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NEHEMIAH 10:32-39

Series: Life Lessons from Nehemiah

Let's go to our heavenly Father and pray together.

[PRAYER] Father, we thank you for your forgiveness for us that's so big that it just wraps around us. We need that and we're grateful for it. We're thankful for your love that you have in a very personal way to each of us in our hearts. Lord, we appreciate your word and the things we're learning from it. We ask that as we open your word now that you would teach us through this Bible study. I pray for myself, Lord, that you would give me wisdom and the ability to remember the things that I've planned. I pray that only the things you want to be said would be said this morning. Cause me to forget the things that you don't want to be said too. Thank you for our time, Lord. Bless us now. In Jesus' name, amen.

You know I like to read. I'm a reader. As I'm reading different works sometimes I'll read something from a non-Christian source and I'm often intrigued and amazed at how someone will do a whole study, an empirical study, and come up to a conclusion that I can read about in the Bible. People often in the world are doing these studies and trying to figure things out, yet if you read the Bible it has a lot of these conclusions in it already. So I find that interesting.

This one guy I was reading this week, Adam Grant, he's divided the whole world up into three groups. He's not a believer, but he's divided the world into these three groups and he says are you a giver or are you a taker? We'll talk about the matchers in a minute. But the givers are characterized by people who think about other people. We all take and we all give. But givers are the people who are characterized by thinking about others and their benefit and their well-being. Those are givers in the world. Takers – we know those. Those are people who are self-focused. They are focused on themselves, looking for how they can take advantage of others in order to benefit themselves.

And then there are matchers. Matchers is like the guy who picks up my garbage. I'd call him a garbageman, but they don't call them that anymore. He's a sanitation engineer. That's the politically correct term. He's a sanitation engineer. I had put out an extra amount of garbage in front of my house on this particular day. I knew it was more than what was generally accepted, so I went out there to meet him as he was coming by to hope to coax him a little bit to take all of my trash. When he came by he rolled his eyes and he ended up taking all of my trash and I gave him a tip. His eyes lit up and he said, "Anytime you got trash, you let me know! I'll help you out! You take care of me; I take care of you." That's what he said. That's a matcher who's interested in giving only if he can take.

So Adam Grant divides the world into these three kinds of groups. I realize that as a Christian we are givers. That's what we are. There's not a choice here. When we try to ask the question what are you, you are a giver. If you're a Christian, you're a giver. The reality is the Bible teaches us that when we were born we were takers. We started with a sin nature. We didn't start as a blank slate. We didn't start as basically good. We started as takers. We have a sin nature. The problem is that sin nature can overtake us and we can become adults who are takers. But when Christ comes into your life it changes the way you think. He changes the way you act. He turns us into givers. It's even based on his own character. That God Himself... *For God so loved the world, John 3:16 says, that he gave his only begotten Son so that whoever believes in him will not perish, but will have everlasting life.*

So I just want to say even before we open our passage today if you find yourself being overwhelmed by being a taker, you need Jesus. Okay? We want to embrace Him into our lives. But when Christ comes into your heart, He changes you and turns you into someone who's not self-focused, but someone who's a giver. We're going to see this idea developed in our passage today as we look at Nehemiah.

In the book of Nehemiah we're going through this passage verse by verse. In Nehemiah 10 we come to the place where the people are making four commitments and we spent four weeks on this. The first commitment they make in Nehemiah 10:28 is we are going to obey all of the commands of God. We talked about that a few weeks ago. The second commitment they made was to family, in particular marriage. We talked about the value of marriage. A lot of people don't value marriage today. We talked about how in God's kingdom marriage is valued and they made this commitment we are going to value marriage. The third commitment they made was a commitment about their business practices. We talked about this last week that as they conduct their business they're going to consider the poor and they're going to consider the environment. They're not going to allow their business lives to consume so much that they would neglect God. That was their commitment we looked at last week.

This week we're going to look at their commitment to take care of the house of the Lord. That's their commitment. I want you to see it in the passage, I want to take you through it, and then today I'm going to kind of step back from the passage at the end of our time and I want to share some personal things from my own life, my own kind of growth that God is doing in my life as a result of this study in Nehemiah and the leadership here at Calvary Chapel Living Hope. But before we get to that, let's read this passage. Would you stand with me in honor of God's word as we read Nehemiah 10:32-39.

And so they said in their fourth commitment – *We assume the responsibility for carrying out the commands to give a third of a shekel each year for the service of the house of our God: for the bread set out on the table; for the regular grain offerings and burnt offerings; for the offerings on the Sabbaths, at the New Moon feasts and at the appointed festivals; for the holy offerings; for sin offerings to make atonement for Israel; and for all the duties of the house of our God.* In other words we know that it costs to do the Lord's work, and so we're going to assume responsibility for that is what he says.

Verse 34 – *We—the priests, the Levites and the people—have cast lots to determine when each of our families is to bring to the house of our God at set times each year a contribution of wood to burn on the altar of the Lord our God, as it is written in the Law.* Just notice families, again, how God chooses families to work together and how families are taking this allotment. I just encourage you as families to look for ways to give to the Lord.

Verse 35 – *We also assume responsibility for bringing to the house of the Lord each year the firstfruits of our crops and of every fruit tree.* The firstfruits was the first that came out as a demonstration of honor to God, entrusting Him for the rest that would be coming.

As it is also written in the Law, we will bring the firstborn of our sons and of our cattle, of our herds and of our flocks to the house of our God, to the priests ministering there. The idea is we're going to bring our sons, firstborn to serve with the priests for a little bit period of time.

Moreover, we will bring to the storerooms of the house of our God, to the priests, the first of our ground meal, of our grain offerings, of the fruit of all our trees and of our new wine and olive oil. And we will bring a tithe (so that's going to happen afterwards because they look at what they have and then they give a tenth of what's come in) of our crops to the Levites, for it is the Levites who collect the tithes in all the towns where we work. So Levites were spread all over the place. A priest descended from Aaron is to accompany the Levites when they receive the tithes, and the Levites are to bring a tenth of the tithes up to the house of our God (so even the Levites are giving a tenth of what they receive to the house of our God), to the storerooms of the treasury. The people of Israel, including the Levites, are to bring their contributions of grain, new wine and olive oil to the storerooms, where the articles for the sanctuary and for the ministering priests, the gatekeepers and the musicians are also kept.

And here's their statement that they make and here's their commitment: *We will not neglect the house of our God.* That's the fourth commitment.

You may be seated.

Now in the Old Testament we have an understanding theologically of the temple and the tabernacle (that's what they're talking about here), and the care for the tabernacle and all of the religious duties that went along with it. In the New Testament the counterpart to the Old Testament temple is the New Testament heart of the believer. So now today Christ lives inside of our hearts. The Bible says that our body is the temple of the Holy Spirit in 1 Corinthians 6:20. So what we realize is that we're the temple. But there is a counterpart also in the fact that there was a spiritual gathering, there was a spiritual sensitivity, a spiritual training that took place in the Old Testament through the temple that we experience in God's church today. So I want to compare what they were doing in the Old Testament of caring and not neglecting the house of the Lord to this idea of caring for what happens in the life of the church and the spiritual guidance that takes place for us as we gather together and we support the church. It's a commitment I think that we can make and a significant one that we want to encounter.

So if we ask the question are we a giver or a taker, it's an important question because one of the disciplines that God has given us as believers is to be givers. We don't give to a church. We give to God. We give through a church to the Lord.

The first thing I want to say about this of giving is thank you because there are a lot of givers here at Calvary Chapel Living Hope. I'm grateful for what God is doing in your life and I'm grateful for the faithfulness that you have to God to significantly give to what's happening here at Calvary Chapel Living Hope. It's just a blessing to be a part of a church with so many givers. Young people, if you're not giving yet, I want to encourage you to start giving now. Start a practice of giving to the Lord because here's what happens in our hearts. God has set up giving as part of our practice because it helps us move from being a taker to a giver. God does something inside of us. We give not only to meet needs that are out there, we give also because the generosity that's developed when we give something and we don't get anything in return or we give something in the life of the church, then what we're doing is we are making a statement about our own selfishness. Every time you give you give away a little bit of your selfishness and God is able to do something deep inside of your heart. So being a giver is an important part of what we do as Christians.

Now it's interesting in the passage to see all the different things that these gifts were given to. Notice that they were given to take care of the things that needed to happen in order for ministry to take place, in order for people to be ministered to, in order for them to worship, in order for them to offer sacrifices, to have wood on the altar, for the priests that were ministering there. All of this was what these gifts that they gave went to. There are costs that are involved in having a church in our society.

I'm just going to give you one cost of Calvary Chapel Living Hope so you know this. I think it's rather interesting. We meet here on Sunday mornings for four hours, from eight to twelve on Sunday mornings. It will cost us for the privilege of meeting here in the month of March one morning each of the Sundays it would cost us over \$2,000 to meet here at this place. That's a lot of money. Just think if we had a building and we had a mortgage of \$2,000 we could use it all in the course of the week. But we have the privilege (and I consider it a privilege) to meet here in this school as we're growing and developing and God is doing some important things for our lives. But there are costs involved in being a church and having a church in our society. I would encourage you to think about giving and financial giving in particular it's talked about in this passage.

So talking about money is one part of this. So the question about are you a giver is an important question. But I want to ask another question, so I want to move on from that subject where they're giving and so on and I want to ask another question. Are you a leader or a follower?

This is going to take us into a little bit more of my personal growth and what God is doing in my own heart through the study of Nehemiah. Because Nehemiah is a book about leadership. In fact in some seminaries they use the book of Nehemiah to teach pastors and others how to lead. It's a really good book to understand more about what leadership is all about. And so I've taken this time during this study to just examine my own leadership at Calvary Chapel Living Hope. I want

to share with you some of the things I'm learning and what God is doing in my life in a moment. But first I want to ask you the question, are you a leader or a follower?

Now in order to understand the answer to this question, before you answer it I want to give you some theology about church leadership. So I want you to understand what the Bible says about church leadership so that you can understand thoroughly. When we look at the Bible and we try to understand about leadership in God's church there are three parts. Just like a three-legged stool, three different parts to leadership. Each one of these are referred to in this capacity of leadership in regards to God's church.

The first one is that Jesus is the head. We must keep that in mind because Jesus is the one who provides us with direction. That direction is evangelism, discipleship, and mobilization. Now you can look at the church as an organization and you can look at the church as an organism. The church is a body that's functioning together. We're going to get to that part in a moment. You can look at it as an organization that there is structure involved in the organization. Certainly as we report to the government then we do so as an organization. So we're both an organization and an organism.

If we ask the question as an organization what are our short-term goals? What are the goals that are right out in front of us? The goals that we have right out in front of us are evangelism, discipleship, and mobilization. Because Jesus gave us those instructions in Matthew 28 to *go out and make disciples*. So making disciples, evangelizing them, and *teaching them to do all that I have commanded you*. So this mobilization, evangelism, and discipleship are our short-term goals. Okay? That's right here in front of us. That's what we do.

Now do you know what long-term goals? If you're in business, your business is determining long-term goals. Five years, ten years, fifteen years, twenty years maybe. That's a long way for businesses today. But long-term goals. Do you know what our long-term goals are at the church? Evangelism, discipleship, and mobilization. Those are our long-term goals as well. You can't lose sight of that. There's some churches who find themselves being more like a museum or other things that they miss the cutting blades. If you think about the cutting blades when you're in the harvest and they are cutting down the crops, the cutting blades are sharp if we're focusing on evangelism, discipleship, and mobilization. Those are our long-term goals and those are our short-term goals.

Now as a church grows in size, you may have greater ability to accomplish those goals. You may have greater ministries, but the goals remain the same. Because Jesus is the head of the church and Jesus sets out the direction that we need to follow.

Pastors are another form of leadership within the life of the church and pastors have a primary job within the church to serve. If they lose that focus and they start building an empire, they start creating a name or something like that, they miss the leadership goal that pastors have. That's very important.

One of the things I like about the Calvary Chapel movement is that in Calvary Chapels you don't have to go to seminary. God might raise you up as a pastor in a church, but we're taught

continually that service is our mission. That is what we do as pastors. I'm not opposed to seminary, by the way. I went to seminary. I think it's great. But I'm just saying that having a high education isn't a qualification necessarily for pastoring. Servanthood is your most important quality.

In fact among all the service tasks that a pastor has, there are four that stand out. One is to teach the word. To feed the flock. To interpret God's word, share it with people, and teach them. That's one of the ways that pastors serve. Another one is to guard the church. To guard the church against false teaching that may corrupt our thinking, but to also guard the church against takers who would come into church for their own self-interest. Guarding the church is important. Leading the church is another task of the pastor to kind of lay out the playing field so the people can join in and then also to equip. That is to help people to have their gifts strengthened so that they can serve in the life of the church. So now we have two parts of this three-legged stool.

The third part is a significant one. I want you to see this because it is very much a part of leadership in God's church. God has given to every person who is a Christian a spiritual gift. So let me define being a Christian. That doesn't just mean attending church. It means that you have accepted Jesus Christ as your personal Lord and Savior. You've asked Jesus Christ to control you. You've committed yourself to God. When you do that there's this transaction that takes place inside of you and your heart is following after God. When you make that commitment to become a Christian, one of the things God gives you is a spiritual gift. That spiritual gift is an empowerment by the Spirit to act, to take initiative, to lead in the body of Christ.

Whether you're a young person, if you've accepted Jesus Christ into your life as a young person, you have a spiritual gift. You are a leader in God's church. When I say leader it doesn't mean you're the head necessarily of a ministry. What it means is you take initiative and the initiative that you take is a significant one because it directs the course of the church. So if the Lord has brought you into this church and you're a Christian and you call this your church home, then you by the very fact that you are in this church will change the course of this church because God has given you something, a way of thinking, a way of initiating. So you're going to initiate in the life of the church.

I like the illustration of these people all having spiritual gifts sitting around a table in a restaurant, everybody having a different gift because we all initiate in different ways. They're all sitting around a table in a restaurant and the waiter comes in with all the food, trips, falls down, food goes everywhere. At the table everybody stands up, but they all lead in different ways. The one who has the gift of encouragement goes, "Oh are you okay? Come on over here. Why don't you sit down here. Have a seat right here and rest for a moment." The person with the gift of leadership says, "Wow, we need to get some things over here now to clean this up right away. Can somebody help us with that." The person with the gift of service or help is already picking up the plates, picking up the things and putting them back on the tray, trying to get them out of the place. The person with the gift of giving pulls out his wallet and says, "Hey, let me help pay for this that's happened." You see each person comes to this situation in a different way because God has gifted them differently.

The initiative that you take in the life of the church is strategic because it forms who we are and how we develop and how we grow. The purpose of our initiative, each one of us, is to edify. That is to build up the church, to strengthen the church. That's its purpose. So we end up taking responsibility in one way or another.

Let me just take you back to the passage for a moment because in the passage notice it says twice *we assume responsibility*. You see they're taking leadership. We're going to take charge of this particular thing. We're going to assume responsibility in this part of the work that they're talking about in the Old Testament temple. In the New Testament this verse describes more about how all these leadership functions work together. Notice it starts with Christ and ends with Christ. It says – *So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and the teachers, to equip (notice that's the word we have in our diagram) his people for works of service*. So who's doing the works of service? It's the people who are using their gifts and exercising them *until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ*.

Now having said that, we're going to go back to our question. Are you a leader or are you a follower? Of course we would say I'm both. I'm a follower of Christ. I'm a Christ-follower. When we say I'm a Christ-follower, what that means is that I have embraced Christ as my Lord, my boss, and I'm running my life in a way that is honoring to Him. I'm controlled by Him, I'm serving Him, I'm a follower of Christ. But I'm also a leader. Every one of us are leaders and you bring something to this fellowship that is strategic for the life of this church.

So the church becomes this place where we're all leading. But the fascinating thing is we're not all bumping into each other. We're not all leading in a way that's conflicting and getting in each other's way and competing with each other. Why? Because the gifts come from the Holy Spirit who empowers us to lead in a direction that turns us from not just an organization, turns us into an organism called the body of Christ where every piece is important. As we function as the body of Christ and God directs us, we are able to do what the head wants us to do – evangelism, discipleship, and mobilization. It's together that we do those things in the life of the church.

So let me go back now and let me just share with you in my own personal development. Just studying the book of Nehemiah is one thing that's guiding me in my own kind of growth as a leader. But another thing that's happened (as I'm sure you've noticed) is that our attendance has grown. So last year at this time we had about 90 people I'd say as an average and now we have about 125 or so as an average in our church. So the attendance has grown. And just in the same way that a child grows through developmental stages and you either relate to them differently or they have different developmental issues, the same thing is true in a church. Do you know that 80% of the churches in the United States are less than 100 people? So we moved out of that stage into the next stage of our church's growth.

Now when the church was 50 people and there were 20 leaders, it was like one big team. I could lead a team of 20 no problem and we all work together. But as the church has grown, teams have started to develop in different ways in the life of our church. There's some place where teams haven't developed and need to develop. So I really see that in my leadership I need to take a

stance to equip people to lead and to equip people to work in teams in order for the gospel to be able to move forward more effectively.

In church growth studies, one of the things they say and I'd say warn us about as church planters is this: That a church sometimes can only grow as big as the pastor allows. Sometimes a pastor gets in the way of church growth. A pastor who's controlling or a pastor who has to be involved in every decision can limit a church's size because it just can't grow past a certain size. I'm afraid of that. I do not want to be a pastor who's limiting the growth of God's church as it's trying to be the church that God has called us to be.

I'm really grateful for you. I'm grateful that the church is growing and I want to be able to adjust my leadership in a way that's going to unleash the church, facilitate the church to be the church that God has called us to be. I'm a servant and I want to be a servant in the life of this church, which means in part I need to lead in a way that is equipping people to work in teams and so on.

I'm just encouraging to get involved in the life of the church. I'm encouraging you to come a giver. Not just financially. But when you come to church on Sunday morning, I would encourage you to donate two hours of your time to Sunday morning. Think in terms of two hours. If you get here at quarter to ten and stay till quarter to twelve, you've got two hours. When you come here during that time and you're interacting with people, you will use your gift, whatever your gift is. An encouragement gift or an exhortation gift. That the two hours that you dedicate to the Lord on Sunday morning is an opportunity for gifts to be used and be practiced in God's church.

But in addition to that, I'd encourage you to think about how God has equipped you. He's given you something we need and we would love to have that developed. If there's a way that I can personally help you develop your gifts and abilities, I want to do that. To that end, I've given you a piece of paper inside of your bulletin because it's a two-step process. If you're going to give to the Lord in this area of gifts, the first thing you want to do is evaluate yourself. You want to ask before the Lord, "Lord, what gifts have you given me?" And then once you kind of know Lord, you've given me kind of a leadership or a service or a speaking gift or something in the midst of that.

Once you know what God has given you and you're bringing that to the church, then you have to ask another question. The second question is where am I going to use that? Because all of these ministries are ways that you could use your gift in the life of the church. So the second thing you're asking is Lord, how do you want me to serve? In what area have you placed a burden on me so I can bring my gifts and my talents to bear in the midst of this place?

Now my guess is that some of you are saying I have no idea. I mean I don't even know what's going on around here. Well that's one of the reasons I created this handout for you so that you can look at some of the ministries that exist here. Let me just say that GraceWay Bible Church is a great church down the road here in Hamilton. I heard some time back that they have eighty-five ministries in their church. That is amazing to me that they would have so many ministries. A great church over there. In fact I encourage you to take advantage of some of their ministries, but come here on Sunday.

But God is doing some great things in their church. I put down fourteen things that God has kind of given us as opportunities to minister. You might think through some of those things and allow God to speak to you in those areas. Let me remind you, though, that there are some things we do because we're real servants in the life of the church. There is no spiritual gift of stacking chairs at the end of the service. We just do that. Why do we do it? Because we're all servants and we're all working together to be the people that God has called us to be and to serve them. So we all have this command to serve, to initiate, to be what God wants us to be. I would encourage you to be a giver, be a leader, and allow God to use you in some great ways.

That's the exciting part. It's an adventure. I don't know where this church is going to be in a year. I don't know. That for me is an adventure because I don't know who God is going to bring. Because every time somebody comes in, it moves the church a little bit in a direction here or there because we use the gifts that God has given to us. So I would encourage you to think in terms of how God has gifted you and come and use those gifts in the course of the church.

I also want to say that some of you are coming to church because you have some needs and you're not ready to serve. That's okay! That's what the church is about. A way for you maybe to receive and to experience God's grace in a particular way. That's who we are as a church and we look forward to what God is going to do. So I want to ask you to pray. Pray for yourself and how God might use you in the life of Calvary Chapel Living Hope. Pray for our church as we try to form and God allows us to work together. And please pray for me. I don't know exactly how to do some of those things in leadership, that I'd be able to make some changes or adjustments, and maximize what God wants to do through me and in me and here in the life of our church.

Alright. Let's stand and let's pray and come before the Lord and worship Him together.

[PRAYER] Heavenly Father, we do want to thank you for your work in our lives and I just thank you that you brought each one of these people here. Lord, you know what's going on in each of our lives and where we are in this whole area of giving and taking and serving or receiving. So, Lord, I'm asking that you would work in the midst of our hearts. Grow us to be the church that you want us to be. We thank you for the unique flavor that we are in this church. We also thank you for the other churches in our community that are serving you and representing you. So we ask for a combined blessing on all those churches that are teaching the word this morning here in our community. Lord, speak to our hearts now any way that you want. We want to listen to you as we worship you. In Jesus' name, amen.