23 : 30] And probably go into 2025, 2026. You get what I'm getting at. He said, you are the great and awesome God. And then he says that, verse 5, awesome God who keeps covenant.

He's a faithful God. He has made a covenant with His people and He is faithful to see it through. And steadfast love with those who love Him and keep His commandments.

He is compassionate. He's a compassionate God. He's great. He's awesome. He's faithful. He's compassionate. And that's just one sentence of a prayer.

recognizing who and what God is. When we pray, do we recognize the attributes and character of the one that we are praying to?

Do we truly understand and grasp the significance of the God of Scripture who we appeal to and who we fall on our face before when we are praying?

[24 : 40] There's only one way you can truly grasp it. There's only one way you can truly understand the depths of it and that's when you explore and you dig into the riches and treasures of the Word of God.

You dig into it and you see who God is. He's our creator. He's our sustainer. He's our redeemer. He loves us. He's also the judge.

He's also the standard giver and bearer. And He is the one in whom we are created. We are created in the image of God. And what does that mean for us?

It is so overwhelming when you think about who God is and what it means for us. And as we go before Him, we have the open invitation to go to the throne of the God of the universe, of all creation.

and to be in His presence in prayer. And He says in Peter, you know, to cast our anxiety on Him because He cares for us.

[25 : 45] He's a God who cares for us and loves us. And in this case, He's a great and awesome God who's faithful and compassionate. And that's who Nehemiah was calling out to.

He understood the situation. He was reflecting on it. He said, Oh Lord, You are great and awesome. You are faithful. You are compassionate. Hear my words and hear my plea.

And not only that, the prayer was offered in view of who and what man is. First, He's a servant. Right?

In verse 6. Let your ear be attentive and your eyes open to hear the prayer of your servant. As a show of humility and the proper response of sinful man approaching a holy God, Nehemiah prostrates himself as a servant of the Lord.

He realizes he does not belong. He is not an equal of God. This is one way in which the church culture, church as a whole, has erred over the years in that we focus so much on, I am a friend of God.

[26 : 55] And we almost make ourselves like, you know, bring him down to our level and say, Well, see, we're friends, we're buddies and, you know, and all that. You don't have that relationship with the God of the universe.

We have erred in that. He is the holy God. Remember Isaiah 6? He's holy. He's above everything. And we are his servants. And he only calls us, he only calls us his friends when we're faithful to keep his commandments.

But he's not your buddy-buddy. You know, Jesus is not going to take the wheel if you let it go. You're just going to go careening off the course, off the road.

We have so much of this, like, personal relationship aspect. We forget who God really is. He's holy and just.

And we're his servants. Psalm 103, 19, he is the one in charge. And we need to submit to him. Psalm 103, 19 says, The Lord has established his throne in the heavens and his kingdom rules over all.

[28 : 06] Another verse is, I think Psalm 115, verse 3. The Lord sits in the heavens and does as he pleases. He's the sovereign ruler of all creation. We're his servants.

And we have, what a privilege to be able to go in before him. Our relationship to God is just so complex, right? There's so many things, like, he wants us to come, but we need to also recognize who we are, have the right stance.

We're sinners. Right? I mean, that's what several verses here talks about, the sins of the people. And he says, Even I in my father's house have sinned.

He's not putting, he's not just saying, All right, Lord, it's these people. They're sinners. They're the ones who are causing all the problems. It's all the Democrats, not the Republicans. Right?

I guess we're not so far removed from that line of thinking, are we? We want to blame everybody else, but never put ourselves in there as well.

[29 : 07] And Nehemiah said, It's the people, and even I in my father's house have sinned. We recognize that we are sinners. The Israelites had fallen short of God's expectation because they had turned away from his word.

In Deuteronomy 28, verse 14, it says, do not turn aside. This is God talking to his people. Do not turn aside from any of the words that I command you today to the right hand or to the left to go after other gods to serve them.

Do not go aside, but it's what they've done. And God, through the book of Deuteronomy, says, Okay, if you obey, this is what you get. If you disobey, this is what you get.

And God is a good judge. Right? And so they disobeyed. This is what they got. He is more consistent than I am. I try to be consistent with my kids, right?

But I suspect, I'm making an assumption here, that I'm not the only parent in the room that has said, if you do this, this is going to happen.

[30 : 12] And then when they do this, it's like, I don't really want to do that. You know, so you kind of almost fall there. You soften it up a little bit. You come just short of it. But that's inconsistent.

Guess what? God doesn't do that. He says, you do this, this happens. They did this, this happened. You continue in disobedience, I'm going to send the Assyrians. Guess what?

722, northern kingdom, gone. Southern kingdom keeps going. You continue in disobedience, I'm going to send the Babylonians. They continue in disobedience, Babylonians come. They're gone.

God is a God of His word. And He said it, it's going to happen. So we are sinners. We're servants, we're sinners, and thankfully, He's a loving, compassionate God who allows us to enter His presence.

And finally, we see that this prayer was offered in light of God's promises. They're in the state that they're in because of God's promised judgment for disobedience. However, verse 9, so I'm going to read verses 8 and 9.

[31 : 17] Verse 8, remember the word that you commanded your servant Moses, saying, if you are unfaithful, I'll scatter you among the peoples. That's what God said, you're unfaithful, I'm scattering you.

That's what He did. Verse 9, but if you return to me and keep my commandments and do them through, though your outcasts are in the uttermost parts of heaven, from there I will gather them and bring them to the place that I've chosen to make my name dwell there.

There's hope. There's a promise of hope if they return and keep His word. So, as we talk about the steps to developing a vision, first we have to observe the situation.

We need to then reflect on the situation and we need to be praying for improvement of the situation. ultimately, you must have the word of God as your standard and seek to put it to work in your own

life.

This all comes together. It's not, you know, what we do here as a body of believers is not somehow separate from us individually as Christians.

[32 : 30] It's all, we're one body together to build each other up. So, I encourage you to be in the word of God. Seek to establish it as your standard and authority and have it work in your own life.

And for those here at First Baptist Shapley, we must be committed to the word of God on an individual basis before we can be consistent with it on a corporate basis or on a large scale.

We have to individually put in what we desire to see as a group. Oswald Chambers says, a man with the vision of God is not devoted simply to a cause or a particular issue but to God himself.

So, as we are talking about vision and the future of this church, remember that. A man with the vision of God is not devoted simply to a cause or a particular issue but to God himself.

Let's pray. Dear Lord, I thank you for this time in your word, what we learn and we can apply, put into practice. Lord, help us to see the situation we're in.

[33 : 48] Help us to evaluate the recent past of this church, how you've used this church and this community for your glory. Lord, help us to reflect on it and to pray to you and to seek you in your word and in prayer and how we can improve the situation, Lord, how you want us to move forward for your glory.

We pray you'd make it clear. We pray that there'd be a unity in this church and this body and that we'd be united for your glory. In Jesus' name, Amen. Amen.