

the next step

stepping out and following where He leads

Jesus' summons is simple - 'Follow Me!'

As His disciples, those who have responded to His call, the church is, by definition, a people on the move.

As Ruth said to Naomi, so His church says to Jesus, 'Where you go, I will go.' We are bold, therefore, both as individuals and as a local fellowship of believers, to step out in faith and to follow where He leads. 'The next step' is always the most important one and it's what that 'next step' looks like for ourselves that this series of studies addresses.



You can find the background to this short series here.

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1. Ground Zero

(Nehemiah 2.11-20)

[w/b Sunday 8th March 2020]

“.. Come, let us rebuild ..”

Nehemiah's experience provides a useful introduction to this fresh series of studies on 'the next step' - not least because the story of his life was punctuated by a series of 'next steps'. Only as in faith he took one step did the next one become clear.

Nehemiah was a Jew living in exile: as 'cupbearer to the king' (1.11) he held down an important job as, effectively, a steady, reliable civil servant. Little did he realize that this first small step of faith, in obedience to the promptings of the Spirit, would lead him into a lifetime's ministry in church renewal!

[Although there are 7 questions as ever, all of them important, your Community Group may choose to concentrate on just some of them. Key questions in this study are probably 2, 4 and 6. As always try to leave good time for shared prayer!]

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1. **Read Neh.1.1-2.10.** These verses provide the relevant background to Nehemiah's story: he was burdened for the glory of God and conscious of the grace of God.

What parallels (if any) can you see between the state of God's people in Jerusalem (1.3) and the state of Christ's church in Scotland today?

How did it become clear to Nehemiah that the next step for him would involve his going to Jerusalem?

2. Read Neh.2.11-20. Reading the whole of the passage will give you a sense of the considered and careful way in which this man went about things: his example is instructive.

Do you tend more towards being impulsive (acting too quickly) or over-cautious (acting too slowly - or not acting at all!)?

Particularly with reference to taking the 'next step', in what ways can you see parallels between Nehemiah in this passage and what we learn of Barnabas in Acts 11.19-30?

What lessons can we learn from Nehemiah in this passage?

3. Read Neh.2.11-12. Before doing anything Nehemiah took time to survey the scene in Jerusalem: although there was an urgency about the work, he was careful not to rush.

Despite doubtless being keen to get started, Nehemiah did not fling himself into the work immediately (v .11): do you pace yourself well for the 'long haul' of Christian service?

Why was this initial exercise so important a part of what 'God had put in (his) heart to do' (v.12)?

4. **Read Neh.2.13-15.** The first thing that Nehemiah set himself to do was to survey the scene and examine the wall - or what was left of it!

Nehemiah saw that the first step in rebuilding the city (2.5) involved rebuilding the walls: why were the walls of a city like Jerusalem so important?

Do you take time periodically to 'examine yourself' (2 Cor.13.5) and to assess the state of the 'walls' in your life?

5. **Read Neh.2.16.** The initial 'groundwork' was done during the night and without the involvement or knowledge of others "*who would be doing the work*".

Why do you think Nehemiah was, if not quite secretive, certainly singularly discreet?

6. **Read Neh.2.17-18.** There was nothing apologetic about Nehemiah's 'pitch' to the people: his 'presentation' is an object lesson in how to press the right buttons and get others on board.

What were the key ingredients in Nehemiah's sharing the 'next step' with the people?

In what ways do you think we might similarly speak of 'the gracious hand' of our God being on us?

7. Read Neh.2.19-20. All through the Bible we see that any work of God is inevitably contested by the powers of darkness: this 'next step' involving the rebuilding of the walls was no different.

To what sort of mockery and ridicule have you found yourself exposed as you have sought to follow Jesus?

What does Nehemiah's response here (v.20) teach you about handling opposition and ridicule?