

Fulfilling Your Kingdom Purpose When You Need an Extreme Life Makeover

I set the last box down and stared at the storage unit in front of me. It held everything I owned: a small table, a few chairs, an old navy couch, a banged-up dresser and a fridge that struggled to stay cool. With a heavy sigh, I asked: "Lord, how long will this season last?"

I needed every dollar I had—plus the next month's rent—to replace the transmission in my car. Without a car, I couldn't get to work. Without a job, I couldn't support myself and my daughter. I didn't know what else to do. So when a friend said we could stay with her while I saved up enough money for a deposit on another apartment, I gave my landlord notice and paid for my car to get fixed. But that meant, basically, my 5-year-old daughter and I were homeless.

I locked the door to my storage unit and began the long process of rebuilding our lives. A few months later, my daughter and I settled into a new-for-us apartment. It wasn't especially nice, but it was clean, and it was ours. I had a full-time job, but every month was still a struggle. We were always one unexpected bill or one car repair away from being homeless again. There was no such thing as hashtags back then, but if there had been, hashtags like #singlemomlife and #inthetrenches and #inthethickofit would have been recurring themes for us. I didn't have family nearby or anyone who could help with childcare. And yet, as hard as this season was, I never felt alone. I knew God was with me.

At every turn God was there, providing in the most unexpected ways, oftentimes through friends and church family. When I had to attend a night class and babysitting fell through, the

professor said I could bring my daughter to class. When I had nowhere to go on Christmas Day, a friend invited us to her house. When I felt overwhelmed and worried that I wasn't going to make it, my pastor assured me that God wasn't asleep on the job, that God could bring good from a broken story. Even mine.

All this was a lifetime ago—in another millennium really. But through it all, God showed Himself faithful. There's no way I could have survived this season without God's grace and His people surrounding me. The walls of my life had crumbled around me. But just as the people of Jerusalem came together to rebuild the broken walls of their city, God's people came together to help me rebuild my life.

When Nehemiah arrived in Jerusalem, he went on a secret mission at night to inspect the walls. With several men, he traveled around the city's perimeter and took extensive notes. He started at the Valley Gate, and the task before him looked like mission impossible (Neh. 2:13). In the same way, our stories often begin in the valley, with stories of loss and heartache. Our stories often make us wonder what God is doing while His people suffer.

After surveying the wall, Nehemiah mobilized the people to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem. Yet when he later recorded the reconstruction efforts, it's noteworthy that, this time, he started at the Sheep Gate (Neh. 3:1). This gate was near the temple because this is where the sheep were brought in for the temple sacrifices. This was an integral part of Israel's history, both ritually and spiritually. The sacrifices pointed to their constant need for forgiveness—ours too.

When John the Baptist saw Jesus coming to be baptized, he said, "Here is the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29b, CSB). From the outset of His public ministry, Jesus was named the Lamb of God, for one day He would walk through a gate in Jerusalem and become the ultimate sacrificial Lamb.

It's fitting that Nehemiah's record of reconstruction begins at the Sheep Gate. When we need to rebuild the ruins of our lives, we can look to Jesus as the author of new life. That's not to say we're promised immunity from suffering once we're a believer in Christ. Jesus said, "You will have suffering in this world" (John 16:33b). Valleys are a part of the broken world we live in, but we can walk through those valleys with a humble obedience because of the new life and sure hope we find in Jesus.

Friend, I don't know what valley you may be walking through today. I don't know the damage that's been done or the devastation you've endured. But I do know where healing begins. It begins with Jesus. He can take any broken story—even one that looks like mission impossible—and He exchanges beauty for ashes. Then He surrounds us with His family—brothers and sisters who will walk alongside us.

After 70 years of exile, the restoration of Jerusalem became an ongoing work in progress. Men and women came together to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem, with each person playing an important part. The same is true today. God has a unique purpose for each of our lives. He has a job for us to do.

The apostle Paul wrote, "For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared ahead of time for us to do" (Eph 2:10).

God has prepared good works for us. He's given each of us a distinct role in the kingdom. In obedience we can step forward to fulfill the purpose He has for each of us, trusting Him to be the one who rebuilds lives.

Reflection Questions

Have you ever found yourself in the midst of a "mission impossible" situation? Are you there now?

How did God come through and meet your needs in that valley?

How can you cling to His promises today? What truth will you keep at the front of your mind as you meditate on His faithfulness in your past? {eoa}

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