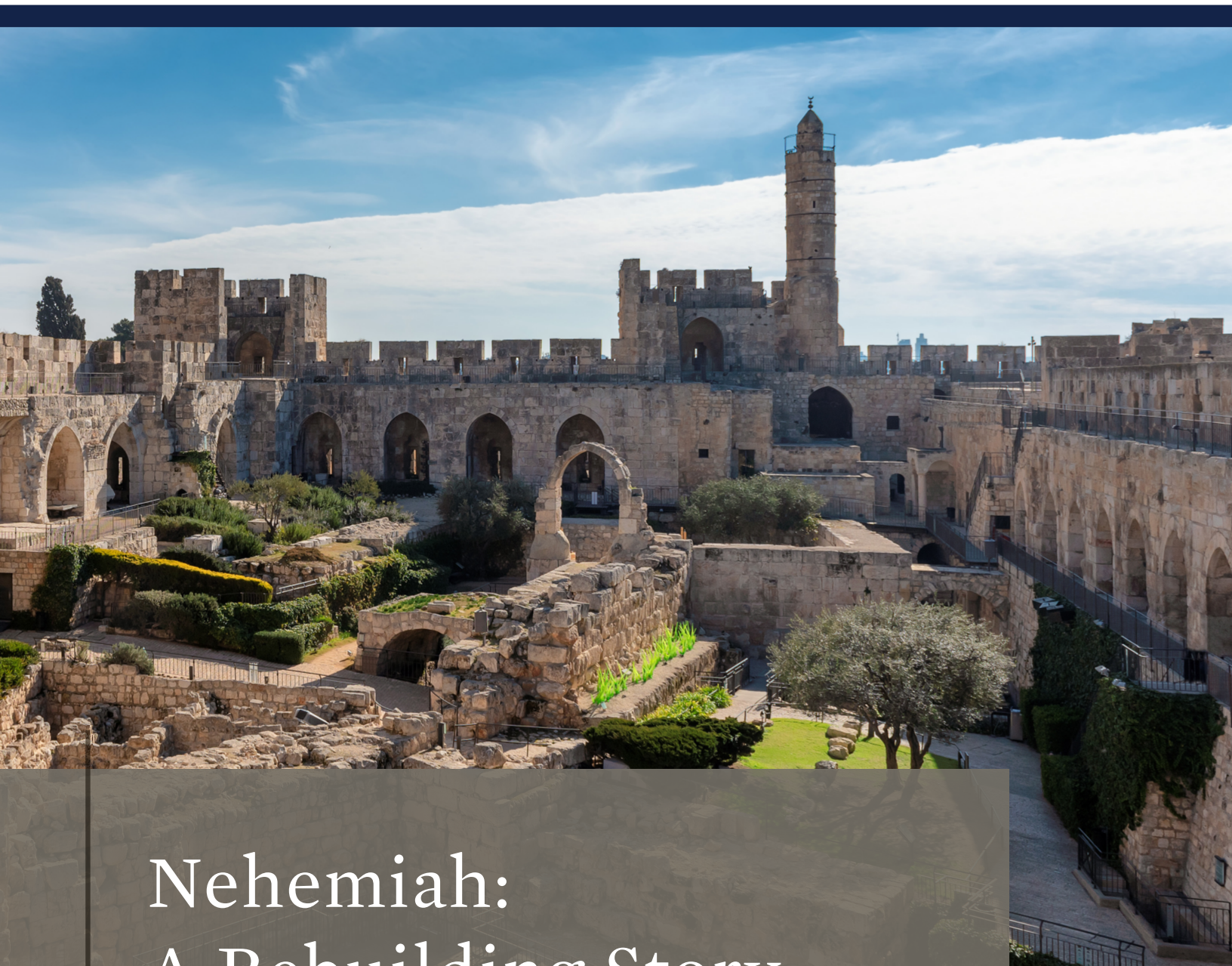


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Nehemiah: A Rebuilding Story

A “WISDOM FOR BUSINESS” E-BOOK

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INTRODUCTION

The Five Steps of Rebuilding

Times of crisis often multiply the uncertainties facing businesses and their leaders. Just as business owners need wisdom for how to react during the crisis, they also need wisdom for how to rebuild their companies after the crisis.

Thankfully, we have the story of Nehemiah, an ancient but relevant example from the Bible to help guide us. Although it took place between 445 B.C. and 430 B.C., there are a number of lessons that business owners and leaders can learn from Nehemiah's story that will prove helpful as they rebuild their businesses.

Directing a business through this crisis has required business owners and leaders to focus on work that is both urgent and important. However, much of the work that will be required to rebuild a business after this crisis is likely important, but NOT urgent. Business owners must first reorient their thoughts from a reactionary mindset toward a rebuilding mindset by focusing on the strategic work that will lead their respective organizations forward.

For example, it is important for business owners and leaders to invest the time to:

- Step 1: Reorient their mindset
- Step 2: Reflect on the lessons they have learned through this crisis
- Step 3: Reassess their companies' operations within a changing landscape
- Step 4: Reinvent their businesses' products and services within a new competitive landscape
- Step 5: Redirect their strategic plans

As we explore Nehemiah's story, you will see that he followed these same five steps.



The Crisis

We often think it will be a long time before the challenges created by a crisis will fade from people's memories. If history teaches us anything though, it is that time has a way of healing old wounds and erasing lessons learned during trials. In fact, this describes the circumstances in which Nehemiah found himself.

Around 587 B.C., the Babylonians invaded Judah, destroyed the city (including its walls) and demolished Solomon's temple. This was actually the third invasion of God's promised land. God had created Israel to be a light to the Nations bringing glory to God and salvation to all Peoples. Unfortunately, the Israelites rebelled against God and He used foreign invasions to lead them into repentance. For seventy years, the Israelites lived in captivity until the Persians released them to return home. This is the setting for Nehemiah's story. Many Israelites had returned to Judah, but many had chosen to stay in Persia. Nehemiah was one that chose to stay.

The people that returned to Judah refused to turn away from their rebellious acts. Nearly 70-years later the wall around Jerusalem had still not been rebuilt, the temple was not being maintained, sacrifices had ceased and the people were adopting the religious practices and cultures of the surrounding nations. By the time Nehemiah's involvement in God's story begins,



the political, social and spiritual conditions in God’s promised land were anything but glorifying to God.

Back in Persia, Nehemiah was growing in influence and skill. The book of Nehemiah starts with Nehemiah serving as the cupbearer to the King. This means that every day the king was entrusting his life to Nehemiah, so they must have built a special relationship over time. In fact, King Artaxerxes’ father was poisoned by a trusted servant, so the king knew well the importance of his own cupbearer. At some point growing up, Nehemiah was given a place amongst the palace servants. As he grew up, he must have continually impressed the Persian officials with his integrity, trustworthiness and devotion to be granted this strategic position.

Clearly Nehemiah reacted well, making the best of his circumstances, but this was not the only story that God was writing through his life.

Just as leadership “in” crisis and leadership “out of” crisis are different for business owners and leaders today, it was different for Nehemiah, too.

God wanted to change Nehemiah’s leadership from reacting to his circumstances to rebuilding the walls around Jerusalem. As business owners begin rebuilding their businesses, it is important to understand these differences so the necessary adjustments can be made.

STEP 1

Reorient Your Mindset

The environment in a businesses can become blurred during a crisis. The same blurring happened to Nehemiah. In order for Nehemiah to transition from leadership in crisis to leadership out of crisis, he had to reorient his mindset from devotion to the King and Kingdom of Persia to devotion to God and His Kingdom in Jerusalem.

The process of reorienting Nehemiah's mindset began in Nehemiah 1:2 when he received a report about the condition of God's people in Jerusalem. The news he received broke his heart and he wept. It was at this point that everything changed for Nehemiah. He realized that he could not stay in his current circumstances any longer; he needed to make a change. For almost 150 years, the walls around Jerusalem had been broken down and God's people were living in "great trouble and disgrace." (HCSB) God's purpose of creating a people to be a light to the Nations bringing glory to God and salvation to all peoples was not happening. If Nehemiah was going to further God's mission, then he was going to need to change his position and refocus on God's mission.

Similarly, business owners and leaders leading their companies out of crisis need to reorient their mindsets. They cannot be content with the status quo of surviving. Every business still has a role to play in advancing God's story by adorning

the Gospel, fulfilling the Great Commandments and furthering the Great Commission. The first step toward rebuilding your business is to “reorient” your mindset by clarifying three key elements that became blurred as a result of the pandemic: 1) the role of the business owner, 2) the mission of the organization and 3) the risks facing the business.

A good place to consider starting would be the same place that Nehemiah began. As soon as Nehemiah reoriented his mindset, he immediately turned to God for direction through prayer and fasting (Nehemiah 1:4-11). His prayer was concentrated on four main themes:

- Praising God’s greatness
- Focusing on God’s promises
- Humbling his heart through confession
- Making a bold request
 - For an opportunity to join God in His work, and
 - For God’s favor

What does your prayer life look like as you seek to rebuild your business?

For business owners and leaders rebuilding their businesses from a crisis, there is still a lot of uncertainty. This uncertainty could include, employee and client safety, changing customer/client behaviors, supply chain health and sustainability, and access to growth capital. Additionally, many of the laws and regulations regarding this crisis could still be being written, legislated, or considered.

While these are real concerns, the uncertainties for Nehemiah were much more serious. He was a slave that worked for the king. He could not just decide to leave his role and begin leading God’s people out of crisis; he needed the king’s permission. The uncertainties around the king’s permission were huge:

- Would the king see rebuilding the walls around Jerusalem as a sign of rebellion against Persia?
 - After all, why would he want to invest in improving the conditions of a country with such a long history of rebelling?
 - A defenseless city posed no threat to Persia.
- How would Nehemiah have an opportunity to even speak with the king about rebuilding the walls around Jerusalem?
 - He couldn’t just ask for King Artaxerxes’ permission: he had to be invited to approach the king or he would face a penalty of death.
 - Similarly, if he allowed his demeanor to reflect the burden he felt, he risked losing his job.
 - One of the requirements for his role was for him to maintain a positive demeanor whenever in the king’s presence.

Even if Nehemiah could obtain the king’s permission, what made him think that he could make a difference? After all, the walls had been destroyed for close to 150 years! If the people who lived in Jerusalem had not rebuilt them, what difference could Nehemiah make?

These uncertainties were real for Nehemiah, just like the uncertainties facing business owners and leaders today are real. But none of these uncertainties are insurmountable! Business owners and leaders can overcome the uncertainties facing their businesses as they seek to rebuild.

How will you mitigate the risk of uncertainty in your business?

Who else needs to weigh in on these decisions?

Since we know how Nehemiah's story ends, we know that he overcame (with God's help) all the uncertainties he faced as he launched his plan to rebuild the walls around Jerusalem.

- King Artaxerxes noticed his demeanor and asked him why he was sad (Nehemiah 2:2).
 - The king was not known for being a compassionate man, but God intervened and inclined the king's heart to Nehemiah's request (Proverbs 21:1, Daniel 4).
- The king did not see the request as a potential act of rebellion.
 - In fact, the king was so moved that he offered to finance the entire project!

And Nehemiah gave all the credit to God!

STEP 2

Take the Time to Reflect

We have all heard it said, “if we don’t learn from history, then we are doomed to repeat it.” While this is true for business owners and leaders rebuilding their businesses, it is also true of Nehemiah’s plan to rebuild the walls around Jerusalem. His arrival in Jerusalem did not go unnoticed. After all, his entourage included Persian military officers and horsemen, and he himself was a Persian official acting on behalf of the king! But Nehemiah didn’t tell anyone why he had come until three days had passed (Nehemiah 2:11-12).

It is likely that Nehemiah spent the first three days becoming acclimated to his surroundings. He had probably never been to Jerusalem before. Along the way, he probably inquired about the wall and why it had not been rebuilt for more than 70 years since the first exiles had returned. He even got up late one night to review the condition of the original wall (Nehemiah 2:13-15). He wanted to be sure he reflected on the lessons history had to teach (e.g., lessons learned, traditions, etc.) before he moved forward with his mission. When he finally revealed his purpose for being there, he knew exactly what he was up against.

It is equally important for business owners and leaders to take time to reflect as they begin rebuilding their businesses. While this may seem like wasted time to some, it is a wise approach to better understanding what the business is up against in this new environment. The second step toward rebuilding your business is to “reflect” on three primary areas: 1) the lessons learned about yourself, your leadership team and your team members, 2) the traditions/rituals that you want to take from this experience and 3) a systematic review of your business model.

What lessons have you learned through this crisis?

What traditions/rituals do you want to take from this time, so that you and your people do not forget God’s provision?

STEP 3

Reassess the Changing Landscape

For many owners and leaders, their business operating landscape has been impacted by this crisis. Some of these changes are temporary, while some of these changes will be long-lasting. It is important to invest the time to reassess what has changed for each business and to understand how these changes will impact the company's operations. The third step toward rebuilding your business is to intentionally "reassess" your company's health by: 1) calculating the impact of your reflections, 2) measuring the changing behaviors of your clients and suppliers and 3) prioritizing which of these potential threats can have the greatest impact on the company. Overlooking this opportunity to "reassess" will likely impair the ability of business owners and leaders to steward the businesses God has given them.

In chapters 4 & 6 of the book of Nehemiah, we see a wonderful example of a leader that reassesses the landscape, prioritizes the threats and then acts. As business owners and leaders begin to rebuild their businesses, they would be wise to follow Nehemiah's example.

Let's look at how Nehemiah analyzed these two threats:

First, he calculated the impact.

Ch. 4 – Employee morale. If he left the threats unaddressed, the building of the wall would be adversely impacted.

Ch. 6 – His reputation. If he left the threats unaddressed, his reputation could be adversely impacted.

Second, he measured the changing behaviors

Ch. 4 – The escalating behaviors were putting the peoples' lives at risk.

Ch. 6 – The behaviors were a different variation of the same personal attack.

Third, he prioritized the threat

Ch. 4 – He took action.

Ch. 6 – He did not respond.

Throughout both accounts, Nehemiah was completely dependent on God for provision. We see this in Nehemiah 4:4, 4:14 and 6:14. How can we apply this lesson to our businesses and respond like Nehemiah did?

1. Reassess the changing landscape;
2. Seek the Lord through prayer;
3. Trust God to provide; and
4. Get to work!

CHAPTER 4

THREAT:

Attempts to discourage the builders

- Observing the work
- Insulting the quality
- Scheming to attack

RESPONSE:

- Prayer (v. 4)
- Redirecting focus (v. 14)
- Adjusting workforce (v. 16)
- Increasing communication (v. 20)
- Providing protection (v. 22)

CHAPTER 6

THREAT:

Attempts to intimidate

- Deceptive invitations
- Spreading rumors

RESPONSE:

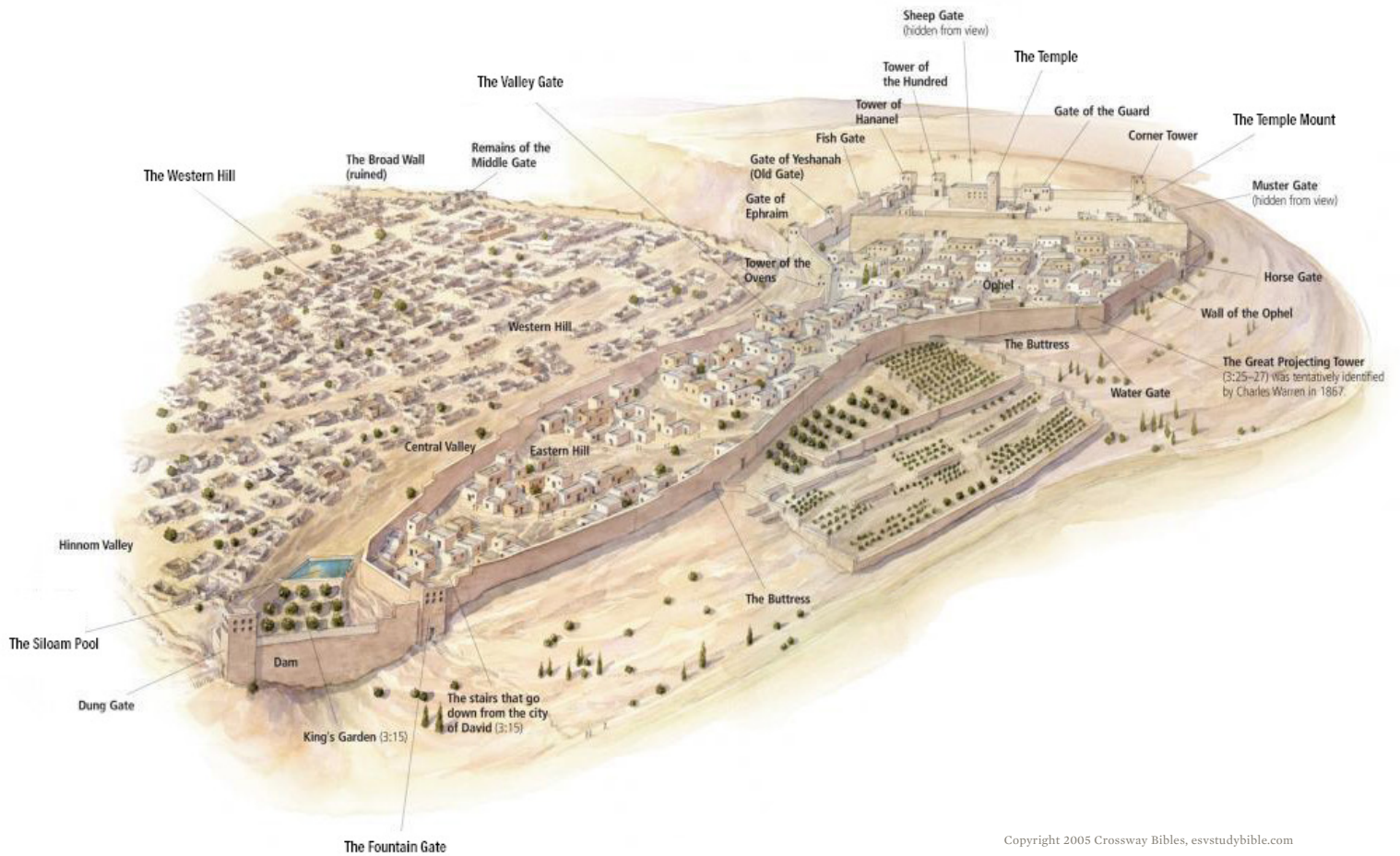
- Stayed focused on the work (v. 3)
- Focused on truth (v. 8-9)
- Stayed focused on God's glory (v. 12-13)
- Depended on God's provision (v. 14)

STEP 4

Opportunities to Reinvent

This crisis may have impacted the products/services offered to customers, how products/services are utilized by customers or how customers are defined. It is important to invest the time to understand this changing landscape, so that you don't miss any opportunity to "reinvent" within the business. Nehemiah had to do the same thing.

It is not known for sure why Nehemiah chose to reinvent the design of the wall he was rebuilding. Perhaps it was because Israel was a largely agrarian society. As such, most of the people lived outside of the city near the land they were farming or where the flocks were grazing. After Nehemiah took time to reflect and reassess, he decided to reinvent the size of the wall. Instead of rebuilding the old wall, Nehemiah chose to reestablish the wall around the Temple Mount and the major settlement south of the city.



God’s plan for your business likely has not changed. But your understanding of God’s plan for your business may need to change. The fourth step toward rebuilding your business is to “reinvent” within your company’s distinctives. This can be accomplished in three primary ways: 1) multiplying the products/services offered to your existing clients, 2) expanding your value proposition to serve new clients, and 3) enlarging the target market (e.g., new geographies, larger or smaller companies, etc.) for your existing products/services.

How has the competitive landscape changed for your products/services?

How does this impact the opportunity to “reinvent” your business as you rebuild from this crisis?

STEP 5

The Steps to Redirect

Many businesses have seen their strategic plans changed by this crisis. The dramatic changes caused by the crisis have likely impacted a business's near-term opportunities and options, required an adjustment in their near term priorities and necessitated new action steps. These steps are vital as leaders redirect aspects of their businesses.

For Nehemiah, he had to redirect his plan because he rebuilt the wall in just 52 days! Think about that. A wall that had been in rubble for close to 150 years was rebuilt in 52 short days. Israel was positioned to once again become God's light for the Nations. His plan to rebuild the wall had worked in miraculous fashion; but there was still some work for Nehemiah to do. Instead of rebuilding walls, he now needed to develop a plan to redirect peoples' hearts.

In addition to rebuilding the wall, Nehemiah oversaw a spiritual revival in the land as:

- Unlawful lending practices were abolished
- Taxes were reduced
- People were united around God's word
- Jewish festivals were observed like they had been under Joshua's leadership
- The Nation confessed their sin and worshiped the Lord their God
- The Nation pledged their faithfulness to their Heavenly Father
- People resettled in Jerusalem
- People gave generously to support the work of the Levites

The final step toward rebuilding your business is to “redirect” your company's strategic plan by: 1) identifying the strategic options available to your business in this new environment, 2) developing a new 3-year picture for the company and 3) making your new plan actionable over the next year.

How can you apply this example to your business as you rebuild from this crisis?

CONCLUSION

A Successful Rebuild

REACT

STEP 1

REORIENT

STEP 2

REFLECT

INTERNAL FOCUS + LOOKING BACK

STEP 3

REASSESS

EXTERNAL FOCUS + LOOKING BACK

STEP 4

REINVENT

EXTERNAL FOCUS + LOOKING FORWARD

STEP 5

REDIRECT

INTERNAL FOCUS + LOOKING FORWARD

REBUILD

Conclusion

This e-Book has walked you through the story of Nehemiah as he modeled an intentional process that is applicable to rebuilding your business. As you have read this book, you have considered how God’s word applies to your business from the following perspectives:

It’s now time for you to focus on executing your “rebuilding” plan.

If we can help you in any way, please do not hesitate to let us know. Thank for the opportunity to share with you what the Lord has been revealing to us and through us these past few months.

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