

How to Turn a Minus into a Plus¹

Nehemiah 1:1-2:8

INTRODUCTION:

1. The first return of the Jews to Jerusalem from the exile had been led by Zerubbabel; the second by Ezra. In 445 B.C., Nehemiah wanted to return.
2. The first six chapters of Nehemiah are about rebuilding walls; the remaining seven chapters are about rebuilding people.
3. Nehemiah 2:20 sets the tone for the entire book.
4. Nehemiah shows three steps to turning a defeat into a victory.

DISCUSSION:

I. Visualize

- A. Some Jews had come back to Susa with a discouraging word: The people are defeated, humiliated, and weary.
- B. The walls were down, and the people were defenseless.
- C. People today have walls to rebuild.
 1. Domestic walls that have fallen need to be rebuilt, e.g. the American home.
 2. The walls of moral decency need to be rebuilt because of pornography and sexual perversion.
 3. We need to rebuild the walls of morals in our education system.
 - a. The theory of atheistic evolution is taught as fact.
 - b. Parents are out of the picture.
 - c. Discipline has been removed from the classroom.
- D. When Nehemiah heard that the walls were down, he visualized what was happening.

II. Agonize

- A. Seeing the problem, Nehemiah wept, grieved, mourned, and fasted.
- B. Nehemiah prayed (1:5-11)...
 1. A prayer of conviction
 2. A prayer of confession
 3. A prayer of confidence
 4. A prayer of commitment
- C. God wants us to ask, for He wants to give (cf. 1 John 5:14).
- D. Nehemiah didn't have to be so concerned about his people who were so far away, but he was.

¹ Douglas F. Parsons, "How to Turn a Minus into a Plus" in *The Preacher's Periodical*, Vol. VI, No. 3, August 1985, pp. 3-5. Adapted by Andy Kizer (07/10/1992).

III. Organize

- A. Some people think that when you are spiritual, you do not organize or plan, but Nehemiah did.
- B. His life was so marked by prayer that he would talk to the king and pray to God at the same time (2:2-4).
- C. During his prayer-filled four months, Nehemiah was also planning. So, when the king asked for information, he had it (2:6-8).
- D. After so much planning and prayer-peration, Nehemiah received...
 - 1. The king's permission (2:5, 8),
 - 2. The king's protection (2:7, 8), and
 - 3. The king's provision (2:8).

CONCLUSION:

- 1. If we will visualize what we need most, agonize over it, and organize, then we may go into the presence of God, standing on His word, and say, "Father, I want Your permission, protection, and provision for this project."
- 2. When we live as God's people, we can say, "The Lord has done great things for us, and our hearts are filled with joy."