

TALK IT OVER

REBUILDERS SERIES | PART 2

28 JUNE 2026

SCRIPTURES

NEHEMIAH 2:1-9

In the month of Nisan in the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes, when wine was brought for him, I took the wine and gave it to the king. I had not been sad in his presence before, ² so the king asked me, 'Why does your face look so sad when you are not ill? This can be nothing but sadness of heart.'

I was very much afraid, ³ but I said to the king, 'May the king live for ever! Why should my face not look sad when the city where my ancestors are buried lies in ruins, and its gates have been destroyed by fire?'

⁴ The king said to me, 'What is it you want?'

Then I prayed to the God of heaven, ⁵ and I answered the king, 'If it pleases the king and if your servant has found favour in his sight, let him send me to the city in Judah where my ancestors are buried so that I can rebuild it.'

⁶ Then the king, with the queen sitting beside him, asked me, 'How long will your journey take, and when will you get back?' It pleased the king to send me; so I set a time.

⁷ I also said to him, 'If it pleases the king, may I have letters to the governors of Trans-Euphrates, so that they will provide me safe-conduct until I arrive in Judah?' ⁸ And may I have a letter to Asaph, keeper of the royal park, so he will give me timber to make beams for the gates of the citadel by the temple and for the city wall and for the residence I will occupy?' And because the gracious hand of my God was on me, the king granted my requests. ⁹ So I went to the governors of Trans-Euphrates and gave them the king's letters. The king had also sent army officers and cavalry with me.

NEHEMIAH 1:11

I was cupbearer to the king.

START THINKING

1. Read Nehemiah 2:1-9. Phil pointed to the phrase "the gracious hand of my God was on me" as the hinge of the whole account. Where do you see God's hand quietly at work in the events of this chapter?
2. Phil said God is always the hero of the story, and that these accounts were given so we would marvel at God, not the people in them. Why do you think we so easily make the hero of a Bible story the person rather than God?
3. Phil drew a careful line: God's providence does not depend on our prayers, yet we are called to pray fervently as if everything depends on it. How do you hold those two truths together?
4. Phil said, "Living by faith does not mean bad planning, and it certainly does not mean no planning at all." Where do you find the balance between trusting God and doing your practical part hardest to strike?

START SHARING

1. Phil challenged us to notice the "providence moments" in our lives, the unexpected conversation, the delayed flight, even the closed door. Can you look back and see one of those moments where God's hand was at work, even if you couldn't see it at the time?
2. Phil distinguished instant prayers, which build our faith, from long, persistent prayers, which build our intimacy with God. Which comes more naturally to you, and which do you most need to grow in?
3. "Put your trust in God, but keep your powder dry." Is there an area right now where you are praying but not yet acting, or acting but not really praying? What would it look like to do both?
4. Phil suggested God calls us to pray partly because He wants our intimacy with Him more than our comfort. How does that reframe the way you think about unanswered or long-awaited prayers?

START PRAYING

1. Worship God for who He is: sovereign, accountable to no one, yet working all things, down to the smallest detail, for His glory and our ultimate good.
2. Ask God to make us people who both pray and plan, going to Him first in everything, and then acting faithfully on what He puts in front of us.

START DOING

This week, take one thing you have been praying about and ask God what your part is in it, the "powder to keep dry." Pray over it first, then take one practical, faithful step towards it.

START TALKING

1. What stood out to you from Sunday's message? What challenged you or encouraged you?
2. What has God been doing in your world - what can we celebrate?

TALK IT OVER

SUMMARY OF SUNDAY'S MESSAGE

This Sunday, Phil Kinder continued our Rebuilders series with the second message in Nehemiah, titled "Providence, Prayer and Planning," from Nehemiah 2:1-9.

He set the scene. Nehemiah was a Jew, born in exile in Susa, the winter capital of Persia, and most likely, he had never even seen Jerusalem; everything he felt for the city, God had placed in his heart. He served as cupbearer to the king, a role of real trust and danger. He tasted the king's food and wine in case of poison, and he guarded the royal chamber, standing in the gap between the king and any threat. In Nehemiah 2, the king notices his sadness, asks what he wants, and grants him letters, timber and an escort to go and rebuild Jerusalem's walls. The hinge of the whole account is one phrase in verse 8: *because the gracious hand of my God was on me*. Phil built the message around three responses to that gracious hand.

1. The gracious hand: PROVIDENCE

Before we look at Nehemiah, we have to see God. God is always the hero of the story; the Old Testament accounts were not given so that we would marvel at the men, but at God.

What is God's sovereignty?

It is His right and power to do anything He pleases. As A. W. Pink put it, God is "subject to none, influenced by none, absolutely independent."

Daniel 4:35 says *all the peoples of the earth are regarded as nothing, and no one can hold back His hand*.

What is God's providence?

If sovereignty is God's throne, providence is His hands. Providence can be defined as follows: "He continuously preserves His creation, directs the course of history, and orchestrates even the smallest details of daily life, so that everything unfolds for His glory and the ultimate good of His people"

He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. Colossians 1:17

We see it all over this story. God placed a Jew as cupbearer to a pagan king, then used Persian money to rebuild Jerusalem. Even the small detail that the queen was sitting beside the king points to a quiet, private moment God had arranged. As Proverbs 21:1 says, *In the Lord's hand the king's heart is a stream of water that he channels towards all who please him*. Changing hearts is God's speciality.

Phil's challenge to us: do we notice the providence moments in our own lives, the unexpected conversation, the delayed flight, even the door that closes, and respond, "Lord, thank You that You see beyond what I can see"?

2. On our knees: PRAYER

When the king suddenly asked, "*What is it you want?*", Nehemiah *prayed to the God of heaven* (Nehemiah 2:4) and answered immediately. This is possibly the greatest expression of spontaneous prayer in the Old Testament. Yet Nehemiah had also prayed into this moment for four months. Here Phil drew out something important, and chose his words carefully: God's providence does not depend on our prayers, for then it would not be providence; and yet, with equal weight, God calls us to pray continually and fervently, as if our prayer is what makes all the difference.

Pray continually 1 Thessalonians 5:17

Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him. Matthew 6:8

Why design it that way? It is a mystery, but Phil's sense is that God is more interested in our intimacy with Him than in our comfort.

- Some PRAYER comes wrapped in WAITING
- Some PRAYER is charged with URGENCY
- ALL Prayer bows to God's Providence and Timing

Instant prayers build our faith; long, persistent prayers build our intimacy.

3. On our feet: PLANNING

Oliver Cromwell told his troops, "Put your trust in God, but keep your powder dry." In other words, trust God completely, and do your practical part diligently. Nehemiah had not only prayed for four months; he had planned. He knew to ask for letters of safe passage across the provinces (like a passport), and he knew the name of the keeper of the royal park who could supply the timber. Picture the alternative: arriving at the first border with no papers, or at the lumberyard with no idea what to ask for.

Living by faith does not mean bad planning, and it certainly does not mean no planning at all. As Proverbs 21:31 says, *"The horse is made ready for the day of battle, but victory rests with the Lord."* Turn it around, and you see the order: victory belongs to the Lord first, and then we ready the horse. Battling to find work? Pray, then get up and make the calls. Body unwell? Pray, then make use of the medical help God has provided. It is always God's providence first, and then our faithful action.

The other Cupbearer

Phil closed at the cross. Nehemiah's job was to be a cupbearer, to take the cup so the king would not die. In another garden, on another night, there was another cupbearer. Jesus took His cup to the Father and asked for it to be removed, and the answer was no, because it was not the Father's will. Knowing exactly what it would cost Him, Jesus took that cup all the way to the grave so that we could live. So this providence is not something out there to be earned. We do not pray and plan to win the gracious hand of God; we pray and plan because, in Christ, we already have it.