



Transcript

Part 3 - "The Credibility Factor"

Andy Stanley

Let me begin by welcoming all of our friends who are watching online. Every week we get an update on statistics. It's pretty interesting. Today we have people from a little over forty different countries watching us. I'm sorry I can't speak your language; if you understand me, you're way more educated than us. But we're so glad you're joining us, really, from all over the world, almost every state, and of course, Brown's Bridge, Buckhead, Watermarke, and soon to be Gwinnett Church beginning next month. So, we're pretty excited about that. Yeah.

Hey, we're in part three of this series, *Recovery Road*, and the fact that you would come back after last week says a lot for you. Okay. Because I beat you up pretty bad. I mean I really did. And I just want you to know if you were here for the last two weeks, I don't have any hidden cards back there behind my screen. I'm going to be really nice today. We're going to beat up some other people, so you'll really enjoy the service. We're in this series, *Recovery Road* because our nation is focused on our national recovery, and I just feel like whenever our nation is focused on something and that something intersects with the Scripture, people like me should talk about it.

So, for the last couple of weeks we've been talking about it and we're going to continue that today. And really, the big takeaway, the big takeaway, if I could push a button for all of you who are watching, all of you who live in this country, and specifically our local churches, it would be that we would be able to look at our politics through the filter of our faith, rather than looking at faith through the filter of our politics. Because I'm convinced . . . and maybe you're kind of getting the sense in these last two weeks, and, hopefully, today will be another step in that direction . . . I believe it's not about left or right, that there is a third way.

In fact, we said Jesus is neither far left nor far right; Jesus was "far out." Every time he was invited into a conversation where people wanted him to choose sides, he would always introduce something new. And both the left and the right, or people on each side would just kind of scratch their heads like, *Well, we never really thought about that*. So he would say over and over, *The kingdom of heaven is like . . . the kingdom of God*. And it was like *the kingdom of heaven is like . . .* and they're thinking, *But it's the kingdom of Rome*. And he's going, *No*. And they're going, *But it's the kingdom of religion*. And he's going, *No, there's a different way; there's a third way*.

I'm absolutely convinced, as many of you are as well, that there is a way out, there is a way to recovery nationally, but it's not going to be far left or far right. And I believe, and many of you as well, that there are so many Christians in this country—we may not be a Christian country, but there may not be a Christian anything, it's not an adjective, but you can talk about that later—but there are enough Christians in this country that if we were simply willing to look at our politics through the filter of our faith, rather than the other way around, there is a way, there is a way to recover, and not simply recover financially. As we've said in the first two weeks, finances get our attention. Finances are rarely ever the root problem.

I believe, as many of you do, as well, that if we can get our filters reversed, if we can begin to live out as Christians and vote as Christians in such a way that we get those two things straight, we're not only going to recover



financially, perhaps this is an opportunity for God to do something miraculous and incredible in our nation at several different levels. So, part three of *Recovery Road*.

Now if you are Jewish, we are so glad that you are here, and we are so glad that you're watching online. I love it when I meet Jewish couples or Jewish individuals who attend our church. They say the most interesting things to me. They say, *Andy, you're a great motivational speaker*. Then as I dig down they say, which I love this, I take this as a compliment—they say, *I love Buckhead Church, Brown's Bridge Church, North Point Church and Watermark. I love attending your church or our church. Sometimes I have to filter out the Jesus part but I really, really love attending church here*. And I always say, *You know what, I'm so glad you're here. You can filter out whatever you want. We're just glad you're here*.

Well, today we're going to look at a story from the Old Testament. And because this is one of the most remarkable recovery stories ever, it's certainly one of the most remarkable recovery stories, maybe the most remarkable recover story in the Bible, it has national implications. There is a huge, huge, huge, huge lesson in this story for all of us. In this story, the interesting thing is that it's a Jewish leader, there are no miracles in this story, there is nothing supernatural, God never speaks, angels don't show up, lightning doesn't even flash. It is just all about heads down leadership and the providence of God and a man who just prayed like crazy. So that's one thing I love about this story—there's not the, *Oh yeah, well if* part. It's just hey, here's a principle that if we could at a national level get our arms around, it could make, I believe, a huge difference. Let me kind of set up the story and then I'm going to tell you the story.

Around 586 BC Nebuchadnezzar, king of the Babylonians, came into Jerusalem, came into Israel and destroyed the temple and destroyed the walls and took a bunch of guys prisoner, and kind of just put an end to Israel as a super power. If you grew up in church, you remember the story of Daniel in the lion's den, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego—all that kind of stuff. That happened during this period of history. Fifty years later, things had changed in the world and the Babylonians were no longer the super power, the Persians were. And under King Cyrus, something very interesting happened fifty years later. He looked around at what was Babylon that was now an expanded empire we call Persia, and he looked around and there were all these foreigners that the Babylonians had brought in whenever they would destroy a nation.

And he said, *Look, let's send these people home*. So, he declared an edict and about 50,000 Jewish people left Babylon, or what was Babylon but was now Persia, and went back to Israel to try to rejuvenate that nation and rejuvenate that economy. Things went okay. If you read the book of Ezra, you can read about that first group that went back under a man named Zerubbabel. And they rebuilt the temple, sort of—it never had the glory of Solomon's temple. The economy got a little better, but then faltered because there was no wall around the capital city. The nation of Israel was in incredible, incredible, incredible debt to all the surrounding nations and things were really bad.

Time goes by, and now King Artaxerxes sits on the throne of the Persian Empire. And King Artaxerxes was continuing the habit of the Persians to send people home, send them back to their nations. Well, he just happened



to have an official that worked with him, he was referred to as a cupbearer, the cupbearer to the king, who was Jewish. He actually had been born in captivity and all he knew was the Persian Empire. But because he was very, very smart and very, very on the ball he was close to the King of Persia. When we think of a cupbearer, we think of somebody that's like a wine taster or somebody that's going to make sure the king's food isn't poisoned. That may have been part of his job, but his responsibility was much broader than that. This man had spent so much time with the most powerful person in the world there is no doubt that he picked up some incredible leadership lessons along the way. And his name was Nehemiah.

The way the story begins in actually the book of Nehemiah, Nehemiah is with King Artaxerxes. Nehemiah's brother, who had been in Jerusalem, visited Nehemiah in the Persian capital. Nehemiah said to his brother, *How are things going in Jerusalem? How are things in our homeland?* Now, we aren't sure that Nehemiah had ever been there. We know he wasn't born there and there is a good chance he had never even visited his homeland, because he was enslaved in some ways and had gained this great responsibility with King Artaxerxes. And so his brother says, *Nehemiah, I don't know how to tell you this, it's worse than ever. The gates are burnt, there are no walls, things are disorganized, the economy is terrible, most of the citizens are enslaved outsiders and foreigners, they've had to leverage their houses, their businesses, their crops. They've even had to use their wives and children as collateral for all the loans they've taken out. Things are absolutely chaotic.*

And in the book of Nehemiah, when he gets this news, it breaks his heart and he begins to weep. He begins to weep and he begins to pray and he says, *God, I want to do something for my people, I want to do something for my people.* And he begins to pray that God would give him favor in the eyes of King Artaxerxes and King Artaxerxes would allow him to leave his responsibilities in the capital city of Persia and go to Jerusalem and do something for his people. It's an incredible prayer.

So one day when the King is in a good mood, because that's important, approach is everything, he goes to the king and he says, *King Artaxerxes, here's the news I've received. It's broken my heart. Would you give me an extended leave of absence to go to Jerusalem and see if I can bring some order to the chaos of my homeland?* King Artaxerxes says, *Yes, and I'm actually going to make you the governor of that province.* Jerusalem was beholden, and the whole of the nation was beholden to the Persian Empire at that point. *I'm going to make you the governor. And I'm going to give you letters to every single king or leader between here and there to support you and to help you and to give you anything you need in order to make your journey successful, as long as you'll promise me that eventually you'll come back and serve me.* So, Nehemiah spends several weeks putting together this large entourage of people and materials and wealth that the king gave him. All along the way, he collected lumber, everything he would need to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem, and eventually he arrives at the city of Jerusalem.

And when he does, the Jewish people there assumed here comes another governor that's just going to add more taxes and take more from us as all the previous governors have in the past. And Nehemiah didn't do that. He settled into the city, he established a residence, and then night after night he would go out and survey the city and survey the broken-down walls. Then in one of the most remarkable pieces of leadership Scripture in the



book, I think it's chapter 2 of Nehemiah, Nehemiah gathers the people, who are very suspect, the people who had no reason to trust him. He gathered them together and he cast an incredibly compelling vision about their future as a nation. In fact, fourteen or actually fifteen years ago when I studied the book of Nehemiah and I read his speech, I have used that as the model for vision casting ever since, and I've taught leaders all over the country. If you want to understand how to cast vision, this is the model in Nehemiah's case. Nehemiah cast this vision that we're going to rebuild the walls, we're going to re-establish our credibility with the surrounding nations, and the people said, *Let's do this*. It's absolutely incredible. And they began to organize in order to rebuild the walls around the city of Jerusalem.

Well, as they begin their work, Nehemiah begins to understand the biggest impediment, the thing that's going to hold them back more than anything else, is that the men in particular, the leaders of the households, were so indebted to the surrounding rich people and the surrounding nations and the surrounding merchants that they were so afraid that if they missed a single payment, they were going to lose their land. They were going to lose their farms. They could lose their daughters. They could lose their sons. They could lose their wives. And he realized, *If I'm going to get their undivided attention to get this wall built, I've got to do something about our economy*.

So, Nehemiah dips into his own personal resources and the money that the king had given him to get the job done. He goes around and he finds out who owes who what and he begins to pay the debts of the people personally so they can get their homes back in their names, their land back in their names. They can begin to relax a little bit and enjoy the fruits of their own labors without feeling like at any point somebody is going to come in and take what belongs to them. Their children wouldn't be threatened anymore; their families wouldn't be threatened. He spent an enormous amount of personal wealth to buy the people out of slavery. But in exchange he said, *You've got to work on the wall. You've got to harvest your crops. But any spare time you have, it's all hands on deck. We're going to get this wall built*. So, he created a whole bunch of jobs, paid off a whole bunch of debts, and suddenly there's energy and there's activity in the community. And things began to change under Nehemiah's leadership. All of this is in the book of Nehemiah.

Well things begin to go better, people are kind of feeling a lift in their spirits, and then Nehemiah discovers something that makes him so mad he can hardly see straight. Just as things were beginning to go well, they're beginning to work on the wall, everybody had an assignment—it's one of the most organizationally rich books of the Bible—he discovers that the wealthy Jews in Jerusalem and the wealthy Jews in the surrounding area saw this as a business opportunity for themselves. Here's how they thought: They thought, *Oh, "money bags" is here; look at him. He's going around and he's paying off everybody's debts. Which means if we can figure out how to get these Jews indebted to us, we've got a guarantee that our loans are going to be paid off*.

And they began to work through some of the Gentiles and through some of the people they knew outside of Jerusalem to move these people and to trick some of these people back into debt—to re-leverage their property, re-leverage their houses. And so the rich Jewish people, some from the previous royal family, some merchants who had just become wealthy through the years, they began to take advantage of the situation and put the people of the city back into debt to them. And Nehemiah finds out. He has spent an enormous amount of his own wealth to get



them out of debt, and now the people within the city, his own Jewish brothers, have begun to undo all that he's done and he is furious. And that's where the story picks up: Nehemiah 5:6.

Nehemiah 5:6 (TNIV)

⁶ When I heard their outcry and these charges, I was very angry.

Can you imagine how betrayed he must have felt?

Nehemiah 5:7 (TNIV)

⁷ I pondered them in my mind

Throughout the book of Nehemiah, you find Nehemiah bumping up against tough circumstances and pausing. He's an incredible leader. He doesn't react; he pauses.

Nehemiah 5:7 (TNIV)

⁷ I pondered them in my mind and then accused the nobles

These are the leftovers from the noble family from generations back.

Nehemiah 5:7 (TNIV)

⁷ I pondered them in my mind and then accused the nobles and officials. I told them, "You are charging your own people interest!"

What? I mean in the Old Testament when God set up the nation of Israel, he said, *You are to be a nation that loans; you are not to be a nation that borrows. You are to be a nation that owns; you are not to be a nation that borrows. And you should not charge your own people interest. If you want to charge interest, charge the Gentiles interest, don't charge your own people interest.* So, this wasn't exactly against civil law, but it was against the custom and the tradition of the Jewish people. *You're charging your own people interest?* So, he called a meeting.

Nehemiah 5:7 (TNIV)

⁷ So I called together a large meeting to deal with them ^{eight} and said:

So, he's got all the nobles and all the rich people and all the power brokers that are all in the room together, all gathered together.



Nehemiah 5:8 (TNIV)

⁸ *and said: "As far as possible, we [talking about himself and his group that came from Persia] have bought back our fellow Jews who were sold to the Gentiles.*

In other words, *I spent my own money to solve this problem. I spent my own money to free them up so they could work on the wall and now you are selling your own people, only for them to be sold back to us.* So, they had figured out a scam because they knew Nehemiah was going to come along and pay their debts, and they figured out a way to enrich themselves off Nehemiah's generosity and patriotism. Can you imagine how mad he was? Listen to their response:

Nehemiah 5:8 (TNIV)

⁸ *They kept quiet, because they could find nothing to say.*

Now I said there were no miracles in the book of Nehemiah. This might be the miracle right here. Okay? You've got a bunch of rich guys, the power guys, the you know, *We've had it in our family, we got it going on, we've got the largest farms.* And suddenly they're being faced down by a guy who's really relatively new to town, who doesn't really have any kind of personal leverage other than the fact that he's got letters from the king of Persia who is far, far away. And they're speechless.

Nehemiah 5:9 (TNIV)

⁹ *So I continued, "What you are doing is not right.*

Now it may not be illegal, there may not be a specific law on the books, and I realize that this has been going on for generations, but you know in your hearts you are taking unfair advantage of people who aren't as educated as you. You're taking unfair advantage of people who aren't as wealthy as you. You're taking unfair advantage of people who are part of you. They're you; it's fellow Jews.

Nehemiah 5:9 (TNIV)

⁹ *What you are doing is not right. Shouldn't you walk in the fear of our God to avoid the reproach of our Gentile enemies?*

He's saying, *Look, what do you think the people outside this city, outside this nation think of us when we're taking advantage of our own people? What's wrong with you?* Then he goes on.

Nehemiah 5:10 (TNIV)



¹⁰ *I and my brothers and my men are also lending the people money and grain. [It's not that we're not aware of need.] But let us stop charging interest!*

In other words, *If people need something loan it to them, give it to them, but quit trying to enrich yourself off the disadvantaged people around us.*

Nehemiah 5:11 (TNIV)

¹¹ *Give back to them immediately their fields, vineyards, olive groves and houses, and also the interest you are charging them—one percent of the money, grain, new wine and olive oil."*

They were charging basically the equivalent of 12 percent annual interest on all this stuff, and then they were going to come around and collect it from Nehemiah. Here's how they responded.

Nehemiah 5:12 (TNIV)

¹² *"We will give it back," they said. "And we will not demand anything more from them. We will do as you say."*

And Nehemiah looks at them and says, *I'm not buying it.* Look what he did.

Nehemiah 5:12 (TNIV)

¹² *Then I summoned the priests and made the nobles and officials take an oath to do what they had promised.*

I don't trust you. Anybody that would do what you've done, I don't trust you. Thanks for saying it, but we're going to take it a bit further. Then, he said this:

Nehemiah 5:13 (TNIV)

¹³ *I also shook out the folds of my robe. [This is sort of an ancient curse.] and said, "In this way may God shake out of their houses and possessions anyone who does not keep this promise. So may such a person be shaken out and emptied!"*

It's like, *If you think you're going to get by with this, God's going to get you.* That's basically what that meant.

Nehemiah 5:13 (TNIV)



¹³ *At this the whole assembly said, “Amen,” and praised the LORD. And the people did as they had promised.*

Tragedy averted. Now, you hear a story like that and you try and picture like the President or somebody facing down business leaders, or people in the banking industry, or some group that you think has taken unfair advantage of poor people or uneducated people, or whatever it is. It’s just hard to imagine a group of people in suits and ties, you know, and business suits and cool shoes going, *Yes, you’re right. We’re going to pay back everything we took and we’re going to pay back the interest too.* It’s just hard to imagine, but there’s a part of this story that you don’t know yet unless you’ve read the book of Nehemiah. There was another kind of advantage that Nehemiah had that other governors who had been in this place before didn’t have.

Nehemiah had something beyond the authority that went with being a governor. He had something that had taken him over time, actually, and we learn later on about twelve years to fully earn. He had something that gave him such incredible credibility and such incredible influence beyond simply his authority as governor that when he faced this group of people that had taken unfair advantage of the situation, honestly, they were shamed, they were shamed into doing the right thing for the nation and for the city. Here’s what we find out he had been doing all along.

Nehemiah 5:14 (TNIV)

¹⁴ *Moreover, from the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes, when I was appointed to be their governor in the land of Judah, until his thirty-second year—twelve years—neither I nor my brothers ate the food allotted to the governor.*

Now, what that means is this—as the governor of Judea, as the governor of this area, he was entitled to a percentage of all the grain, all the crops, all the land, all the wealth. In other words, he had the opportunity to come in as the governor and say, *I’m going to impose on you the governor’s tax; you have to give me a percentage of everything. After all, I’m the governor.* And Nehemiah said, *When I showed up, I decided not to take everything I was entitled to.*

Nehemiah 5:15 (TNIV)

¹⁵ *But the earlier governors—those preceding me—placed a heavy burden on the people and took forty shekels of silver from them in addition to food and wine. Their assistants also lorded it over the people.*

In other words, the previous governors were surrounded by these cronies, who just went out and leveraged their positions and authority for their own benefit.

Nehemiah 5:15 (TNIV)



¹⁵ *But out of reverence for God I did not act like that.*

Don't you love that? Not because I had to, not because somebody made me, but just out of reverence for God I did not act like that.

Nehemiah 5:16 (TNIV)

¹⁶ *Instead, I devoted myself to the work on this wall.*

This is so huge. In other words, he said, *I came here to get this wall built, so that's what I focused on. I came here to get this job done; that's what I focused on.*

Nehemiah 5:16 (TNIV)

¹⁶ *All my men were assembled there for the work; we did not acquire any land.*

This is huge as well. The way you enriched yourself in that ancient culture is much like today, but even more so then. Whoever owned the land basically owned the resources. And as a wealthy person coming into a very depressed economy, there were lots of good land deals. And he told his guys, *We do not purchase land. We are not going to leverage our power and wealth to become wealthier and more powerful. We are not going to purchase any land.* He goes on.

Nehemiah 5:17-18 (TNIV)

¹⁷ *Furthermore, a hundred and fifty Jews and officials ate at my table, as well as those who came to us from the surrounding nations.* ¹⁸ *Each day one ox, six choice sheep and some poultry were prepared for me, and every ten days an abundant supply of wine of all kinds. In spite of all this, I never demanded the food allotted to the governor; because the demands were heavy on these people.*

Then he closes this little section this way; this is awesome.

Nehemiah 5:19 (TNIV)

¹⁹ *Remember me with favor, my God, for all I have done for these people.*

So, when Nehemiah gathered the wealthy and the powerful, they were eyeball to eyeball with a guy who had not only obeyed the law, but had gone above and beyond. They were eyeball to eyeball with a guy who was entitled as the governor and never took what he was entitled to. They were eyeball to eyeball with a guy who said, *I've come to build this wall and I'm not going to allow myself or my people to be distracted by wealth, by power, by*



entitlement, by opportunity. We are here to get this wall built and that's what we're going to do. When he stepped up and demanded of the rich and powerful that they do what was best for the nation, they were shamed into doing it because they were looking at a guy whose words had matched his actions at the deepest, deepest level to a level where it had actually cost him financially.

Nehemiah had something that went beyond the authority of his position. Nehemiah had what we refer to as moral authority. It goes beyond position. Moral authority, just to throw out a simple definition: it's simply the credibility, and that's the key word, it's the credibility you earn by walking your talk. It's the credibility you earn when people look at you and say, *I may not believe what he believes, but there is no doubt in my mind that he believes what he says he believes. I may not agree with the way he sees the world, but there is no doubt in my mind that there is consistency between the way he or she acts and he or she views the world. We may not believe everything alike; we may have differences, but I tell you what, he or she is sincere. He or she speaks the truth, and he or she is absolutely committed to what they say. There is no hidden motive, no hidden agenda, there is no duplicity, and there is no separation between what they say and what they do.* And when you are eyeball to eyeball, when you are face to face with somebody who has earned and has moral authority it is a powerful, powerful thing. Because their moral authority is more convincing than any position of authority that someone might grant them.

Another way of thinking about it is this: that your position, whatever your position is—as a father, as a business leader, as the president of an association—gives you a measure of authority, but your moral authority is what gives you credibility and influence. Now, the phrase “moral authority” isn't in the Bible, but there is a biblical phrase that communicates the same thing. In the Bible, we find this phrase: beyond reproach. Beyond reproach. That is, a person, that as we look deep into his life, we find there is extraordinary consistency between what he says, what he claims to believe, what he claims to be here for, what he actually says, and what he is actually all about.

Now, when you hear that story you just think, *Wow.* If you're a guy—men and women, I think we process these kinds of stories a little bit differently, maybe, but as a man you think, *That's the kind of guy I want to be. That's the kind of leader I want to be. I would love to know that my life has such moral authority, that my life has such force that people will just take me seriously, not because they agree, but because they know there is no duplicity, there is no hidden agenda. There is no separation between what I'm asking them to do and what I would do myself.* And if you've ever followed a leader like that, you know how powerful his words are; you know how weighty his words are. And even when you're not sure you understand or agree, again, you're willing to lean in and listen, because you know he is sincere.

Now, here's the interesting and I think tragic thing about our nation currently. About thirteen years ago, about thirteen years ago we began basically a national debate over the question of, *Is a man or woman's personal life important as it relates—or is there any relationship between his or her personal life and his or her authority or position in government?* I mean, does it really matter how a man or woman handles his or her finances personally, or morality, or ethics?

Can there be a division, so on one hand as a public official he or she can do “X” but personally can do “Y” and does it really matter that the two don't line up? And we, the American people, have voted on that, and we've all



weighed in on that debate, and here's what we've concluded. We've concluded, yes, it matters. No, it doesn't matter. We've concluded, yes, it matters when it's the person in the other political camp that messes up. Then it matters. There should be consistency. I can't believe they would say this and do that, but when it's the person in my political camp that messes up, well I don't think it matters that much. So today, since we're no longer looking at our faith through the filter of our politics, we're looking at our politics through the filter of our faith, we're going to all agree together with God.

The Jewish Scriptures and the Christian Scriptures and common sense—and just think back to your daddy and your mama—we know in our gut and in our hearts, yes it matters, yes it matters if there is a line between what people say publicly and what they do privately. Yes it matters if there is a difference or if there is duplicity between what they represent publicly and how they live their lives privately. Of course it matters. If we want our national leaders to have credibility, of course it matters. If we want our national leaders to have influence beyond their position, yes it matters. If we want to get rid of the cynicism that prevails in the political culture, of course it matters. If we want a generation of Americans, the next generation of Americans to grow up with respect for the President, respect for the political process, respect for senators and representatives and Congress, absolutely it matters. It's okay to ask those who represent us, it is okay to ask them to be beyond reproach in their personal finances, in their personal morality, in their personal ethics—that's not a lot to ask.

Now, I can already hear because you hear and you know maybe you're one of those that goes, *Wait, wait, wait, hold on preacher. That's easy for you to say up there all cool and everything and preaching to the choir, but hey, nobody's perfect. We're all just human.* To which I want to say, *This is not the homeowner's association. This is the United States of America, come on. We have asked you to represent our country.*

And I know plenty of people, like you know plenty of people who have moral authority. They're not famous, they're not even the richest, they're not the most talented, but we all know people who walk their talk. It is not too much ask. It is not too much to ask our national leaders to be Nehemiahs. I don't care if they're Republican Nehemiahs or Democrat Nehemiahs; it's not too much to ask them be men and women who are patriots before they sell themselves out to special interest groups. It's not too much to say, If you're there to do a job, do the job—make it the priority. And yes, we are going to hold you accountable to how you live your personal life.

It matters, because all of us have enough sin in our lives and all of us have enough failure in our lives to know this: that when you have a secret, it may be a secret that doesn't relate directly to your job, but it ultimately impacts your job. It is human nature. It's the nature of secrets. Yes, we can ask our national leaders to be men and women who lead, not simply with the authority that comes with their position, but maintain their moral authority. In fact, if we could kind of bottom line the whole message it would simply be this: Recovery begins when moral authority supersedes reelection as the value of choice among our national leaders. That I don't care if you're a Republican or a Democrat or Libertarian or Tea Party, or don't go to parties or whatever you are, the bottom line is this: you want, we want men and women in leadership whose walk matches their talk. And we want them to value that more than they value reelection. Right?

So, here's the bottom line. If you're a national leader and you have a secret and it's a secret that if it were to



become public would embarrass our nation, embarrass your family, embarrass the people you represent, and detract from what you're there to do, please, please don't run for reelection. Republican or Democrat, I don't care. And if you have a secret, if you have a secret that is on the verge of being found out, just resign now. You don't have to wait. We'll applaud that element of your integrity. If you're not paying your taxes, if you're not paying your property tax, if you're leveraging your position to get away with things that the average person can't get away with it, don't run for reelection. In fact, we would prefer that you just step down now.

If you're a functioning alcoholic and you know that your alcoholism is detracting from your ability to do your job, don't run for reelection. If you're a prescription drug user and it's a habit and you're breaking the law to get the drugs you need, stuff that we're not allowed to do, don't run for reelection. In fact, I would say this, if you're having an affair and you say, *Well, that's my private life; that's my personal life.* There are enough Americans who have had affairs to understand you cannot create a dividing wall between your personal moral conduct and your public conduct and your professional conduct. Eventually they merge. Just don't run for reelection. And please, if you could, just step down.

And then I want to just throw one out there personally. This is just me talking. This is me—I'm not representing the church. If on your income tax you give away less than three percent off the top to charity, don't run for reelection. If you can't learn to be generous with your own personal money, I don't want you making decisions about how to be generous with mine. Just don't run for reelection. It's simple. Now, here's what we know, okay, here is what we know—red and yellow, black and white, Republican, Democrat, here's what we know: If you get a Republican Nehemiah in the room with a Democrat Nehemiah and you fill the room with Nehemiahs, they will figure out how to fix the economy. They will figure out how to solve our problems.

Here's why—because if you get that group of people together that are there to build the wall—we've come here to build a wall and we don't have any other hidden agenda, we don't see the world the same way, we don't share the same values, but there's no duplicity—I'm looking at someone who sees the world politically different from me, but I know he walks his talk and he's looking at me and he knows I walk my talk, we can figure this out. It's not that difficult. And you know what, together we'll face down the rich without creating some kind of culture war and we will deal with the needs of those who live in poverty without rewarding behaviors that shouldn't be rewarded. We can figure this out because we will see clearly. Our vision will be clear because our lifestyles are in sync with what we say we believe and what we say we're going to do. We'll see clearly and we will choose wisely and we can recover.

You know I would much rather vote for people who are on the other side of me politically who are Nehemiahs than people who are on my side of the political persuasion if there is duplicity in their lives. Because you know what, at the end of the day it is the integrity of individuals that relates to and causes integrity in their decisions. Here's what the wisest king who ever lived said, the wisest king who ever lived, and here's how he summed it up. I memorized this years ago.



Proverbs 11:3 (TNIV)

³ *The integrity of the upright guides them, but the unfaithful [or another translation says the fools, or another translation says the simple or the naïve] are destroyed by their duplicity.*

We have all seen what happens when there is duplicity in leadership. It eventually seeps into their professional, marketplace, political decisions. If you're going to lie to your wife, who would you not lie to? Tell me. If you would lie to your children, who would you not lie to? Tell me. If you are dishonest in the way you handle your personal money, why would we think you wouldn't be dishonest in the way that you view and handle our money? The wisest king who ever lived said this: Ultimately, duplicity destroys the individual. And what we've learned from our families and what we've learned in our businesses and what we've learned politically is that as a leader, so goes whatever it is he leads. *But the integrity of the upright guides them.*

My point is this—we don't have time for any more of that, regardless of what side of the aisle you sit on. We are in desperate need of this, and if we can fill the ranks of our leadership with men and women of personal and political integrity, not only will we recover financially, perhaps by God's grace we can recover at even a deeper level as a nation. So here's what I want you to pray. I know you're going to vote, and, of course, you better vote. We've got to vote. Right? And I know you're probably going to vote along whatever party lines you've always voted with, but would you be willing to pray beyond your party lines? Would you begin, in a practical way, begin to view your politics through the filter of your faith? And would you begin to pray, *God, give us Nehemiahs. God, give us Nehemiahs. God, give us Nehemiahs.* Because you see, here's the thing that all of our elected officials have in common: They were elected.

So at the end of the day it really it's about me, not them; it's about we, not they. Because the wonderful thing about our nation, the wonderful thing about our system, is that they all are elected. And as easy as it is and as fun as it is to get all amped up and all ramped about what he did and what she did and what he said and what she said, you just remember this: They are all there because we elected them. And if the church of the Lord Jesus Christ—the red, yellow, black, and white church, the Republican, Democrat church, the Libertarian church, the Tea Party church, the whatever—if just the Christians in this nation would say, *God, beyond my political badge, beyond my political voting record, I want, we want, Nehemiahs in the White House and to fill Congress. God give us men and women whose walk matches their talk personally, politically, and professionally at every level.*

If God will answer that prayer, then we'll recover. We'll go beyond recovery. We'll be the nation that continues to impact the world with the gospel, that continues to be the most generous nation in the world, but we have to look beyond politics. We have to look beyond even our own past voting record. We have to look beyond our own worldviews and our own prejudices and say, *God, would you please grace us with Nehemiahs. And then give me the courage as an individual, as an American citizen, to make a decision, not based primarily on my political persuasion or worldview or the way I was raised, but on what the Scripture says on what I know is true and what I know that ultimately you want for our nation.* We need men and women who have more than the authority that comes with their positions. We need men and women who have moral, moral, moral authority.

Let me pray for you.