



Saint John United Methodist Church  
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Message for August 7, 2022  
“Lessons in Leadership: Follow Through”  
Speaker: Pastor Tom Grieb  
Scripture: Nehemiah 6:15-16, 7:1-3

## Keep Your Eye on the Ball and Follow Through

I am not a very good golfer. In fact, I downright stink. It is not for lack of trying I can tell you. I have even taken a few lessons. I have a good friend who took a great interest in helping me become a better golfer, and I think he even got discouraged.

In the typical golf scramble, I am your consummate D player. I try not to get upset about it I just tell myself, *“It’s only a game. It’s only a game.”* My friend when he was trying to help me would always say, *“Keep your eye on the ball and don’t forget to follow through.”*

Evidently, follow through is right important when it comes to golf. It is in life as well.

Today, we continue our study of one who was famous for keeping his eye on the ball and even more famous for following through. Nehemiah didn’t just talk about what needed to be done, he went ahead and did it.

We have talked the past few weeks about Nehemiah leading the people of Judah in rebuilding the wall around Jerusalem. He would not be deterred in seeing that project through. Today, we read a couple of passages from Nehemiah 6 and 7 that talk about that. Let’s read then Nehemiah 6:15-16, followed by Nehemiah 7:1-3.

### Nehemiah 6:15-16

*So, the wall was completed on the twenty-fifth of Elul, in fifty-two days. When all our enemies heard about this, all the surrounding nations were afraid and lost their self-confidence, because they realized that this work had been done with the help of our God.*

### Nehemiah 7:1-3

*After the wall had been rebuilt and I had set the doors in place, the gatekeepers, the musicians, and the Levites were appointed. I put in charge of Jerusalem my brother Hanani, along with Hananiah the commander of the citadel, because he was a man of integrity and feared God more than most people do. I said to them, “The gates of Jerusalem are not to be opened until the sun is hot. While the gatekeepers are still on duty, have them shut the doors and bar them. Also appoint residents of Jerusalem as guards, some at their posts and some near their own houses.”*

## Completed with the Help of God

It won't be long before we will be back in the Sanctuary. We are pointing now toward Sunday, August 21, with Homecoming Sunday, August 28 being the latest date we'll get in.

It's interesting that the scripture reports that the rebuild of the wall around Jerusalem was completed in a miraculous fifty-two days. We are going to beat that, but not by much. Regarding the wall around Jerusalem, the work had been done with the help of God. I assert the same for the renovation of our chancel.

This summer, we have come to know Nehemiah as a great leader, who by constant prayer, hard work, and an indomitable spirit set about rebuilding the wall around Jerusalem. His homeland had been conquered years earlier by the Babylonians with the people carted off to exile. Eventually, the people were released by the Persian king, Artaxerxes.

If you remember, Nehemiah was so bold as to ask the king for permission to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the wall. He had heard that things were in shambles there. It would have been easy for Nehemiah to have stayed in Persia. He had a pretty good gig there serving the king. That was not in his nature though.

Leaders shun what's comfortable for the sake of tending to what needs to be done.

Nehemiah rallied the people and set them to restoring the wall around Jerusalem, which would, in turn, served to revitalize their faith and renew their pride in their homeland. The wall would also provide a necessary line of defense against any enemies who might try to overthrow them. It was those enemies who first noticed that the hand of God was involved in the rebuild of that wall.

Nehemiah writes, *"When all our enemies heard about this, all the surrounding nations were afraid and lost their self-confidence, because they realized that this work had been done with the help of our God."* (Nehemiah 6:16)

God did a great work through Nehemiah who then rallied the people to get things done. They would not be denied. They were convinced they were doing the Lord's bidding, which was, in fact, what they were doing. Nehemiah and those who followed him kept their eye on the ball and followed through.

You know Larry the Cable Guy. He was the one who championed the phrase, *"Git 'r done."* Larry and Nehemiah would have gotten along well in that regard.

We have all been acquainted for years with the famous Nike swoosh. Nike is quick to remind us to *"just do it."* When it comes to exercise it's not enough to just think about exercise, you need to *"just do it."*

That's certainly the case when it comes to other things, particularly those things you sense God calling you to do.

## What It Takes to Follow Through

When it comes to follow through just thinking about it won't cut it. Being well-intended won't either. Follow through is a matter of getting after it. Nehemiah did that standing fast in God and in what he was convinced God wanted him to do.

Nehemiah got others involved. He divided up the work so that no one was overwhelmed. Nehemiah didn't care who got the credit, save for God. Nehemiah was all about keeping his *"eye on the ball"* and *"following through."*

He was convinced that what he and the citizens of Judah were doing was the right thing. He pictured the benefits of having the wall re-built, which kept him, and others motivated. He didn't just talk about rebuilding the wall, he worked to get that done.

Proverbs 14:23 states, *"All hard work brings a profit, but mere talk leads only to poverty."* (Proverbs 14:23)

Above all things, Nehemiah avoided avoidance. We all guilty of the *"yes, but"* syndrome, where we are seemingly all in, but are quick to find some excuse for not following through. *"Yeah, I know I need to do this"* we'll say, *"but there is just something that keeps me from doing it."*

In attempting to follow through we'd all do well to:

- Keep our eye on the ball.
- Resist just thinking about things or talking about them and go ahead and do something about them.
- Shy away from lame excuses that keep us from doing what really needs to be done.
- Stay the course on what's right.
- Picture the benefits of what we are attempting to do.

## Staying the Course

You remember a few weeks back in talking about dealing with opposition that there were three guys who gave Nehemiah fits. Those guys were Sanballat the Horonite, Tobiah the Ammonite, and Geshem the Arab.

They re-surface again in Nehemiah 6. Their every desire was to undermine what Nehemiah and the people were trying to do. They first tried to unsettle the people, then they turned on Nehemiah. He would not be swayed. Nehemiah was bound and determined to follow through on what God wanted him to do.

When the appeal came from Sanballat, Tobiah, and Geshem to sit down and talk, Nehemiah wouldn't give them the time of day. He stayed at what he was doing.

*"I am carrying on a great work,"* he said, *"I cannot stop and meet with you."* (Nehemiah 6:3)

Nehemiah was one of those who neither looked to the left or right; he was riveted on the task at hand. He would follow through come what may.

## **Integrity**

Nehemiah knew that if he kowtowed to his three detractors, he would lose all integrity with the people.

In the end, that's where it begins and ends when it comes to leadership. Integrity is critical when it comes to staying the course. This is a lesson in leadership we'd do well to learn.

Those who stay the course are people of integrity. When they say they are going to do something, they go ahead and do it. They make what they commit to a priority, even though they could have said they don't have the time or don't have the energy to do what they committed to do.

## **The Right Use of Time**

That brings us to a broader discussion about the right use of time. When it comes down to it, following through is a matter of finding the time to get things done.

Sometimes that means finding time on the margins. We all are pressed for time. Everyone is busy. When it comes to time though, we are often guilty of simply filling time rather than using it rightly.

The right use of time is a matter of stewardship. We are all given the same amount of time each day. The question becomes how we will use it. It also means resisting the tyranny of the urgent which all too often masquerades as something important. How are you using the time God gives you each day?

Let me suggest following through:

- On studying the Bible on a regular basis.
- On praying so you might become rightly connected to God.
- On loving those around you, even when that's tough to do.
- On serving as God leads.
- On offering a good word about Christ that someone desperately needs to hear
- On your commitment to follow God.

## **Christ Our Example**

The first job I ever had was with the Southeast YMCA. The first job they gave me was to clear the weeds around the perimeter of the property. I remember like it was yesterday. It was a hot Saturday afternoon, and all I had in the way of tools was a sling blade and a rake. I thought I would never get done. I worked a little while with little progress. I worked a bit more and thought I'd quit. I kept at it until I finished and was proud, I followed through.

I learned a lot that day about follow through. I have tried to be good about following through ever since.

When I think of follow through, I don't think so much about my own efforts, or even the efforts of a guy like Nehemiah, as inspiring as they are. The one of think about is Christ. He persevered all the way to the cross.

The shadow of the cross loomed large for him, particularly near the end. As you know Jesus struggled in the Garden of Gethsemane, praying that God would take that cup from him. It was not to be.

Jesus remained resolute in staying true to God's will for his life. This was the very thing that allowed Jesus to follow through which as we know gives us the opportunity to live into the new life he came to offer.

We celebrate Jesus today, and we do that no more pointedly than when we come around this table. We contemplate his follow through, if you will. We celebrate the fact that he kept his "*eye on the ball*" of God's will for his life.

It is an honor to come around this table to contemplate all that God has done through Jesus. We consider what Jesus did on the cross and how that "*follow through*" affects our lives and the life of the world.

May God bless us all.