Time for God?

It only took the people of God an incredibly short fifty two days to take what had been nothing more than a heap of broken-down, fire-burned, garbage-strewn rubble that was so twisted, tangled, and tortured that not even a single beast of burden could penetrate it prior to their arrival, and turn it into a fortified and defendable city perimeter under Nehemiah, to the total disheartening of their enemies (Nehemiah 1:3; 2:11-17; 6:15-16). This, despite powerful and even potentially deadly obstacles and opponents as seen throughout the early chapters of Nehemiah. How did this happen? How could such a massive and maligned undertaking be accomplished so abruptly, efficiently, and completely? Modern churches that can't seem to accomplish much of anything in the way of attendance these days except maybe maintaining the status quo – at best – marvel at what these primitive people of God were able to accomplish within such a short time, with seemingly nothing more than a little hope, a lot of heart, and a handful of hand tools! But they also had something that far too many groups of God's people overall seem to be lacking today: they had a mind to work (Nehemiah 2:18; 4:6, 15-23; 5:16). They had a mind to work that caused them all – despite their different family names and God-given and diversified gifts, talents, and areas of assignment – to work together, side by side, shoulder to shoulder, and as one, with a humility-born harmony and commonality that made them work, move, and act together as one unified entity (Nehemiah 3:1-32), just as the church of our Lord today is ultimately charged with being and doing (Luke 6:46-49; Ephesians 4:1-3; Philippians 1:27-2:4; & Titus 2:11-14).

But they also enjoyed something else that helped them form the foundation for their amazing success; a seldom-mentioned but vital element that only further complemented their already commendable qualities. You see, they not only had a mind to work, but they also had a mind to worship. They had a mind and priority set that said that nothing on earth was more important to them than better understanding, knowing, worshipping and growing closer to, their great and almighty God and Creator – absolutely nothing! Not time, not comfort, not convenience, nor any other worldly pursuit (See Luke 10:27; 1 John 2:15-17). They were more than willing to sacrifice whatever it took, to honestly and attentively listen to the word of the Lord being preached,
literally, from the first light of dawn to at least noon... much of it
while standing... out in the open... for hours on end... even in the
rain... and even if it forced such life-altering obedience to God as the complete dissolution of their
unscriptural marriages... (Nehemiah 8:1-8 & Ezra 10:1-14)! It was not uncommon for their Bible study
and worship service together, to literally take up a full half of the day – at least SIX HOURS (SEE, read,
and really study Nehemiah 9:1-6)!!! They were successful because they had a mind to work. And they
had a mind to work because they were constantly re-focusing their minds and hearts on their God and
His word... in hours-long bible studies and worship services.

What about in the New Testament? What made the Lord's church there grow like wildfire? Lack of
opposition? Lack of persecution? Lack of anything else to do for daily activities on the part of the people?
Hardly! More like a constant and daily refreshing and refocusing on the Lord God of heaven through
their devoted public and personal immersion in His word – once again, for literally hours at a time (Acts

The people of Ezra and Nehemiah’s day accomplished some incredible – and in some cases seemingly
impossible – tasks with the help of the Lord their God. So too, did God’s people of the first-century (Acts
17:1-6; Colossians 1:21-29). And maybe some of our more seasoned and spiritually-mature silver-haired
saints can probably still recall a time not all that long ago as well, when gospel meetings might have
lasted a week, or two, or perhaps even longer in some cases – and where pews were filled to capacity
almost every evening; where it was not uncommon to have gospel preachers preaching sermons that
lasted for at least an hour, if not two, with discussions afterward lasting long into the night, because
nothing else really mattered except the saving of lost sinners’ souls and the strengthening of saved saints’
souls; a time which “strangely” paralleled with the decades when “churches of Christ” (Romans 16:16)
were being recognized in some circles as one of the fastest growing religious groups in America.
Hmmm... coincidence? I think not.

Just as God’s people of Ezra’s and Nehemiah’s day as well as our own first century brethren in the Lord’s
church learned, when people fully, completely, and absolutely and sincerely devote themselves to
learning, loving, living and sharing the Lord’s word at all cost (2 Peter. 1:2-21) – despite any and all
personal hardship, sacrifice, inconvenience, or discomfort; when God, His Son, and His word are truly the
only things in life that really matter, period – His people are always blessed by Him in return for their
faithful devotion, with incredible and even almost unbelievable results. Which brings us to the present...

Today, generally speaking, we as a group of God’s people are no longer growing by leaps and bounds.
Instead, as the American and global population mushrooms – and despite all of the previously
unavailable technological advantages which we now have at our disposal – we as the Lord’s
congregations of His church are almost daily graying, dying, and shrinking down it seems. And the
answer as to why should be so incredibly obvious based on the above, that one would almost have to
want to miss it, in order to truly miss it. Many of today’s gospel meetings have been cut back to no more
than a few days, at best, if that. Many saints no longer put forth much, if any, effort whatsoever to bring
their lost friends and neighbors to bible studies, gospel meetings, worship services, or even to Christ
overall. Today’s gospel meetings and lectureships are seen much more in many church circles as
opportunities for renewing old acquaintances and relationships with brethren from other congregations
rather than with actually reaching out to convert the lost and dying souls of our own local communities. They are viewed as more of a social event for the saved than as a soul-saving event for the sinner. And, can you even begin to imagine the outcry today, if our local congregational leadership were to insist that we start – in the spirit of Ezra’s and Nehemiah’s day as chronicled above – conducting 3 hour-long morning bible studies... followed by 3 hour-long morning worship services and sermons... outside... with congregants standing up and out in the elements for most of said services... with their families as well? And then, that we are going to start – in the spirit of the apostle Paul – conducting our evening worship services at our regular time, but that they will then be extended many hours, carrying us long into and after midnight, and perhaps even into the pre-dawn light (Acts 20:7-11)? Satan would be beside himself in hell because He knows the almighty power of God’s invincible word, and has done everything in his power to distract God’s people of today from this type of top priority, take no prisoners, first-century, full-throttle approach to, and pursuit of it!!!

No; instead some seem to want to go in the exact opposite direction. While most people today certainly seem to have no problem whatsoever with sitting and watching the same 2 ½ – 3 hour movie repeatedly; with sitting through a 3 hour ball game or other sporting or entertainment event; with regularly sitting in a 2 – 3 hour long college class in order to eventually graduate and make more money; or even with watching the same old television shows shows over and over on the “re-run” channels for hours at a time; when it comes to God and His word, too many of today's Christians no longer seem to have the stomach, the heart, the love, the desire, or the devotion for much more than a twenty or so minute sermon... sitting on padded pews... inside of a heated or air-conditioned building... once or maybe even twice a week... for their Lord and Savior, God in the flesh, who gave up the glories of heaven and came and spent 33 years within Satan’s reach – and then 6 infinitely-long hours fighting for His every breath, as He was nailed to a blood-soaked and spattered cross – all for them and their sins. And we wonder why the church of our Lord – the body of Christ – is shrinking, graying, and dying today, instead of spreading, growing, thriving and glorifying God? Really?

There’s a God-given 168 hours in each week. If a Christian even actually bothers to attend both bible classes and both 1 hour and 15 minute-long worship services (due to the sermons lasting about 45 minutes of that time), then that means that they have devoted to God – if they have truly given Him their full attention during the entire duration of those services – just a little over 4, count them again, 1, 2, 3, 4 hours, out of their weekly, God-allotted, 168. That leaves the devil with a whopping 164 or so hours a week to work with, to try to distract, deceive, defeat and destroy them. That means, that with a 45 minute-long worship service sermon at both Sunday services, and if the Christian who makes all 3 weekly services of the Lord’s church doesn’t actually open up their bibles the rest of the week, and even if they somehow manage to stay studiously engaged throughout the entire bible study and worship services every week, that they are still devoting only about 2½ % of their entire God-given week to the learning of God’s life-giving word – and 97.5% to other, more worldly, physical, and far less important pursuits.

What is the answer? Well, tragically, to some the “answer” is quite simple. To some who may be more concerned with social, sporting, and/or other entertainment events (like arriving before their denominational friends and neighbors to claim the best seats at the local restaurant for Sunday dinner, or getting home to watch the big 3-hour long ball game that won’t mean much of anything by tomorrow morning) than with growing in Christ, saving souls, spreading the gospel, and/or other spiritual events,
the answer, in effect, seems to be: “Let’s do everything in our power to make known to the congregational leadership that we want significantly shorter sermons, shorter amounts of time spent singing, shorter prayers said, and basically just far shorter worship services overall. After all, 2.5% of my week (4 plus hours out of 168) is more time than God deserves for me to devote to worshipping Him and learning His word. Who does He think He is anyway? 2% of my week (3 ½ hours out of 168) works better for me.” ... And we wonder why the Lord’s church is graying, shrinking, and growing old and dying in some areas of our country today? Seriously? The problem is priorities – plain and simple (Lk. 10:25-28).

God’s Scriptural prescription for building a strong and growing church in a self-centered and godless society? Simple. More time – not less – spent in the study of God’s word, good works, everyday evangelism, and fully engaged and involved spirit and truth worship! Read again and truly take to heart this time, the entire message of Ephesians 5:3-27 as it relates to this topic! And then ask yourself the same exact question Jesus the Lord asked almost two millennia ago: “…when the Son of Man comes, will He really find faith on the earth?” (Lk. 18:8).