

# Final Manuscript: Who Moved My Pulpit: Pursuing Change That Lasts Forever

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A Heart for the Kingdom / Nehemiah 10-13

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## How's it going at your church?

When I visit family and friends I haven't seen in a while, they almost always ask me, "How are things going at your church?" They are just making conversation, but I've never been a fan of the question. If you ask how Kentucky's football season is going you can look at their record and give a disappointing answer. If you ask Kat how her 3rd grade class is doing, she can tell you. Clear measuring points exist in sports, education, and business to know how things are going. Churches cannot be measured like that. People try, but the Bible and church history are full of examples when what appears to be happening on the surface does not reveal how God is at work in the long run.

## Dramatic change at BP. How are we to make sense of it all?

That said, we live and serve in unprecedented times. In addition to simply being the church at Bethany Place, which means loving, teaching, serving, praying, sharing the gospel, doing missions, and all the activities that go into supporting those actions, demands tremendous effort from many, many people. In addition to all that, we have almost completed renovating the facility, we have started a non-profit to facilitate ministry to the community, and we have started the process of becoming a part of Coastal Church.

## Marvel at change over 90 year old's life.

### Know change reality, necessary. Want to know it's for good. For God's glory, our good and for good.

When doing a funeral for someone in their 90's, like at my granny's funeral a few weeks ago, I always marvel at the bewildering change witnessed over that person's lifetime. We know change will happen, but it's more of a challenge when something close to us becomes different.

## Books

I've read a number of books on change over the years, but hundreds more have been written. Some I choose to read, some were assigned to me. Some that I have read are "Changing for Good," "Leading Change," "The Heart of Change," "Leading Major Change In your Ministry," "Who Moved my Cheese," and "My Iceberg Is Melting." A few years ago, Tom Rainer, riffing on the ideas in a couple of those books wrote, "Who Moved My Pulpit," which addresses how to lead change efforts in the church so that they make a difference for eternity.

**Constant need for confession and repentance. resisted in our time because don't let anyone tell you how live your life. We are strongly tempted believe anyone who challenges us means to hurt us.**

To be a follower of Jesus means to be in a constant state of adjusting to God's will, in other words to be in a constant state of change. That begins with repentance when we first come to Jesus and that spirit of repentance continues. As we read God's word and hear it preached, God presents us with a vision of kingdom living that, by definition, reveals where we are off.

Our culture more than perhaps any in the past resists this process because of the value in our culture that says, **"Don't let anyone tell you how to live your life." That message gets repeated so often that we may presume that anyone who would dare challenge us means to hurt us.** But in relationship with God **every time we read, and we sense the conviction of the Holy Spirit, that provides obvious evidence that God loves you, that you belong to him, and that he lovingly speaks to you through his word by His Spirit to guide your feet into the path of peace.** The experience of sensing conviction, while perhaps unpleasant at first, if it is rightly understood it results in joy because it reassures us that we belong to God. And we can sense that God is changing us for his glory and our good to conform us to the image of Christ.

**So, How can we change for good? Meaning how can we change for God's glory and for our good, and for good (change that endures)?**

**Most of us know the experience of clarity in a moment, but knowing the temptation or hardship in the future makes it harder to drill in the changes we know must happen. How can we aim at long term change?**

**Nehemiah is known for rebuilding the wall. His memoir ends with a less well known section, but likely he would rather be remembered for the long**

term effect of his ministry. It proves that the focus all along was not the wall but God's glory & our good in restoring worship among God's people.

## 1. Tend Your Commitments

**Ch. 8-9. Major scripture input together. Hours of reading. Not bored, shaken. Ch. 9 long confession.**

[Nehemiah 9:38](#) "Because of all this we make a firm covenant in writing; on the sealed document are the names of our princes, our Levites, and our priests.

### **lack of faithfulness led to exile**

They **made these commitments because their lack of faithfulness to** follow God according to his call on them resulted in two generations, at least, remaining in exile. Now, through a specific return to the word of God (Ch. 8) and faithful and honest confession (Ch. 9), they saw reality more clearly and made a firm commitment and signed their names to a public document.

[Nehemiah 10:1-27](#) lists the names of those who signed this covenant. The Holy Spirit deemed this to be so significant that he not only preserved for us that this happened, but the names resonate down through the centuries to remind God's people of the need to periodically revisit and sharpen their commitments.

The next paragraph continues that story.

### **Nehemiah 10:28-31 (ESV)**

**28** "The rest of the people, the priests, the Levites, the gatekeepers, the singers, the temple servants, and all who have separated themselves from the peoples of the lands to the Law of God, their wives, their sons, their daughters, all who have **knowledge and understanding**, **29** join with their brothers, their nobles, and enter into a curse and an oath to walk in God's Law that was given by Moses the servant of God, and to observe and do all the commandments of the Lord our Lord and his rules and his statutes. **30** We will not give our daughters to the peoples of the land or take their daughters for our sons. **31** And if the peoples of the land bring in goods or any grain on the Sabbath day to sell, we will not buy from them on the Sabbath or on a holy day. And we will forego the crops of the seventh year and the exaction of every debt.

These commitments involved the **whole community**. He specifically mentions their wives and sons and daughters, **all who have knowledge and understanding**. That points back to the hours of scripture reading they did together. They did not just go through the motions of a big celebration; **they read, they heard, they understood, they worshiped, they confessed, and now they are committing themselves going forward**.

This represents the **shape of what God intends for our worship to be**. We worship God for who he is as revealed to us in his word, we confess our sins, we hear the text applied to our lives through sermons, we then commit ourselves to the fresh vision of the kingdom life that he places before us.

When they say, “we enter into a curse and an oath to walk in God’s Law that was given by Moses the servant of God, and to observe and do all the commandments of the Lord our Lord and his rules and his statute,” they point back to this passage from Deuteronomy which they surely had read in those extended sessions of reading the word of God together.

#### **Deuteronomy 29:10–15 ESV**

“You are standing today, all of you, before the LORD your God: the heads of your tribes, your elders, and your officers, all the men of Israel, your little ones, your wives, and the sojourner who is in your camp, from the one who chops your wood to the one who draws your water, so that you may enter into the sworn covenant of the LORD your God, which the LORD your God is making with you today, that he may establish you today as his people, and that he may be your God, as he promised you, and as he swore to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob. It is not with you alone that I am making this sworn covenant, but with whoever is standing here with us today before the LORD our God, and with whoever is not here with us today.

Beginning in verse 30, the text details several **areas of recommitment**, each of which led them astray in previous generations. For one, they commit to stop the practice of intermarrying with peoples of other religions. There is no instruction in the Bible that speaks against interracial marriage. The concern was not racial; the concern was spiritual influence. The apostle Paul gets even more clear about this in 2 Corinthians.

#### **2 Corinthians 6:14–15 ESV**

Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. For what partnership has righteousness with lawlessness? Or what fellowship has light with darkness? What accord has Christ with Belial? Or what portion does a believer share with an unbeliever?

They go on to list recommitments related to the Sabbath (v. 31), providing for the ongoing ministry in the temple v. 32-39.

**This list of signees reminded me of the signees on the Declaration of Independence and especially John Hancock's bold signature which he knew would lead to his death if the revolution failed. We don't always put so much on the line every time we need to sign our name. We sign checks and tax returns. In school, you sign your paper, identifying your work. Taking out a loan or buying a house, we sign our names for many reasons.**

## **What? Commitments require tending**

### **Ways to tend commitments**

#### **1. Reviewing Goals**

Those who teach on goal setting know that for goals to be effective need regular revisiting, reviewing, and revising if necessary. Now more than ever because of so many options and so many choices without measurable goals tied to what matters most to you, we are in far more danger of being drawn away by hundreds of trivialities. Among those of us who use social media, we have found ourselves stuck in an endless loop of scrolling that benefits the social media company but, at best, wastes precious time and, at worst, discourages and harms your well-being. I urge you to write measurable goals relative to your most important relationships and responsibilities. For me that's as a disciple of Jesus, husband, dad, grandad, church member, pastor, preacher, evangelist, disciple maker, leader, friend, and neighbor. Normally I set goals related to reading and health as well. But all of these goals only work if I review them. Commitments require tending.

#### **2. Write specific applications**

Your relationship with God or the lack of one, matters more than any other relationship in your life. He made you and this relationship affects you longer than any other relationship. To become a Christian, by definition, means to understand the gospel that God is our creator, sin is our failure, Jesus is our Savior. Trust is our response, so that new life can be our pleasure. The trust part Biblically means surrender. It means commitment to him. That commitment requires tending. One way to tend that commitment is not to simply read the Bible, obviously that's part of it. But to write specific application to your life from that passage. That's what's happening right now. I'm never simply offering you a lesson about the Bible. We believe that all scripture is God breathed and profitable for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness, so that we may be equipped for every good work. I work diligently in each sermon to ask God as I study what can I require of us based on this passage of scripture. I'm not promoting my thoughts. My task is to help us all to see how what God says relates to our real lives. God calls every believer to learn to do this with the Holy Spirit's help. The more specific you can be with yourself the better. So, a measurable goal could be that I will read

one chapter of scripture per day and write one sentence of application to my life from that chapter.

### **3. Pursue renewable membership**

We have chosen to follow what, I am certain, represents a more Biblical approach to church membership. Several elders and deacons and spouses attended our first new Membership Class this past Sunday. You won't be surprised that I thought it was great. But several of our people present outside of the Elder Team spoke to me about how encouraged they were following the experience. I urge everyone with any connection to BP to sign up for one of the classes being offered in November and December. That class, more than anything that I can say or write, will help us understand what God is doing here and then you can pray and think more clearly about your part in that. Part of the process to becoming a member of this church for years since before I came here was to sign a membership covenant. You can see from our text that signing commitments is not a new invention. The Holy Spirit provided a long list of names in our text of people doing just that. And because commitments need tending, we will revisit that commitment annually. When I was growing up, we were often encouraged to come forward during an altar call to rededicate our lives to Christ. We will, in a sense, do this together to remind ourselves of our commitment to another of our most important relationships: that of a locally gathering body of believers in a church.

Part of the power of the class is that we sign together, we agree together to commit to these actions that every faithful believer knows is their responsibility before God to do. But we struggle to commit. It seems that the hardest thing for Americans is not to give money, or time, but control. And in signing and making a commitment we know that we are obligating our future selves, because our commitments do restrain us. And where the membership to Bethany Place is concerned, we have decided as a church to change how that works, to a more Biblical approach where we annually agree together that we are making these commitments before God, both to God and to one another.

### **4. Accountability**

One other help for believers is accountability. Church membership is one form of that. We commit not only to God, but also to one another. Three major turning points in my life came about through accountable relationships that I willingly entered. You can do this one on one, or in a small group where you agree together to a regular conversation about a growth or change need in your life. The very act of walking through that can help strengthen commitments we make in moments when what matters more than anything to us is made clear.

**How can we change for good? Meaning how can we change for God's glory and for our good, and for good, change that endures?**

## 2. Mark God's Faithfulness With Celebrations

**Chapter 11 records leaders and the people settling in and around Jerusalem. They were not random nomads. They were an orderly society who belonged to God; he was their identify.**

**Then they dedicated the wall in a dramatic act of thanksgiving.**

[Nehemiah 12:27-43](#) (ESV)

And at the dedication of the wall of Jerusalem they sought the Levites in all their places, to bring them to Jerusalem to celebrate the dedication with gladness, with thanksgivings and with singing, with cymbals, harps, and lyres. And the sons of the singers gathered together from the district surrounding Jerusalem and from the villages of the Netophathites; also from Beth-gilgal and from the region of Geba and Azmaveth, for the singers had built for themselves villages around Jerusalem. And the priests and the Levites purified themselves, and they purified the people and the gates and the wall. Then I brought the leaders of Judah up onto the wall and appointed two great choirs that gave thanks. One went to the south on the wall to the Dung Gate. And after them went Hoshai and half of the leaders of Judah, and Azariah, Ezra, Meshullam, Judah, Benjamin, Shemaiah, and Jeremiah, and certain of the priests' sons with trumpets: Zechariah the son of Jonathan, son of Shemaiah, son of Mattaniah, son of Micaiah, son of Zaccur, son of Asaph; and his relatives, Shemaiah, Azarel, Milalai, Gilalai, Maai, Nethanel, Judah, and Hanani, with the musical instruments of David the man of God. And Ezra the scribe went before them. At the Fountain Gate they went up straight before them by the stairs of the city of David, at the ascent of the wall, above the house of David, to the Water Gate on the east. The other choir of those who gave thanks went to the north, and I followed them with half of the people, on the wall, above the Tower of the Ovens, to the Broad Wall, and above the Gate of Ephraim, and by the Gate of Yeshanah, and by the Fish Gate and the Tower of Hananel and the Tower of the Hundred, to the Sheep Gate; and they came to a halt at the Gate of the Guard. So both choirs of those who gave thanks stood in the house of God, and I and half of the officials with me; and the

priests Eliakim, Maaseiah, Miniamin, Micaiah, Elioenai, Zechariah, and Hananiah, with trumpets; and Maaseiah, Shemaiah, Eleazar, Uzzi, Jehohanan, Malchijah, Elam, and Ezer. And the singers sang with Jezrahiah as their leader. And they offered great sacrifices that day and rejoiced, for God had made them rejoice with great joy; the women and children also rejoiced. And the joy of Jerusalem was heard far away.

**One effect of reviewing all of those names and those referred to but not listed in chapter 10 was to be overwhelmed by the size of this worship spectacle in chapter 12.**

**v. 27 made thorough preparations to fully support the worship experience of God's people**

**v. 31 brought leaders of Judah onto wall & appointed 2 great choirs who gave thanks.**

**Walked in two great processions on top of the wall.**

**God's provision calls for specific celebration.**

**Offered great sacrifices & rejoiced. God made them rejoice with great joy. Not made them as in he programmed them to do it. But he delighted them with his grace so that they rejoiced. Whole families.**

**Joy of Jerusalem heard far away.**

There are three major acts of God's mercy in scripture that his people have celebrated through the years

Celebration after the Exodus.

Celebration after this deliverance recorded here in Ezra and Nehemiah.

But in the New Testament, following the death, burial & resurrection, in some respects the church met every day, (see [Acts 2](#)) but certainly every Lord's Day. They changed centuries of behavior to move from Saturday to Sunday because of the resurrection.

[Luke 7:36-50](#) records the incident where Jesus shared meal/Pharisee Simon. Woman of city brought alabaster flask of ointment standing behind Jesus wet feet/tears & wiped/hair & kissed & anointed /ointment. Shocking. Simon Judged Jesus for not knowing what kind of woman was touching him. [Luke 7:47](#) Therefore I tell you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven—for she loved much. But he who is forgiven little, loves little.”

If we lack the capacity to celebrate God's faithfulness in worship and express gratitude to him in public and private worship, that's a symptom of no longer being amazed with the glory of the good news, the worth of Jesus's sacrifice, and God's goodness in drawing us to himself.

**I have not been strong on ceremony or in celebration, but God has called us to that, we simply have not paid much attention to such passages.**

Opportunities to celebrate God's faithfulness

Every Sunday

Baptisms

Births

Marriages

Lord's Supper

Easter

Christmas

**How can we change for good? Meaning how can we change for God's glory and for our good, and for good, change that endures?**

### 3. Anticipate the Need for Humble Disruptive Leadership

- The reforms recorded in chapter 10 were compromised in Nehemiah's absence as recorded below. His leadership actions here seem way over the top, and some were, but the moment called for disruptive leadership. However, several moments of prayer reveal not arrogance, but humility in his poignant dependence on God and longing to hear, as Jesus said, "Well done good and faithful servant"

#### Nehemiah 13 (ESV)

Ongoing reforms sprang from persevering in the scriptures

**13:1** On that day **they read from the Book of Moses in the hearing of the people.**

**4** Now before this, Eliashib the priest, who was **appointed over the chambers of the house of our God**, and who was related to Tobiah, **5 prepared for Tobiah a large chamber where they had previously put the grain offering, the frankincense, the vessels, and the tithes of grain, wine, and oil, which were given by commandment to the Levites, singers, and**

**gatekeepers, and the contributions for the priests.** **6** While this was taking place, I was not in Jerusalem, for in the thirty-second year of Artaxerxes king of Babylon I went to the king. And after some time I asked leave of the king **7** and came to Jerusalem, and I then discovered the evil that Eliashib had done for Tobiah, preparing for him a chamber in the courts of the house of God. **8** And I was very angry, and I threw all the household furniture of Tobiah out of the chamber. **9** Then I gave orders, and they cleansed the chambers, and I brought back there the vessels of the house of God, with the grain offering and the frankincense.

**Outrageous. Gave inch took a mile. Enemy of God's people displacing resources & tools for worship.**

**Nehemiah had left, in his absence, Eliashib had brought his sworn enemy into the temple to work his subversion from the inside**

**Anger was appropriate. Threw out the household furniture. They had placed him to live in a prime location in the temple.**

**Nehemiah then acts to restore the rightful tools and practices**

**10** I also found out that the portions of the Levites had not been given to them, so that the Levites and the singers, who did the work, had fled each to his field. **11 So I confronted the officials and said, "Why is the house of God forsaken?"** And I gathered them together and set them in their stations. **12** Then all Judah brought the tithe of the grain, wine, and oil into the storehouses. **13** And I appointed as treasurers over the storehouses Shelemiah the priest, Zadok the scribe, and Pedaiah of the Levites, and as their assistant Hanan the son of Zaccur, son of Mattaniah, **for they were considered reliable, and their duty was to distribute to their brothers.**

**He put people and systems in place to make faithfulness more likely**

**14 Remember me, O my God, concerning this, and do not wipe out my good deeds that I have done for the house of my God and for his service.**

**• Kidner comments that verse 14 may seem like eavesdropping on Honest journaling we shouldn't have access to, but Nehemiah's public & private lives are together, and this prayer expresses humility and dependence on God. He also seems to grieve that he has not done more. He Longs to hear well done, good and faithful servant. If we think he's a little too honest. He would say we are too sophisticated.**

## Not works righteousness. humble disruptive leadership

**15** In those days I saw in Judah people treading winepresses on the Sabbath, and bringing in heaps of grain and loading them on donkeys, and also wine, grapes, figs, and all kinds of loads, which they brought into Jerusalem on the Sabbath day. And I warned them on the day when they sold food. **16** Tyrians also, who lived in the city, brought in fish and all kinds of goods and sold them on the Sabbath to the people of Judah, in Jerusalem itself! **17 Then I confronted the nobles of Judah and said to them, “What is this evil thing that you are doing, profaning the Sabbath day? 18 Did not your fathers act in this way, and did not our God bring all this disaster on us and on this city? Now you are bringing more wrath on Israel by profaning the Sabbath.”**

## Confrontation for failure to guard sabbath practice. V. 15-18 Sabbath reforms. Don't earn points. Either we will worship God, or we worship something else. Idolatry. Sin

**19** As soon as it began to grow dark at the gates of Jerusalem before the Sabbath, I commanded that the doors should be shut and gave orders that they should not be opened until after the Sabbath. And I stationed some of my servants at the gates, that no load might be brought in on the Sabbath day. **20** Then the merchants and sellers of all kinds of wares lodged outside Jerusalem once or twice. **21** But I warned them and said to them, “Why do you lodge outside the wall? If you do so again, I will lay hands on you.” From that time on they did not come on the Sabbath. **22** Then I commanded the Levites that they should purify themselves and come and guard the gates, to keep the Sabbath day holy. **Remember this also in my favor, O my God, and spare me according to the greatness of your steadfast love.**

## Intermarriage with their pagan neighbors

**23** In those days also I saw the Jews who had married women of Ashdod, Ammon, and Moab. **24** And half of their children spoke the language of Ashdod, and they could not speak the language of Judah, but only the language of each people. **25** And I confronted them and cursed them and beat some of them and pulled out their hair. And I made them take an oath in the name of God, saying, “You shall not give your daughters to their sons, or take their daughters for your sons or for yourselves. **26** Did not Solomon king of Israel sin on account of such women? Among the many nations there was no king like him, and he was beloved by his God, and God made him king over all Israel. Nevertheless, foreign women made even him to sin. **27** Shall we then listen to you and do all this great evil and act treacherously against our God by marrying foreign women?”

• **V. 23-24 Not racial prejudice. Non-Jews could become part of Israel by conversion [Ruth 1:16-17](#)**

• **Seeking to pass faith on to next generations. This happened through Hebrew language. Serious danger here.**

• **Text not promoting a method of leadership. Nehemiah not the first leader to act out in anger. Surely, he sinned in going this far. But his passion & dramatic intervention were not wrong. Also, they had known Nehemiah long time, and he had the credibility to offer forceful leadership.**

**But by contrast, since we rightly recoil from this leadership method in our time, while giving Nehemiah some grace, Jesus instead of delivering blows, received them.**

**v. 28 Political influence, perhaps most dangerous of all. Sworn enemy managed to get one of his daughters married to high priest son. Dangerous.**

**28** And one of the sons of Jehoiada, the son of Eliashib the high priest, was the son-in-law of Sanballat the Horonite. Therefore I chased him from me. **29** Remember them, O my God, because they have desecrated the priesthood and the covenant of the priesthood and the Levites.

**v. 30 Summarizes his work and again reiterates his humble desire to be found faithful.**

**30** Thus I cleansed them from everything foreign, and I established the duties of the priests and Levites, each in his work; **31** and I provided for the wood offering at appointed times, and for the firstfruits.

Remember me, O my God, for good.

- **Zeal for your house has consumed me. Nehemiah was full of passion, but it's hard not to sense that the teaching of James applies here, the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God.**
- **Despite all the incredible reforms after the years of exile, judgment at God's hand for generations of sins, and big commitments from the people, in the end, only Jesus**

perfectly obeyed the law and for all those who surrender to him, acknowledging their sin

- Remember me, O my God, concerning this, and do not wipe out my good deeds that have done for the house of my God and for his service. The sense of this is that God would not let his effort go to waste, that these reforms would last. How discouraging it would have been to have seen all of that effort to seem as if it had done no good.

Illustration. Jesus turning over the tables in the temple. But he did this without sin.

Halloween has increasingly become a problematic holiday because of such obsession with the holiday in this country. It has become the third highest commercialized holiday in the country. Many who consider themselves followers of Jesus seem to completely lose their minds on this. It appears to grow out of a desperation to squeeze life out of the something because they have decided that Jesus does not excite them. I suspect that such people, obsessed with Halloween have failed to deal with or actually encounter Jesus as he has revealed himself to us through his word.

What? Anticipate the need for disruptive leadership

Prompted by Scripture discern moments . . .

When holiness is challenged

When giving becomes lax

When pride dominates

When worship is neglected

When randomness rules

**How can we change for good? Meaning how can we change for God's glory and for our good, and for good, change that endures?**

(The following two paragraphs paraphrase the end of the Kidner commentary on Ezra.)

We remember Nehemiah for rebuilding the wall of Jerusalem, but he ends his memoirs with much less spectacular achievement.

This man from the court of Artaxerxes, perhaps the greatest leader of the time, brought no worldly values with him. I cleansed, I established, I provided makes a far less brilliant statement than Caesar's boast: I came I saw I conquered. But Nehemiah's work was the making of his people. His reforming zeal, partnered by the thoroughness of Ezra's teaching, gave to the people of Israel after their exile a strength and clarity of faith they never completely lost. This would've be the way that he would want to be remembered, not that he built a wall but that the glory of God and the worship of God's people continued. This indeed, now crowned by the lasting benefits of his book to the Christian church surely provides heaven's answer to his repeated prayer, remember me O God for good. Or in the words of Jesus, well done, good and faithful servant.

May future generations see the patient work we have done and the perseverance through challenging times to faithfully preach the gospel and make some bold moves to seek to ensure that we keep our focus outward rather than inward. And may we aim more than anything else to hear those words of Jesus, "Well done good and faithful servant."