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Well, welcome to The MET. My name is Scott [Rodgers, *Jones Road Campus Pastor*]. The 9:30 loud—the rowdy—crowd, are you guys doing good this morning? All right, so let me ask you this question: Who do you think has the easiest job in the whole world? [Congregational response: Our kids. Then Pastor Scott smiles and points to where the majority of *Students* sit in the congregation:] They know.

We lived in Phoenix for a few years at one point. When we first moved in something was going on and here's what it was. For the first 138 days—138 of living in Phoenix—we had zero precipitation. That was over four-and-a-half months of no rain. It (just kind of) hit me. I was like: Do you know who's got to have the easiest job in the world?

- It's got to be the weather man in Phoenix. It's going to be sunny on Monday and (by the way) Tuesday's going to be sunny as well as Wednesday. You know Thursday—uh, sunny. And Friday—(you know) it's just all the time. I think that's got to be the easiest job in the world.
- Until I heard about this guy named Wayne Munnelly. Wayne is actually (they call him) the Director of Sleep for the *Travelodge* hotel chain. His job is to nap on as many of the 25,000 beds that they have to check for comfort. That's got to be the easiest job in the world (I would think).
- Until I began to think back a little bit and Vanna White came to mind, from the *Wheel of Fortune*. You know Vanna. [Pantomimes walking up to an imaginary board of letters and pointing.] How difficult can that be? (I mean) that's got to be the easiest job in the world. Right?
- Until you watch *Deal or No Deal*—the briefcase holders on *Deal or No Deal*. Right? (I mean, you know...) [Using his Bible on his open palm to pantomime:] the drama of lifting the lid on the briefcase. So that's got to be the most—that's not the right way to say it. That has to be the easiest job in the world.

Some of you guys said: Pastor, well, that's just plain-out mean. Don't be saying that. That's just plain-out mean.

Well, welcome to The MET. Today we're going to wrap up our series called *Kickin' It Old School*.

By the way, next weekend we begin a brand-new series called *Start Something [New]*. And our very own Lead Pastor, Salvatore Joseph Sberna III, will be back with us teaching that series. So we're all excited to have him back.

But today we're going to wrap this thing up as we take a look at the person and the book of *Nehemiah*. So if you have your Bible (or your mobile device), go to *Nehemiah, chapter 1*. Here's the context. Nehemiah is what they called the cupbearer to the king of Persia.

- He is in exile.
- He's in Persia.
- He's the cupbearer.

I'd think (you know) that potentially could have been the easiest job in the world in that day. Because all he had to do was make sure that the wine goblet for the king was ready. So his whole job was to take care of the cup. He was the cupbearer. I don't know if—

- He had a suitcase he put it in.
- He'd carried it around with him wherever he went with handcuffs on it so nobody could get to it.
- He washed it.
- He made sure it was ready for the king.

The thing was that in that day—not only was there politicking and lobbying and all that (kind of) power struggles going on but—if someone wanted to get rid of you as a king, it was a little more black-and-white in that day. They would just try to get rid of you—literally. So the cupbearer's job was to make sure that the king didn't drink any strychnine wine—that no one slipped in some cyanide or some strychnine—to take out the king.

So the unique job of being the cupbearer was not only making sure the cup was always in sight and taken care of but—guess what else the cupbearer had to do?—he had to take the first sip. Can you imagine that? All right, here we go. That's got it. [Pantomimes pouring wine into a cup, taking a sip, and swishing it around in his mouth] Hmm...hmm...hmm...are those Beaujolais grapes from France? Hmm...oh, I'm alive! Okay, here you go, King. He gives him the cup and the guy drinks his wine with his steak or whatever he was having. So he's the cupbearer to the king.

So we're going to pick this up in *chapter 1*. Here's the context of what happens. Before I jump there, let me say this. The book of *Nehemiah* (it is just)—I read through it and the overall theme of the book is really God preserving His people:

- Bringing back a third wave of people, [who] are in exile, into Jerusalem
- He calls this man Nehemiah to lead the charge
 - To rebuild the walls of the city that had been broken down for over 90 years
 - To restore some sense of society and forward progress

So that's the overall theme of the book.

But as I read it, there [are] so many ways we can apply the book of *Nehemiah* to our lives (I mean) from a business aspect. (I mean) it reads like a Jim Collins *Good To Great* [book] on:

- Organizational leadership
- Life cycle
- Fifth-level leader (and on)
- How to leverage technology

(You know, I mean, it's just kind of this)—it's a really good application in a lot of areas of business.

For leadership in general it's: God gives a man a vision (or a woman a vision) and—

- They rally the troops around
- Keep them on task.
- They know what they're doing.
- They go after it.

He keeps them inspired and that kind of stuff.

Or even in personal life from a success-approach [standpoint] (you know):

- How to set goals (and you know)
- Fight against the resistance that's going to come in your way (and)
- Keep on going

—so that ultimately someday you'll be able to hoist the trophy up in the air with the confetti flying and all that kind of stuff. It's applicable in so many ways.

But when I read through the book of *Nehemiah*, the one that hit me was: I see it applicable in the way of the local church—the body of Christ—working through the local church. So it's through that lens that we're going to look at this book and unpack it.

So *chapter 1*—the context is: Nehemiah is having a conversation with his brother. His brother had just returned from a trip to Jerusalem. And in their passing Nehemiah says: Hey, weren't you just in Jerusalem? Tell me how it's going. What's going on there? Because (you know) I'm getting some mixed reports and—who knows?—at CNN and all that drama, I don't know if that's accurate or what's going on.

So here it is; in *verse 3* we pick it up. *Nehemiah, chapter 1*—here's the reply that Nehemiah's brother gives to him. He says: Well—

³ "...The wall of Jerusalem is broken down, and its gates have been burned with fire." {Here's his response—Nehemiah: }

⁴ When I heard these things, I sat down and wept. For some days I mourned and fasted and prayed before the God of heaven.

Nehemiah 1:3-4 (NIV)

If you're taking notes, write this down. I got a thought right up front on this; it's that:

NEHEMIAH HEARD WHAT WAS HAPPENING AND HE THOUGHT SOMETHING SHOULD BE DONE

See, what Nehemiah heard about God's people in Jerusalem was: the walls are broken down and—

- They're vulnerable.
- They're lacking safety.
- They're making zero progress as a people.

And that bothered him. That bothered Nehemiah. He heard about it and he's thinking: Something should be done.

I don't find it disconnected that God gets our attention (as followers of Christ) very often by bothering us with something.

- We hear about something that just shouldn't be.
- We hear about something that's not what we see scripturally the way God designed for it to be.

And it bothers us. Often God will just get our attention by bothering us with something that's not right.

Here's what Scripture says in *Philippians, chapter 2, verse 13*. Check this out—it says (that):

...for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose.

Philippians 2:13 (NIV)

You see, God is at work in us. He's putting the desire in us to want to—to act and live our lives according to His purpose. And often I find in my own life (and many people that I know); is that, God will get our attention by bothering us with something that we hear about. We're like: Man, (you know) that's just not the way it should be.

In February of 1991—way back—when I gave my life to Christ, I prayed this simple prayer: Jesus, come into my life. Forgive me of my sin. I want to live my life for You. (Whatever it was) in that moment everything began to shift for me. Not only was I saved (as the Bible calls it) and forgiven and knowing that I was going to spend eternity in heaven now as a child of God; but I began to see things a whole different way in the world around me. One of the biggest things I noticed right off the bat was: There were so many people in my life—in my circle of relationships—[who] had no relationship with God and that bothered me. I would literally just—it bugged me to all get-out like:

- Man, I'm seeing this God who loves me.
- I'm opening up the Bible.
- The Scriptures are just jumping off the page.
- My heart is being transformed.

Then my friends and the people around me are (just like) not even connected to God—exactly like I was before that moment in February 1991—and that just began to bother me.

So let me ask you this: What bothers you? Is there something that God has drawn your attention to that bothers you?

You see, when God wants to get our attention—often—He'll bother us with something; because He's wanting for us to act according to His purposes. When we hear about something, we think: Something should be done.

- Maybe for you, it bothers you that there are a lot of people [who] are far from God. And you see it every day. And it just—God messes you up; you have a holy discontent because people don't know Him. (Or)
- Maybe what bothers you is people who have just begun a relationship with Christ, but they really don't know the next steps.
 - How do I grow spiritually?
 - How do I realize all of this stuff—that, Scott, (that) you say or—that the Bible says I can have as a follower of Christ?
 - How do I realize that in my life?
 - How do I live that out?

I don't have—I don't know the next steps. Maybe that bothers you that so many of us don't know the next steps to take.

- Maybe it bothers you that so many marriages around us are falling apart and divorce is normal; it's normal. (Or)
- Maybe it bothers you that today there are one billion people on our planet [who] do not have access to clean drinking water; and that just bothers you.

What is it? What is it that bothers you? Where has God got your attention?

Do you want to know what's been bothering me lately?—is this whole human trafficking thing. A couple of years ago I was exposed to it just by hearing about it. Man, I'll tell you what. It jacked with me; it messed me up. (I mean) to hear—

- That it's literally the second largest and fastest growing criminal activity on the planet
- That the United Nations estimates that the industry of human trafficking generates \$32 billion a year
- That 50 percent of the victims of human trafficking are children

We're talking prostitution, child pornography; all these sex crimes. A lot of them are kidnapped into this and forced into drug addiction and then forced into prostitution.

- It's happening here in Houston
- It's happening all over America
- It's happening all over the world

When I hear that, it just bothers me. Do you want to know what I've done about it?—pretty much nothing.

If I were to take *Nehemiah 1:3*—I know that we can't be the savior to every issue in the world; but when God gets our attention, He's getting our attention for a reason. If I were to apply *Nehemiah 1:3*—let me read it to you in a little modified version. This is (kind of) how—if it was about me—how it would read in regard to human trafficking:

³ "...The wall of Jerusalem is broken down, {while this human trafficking thing is crazy; it's out of control.} and its gates have been burned with fire."

⁴ When I heard these things, I sat down and wept. For some days I mourned and fasted and prayed before the God of heaven. {Then, I got back up and went on with life as usual.}

Nehemiah 1:3-4 (Scott's modified version)

I've come to (what I call) the *first line* of being bothered with this issue. It's this: I'm bothered enough to be concerned.

CROSSING THE FIRST LINE: WE ARE BOTHERED ENOUGH TO BE CONCERNED

I think so many of us get to that place where we hear about it and we think something should be done. God gets our attention; He's bothering us with this thing. And we go up to that first line

and it's like: Man, I'm concerned about this. If you're like me in some areas, maybe that's as far as you went.

But let's take a look at what Nehemiah does with this holy discontent that God gives him about the walls of Jerusalem. It says this as we pick it up again in *chapter 2*: What he does is he gets permission from the Persian king to go and scope it out. He's on recon, checking this thing out, and he goes—in one night (all by himself) he gets on his horse and he goes—literally around the walls of the city that are all broken down. It says in *verse 17* when he returns—maybe the next morning or whatever it was—he says to the people [who] are with him:

Then I said to them, "You see the trouble we are in: Jerusalem lies in ruins, and its gates have been burned with fire. Come, let us rebuild the wall of Jerusalem, and we will no longer be in disgrace."
Nehemiah 2:17 (NIV)

If you're taking notes, write this down because this is the second thing that I see here; it's that:

NEHEMIAH SAW WHAT WAS HAPPENING AND HE REALIZED SOMETHING MUST BE DONE

See, he first heard about it and thought something *should* be done and he became concerned. Now he *saw* it firsthand and he's like: Something *must* be done. Now he's crossed into the *second line* of what I call being bothered; and that is this: That I'm bothered enough to take action and sacrifice something.

CROSSING THE SECOND LINE: BOTHERED ENOUGH TO TAKE ACTION AND SACRIFICE SOMETHING

He's taking action. He's going to go through some sacrifices. But God has bothered him with this and he realizes that something must be done—

- I'm the one.
- I'm going to take action.
- I'm going to make some sacrifices to help do my part in making this all happen.

I remember when I was really first exposed to doing something as a Christian other than:

- Just going to church (which was great)
- Growing personally (and)
- God taking care of some baggage in my life.

I remember when I became—when I'm on fire for the things of God, I literally become possessed with a passion to make the world a better place. It's (kind of) how I'm wired. The closer I get to God, the more I'm like: Man, something has to be done! I'm not talking about policing morality or all the tasteless picketing that Christians do. I'm talking about being light and salt in our world in trying to help people know this God who loves us. I become (just) possessed with this passion to help the world become a better place. And we cross that *second line*.

I remember that early in my days as a follower of Christ I heard about a ministry out of our church; and it was in the inner city—not The MET, but—where I was when I was living as a Michigander. (I've told a little bit of this story in the past.) I heard about this and I thought: Man, something *does* have to be done. They're telling me about what's going on. That's cool. That's great! Kudos! Good for you, man, hand clap. Then I was personally invited to go check it out myself. I went. I was first exposed to people:

- Living on the streets
- Under bridges
- People trying to find food

—and feeding people [who] didn't have food. And all this good-good-good stuff that I believe represents the heart of God.

Well, then I was exposed to the kids in that area in this inner-city segment. And I tell you what: God bothered me; because I saw these kids—visiting them in their houses—and trying to (just) do life with them.

- They had no father. Not one of them that I was exposed to—none of them—had a father figure.
- Their mothers were mostly strung out on drugs; weren't really at the place to mother these kids.

I'd go in homes and kids are sleeping on the floor [and] literally eating off the floor. I'm not being overdramatic. It's the truth. I'd go and open their refrigerator and cockroaches are coming (all) out of the fridge. It was a mess and God bothered me with that. I'm thinking: Man, something *must* be done with this.

It was the next 13 years of my life that was really dedicated to the cause of helping boys and girls know Christ; and helping them to have some vision and dream from beyond where they currently were. It was tough:

- There are points where you say: Man, that's a win!
- There are a lot of them like: Man, did we make any difference?

But aside from that fact, God bothered me with it and I realized something *must* be done. So I had to take action.

One of the things I love so much about The MET is that this church (just) takes action. You guys have such a heart for people. As I'm getting to know you and talking to you and meeting with — some of you guys—over coffee and lunch and stuff—and (just) hearing your heart in what God's doing:

- I'm hearing about first what He's doing in your life and how passionate you are, because of what the Spirit of God is doing in you (but then)
- I'm hearing about how you love the heart of The MET (and)
 - Locally trying to reach out and impact people's lives.
 - Globally through what we're doing in missions and investing in people who are out there, reaching people and being a part of that.

I just love that whole deal. It's (just) so cool to hear about.

I want to challenge you: For those of you who are sacrificing to help make all that happen, keep doing it because God is changing lives. For those of you who are (maybe) at that line of concern

but you haven't stepped into taking action and sacrificing something; I want to ask you today to allow God—give Him the permission—to bother you with something. Give Him the permission:

- God, bother me with something.
- Show me a broken down wall in my world.
- What is a wall that's broken down that it shouldn't be like it is?
- Show me something and bother me with that.

Because (I'll tell you) living the life as a Christian without having a cause for Christ is really (kind of) dry and stale. And (I don't know) that's not the life I see in Scripture. (I mean) it's just not any fun. But what is the cause that God's bothering you with? What is the broken down wall that He's exposing you to? Because I guarantee you if you say, "God show me," He's going to show you. Bother me with something.

So Nehemiah—he's bothered.

- First, he hears about it. Then he realizes: (You know) something *should* be done. So he crosses that *first line*: he's concerned.
- Then he goes and sees it firsthand and he's realizing it *must* be done. He crosses the *second line* and that is: I'm going to take action and I'm going to sacrifice something.

In the book [of *Nehemiah*], *chapters 4 through 7* really unpack all the resistance that he faces; all the hard work that he faces with people saying—(you know) the naysayers:

- Oh, you can't do this.
- You can't do that.

Political gesturing and maneuvering [that's] trying to keep him from rebuilding the wall. But he presses on and he gets through it.

Here's what's interesting. As God uses Nehemiah to stay on task, He casts the vision. And the wall—that's been down for 92 years—is rebuilt in 52 days, because the people united together and rallied together. The Bible says that they would have a shovel in one hand and a sword in the other:

- They're defending.
- They're working.
- They're praying.

It's a great picture of what I think is the body of Christ: putting our hands to the work of rebuilding walls in people's lives while we're praying spiritually. We're (just) ready and that (just) seems like a great parallel in this book.

He goes through all that. Then in *chapter 8* he gets to this place. If you have your Bible, you can open it up. *Chapter 8, verse 1* (it says this)—the walls are rebuilt and it says:

...all the people assembled as one man in the square before the Water Gate. {Now the Water Gate is not the *Watergate* of the '70s. All right? The Water Gate is just a gate that was in the wall—the city wall—that had been rebuilt. Okay? So they get everybody assembled as one man before the Water Gate.} They told Ezra the scribe to bring out the Book of the Law of Moses, which the LORD had commanded for Israel.

Nehemiah 8:1 (NIV)

Now, literally in that day, that's their Bible. That's what they had as Holy Scripture. They got the Book of the Law of Moses—for you Bible students (some of you)—may be called the *Septuagint*. In *Nehemiah 8:6*—go on down:

Ezra {it says} praised the LORD, the great God; and all the people lifted their hands and responded, "Amen! Amen!"...

Nehemiah 8:6 (NIV)

Now what they were saying is:

- Yes, Lord, we see it in Your Word.
- It is written.
- So let it happen.
- So let us respond to it.
- Do what You say You're going to do, God.

That's (kind of) unpacking what the word, "Amen! Amen!" means. It says:

...Then they bowed down and worshiped the LORD with their faces to the ground.

Nehemiah 8:6 (NIV)

Here's the third thought that I get from it; is that:

NEHEMIAH RESTORED THEIR WORSHIP OF GOD

He got to the place where—okay—

- The *first line* is: I'm concerned.
- The *second line* is: I'm willing to take action and sacrifice something.
- The *third line* is: He was bothered enough to be bold about his faith.

CROSSING THE THIRD LINE: WE ARE BOTHERED ENOUGH TO BE BOLD ABOUT OUR FAITH

- Is it enough to provide clean drinking water or help to source clean drinking water for one billion people?—that's a God-honoring cause and I believe it represents His heart.
- Is it enough to feed people who are having a hard enough time feeding themselves?
- Is it enough to help a couple realize that most of their marriage conflicts can be solved if they just worked at it and we helped them take some action steps to do that?
- Is it enough to do all this stuff that honors God and helps people?

I would say it falls short. Because the ultimate goal—when God gets your heart and gets your attention and bothers you with something—the ultimate goal is to bring them into a relationship with Him.

Jesus said in *John, chapter 7, verse 37*—check this out:

³⁷ "If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. ³⁸ Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him."

John 7:37-38 (NIV)

He said: "If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me." And I believe that when God gets our attention and bothers us, there comes a place where we have to be bold about our faith. Because we realize that we can feed people, we can help them—and we better be doing that—but the ultimate win (the ultimate outcome) is a person coming into a saving, forgiving relationship with Christ.

So when God bothers you and He gets your attention, realize that—

- The path that He takes you down
- The walls that are broken down that He may show you
- The sacrifices that are necessary to take

—realize that as you work and you battle and you go through all that hard stuff, the ultimate win is when someone comes to Christ through your efforts.

It's going on all the time here at The MET and—

- If that's you and you've been sacrificing, thank you.
- If you've been serving, thank you.
- If you're in the office and you've opened up to people—
 - They know they can come to you to pray for them (or)
 - They can come to you when they're having a hard day—and you're someone who will listen and just help them take that next step, because you have something in you that maybe they don't have; I want to say thank you for doing that.
- Dads, if you're leading your family in a way that's helping them to grow closer to Christ; thank you for doing that.

It's not easy, is it? It's tough stuff. But God will bother us and we'll realize that something must be done. If He bothers you, He probably wants you to help do something about it.

Let's bow our heads and close our eyes. Let's pray.

Father, we thank You that You are at work in us to will and to act according to Your good pleasure. That, God, You're putting in our hearts—You're exposing us to needs in our world—with the ultimate goal of helping people come to Christ.

I want to ask you guys a question as we're (kind of) in a posture of prayer—heads bowed, eyes closed—here's my question: Will you give God permission to bother you? Some of you haven't been bothered in a long time for a cause that God wants you to be involved with. Will you give God permission to bother you again?

If you're sitting here and you're like: Yes, Scott, I want God to bother me because I want to contribute in this world. I want to see the world a better place. And I want to ultimately see people come to Christ. God, I give You permission to bother me with something that will honor You. If that's your prayer, just slip your hand up. I want to—man, of course, all over the place.

Father, I just thank You for all of these people who said: Yes, God, I give You permission. I ask You to bother me with something. So, Father, I pray that You do that. That You'd begin that today or You'd amp-up what You've already been doing in bothering some of us with some issues. Lord, I pray that as You bother us, You'd show us some steps to take. Let us wrestle with this for awhile, God, and challenge us to figure it out. What do I do with this? But, God, I pray You'd bother us again with something that will honor You and that will help people.

With our heads bowed and our eyes still closed, you're here and maybe you're suddenly bothered with the reality that you don't know God. You came in here—someone invited you—and you weren't sure what you were walking into. (I know how that feels.) But all of a sudden you're bothered that you may walk out of here without a relationship with Christ. You're bothered that you're hearing about this God who's loving, but you don't really know Him (if you're honest).

Well, let me explain something to you real quick: If that's bothering you right now, I would say that's what the Bible calls *conviction*; that God is convicting you of the reality that you don't know Him. And He is wooing you. He is encouraging you to take a step today to say: Jesus, come into my life; be at the leading point of my life; be the Lord of my life.

If you're sitting here and that's what's bothering you, let me tell you this: God sent His son, Jesus Christ, who is sinless and perfect, to die for you. Why'd He have to die?—because you and I have sin within us. It doesn't matter if we do good [or] if we do bad, we have sin within us and someone had to pay the price. The justice of God had to be fulfilled. And it was His son Jesus—literally God in the flesh walking on our planet—who said: I will pay the price and the price is death. I will pay the price so they can have forgiveness and have life. That's what Jesus came to do for you and [me]. He's already done it. It is finished.

But now the next step is for you to acknowledge that and say: Jesus, I want You in my life. It's for you to intentionally surrender yourself to the lordship of Christ. What's that mean? That just means:

- Come into my life, God.
- Forgive me.
- Change me.
- Help me to live my life from here on out, living for You.

That's what that means.

Maybe you're here and God's bothered you that you don't know Him. I want to pray for you. I want to pray for you that you'll walk out of here having made a decision to ask God into your life, to be forgiven, to become a child of God. If you're sitting here and that's your decision, then you say: Scott, pray for me. I just want Christ in my life. I've never made that decision before and that bothers me. I want to be a child of God. Just stay in your seats—heads bowed, eyes closed. If that's you, just say: Scott, pray for me. I want Christ in my life. Just lift your hand up. Come on, be bold, be bold; come on, lift it up. Yep, I see your hand here. Sir, I see your hand here. Who else? Just keep it up. I want to just see—got you back there in the back; another one in the back. Scott, pray for me. I want Christ in my life. I don't want to walk out of here without Him. I want Jesus in my life. Who else? Scott, pray for me.

We're going to pray together, you guys, and we're going to pray as a family. Repeat this prayer. Give me the privilege to lead you in this prayer. Just mean it from your heart and say this. Let's say it all together—say:

Father God, today I surrender my life to you. Forgive me of my sin and my mistakes. Jesus, thank You for dying for me on the cross. I believe You're the Son of God and that You've risen from the dead, so be my Savior, the Lord of my life. Thank You that I am forgiven and I'm a child of God. In Your name I pray. Amen.

Come on, 9:30! Put your hands together. That's fantastic! Great job!

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**Strategic planning is the key to warfare;
to win, you need a lot of good counsel.**

Proverbs 24:6
(*THE MESSAGE*)

Legend:

(**words in parentheses**) = spoken by the preacher *but unnecessary* to the core sentence idea
[**words in square brackets**] = additional explanation for clarity *not spoken* by the preacher
{**words in curly brackets within indented quote**} = spoken explanation *not part of the quote*