

# THE PASTORS' PEN

articles from the elders of BBC

Recently, our church examined Nehemiah 3 as we sought to hear from God about the need for each of us to “stand in the gap.” We saw that, like Jerusalem’s walls of old, there are some “gaps” in our ministry to one another that requires us to put our necks to the work and to rebuild the walls that will protect and promote our worship of God. Our goal is the glory of God—in our midst and among the nations.

We saw that the rebuilding of walls requires an honest assessment of the reality before us: Work is required for our ongoing quest for reformation and revival.

Once this reality is acknowledged, we need to resolve to do the work that is before us. Each church member is to take personal responsibility for their section of

the “wall.” Each of us is to take seriously our covenantal responsibility to use the gifts and opportunities that God has uniquely provided. This *uniqueness* (age, gender, abilities, ethnicity, etc.) is to be expressed *unitedly* in the work of building up the body of Christ (Ephesians 4:1–16).

If each of us assumes our God-gifted responsibility, then the walls of our *reverence* for God, and the walls of our *relationships* for God, and the walls of our *reach* for God will be repaired, restored, rebuilt.

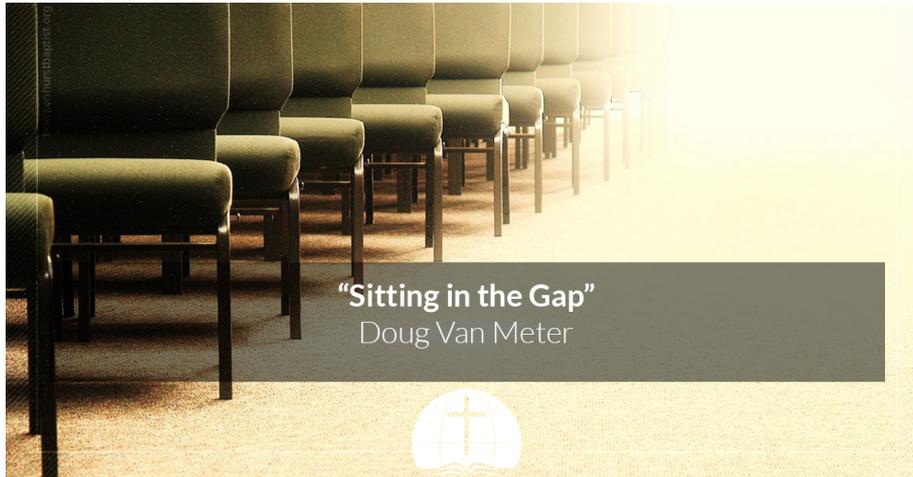
For me, one of the most significant phrases in this chapter is “*next to them*” or “*beside him*.” The point is simple and yet practically profound: The work of church reformation (which is a continual

work until Jesus returns) requires connection with one another.

Though each of us is diversely gifted, and though each of us has unique circumstances, unique personalities, unique vocations, etc., when it comes to the work of the local church—to deeds of service and to our worship—we need to carry these out “*next to*” one another. Failure to do so may result in unnecessary, unhelpful, and even unhealthy gaps in our body life. So, we must stand together in ministry. But let me suggest that we must also *sit* together.

One of the most frequently reiterated commands in the New Testament epistles is for Christians to “*greet one another*.” In his excellent, practical book, *Side by Side*, Ed Welch highlights that

obeying this simple command can lead to deeply helpful conversations and relationships. To sincerely greet someone is to take them seriously as a person. It is to acknowledge their existence. And if we sincerely greet them, it may open the door to their sharing their heart, a heart that in many cases is broken by sin and/or suffering; a heart that needs to be heard, so as to be healed. But of course, to greet requires *proximity*. Shouting a greeting across the hall may at times be legitimate, but it probably won’t produce much intimacy. In other words, a wave at a distance does not lend itself to the individual baring their heart to you—even if you both know Morse code. No, intimacy requires nearness. So, we must learn to stand next to each other, but we also must be willing to *sit*



“Sitting in the Gap”  
Doug Van Meter



next to each other. Failure to do so can produce unnecessary, unhelpful, and even unhealthy, *gaps*.

Let me be practical. When we gather on the Lord's Day for corporate worship, we should be alert to *sit in the gaps*. Rather than adding an extra row in the back of the church, dare to move to the front. Yikes! I know that might frighten some, but, honestly, I don't bite. And neither does anyone else in the front (at least, not that I am aware of).

Now, I know that I am treading on holy ground here, but it needs to be said that the convenience of the balcony beckons too many. I am grateful that we often need to use the balcony due to "overflow" seating. On a Sunday morning, this is doubtless necessary. I am also grateful that the balcony serves well parents with small children who seek to train them to sit in church. But our families should never feel compelled to sit there because they fear their children will be a disruption. Honestly, we can handle it. What a joy for whole families to sit together in a worship service; what a privilege for us all to encourage them to sit in the gap, rather than creating a gap. Love can overcome the minor disruptions of a child who hasn't yet learned the "rules" of a corporate gathering. Allow the little children to be with Jesus, to be with the Body of Christ.

As we sit in the gap, we will probably find ourselves sensing more connection with what is taking place in our midst. By sitting in the gap, we create a helpful sense of fullness as we join our voices in song and in the corporate amen as we pray. As we sit in the gap, we may find ourselves less isolated. And—who knows?—by sitting in the gap, you may even find a new friend. Or, just as importantly, you may *become* a friend. So, rather than making a beeline for the balcony, look for gaps below—gaps that your body can fill.

Brackenhurst Baptist Church, God is at work in our midst, and I am very grateful. Some relational gaps are being repaired, and our corporate reverence is being strengthened. Further, our evangelistic concern is growing. We trust that we will see our section of the New Jerusalem being repopulated. People are standing in the gap. But let's all be alert to *sitting* in the gap as well.

