



T H E R U N W A Y

Part 3 • April 26, 2026 | Pastor Jason Smotherman

GIVING. SERVING. LIVING.

2 CORINTHIANS 3:2-3 (NKJV)

² You are our epistle written in our hearts, known and read by all men; ³ clearly you are an epistle of Christ, ministered by us, written not with ink but by the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of flesh, that is, of the heart.

An epistle is just a letter. In the New Testament, epistles are letters written by early church leaders to believers and churches. They weren't written as textbooks. ***They were written to real people, dealing with real situations, helping them understand how to follow Jesus in everyday life.***

Think about books like Romans, Ephesians, or 1 Corinthians. Those are all epistles. Many of them were written by Paul the Apostle, and others by leaders like Peter the Apostle and John the Apostle. Those letters weren't just information, they were proof of transformation. They weren't written just to be read, they were written to be lived and transferred.

The audacious claim is that the same God who inspired those letters is still writing. Not with ink. Not on paper. But on people.

Paul says in 2 Corinthians 3:2-3 that "you are our epistle... known and read by all men."

That means your life is a message. When you read a letter, the first thing you need to discern, is it discernible? Is the letter clear and legible?

The way you respond when life gets hard, that's a sentence. The way you love people who don't deserve it, that's a paragraph. The way you carry peace in chaos, that's a testimony being written in real time. People may never open a Bible but they are reading you every single day.

So the goal is not just to know the epistles, ***it's to become one.*** Not an existing letter. Not something that just sits on a shelf. ***But a living epistle written by the Spirit of God, read by the world, and pointing people to Jesus.***

You are the letter. Not your notes. Not your intentions. Not your church attendance. Not your potential. Not your perception. Your life.

Many of us have had good chapters. Bad Chapters. Boring Chapters. Busy Chapters. Painful Chapters. Our story doesn't need perfection to be effective. Our story needs faithfulness.

God longs for a life written with obedience in every season.

PHILIPPIANS 3:13-14 (KJV)

¹³ Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, ¹⁴ I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.

Pressing forward means the ink is still needing a heart to write on. When we look to when God last wrote on our heart. A letter that's faded. A message that's unclear. Words that are there, but carry no life.

But God didn't call you to be an existing epistle. He called you to be a living epistle. A living epistle is not just written, it's alive. It's not just seen, it's felt. It's not just read, it transforms the reader.

Because it's written by the Spirit of the living God. An existing epistle says, "I'm here." A living epistle says, "Christ is being revealed through me."

An existing epistle is ink on stone: rigid, cold, unmoved. A living epistle is written on the heart: responsive, active, alive.

People may never open a Bible but they are reading you every single day. So the question isn't just, "Am I saved?" **The question is, "What is my life saying?" Is it just existing, or is it speaking?**

We are called to be living epistles not just existing epistles.

There is this new phrase being made popular by culture. Couch rot (or "bed rotting") is a popular, voluntary self-care trend where a person stays on the couch or in bed for hours or all day, indulging in low-energy activities like streaming shows, doom-scrolling, or resting. A living epistle doesn't just occupy space it carries a message from heaven into the earth.

Nehemiah was a "living epistle". He saw the need through what he heard. What he saw was a picture of spiritual and communal collapse. The report in Nehemiah 1:3 was that the people were in "great distress and reproach".

His burden went deeper than the rubble he saw lay in front of him. He saw a city with no protection. They were vulnerable from every enemy, influence, or disaster. He saw a community with no boundaries and no defense. He saw a people living in distress and disgrace. Walls that once stood, now falling.

He saw the gap between God's promise and their reality.

What's worse: it had been normalized. The walls were destroyed for years. The people were used to existing and not living.

The Bible says HE FELT IT. He sat down, wept, mourned, fasted, and prayed. You haven't felt it until you do THAT.

Nehemiah wasn't burdened because things were broken. Things always break. Nehemiah was burdened because people had learned to live with the brokenness.

It was in those moments. Moments when He felt what he saw that he went from existing to living.

A true burden will wake you up. It will shake you up. In the end it will keep you up. People will always criticize or distract those who are living not just existing. Nehemiah was no difference.

In Nehemiah 6 each opponent didn't just oppose Nehemiah. These opponents were His friends. He is actively restoring the wall. They used different strategies to try to pull him off the wall.

Note: The enemy rarely uses just one tactic. He layers them. He tries to overwhelm what he cannot overcome.

Sanballat, Tobiah, and Geshem all worked together, but their approach came in four distinct waves:

FIRST: DISTRACTION THROUGH "HARMLESS" OPPORTUNITY

In Nehemiah 6:2 they said, "Come, let us meet together..." It sounded reasonable. It sounded productive. But Nehemiah discerned it, "they thought to do me harm." This is the tactic of distraction. Not everything that invites you is assigned to you. This is the pull toward existing: busy, but not purposeful.

SECOND: PERSISTENCE MEANT TO WEAR HIM DOWN

They didn't ask once: they asked four times (Nehemiah 6:4).

Same invitation. Same pressure. Over and over. Sometimes the goal of the enemy isn't immediate failure, it's gradual fatigue.

GALATIANS 6:9 (KJV)

And let us not grow weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not.

If they can't get you in one moment, they'll try to wear you down until you say yes just to make it stop.

THIRD: INTIMIDATION THROUGH FALSE ACCUSATION

In Nehemiah 6:6-7 they accused him of rebellion: "saying he was trying to make himself king." This attack uses the tactic of fear and reputation.

"People are talking..." "There's a report going around..."

The goal? Make him come down to defend himself. If the enemy can't pull you into distraction, he'll try to pull you into defensiveness.

FOURTH: SPIRITUAL COMPROMISE DISGUISED AS PROTECTION

This is the most subtle one. In Nehemiah 6:10, Shemaiah tells him to hide in the temple to save his life.

It sounds spiritual. It sounds wise. It sounds safe.

It was actually disobedience. Nehemiah wasn't permitted to go into the temple like that.

This is the tactic of deception. Not everything that sounds spiritual is from God. Not everything that offers safety aligns with calling.

Nehemiah's response reveals a living epistle mindset:

NEHEMIAH 6:3 (NKJV)

"I am doing a great work, so that I cannot come down..."

He resisted distraction. He outlasted persistence. He rejected accusation. He discerned deception. And because of that he stayed on the wall.

That's the message: The enemy will try to get you to come down through distraction, pressure, fear, or even false spirituality.

But a life that is truly living is a life on mission. Most people want a life of living not just existing. We want movement not just motion. We want advancement not existence.

Nehemiah didn't just resist, He persisted in purpose. He wasn't spending his energy fighting every rumor, answering every critic, or chasing every distraction. He just kept building.

Purpose is not protected by what you fight, it's protected by what you refuse to leave.

In our lives, we are called to restore the broken things to purpose. Many of us came from families where "normal" wasn't normal. Many of us came from upbringings that were more about existing than living. What does restoring what's broken look like?

In relationships:

- Purpose looks like encouraging someone instead of criticizing them.
- Purpose looks like reaching out when it would be easier to stay silent.
- Purpose looks like carrying someone else's burden when you've got your own.

At Home:

- Purpose looks like patience when you're tired.
- Purpose looks like leading your family when its not convenient.
- Purpose looks like modeling forgiveness, consistency, and love that your kids and spouse can actually see.

In Private:

- Purpose shows up when no one is watching.
- Time in the word.
- Time in prayer.
- Choosing holiness when compromise is available.

In Culture:

- Purpose looks like standing firm without becoming harsh.
- Purpose looks like holding truth without losing love.
- It looks like being different, because living looks different.

Living looks good on you!