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PEOPLE IN THE WORLD

WILFREDO  
DE JESÚS

THE

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN  
GOD'S PEOPLE STAND STRONG

WORLD

GAP

## WHAT PEOPLE ARE SAYING ABOUT *IN THE GAP*...

*In the Gap* expresses the passion of a visionary leader who influences and inspires others to live and to die for God-given vision.

— Edwin Alvarez, Pastor of Comunidad Apostólica Hosanna in Panama City, Panama

If you want to learn how to be a person who stands for righteousness, who goes into the deepest valleys to be the light and the voice of truth, then read *In the Gap*. Pastor Choco inspires us with powerful examples of people throughout history who are Gap Leaders.

— Mark Batterson, *New York Times* best-selling author and Lead Pastor of National Community Church in Washington, DC

*In the Gap* is far more than an inspiring book about how to make a compelling difference. It's ideal for pastors to use in church-wide campaigns, or for class or small-group settings. Each chapter brings Bible characters into today's challenges with a fresh, engaging style. A self-assessment, discussion questions, and DVD offer additional practical uses. This is another winner from Pastor Choco!

— Warren Bird, coauthor of twenty-six ministry books including *Better Together: Making Church Mergers Work*

Pastor Choco's book is powerful. It challenges and empowers us to stand in the gap for our generations and communities. Pastor Choco is uniquely qualified to speak on this vital topic because he has literally stood in the gap for his community and the nation—and ultimately, he has stood in the gap for God's kingdom. I highly recommend Pastor

Choco's book to you. By reading it, you will walk away empowered to stand in the gap as I did when I encountered Pastor Choco's life!

— Russell Evans, Senior Pastor of Planetshakers City Church in Melbourne, Australia

*In the Gap* is a bold and daring challenge to stand strong and watch God work! Through the lives of great Bible heroes of yesterday, Wilfredo De Jesús challenges us to live more courageous lives today! If it's strength, bravery, or faith that you need, read this book! You can't read *In the Gap* without being inspired to live a more gutsy life for God!

— Dave Ferguson, Lead Pastor of Community Christian Church in Chicago, Illinois

This book identifies a tremendous need—it shows how God wants to use and equip us to be men and women who stand in the gap for the vulnerable in our society. This concept is crucial if we want to be like Jesus. If our communities hear us proclaim His good news, they also need to see the good news in action. And no one is better positioned to teach us how to do that than my friend, Pastor Choco. *In the Gap* reveals the heart of Choco's ministry, which is really the heart of Jesus' ministry.

— Dr. Tim Harlow, Senior Pastor of Parkview Christian Church in Orland Park, Illinois

There are few voices in a generation that have the authentic authority to call the army of the Lord to action. Pastor Wilfredo De Jesús is one of those voices. In his new book, *In the Gap*, De Jesús directs believers to stand up and stand strong. The message inspires and instructs, challenges and confronts, encounters and encourages. It is required reading for anyone determined to make a difference in the world.

— Dr. Chris Hill, Senior Pastor of The Potter's House of Denver, Colorado

I'm very excited about Pastor Choco's book, *In the Gap*. It will give you a fresh vision to reach the poor, the forgotten, and the oppressed in your community. You'll find practical steps to care for "the least of these" as you rediscover the heart of the gospel. Pastor Choco has stood in the gap for his city; now let's learn from the expert and follow his example to care for people in our communities!

— Rob Ketterling, Lead Pastor of River Valley Church, Apple Valley, Minnesota, and author of *Change Before You Have To*

Our world is full of "gaps"—places of weakness and vulnerability where we must stand on behalf of needy people and worthy causes. Pastor Choco reminds Christians of the call to stand in those gaps. He explores the traits of "gap people," holding up a mirror for us to examine ourselves. This book issues a much-needed challenge to the church, encouraging us to stand securely on Christ while we stand lovingly in the gap.

— Justin Lathrop, Director of Strategic Relations, Assemblies of God

Pastor Choco is a man of God who has lived out what it means to stand in the gap for others. This book will challenge you and inspire you to look around and make a difference.

— Pastor Clemente Maldonado, District Superintendent, Midwest Latin District of Assemblies of God

Every dreamer has a dream for others. It begins with a seed that flourishes into a harvest. Choco De Jesús is a dreamer who has always been the one to stand in the gap. In this great book, Choco reveals to us his lifelong strategy that has been a hallmark in his life. If you want to have your dreams fulfilled, this book is for you!

— Obed Martinez, Senior Pastor of Destiny Church in Indio, California

The church is called to be the hands and feet of the gospel in the broken world. In his new book, my friend and fellow pastor Wilfredo De Jesús challenges God's people to fill the gap between despair and joy in our communities. We need to hear this message, and then make it happen!

- Miles McPherson, Senior Pastor, The Rock Church, San Diego, and author of *God in the Mirror: Discovering Who You Were Created to Be*

*In the Gap* is a profound message written to answer the rising cry *within us* to impact the hurting society *around us*. Wilfredo De Jesús clearly, biblically, and inspiringly expounds the keys to respond to the gaps evident in the faces and families across America and the world. More than a book, *In the Gap* is the written proclamation to the cause we have all been called to join.

- Sergio De La Mora, Senior Pastor of Cornerstone Church in San Diego, California

The book you're holding will teach, inspire, and help you stand in the gap for someone. Pastor Choco can teach you how to do it because he has personally raised up an army of people in Chicago to stand in the gap for the hurting. You're about to change someone's life. You're about to become a stand-in-the-gap champion!

- Stephan K. Munsey, PhD, Senior Pastor of Family Christian Center in Munster, Indiana

Pastor Choco gives a clarion call to all of us to stand "in the gap" for those in need around us. This book will certainly inform you, but it will also inspire you to be the person Jesus has destined to stand in the gap for others. Jesus paid the price for us and has given us His Spirit—now it's time for us to stand in the gap for people in need.

- Benny Perez, Lead Pastor of The Church at South Las Vegas in Henderson, Nevada

*Radical, revolutionary, innovative, anointed, and cutting-edge* are words I use to describe Pastor Wilfredo “Choco” de Jesús. His new book reflects nothing less. *In the Gap* will challenge and inspire you to step out of your comfort zone, realign your priorities, take a radical stand for the less fortunate, and be creative with innovative ideas to reach your hurting community.

— Rev. J. R. Rodriguez, Superintendent, Texas Louisiana Hispanic District of the Assemblies of God

In his new book, *In the Gap*, Pastor Choco provides a biblical prescription that empowers the reader with the necessary tools to fill the areas in and around us left empty by sin, heartache, apathy, and relativism with grace, hope, and love. This book is a must read, indeed!

— Rev. Samuel Rodriguez, President, National Hispanic Christian Leadership Conference

Choco De Jesús is a powerful voice for God in challenging His people to fight for others. Unlike anyone else I know, he models this trait in his own life with the courage, faith, and inner strength of God. Now he’s written a book that will stir you to do the same. Read *In the Gap* today, and prepare to be challenged!

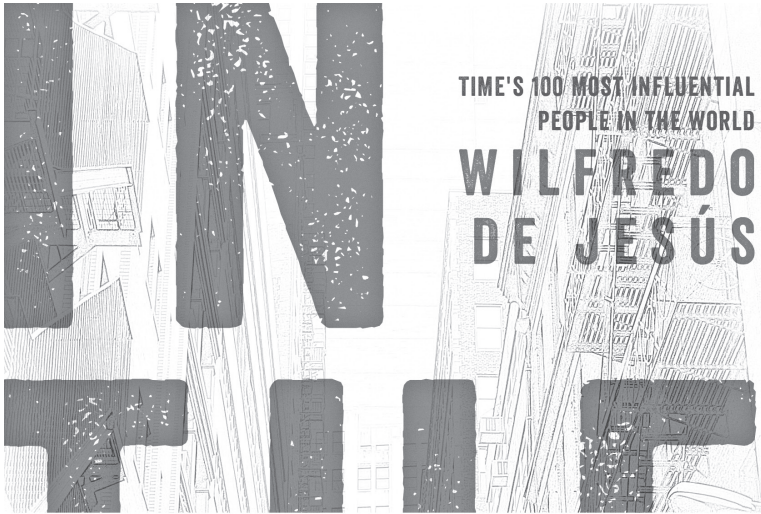
— Stovall Weems, Senior Pastor of Celebration Church in Jacksonville, Florida

I am thrilled to read Pastor Wilfredo (Choco) De Jesús’ new book, *In the Gap*. Not only is Choco a dear friend, but he is also a person I look up to and draw insight and spiritual strength from on a regular basis. As you read this book, I know that Jesus is reaching from heaven to take hold of your hand today. Quite often, He uses someone to stand in the gap who can touch Him while reaching out to rescue others who are too weak to reach up on their own. This book will help you stand in the gap for those who need Jesus.

— Rich Wilkerson, Senior Pastor of Trinity Church in Miami, Florida

Too many contemporary Christians seek lives of comfort and ease. But following Jesus Christ means ministering to others “in the gap,” that is, in places of weakness, vulnerability, and danger. In this book, Pastor Choco highlights nine biblical heroes to show each of us how to become a “gap person.” I highly recommend this book.

— George O. Wood, General Superintendent of The General Council of the Assemblies of God, USA, Springfield, Missouri



WHAT HAPPENS WHEN  
GOD'S PEOPLE STAND STRONG



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Note: In some stories, the names and details have been changed to protect anonymity.

*I want to dedicate this book to the woman who has been with me longer than my mother—you guessed it, my lovely wife, Elizabeth. In my life and in our family, she is the quiet force behind the scenes making sure everything runs smoothly.*

*For the last thirty-five years, Elizabeth has led thousands of worship services—for her Dad when he was Pastor, and now for me. She has stood in the gap for true worship and has trained many worshippers throughout the years. Elizabeth has held the hand of God to worship Him in spirit and in truth. She believes that true worship is not a performance. She leads from the heart—the way God designed us to worship.*

*Elizabeth, thank you for your purity, thank you for standing strong, thank you for sharing your voice, thank you for your heart of worship, and thank you for being my wife and friend—te amo Mi Amor.*

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# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First, I want to acknowledge my Father in heaven for His unconditional love and patience with me. To Him I dedicate my life. I will forever be grateful for the trust He has bestowed upon me with His bride and for providing me with the courage and strength to stand in the gap for her. I love you, Father.

I give a big “thank-you” to our church staff, board and elders who encourage, empower, and cover me and my family in prayer. You keep me moving forward and dreaming big. I sincerely appreciate your dedication and your commitment to serve the Lord. I’m forever grateful for your love and support.

I’d like to also say thank-you to the members of New Life Covenant Church and the younger generation who are learning what it means to be a gap leader. It’s a privilege and an honor to pastor you. You are the greatest church in the world. I love you all.

To Influence Resources, especially Sol and Wini Arledge as well as Steve and Susan Blount, thank you for encouraging me to step out in faith again and put this book together. To my friend and writer, Pat Springle, who worked tirelessly to get this book out of my heart, thank you for sharing your awesome gift.

I want to acknowledge my brothers in Christ, Efrain, Rico, Deacon, Snake, Dino, and Izzy, who have stood in the gap with me in our city—and are still standing with me. Your loyalty and friendship mean the world to me. Thank you.

Finally, I want to acknowledge my entire family who has been a great blessing to Elizabeth and me as they, too, stand in the gap with me in the City of Chicago. To my amazing wife, Elizabeth, and our three beautiful children, Alexandria, Yesenia, Wilfredo Jr., and my son-in-law, Anthony, thank you for sharing your gifts and talents with the body of Christ. I am beyond grateful for your love and support. You are my greatest joy. I love you so much.

# INTRODUCTION

## Gaps All Around Us

“I looked for someone among them who would build up the wall and stand before me in the gap on behalf of the land so I would not have to destroy it, but I found none” (Ezek. 22:30).

A gap, by definition, represents a place of weakness, vulnerability, and danger. It is a defenseless location of exposure and limitation, a point where people face real threats. Gaps exist in our countries, our communities, and at home with our families.

In September of 1939, the German army launched an attack into neighboring Poland. Their strategy was revolutionary in the history of warfare . . . and the effects were devastating. The Panzers (German tanks) punched a hole in the Polish army’s defensive wall. Then, the tanks, artillery, and infantry poured *through the gap* and attacked the defenders from the flanks and rear. The ferocity of the attack was so sudden and effective that it became known as Blitzkrieg, lightning war.

When an enemy attacks the gaps in our lives, we are hopelessly overwhelmed—if not for the grace of God and the intervention of His divine hand. As we read Scripture, we see how Moses stood in the gap for his people. Countless times, he pleaded for God to have mercy on his doubting, rebellious followers. At critical times, when the future of the people of God hung in the balance, Moses spoke to God for them and faithfully instructed them to follow God with all their hearts.

Centuries later, in about 590 BC, God's people were weak, vulnerable, and in danger. The mighty empire of Babylon threatened to attack Jerusalem and destroy Judah. The Jewish political leaders were terrified and turned on their own people. The religious elite used the chaos to gain power by lying to the people, and the common people committed crimes against each other. The poor, the needy, and the immigrants were mistreated. Even the weather caused heartache and calamity. Everything, it seemed, was going wrong for the people of God. In this chaos, God looked for someone He could trust, someone who would stand strong and represent His power, wisdom, and love. God's people desperately needed someone to stand up for them. Sadly, God had to report:

“I looked for someone among them who would build up the wall and stand before me in the gap on behalf of the land so I would not have to destroy it, but I found none” (Ezek. 22:30).

In many ways, nothing has changed in two and a half millennia. People are still in distress, and God is still looking for men and women to stand in the gap in our homes, in our neighborhoods, in our cities and towns, in our nation, and in every corner of the world. Every news account tells us that people are in trouble. They are weak, vulnerable, and in danger. If no one stands in the gap for them, it will be a catastrophe. In many cases, a series of catastrophes have already occurred, and the gap is even wider.

This isn't a black or white problem, or a socio-economic problem. The problem isn't affecting some of us, but *all* of us. It affects our deepest hopes and fears. The gap looks like:

- a prodigal child,
- an unfaithful spouse,
- an abusive family member,
- an addict who is out of control,
- lying, stealing, and cheating,
- sexual promiscuity,
- parents who have lost hope for their kids,
- neighbors (even church members) who hate each other and poison their communities,
- gangs, violence, and other crimes,
- the elderly who are forgotten and overlooked,
- children who grow up unable to read,
- poverty from lack of training and skills,

— social breakdown, including human trafficking, attacks on the sanctity of marriage, racism, immigrants lost in the system, prostitutes and others who have made terrible choices and feel cut off from the goodness of God.

Do you recognize any of these gaps around you right now? You may have protected yourself and your family from many of them, but all of these life-threatening problems are only minutes away from all of us—and many of us live with these difficulties all day every day.

Huge gaps have opened up in our world. Do we even notice? Do we care? God is asking, “Will you stand in the gap for these people? Will you stand in the gap for My sake and My glory?”

What is a “gap person”? Who is the kind of person God is looking for, the type of man or woman, young or old, who has insight into the problem and courage to take bold action. God isn’t looking for people who feel no fear. He’s looking for people who walk toward their fear and stand in the gap to help those in need.

The Bible uses a Hebrew term to describe the kind of person who stands in the gap for others: *ish habinayim*. *Ish* is a man; *isha* is a woman. *Habinayim* is “one who places himself between the two camps and offers single combat.”<sup>1</sup> The effort involved means to break or burst out, like a child coming out of a womb, to break through, break open, or break the limits of a stronghold. So, an

*ish* (or *isha*) *habinayim* is a champion for a cause, a person who protects or supports someone in need, a man or woman who finds the courage to sacrifice everything to represent God and block evil from destroying those He loves.

When we look at the Scriptures and the history of God's people, we find at least nine traits that characterize "gap people." Particular people found in the pages of the Bible exemplify each of these:

- ✦ Nehemiah identified a problem to solve,
- ✦ Esther understood her times,
- ✦ Noah was "all in," no matter what the cost,
- ✦ David was anointed by God to do the work,
- ✦ Barnabas saw hidden potential,
- ✦ John the Baptist was willing to take risks,
- ✦ Gideon was sensitive to the voice of God,
- ✦ Deborah earned a reputation of wisdom and strength, and
- ✦ Caleb had "a different spirit."

All of us have the privilege and the responsibility to stand in the gap for those around us. Love, courage, and tenacity, though, don't come out of a vacuum. We look at Jesus. John the Baptist told people, "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29) When we look at Him—and begin to realize the wonder of His awesome power and consistent

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“Random acts of kindness” are wonderful, but most needy people have complex problems that aren’t solved easily or quickly.

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love—our hearts are transformed. The message of the gospel never gets boring. When we were weak, vulnerable, and in danger, Jesus stepped out of the comfort and glory of heaven to give, not just His time, but His life for you and me. He

didn’t just risk His reputation; He poured out His blood for us. We were broken sinners, but Jesus loved us so much He gave it all to pay the ransom to bring us back home to God.

People who are in desperate need may have nothing to offer us in return for our care. That’s how Jesus loves us—unconditionally—and that’s what it means for us to love people in need. His story of the good Samaritan demonstrates what it means to stand in the gap for someone. We need to notice—to see others’ needs: spiritual, physical, relational, and emotional. Our hearts need to be soft enough to feel the pain of others and strong enough to care. Compassion is one of the marks of a person who stands in the gap. And like the good Samaritan, we need a plan. “Random acts of kindness” are wonderful, but most needy people have complex problems that aren’t solved easily or quickly. The word *compassion* means “with passion.” It’s easy to be passionate about our careers or our education or even our entertainment but what about our passion for the poor? When we encounter hurting, struggling people, we need to resist the

temptation to pass by on the other side of the road, assuming that “it’s not my problem.” We need enough passion to actually reach out to help a person.

The story of the good Samaritan shocked those who heard Jesus that day. It was inconceivable that a foreigner—Jews despised the Samaritans—would go out of his way to show such care to a Jew who had been attacked by thieves. And of course, Jesus is the ultimate good Samaritan. He was a foreigner—not from another nation, but from another realm. He stepped out of the glory of heaven to earth, cared for the helpless and hopeless, and paid the price we could never pay for our freedom, healing, and purpose.

When we consider becoming people who stand in the gap, we must draw on the love, power, wisdom, and example of One who stood in the gap for us.

Why are we hesitant to stand in the gap for those in need? There are many reasons. We don’t want anyone to take advantage of us. We have our own priorities of comfort and pleasure, and we don’t want the inconvenience. We fear that people will think we’re weird if we invest our time and hearts in the lives of those who can’t give us anything in return. We may be fearful that if we pour ourselves out for others, God will leave us empty and alone. Selfishness and fear—these are the most common reasons we’re reluctant to stand in the gap for hurting people around us.

The people we'll examine in this book, and the men and women today who stand in the gap in their families and communities, believe in a God of awesome power, strong love, and infinite wisdom. In spite of the complexities of their situations, they trust God is greater—far, far greater—than the problems people face. Out of hearts filled with God's kindness and strength, they pour themselves out to mend broken hearts, restore relationships, and rescue the souls of the people they find on the side of life's road.

In the days before Jesus was betrayed, arrested, tortured, and killed, He explained what it means to be a gap person. He told what will happen when the Son of Man sits on His glorious throne and considers the people before him. One group will be those who saw others in need—hungry, thirsty, strangers, naked, sick, and in prison—but didn't bother to help them. The other group will be those who went out of their way to care for misfits and outcasts. The King will be pleased with them and will say to them:

“Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me” (Matt. 25:34–36).

The people will ask, “Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?” (Matt. 25:37–39)

The King will smile and reply, “Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me” (Matt. 25:40).

The astounding truth Jesus taught was this: When we stand in the gap for hurting, discouraged people who are often difficult to love, He considers that we’re actually pouring out our love on Him. And nothing pleases Him more!

There are many good motivations to be a gap person. We’re being obedient to God’s command, He pours out His Spirit on us, and we see lives changed. But perhaps the most compelling motivations are that we represent and resemble Jesus when we pour our lives out for others, and that makes Him proud.

In the chapters of this book, we’ll explore the nine traits of people who stand in the gap to care for others. At the end, you can take the questionnaire to see where you’re strong (and perhaps where you need some improvement) as you stand in the gap.

Every Sunday before we sit to hear the Word of God, we make this confession of faith and commitment. As we begin, let’s make this same confession.

Your Word is written in my mind.

Your Word is hidden in my heart.

Your Word is a lamp unto my feet and a light to my path.

I will seek you with all my strength.

I choose to live my life according to your Word.

Your Word, O Lord, is eternal.

May the God of grace, wisdom and power fill you with His Spirit and give you courage to stand in the gap for those around you!

# 1 NEHEMIAH

. . . identified a problem to solve

“So we rebuilt the wall till all of it reached half its height, for the people worked with all their heart. But when Sanballat, Tobiah, the Arabs, the Ammonites and the people of Ashdod heard that the repairs to Jerusalem’s walls had gone ahead and that the gaps were being closed, they were very angry” (Neh. 4:6–7).

**E**xile. It’s a word that most people in America today can’t really understand. When people are exiled, what is most important is taken away: security, familiarity, comfort, and relationships. They’re torn from everything they know and love, and they’re forced to live in a foreign land. In an era of rapid transit and world travel, foreign lands are more accessible than ever before, but vacationing in another country is nothing like being exiled. We can’t begin to imagine the conditions of a barren camp for refugees. Enslaved and separated from any social network, exiles lack sufficient food and water, have no protection from harsh weather, and are exposed to sickness and disease from filthy and overcrowded living quarters. The life of a displaced refugee is fearful and lonely.

When the Babylonians defeated Judah in 586 BC, they destroyed the temple in Jerusalem, stole the golden vessels from the altar, and took most of the captured people back to Babylon. It was a forced march. There are ancient images of men and women being dragged along dusty roads with fish hooks in their noses. The physical and emotional pain was excruciating, but the destruction of the temple broke their hearts. For centuries, God's people had worshipped there in the presence of God. His *shekinah* glory dwelled in the holy of holies in the innermost part of the temple. Miracles happened every day. No matter which way the wind blew, the smoke from the sacrifices always went straight up to heaven. In the fields, God gave them a bumper crop in the sixth year so they could take the next year, a sabbatical year, off from their labors.

Now, all that was gone. Jerusalem was destroyed. The temple was torn down and looted, and about 50,000 inhabitants stumbled into exile in Babylon . . . including Ezekiel.

After many years, God's people began to return to their homeland. Zerubbabel and Ezra led the first group. They restored the altar, the sacrifices, and worship of God. About twenty years later, a new temple was built and dedicated. During this period, the Persians conquered Babylon. Nehemiah was a Jewish man who had remained in Persia. His story begins 141 years after the fall of Jerusalem. He rose to a place of honor as the cupbearer to King Artaxerxes.

## YESTERDAY AND TODAY

Before we continue with Nehemiah's story of courage, we need to understand something about ancient culture and biblical truth from the Old and New Testaments. The temple was the place where heaven and earth met, the place where God dwelled in His awesome glory. The wall around the city protected the temple. God's people couldn't imagine their temple being destroyed by a foreign army that worshiped foreign gods. But it happened because they became too self-absorbed, full of doubts, greed, and fear.

At the moment Jesus died on the cross, the heavy veil separating the holy of holies from the rest of the temple ripped apart from top to bottom. Why is this significant? The curtain no longer separated the people from God. Because of Christ's supreme sacrifice, God's presence and His glory no longer reside in a building. They reside in His people. One of the amazing truths of the New Testament is that you and I are temples of the Holy Spirit. Paul wrote to the people in Corinth: "Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body" (1 Cor. 6:19–20). We are the place where heaven and earth meet! And we need to build walls of protection to defend and cherish God's glory in us—walls of integrity, obedience, faith, hope, and love.

So, when we read about the events that occurred in Nehemiah's life so long ago, we can make specific applications in our own lives. All around us, the enemy attacks people, but some are too absorbed with doubt, greed, and fear to fight back. Their temple is ransacked, and their walls torn down. Sometimes, it's not just our family members, friends, or co-workers who are devastated. Sometimes it's us.

God is always looking for someone to stand in the gap. About 141 years after Jerusalem fell to the Babylonians, God's people were still in distress. They were victims of injustice and racial hatred. The walls of the city lay in ruins. It was like living in a house without walls to protect them and to keep them warm. At this moment, Nehemiah answered God's call.

## THE REPORT

Nehemiah had a dream job. He was the king's right-hand man . . . trusted, important, respected by everyone in the kingdom. By this time, the Jews living in Persia weren't the ones who had been led away by fishhooks through their noses. That was long, long ago, almost as distant in time as the Civil War in this country. The Jews had made a home in Babylon and Persia, and at least a few of them had positions of prominence. Their great-great-great grandparents had been pitiful exiles, but after many years living there, they had made Babylon their home.

Nehemiah was just as settled into his role as we might be if we had a prestigious position in our city or our nation. One day in the capital city of Susa, he saw Hanani, one of his brothers, who had just come back from Judah, which was 766 miles away. Nehemiah asked what was going on back in their homeland. He might have expected his brother to say, “Not much,” or “Things are fine.” He didn’t. He reported that the people of Jerusalem were in big trouble. Outsiders were harassing the citizens, raping the women, and stealing from the people—and no one could do anything about it.

## HE PRAYED

With revelation comes responsibility, and for Nehemiah, hearing this news broke his heart. But he didn’t jump to conclusions or act impulsively. Many of us get the sequence wrong. For us, it’s “fire, ready, aim!” Nehemiah’s heart was shattered, but he knew he needed to prepare before he acted.

For days, he wept, fasted, and prayed. The condition of God’s people in their homeland was simply unacceptable to him. God gave Nehemiah a holy discontent, a fire in his bones to make a difference. His prayer wasn’t an outburst of anger and self-pity. He didn’t demand anything from God. Instead, he focused his heart on the greatness and grace of God. He didn’t blame “those people” for the problem. Though Nehemiah was hundreds of

miles away, he identified with the people who were suffering. He included himself in the group that needed God's cleansing forgiveness. His prayer teaches us three steps to humbly make a request of God.

1. He acknowledged God (praise),
2. He reminded himself (and God) of the covenant He had made with His people, and
3. He confessed his sins and the sins of the people.

Only then did Nehemiah lay his request at God's feet:

"LORD, let your ear be attentive to the prayer of this your servant and to the prayer of your servants who delight in revering your name. Give your servant success today by granting him favor in the presence of this man" (Neh. 1:11).

If you don't want to find out what's really going on in the life of an individual, a family, or a community, don't ask. You might discover a problem that's making people "distressed and downcast, like sheep without a shepherd." Nehemiah shows us another important trait: When the pain others feel breaks your heart, don't act impulsively. Of course, imminent danger requires immediate action, but in most cases, we need to follow Nehemiah's example to spend time getting the Father's perspective through persistent prayer. Prayer is a weapon against