

# Nehemiah Devotionals

Devotional Illustrations

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Our Daily Bread

Today in the Word

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## NEHEMIAH 1 - Nehemiah and Satanic Diversion

A.W. Tozer

Failing in his frontal attacks upon the child of God, Satan often turns to more subtle means of achieving his evil purpose. He resorts to devious methods in his attempt to divert the Christian from carrying out the task God has committed to him. He often succeeds by involving the saint in some other lesser occupation and so distracting him.

Nehemiah, the good, rose up from his weeping to do something about a vision God had laid on his heart. Under divine providence, he was soon transported from Shushan to his beloved city, Jerusalem, armed with authority and equipped with materials to rebuild the ruined city.

When Nehemiah's purpose and plans were made known to the men of Jerusalem, they raised the determined shout, Let us rise up and build.

### We Travel an Appointed Way

By A.W. Tozer

Nehemiah, the good, rose up from his weeping to do something about a vision God had laid on his heart. Under divine providence, he was soon transported from Shushan to his beloved city, Jerusalem, armed with authority and equipped with materials to rebuild the ruined city...

The first device of the "enemy," upon hearing of the undertaking, was to heap ridicule on the whole plan. Sanballat, Tobiah and Geshem laughed Nehemiah and his helpers to scorn. Undeterred, Nehemiah replied with firm assurance, "The God of heaven, he will prosper us." And the work went on according to plan.

After all other means had failed to hinder the reconstruction, the conspirators tried to arrange for a conference with Nehemiah. The man of God saw in this an evil purpose to do him mischief and divert him from his monumental work. His reply to the would-be mischief-makers is classic, and might well be adopted for the all-time stock reply to all such overtures: "I am carrying on a great project and cannot go down. Why should the work stop while I leave it and go down to you?" (Nehemiah 6:3)

The great task to which God had called Nehemiah was so important that every other consideration must be waived. Would that we might have such an overpowering sense of being about our Father's business and be so impressed with the grandeur of our task that we would reject every suggestion of the evil one that would bid us take up some lesser pursuit. Let us rout him with the words that date back to 445 B.C., and which cannot be improved upon: "I am carrying on a great project and cannot go down."

### Nehemiah 1

#### Concern For Others

By Warren Wiersbe

Some people prefer not to know what's going on, because information might bring obligation. 'What you don't know can't hurt you,' says the old adage; but is it true? In a letter to a Mrs. Foote, Mark Twain wrote, 'All you need in this life is ignorance and confidence;

then success is sure.' But what we don't know could hurt us a great deal! There are people in the cemetery who chose not to know the truth. The slogan for the 1987 AIDS publicity campaign was 'Don't die of ignorance'; and that slogan can be applied to many areas of life besides health.

Nehemiah asked about Jerusalem and the Jews living there because he had a caring heart. When we truly care about people, we want the facts, no matter how painful they may be. 'Practical politics consists in ignoring facts,' American historian Henry Adams said; but Aldous Huxley said, 'Facts do not cease to exist because they are ignored.' Closing our eyes and ears to the truth could be the first step toward tragedy for ourselves as well as for others.

Are we like Nehemiah, anxious to know the truth even about the worst situations? Is our interest born of concern or idle curiosity? When we read missionary prayer letters, the news in religious periodicals, or even our church's ministry reports, do we want the facts, and do the facts burden us? Are we the kind of people who care enough to ask?

Think about it: "Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others" (Phil. 2:4, niv).

### **Nehemiah 1:11-2:5 The First English Samurai**

For I was the king's cupbearer. —Nehemiah 1:11

William Adams (1564–1620) is believed to be the first Englishman to reach Japan. Taking a liking to Adams, the ruling Japanese shogun made him his interpreter and personal advisor concerning the Western powers. Eventually, Adams was presented with two swords with rank of a Samurai. This showed just how much the Japanese revered Adams. Because William Adams served his foreign king well, he was also rewarded with greater opportunity for influence.

Centuries earlier, another man in a foreign country also had great influence over his king. Nehemiah was a cupbearer to Persian King Artaxerxes (Neh. 1:11). In the royal court, the cupbearer would test the wine before it was given to the king to protect him from poisoning. But this position also meant he had the king's ear as a trusted advisor. Nehemiah's integrity, administrative gifts, and wisdom made him a confidant to his ruler, which paved the way for the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem.

Like Nehemiah, each of us has been given a unique sphere of influence. Raising children, church or community work, and employment all provide a platform where we can have a beneficial effect on others. Has the Lord placed someone in your life upon whom you can have an influence?

When we live with integrity,

We please our God above

And influence society

With truthfulness and love. —Sper

Even a little example can be a big influence for Christ.

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### **Nehemiah 1:1-2:8**

**O Lord, let your ear be attentive to the prayer of this your servant. - Nehemiah 1:11**

#### **TODAY IN THE WORD**

In 1964, Kitty Genovese was murdered in her apartment building in New York City. The story made national headlines because it appeared that none of her neighbors had responded, despite her cries for help. Though subsequent investigations have disproved some of the earliest stories of her apathetic neighbors, the case led psychologists to describe "Genovese Syndrome," or "bystander effect." The larger the crowd, the more likely it is for individuals to think, "Someone else will do something."

Almost a century after the Persian Empire ascended to power, God appointed Nehemiah to ensure the rebuilding of the Jerusalem walls (around 445 b.c.). In the face of this weighty task, Nehemiah did not exhibit "bystander effect" in this time of crisis for God's people. He answered with great faith and completed the rebuilding (6:15). Moreover, Nehemiah did not retire after gazing at the fortified city. In great faith he continued his commitment to God's purposes.

The book opens as Nehemiah was informed of Jerusalem's vulnerability and decadence (Neh 1:1-3). For days, he grieved the news. Then he offered a prayer of confession and surrendered himself as God's instrument to rectify the situation. The elements of Nehemiah's prayer indicate a heart that pleased God. He sought the Lord wholeheartedly; he revealed an attitude of true confession and repentance for the sins of his people; and he demonstrated desperate dependence on God's enduring faithfulness.

Nehemiah's prominent position in the royal court meant trusted access to the king, yet he wisely spent five months in preparation before approaching King Artaxerxes with his request (Neh 2:1). When the king desired details of Nehemiah's plans, he was thoroughly organized. God was pleased and blessed Nehemiah's work. We have examined numerous heroes of faith throughout the Old Testament. At every point the Lord raised up people of faith to carry on His purposes. His faithfulness was the buttress of their great faith.

**TODAY ALONG THE WAY** - Prayer saturates Nehemiah's autobiography. He beseeched the Lord to guide him at every step. In order to pray effectively, we must grow in the discipline of prayer. If you feel like your prayer life needs to grow deeper, you might try praying through the Psalms or Paul's prayers in his letters. As you pray more biblically, you'll find that your heart is shaped to seek God and understand His will more fully. A prayer partner or group can also encourage you to have regular times of prayer.

### **Nehemiah 1:1-11**

**O Lord, God of heaven, hear the prayer your servant is praying. - Nehemiah 1:5-6**

### **TODAY IN THE WORD**

Andrew Murray, the late pastor and noted author on prayer who has become a friend to us this month, has another stirring challenge for us to consider today. He writes: ""So much of our prayer is vague and pointless. Some cry for mercy, but do not take the trouble to know exactly why they want it. Others ask to be delivered from sin, but do not name any sin from which a deliverance can be claimed. Still others pray for God's blessing...on their land or on the world, and yet have no special field where they can wait and expect to see the answer. To everyone the Lord says, 'What do you really want, and what do you expect Me to do?' ""

Murray's challenge is especially timely for us today and makes a good follow-up to our study yesterday on the need of intercessory prayer for America.

Nehemiah's prayer for his homeland is a model any godly person in any generation can imitate. It meets all the criteria Murray named. There is nothing vague or pointless about it. Nehemiah named the sin Israel was guilty of: acting wickedly and failing to obey the Law God gave through Moses.

Nehemiah wasn't clueless as to why he wanted God's mercy. The city of Jerusalem was in ruins, and Nehemiah knew that the rubble gave God's enemies a chance to defame His name and character. Finally, Nehemiah didn't stammer around when it came to the specifics of what he wanted God to do (Neh 1:11).

Like Moses, Nehemiah was a great intercessor. Nehemiah put himself squarely in the middle of his sinful people and identified with them completely in their deep spiritual need.

This prayer draws us away from the tendency to take an ""us and them"" mentality as we pray for national restoration. There are many evil people doing many evil things in our country, but we all stand before God in need of forgiveness.

Nehemiah was arguably the most righteous Israelite of his generation. But he didn't point the finger at others. He went before God on behalf of his own needs as well as on behalf of the nation's. Nehemiah's humility and repentant heart gave his prayer a unique power. We need to study this prayer and make it our own.

**TODAY ALONG THE WAY** Vagueness in prayer happens when we fail to put real effort and thought into our prayers. Here's an interesting way to find out if your prayers are too vague. Jot down three or four people or situations you're praying for, then describe exactly what you want God to do in each case. See if you can do it without using the word bless at all!

### **Nehemiah 1: Your Heart**

I sat down and wept, and mourned for many days; I was fasting and praying before the God of heaven. —Nehemiah 1:4

I loved Malcom's prayer at church the other day. Only 7 years old, he stood in front of 100 other kids and prayed: "Jesus, thank You that some of us get to play football and go to church, and for safety on the ride here, and for forgiveness of our sins, and for eternal life. We love You, Jesus. Please don't ever forget how much we love You!"

It brought tears to my eyes as he expressed his heart to God. As adults, we may tend to try to polish our prayers a little, thinking that it will sound better to God's ears or to those around us who might hear us. But I think God must delight in hearing just what's on His child's heart.

Nehemiah's heart was filled with concern for the welfare of Jerusalem, his homeland, when he heard that the people were in great distress and that the wall around the city was broken down (Neh. 1:3). Wanting to do something, he talked to God about it. He praised God for who He is (Neh. 1:5), requested forgiveness for sin (Neh. 1:6), reminded Him of His promise (Neh. 1:9), and asked

for mercy from the king (Neh. 1:11). God watched over Nehemiah and His people through the whole rebuilding process.

What is on your mind? Thanks or burdens? Whatever it is, your loving God wants to hear your heart.

So lift up your heart to the heavens;

There's a loving and kind Father there

Who offers release and comfort and peace

In the silent communion of prayer. —Anon.

The highest form of prayer comes from the depths of a humble heart.

### **Nehemiah 1:11.**

Nehemiah 1:11 I was the king's cupbearer.

The post was an important one. It gave its occupant the opportunity of coming into close contact with the king; it implied a character of unusual trustworthiness, since Oriental despots were very afraid of poison. But no one expected a royal cupbearer to do anything very heroic. He lived in the inner part of the palace, and was necessarily excluded from the great deeds of the stirring outward world. Nehemiah also was evidently a humble and retiring man. His response to the story of the ruined condition of Jerusalem was just a flood of tears and prayer to the God of heaven. And had you seen those tears and heard that prayer, you might have thought that just another flower was drooping, another seed falling into the ground to die.

But this was not all. These prayers and tears were supplemented by an earnest purpose, which was maturing with every hour. He gave himself to God to be used, if God would have it so, as an instrument in the execution of His recorded purpose. He was a man of faith. It mattered little enough that he was only a cupbearer, for that was no barrier to God; indeed, God might work more efficiently through a frail, weak man, than through the prince, the soldier, or the orator, since He cannot give His glory to another. What a glorious faith was his, which dared to believe that through his yielded life God could pour His mighty rivers! Why do we not yield ourselves in our helplessness to God, and ask Him to work through us, to fulfill His mighty purposes?

We kneel, how weak! We rise, how full of power! Why therefore should we do ourselves this wrong Or others— that we are not always strong!" (Meyer, F. B. Our Daily Homily)

### **Nehemiah 1**

#### **What You Don't Know *Can* Hurt You!**

Some people prefer not to know what's going on, because information might bring obligation. "What you don't know can't hurt you," says the old adage; but is it true?

In a letter to a Mrs. Foote, Mark Twain wrote - All you need in this life is ignorance and confidence; then success is sure.

But what we don't know could hurt us a great deal! There are people in the cemetery who chose not to know or believe the truth of the AIDS publicity campaign statement "Don't die of ignorance". To be sure, this slogan could be applied to many areas of life. And in our reading for today, Nehemiah asked about Jerusalem and the Jews living there because he had concern. When we truly care, we want the facts, no matter how painful they may be.

**H. Adams** wrote that... Practical politics consists in ignoring facts,

**Aldous Huxley** although not a believer rightly stated that... Facts do not cease to exist because they are ignored.

Closing our eyes and ears to the truth could be the first step toward tragedy for ourselves as well as for others. Are you like Nehemiah, desiring to know the truth even about difficult situations? Be sure and do a motive check though... Is your interest genuine concern or idle curiosity? When we read missionary prayer letters, the news in religious periodicals, or even our church's ministry reports, do we want the facts, and do the facts burden us? Are we the kind of people who care enough to ask? Think about it: "Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others" (Phil. 2:4).

### **Nehemiah 1:1-6**

I went out by night ... and viewed the walls of Jerusalem which were broken down (Nehemiah 2:13).

The Chicago newspapers reported a rash of gang-related slayings in a large inner-city housing project. The police seemed unable to stop the violence. For several weeks Jane Byrne, mayor of Chicago, wrestled with the problem. Then, to everyone's surprise, she

announced that she and her husband were moving into that apartment complex. Immediately she gained widespread community support for her action. Soon even her critics admitted that her bold leadership and example had made a significant difference.

Mayor Byrne's action reminds me of Nehemiah, that man of God who was instrumental in rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem. As a Jewish exile serving in a high-ranking position under the king of Persia, he received word that the remnant of his people in Jerusalem were in great danger. The walls of the city had been knocked down; the gates had been burned. Heartbroken, Nehemiah wept, fasted, confessed his sins, and prayed for several days to the God of heaven. Then, as the Lord directed him, he left the security of his position and moved into the violence-racked city. He stayed there until the walls were rebuilt and order was restored.

Whatever position of authority we hold, there's a lesson in this for us. We must be willing to identify with human need so that God can use us in troubled areas. That's leadership that leads. —M. R. De Haan II

**People who doubt what we say may change their minds when they see what we do.**

## **Nehemiah 1:2**

**I asked them concerning the Jews.—Nehemiah. 1.2** (Morgan, G. C. Life Applications from Every Chapter of the Bible)

An interval of about twelve years occurred between the reformation under Ezra, and the coming of Nehemiah. The story this book tells is that of the continuation of the work commenced by Zerubbabel in the matter of the rebuilding of the wall. It is intensely interesting, because in large measure it is autobiographical. Nehemiah tells his own story, with a freshness, and a vigour and transparent honesty which are full of charm. In these words we have a revelation of his patriotism. He held the position of cup-bearer to the king, which was one of honour, admitting him, not only into the presence of the king, but into relationships of familiarity. He had no inclination to forget or to ignore his relationship with his own people, for he spoke of those of them who found their way to the court as "my brethren." Moreover, his interest in them was sympathetic and vital. He made inquiry of them concerning Jerusalem. The news they brought was full of sadness, and his devotion was manifested in his grief. He carried his burden to his God in prayer. That prayer opened with confession. Without reserve, he acknowledged the sin of the people, and identified him-self therewith. He then pleaded the promises of God, and asked that God would give him favour in the eyes of his master, the king. There was in his heart a resolve to do more than pity, if the door of opportunity opened. All this is patriotism on the highest level. It was based upon a recognition of the nation's relationship to God, and expressed itself in identification with her sorrows and her sins, and in a desire and determination to help her in ways according with Divine purpose and law.

## **Nehemiah 1: Exposition by C H Spurgeon**

**Nehemiah 1:1, 2. The words of Nehemiah the son of Hachaliah. And it came to pass in the month, Chisleu, in the twentieth year, as I was in Shushan the palace, that Hanani, one of my brethren, came, he and certain men of Judah; and I asked them concerning the Jews that had escaped, which were left of the captivity, and concerning Jerusalem.**

Nehemiah was in a high office in Shushan the palace of King Artaxerxes, but his heart was at Jerusalem. He therefore remembered the very date, "in the month Chisleu," when some of his brethren came from Judah to visit him, for he was more interested in their coming than in any transaction of the court in which he was for a while employed.

Observe the subject of this good man's conversation: "I asked them concerning the Jews that had escaped, which were left of the captivity, and concerning Jerusalem." Whenever Christian people meet together, they ought to make the subject of their mutual discourse an enquiry as to the progress of the Kingdom of God in the place where they respectively dwell. If you have come up from the country, we want you to tell us about the work of God in your village, or in the town to which you belong; are there many conversions there? We also will tell you about the work in London. Thus should Christian brethren commune with one another, and ask concerning Christ's kingdom among men, and the progress that his gospel is making.

This good man was, of course, one of the banished Jews, but he had greatly prospered. He had risen in the empire of Ahasuerus until he had come to be great—even to be one of the chamberlains of the empire; but his heart was towards his poor people—his brethren—that were in poverty. Now, whenever God exalts a Christian man in temporal position, he ought not to disown his poor brethren, but his heart should go out towards them to see what he can do for them. It is a shame for any man to forget his country. Does not the Pole still say, "No, Poland, thou shalt never perish"? And we admire such patriotism. But the like feeling should be in every Christian breast. We should love the church of God even as Nehemiah loved the chosen race, from which he had sprung. So when he met with Hanani, the conversation was all about the poor brethren that remained at Jerusalem.

**Nehemiah 1:3. And they said unto me, The remnant that are left of the captivity there in the province are in, great affliction and reproach: the wall of Jerusalem also is broken down, and the gates thereof are burned with fire.**

They gave a correct description of the real state of affairs in Jerusalem; they did not color it, but they stated the actual facts. It is well, sometimes, to tell our Christian brethren about the low estate of Zion; where things are not prospering as they should, it is best

to say so, and not to try to smother up the truth, and give a false report.

A sad story they had to tell. Ezra had assisted in somewhat rebuilding the temple, but little had been done for the private dwellings, and for the walls and public buildings of the city. It was in a sad and wretched estate; and the Jews were despised and reproached. Nehemiah was a great man, but he was sorry to hear this. He felt as if he was a fellow-sufferer with his poor brethren.

**Nehemiah 1:4. And it came to pass, where I heard these words, that I sat down and wept, and mourned certain days, and fasted, and prayed before the God of heaven,**

This good man was greatly affected by the sad news which he heard. He was not indifferent to, the condition of his countrymen; he did not say, "We are getting on very well here; I am a Jew, and I am in the palace of Artaxerxes, but I cannot do anything to help my brethren. You, who are away there at Jerusalem, must do the best you can." No; Nehemiah said no such thing; he looked upon himself as being part and parcel of the whole Jewish race, just as every true believer should regard all Christians as being near akin to himself. We are not twenty churches, brethren, nor two hundred; our Lord Jesus Christ is the head, and we are members of that one body which is his Church. We ought to sympathize with all who are in Christ; and, especially, if the cause of God is not prospering in any place, we should do as Nehemiah did, he wept, and mourned, and fasted, and prayed before the God of heaven. He tells us what he said in his prayer; these are, as it were, the shorthand notes of his supplication.

Was it his concern? Was it any more his concern than that of other men? Yes, he felt it to be his: and the tender heart which he had towards the people of God made him feel it to be peculiarly his. If nobody else did anything, he must. And, oh! dear brothers and sisters in Christ, whenever you see the cause of God in a sad estate, lay it to heart: weep, lament, and pray: feel that you have an interest in it. Christ is your Savior. Of the church you are a part. These blessed interests of sovereign mercy belong to you. Take them to yourself and say, "By God's help, I will lay myself out for the progress of his cause. I sat down and wept, and mourned certain days, and fasted and prayed before the God of heaven."

**Nehemiah 1:5, 6. And said, I beseech thee, O LORD God of heaven, the great and terrible God, that keepeth covenant and mercy for them that love him and observe his commandments: let thine ear now be attentive, and thine eyes open, that thou mayest hear the prayer of thy servant, which I pray before thee now, day and night, for the children of Israel thy servants, and confess the sins of the children of Israel, which we have sinned against thee: both I and my father's house have sinned.**

He seems to act like a priest for God, taking the sin of the people upon himself, and confessing it. If they were hard-hearted, and would not confess, he would, and pour out his complaint before God.

This is quite a model prayer. How earnest it is, and how truthful! Nehemiah recognizes the terrible side of God's character as well as his mercifulness. He evidently had right views of God. Some people try to explain away all the passages of Scripture which represent God as a terrible God; whether they know it or not, they will find this course of action to be a great source of weakness to them in dealing with the ungodly. Nehemiah calls Jehovah "the great and terrible God;" but he adds, "that keepeth covenant and mercy for them that love him." He tells us that he prayed before the Lord day and night. Of course, he had to attend to his daily duties, so that he could not always be upon his knees; but his heart was praying even while he was engaged with other matters; and as often as he could, he retired to his room, so that he might cry out unto God.

Please to observe that he makes a confession of "the sins of the children of Israel." It is our duty as Christians, as it were, to take the great lead of the sins of the nation upon ourselves, and to make confession of them before God; if the guilty ones will not repent, we must repent for them; if they will not, confess their sins, we must confess their sins as though we stood in their stead. Nehemiah very pathetically says, "and confess the sins of the children of Israel, which we have sinned against thee:" and then coming still more closely home, he adds, "both I and my father's house have sinned."

**Nehemiah 1:7-9. He quotes the covenant, and he pleads the promise of Jehovah. Now, there is no means of getting a man to do us a favor so powerful as this, to quote his own promise," You said you would do it." So, here, Nehemiah says, "Remember, I beseech thee, the word that thou commandedst thy servant Moses."**

You see what an admirable prayer this is. There is a full confession of sin—an acknowledgment of the justice of God in having punished his people; but then there is a quoting of the divine word—a putting of the Lord in remembrance that he had made such and such a promise. That is the very backbone of prayer. If you go to the bank, the main part of the transaction is to put the cheque—the note of hand—upon the counter. You get no money else. So when you go in prayer, the main part of prayer must lie in pleading the promise, "Thou hast said it: thou hast said it." Hold God to his word with a sacred daring of faith. "Thou hast promised: thou hast declared. Now be as good as thy word."

Then notice another plea he has. He says he is pleading for God's servants—his redeemed—redeemed by great power. Oh! it should always make us feel strong in prayer when we recollect that God's people are very dear to him, and he has done great things

for them; therefore he loves them, and for those whom he loves, surely, he will work great deliverances. These are arguments. There ought to be great argument in prayer if we hope to prevail.

### **Nehemiah 1:1-10 Reject Apathy**

Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me. Matthew 25:40

The room was splashed with an assortment of enchanting colors as women in beautiful saris scurried around, completing the final touches for a fundraising event. Formerly from India, these women now live in the USA. Yet they remain concerned for their native country. Upon hearing about the financial situation of a Christian school for autistic children in India, they not only heard the need, but they also took it to heart and responded.

Nehemiah did not allow his comfortable position in life as cupbearer and confidant to the most powerful man at that time to nullify his concerns for his countrymen. He talked to people who had just come from Jerusalem to find out the condition of the city and its citizens (Neh. 1:2). He learned that “those who survived the exile ... are in great trouble and disgrace. The wall of Jerusalem is broken down, and its gates have been burned with fire” (Neh 1:3).

Nehemiah’s heart broke. He mourned, fasted, and prayed, asking God to do something about the terrible conditions (Neh 1:4). God enabled Nehemiah to return to Jerusalem to lead the rebuilding effort (Neh 2:1-8).

Nehemiah accomplished great things for his people because he asked great things of a great God and relied on Him. May God open our eyes to the needs of those around us, and may He help us to become passionate and creative problem-solvers who bless others.

Father, there are great needs all around us. We choose not to give in to despair or apathy, but look to You for help in doing the task at hand.

Those who walk with God won’t run from the needs of others.

INSIGHT: Nehemiah is remembered for his part in the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem. Today’s passage is the beginning of that project. Notice Nehemiah’s first response to the news about the condition of Jerusalem. He stops everything else and spends time in prayer (1:5). Never a bad first step in any situation.

### **Nehemiah 1:4-11 Ghost Town**

What does the Lord your God require of you, but ... to serve the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul. — Deuteronomy 10:12

A gold rush that began in the 1970s made Boa Vista, Brazil, a boomtown on the edge of one of the world’s richest gold fields. That changed when the gold mines were shut down. Government officials say the miners were destroying the rain forest, dumping mercury into the rivers, and bringing guns and diseases that killed thousands of local residents. Today Boa Vista is a “town of lost souls and frustrated adventurers too poor to return to their bleak beginnings.”

Such was the picture of God’s people exiled in Babylon. All they had were memories of the days when God’s favor was on them. Jerusalem was in ruins because a blessed people had been exploiting the weak, not caring for the land entrusted to them (2Chr 36:19-21), and going through the motions of worshiping God. The prophet Nehemiah confessed: “We have acted very corruptly against You, and have not kept the commandments” (Neh. 1:7).

God loved His people too much to let them continue harming themselves and others. By letting them “do time” in Babylon, He helped them see what can happen when a blessed people get caught up in a life that leaves God out of the picture. He’ll do what it takes to help us see that as well!

The dearest idol I have known,

Whate’er that idol be,

Help me to tear it from Thy throne

And worship only Thee. —Cowper

God gives blessing to us so we can give glory to Him.

### **Tracking and Planning**

## **Nehemiah 1:1–2:10 Tracking and Planning**

Please grant me success today by making the king favorable to me. Put it into his heart to be kind to me (Nehemiah 1:11).

When I spotted some fresh tracks last week, I determined that they had been made by a fairly large red deer, almost certainly a male. So I worked out where he would be lying down for the day, then I planned my evening ambush. After I sat motionless for almost 2 hours, he made his appearance. Stepping out from the woods, he came to within 8 yards of me. The only problem was that he came directly behind me! As soon as he caught my scent on the wind, he disappeared like a ghost. My carefully conceived plan had come so close to working, but in the end it counted for nothing.

As the king of Persia's cupbearer, Nehemiah was a powerful and influential man. He certainly could have spent many hours devising a scheme to help his people—the people of Israel—gain success in their desire to return to rebuild Jerusalem (Nehemiah 1:2). However, I don't think Nehemiah, in his wildest dreams, could have imagined that the king would let him travel to Jerusalem equipped with soldiers, money, and letters of introduction, all for the express purpose of rebuilding the great city! (Nehemiah 2:1-9).

God used Nehemiah's impressive position and abilities to continue the process of restoring Jerusalem, but what He used most was his servant's obedience and reliance upon Him. Nehemiah saw the need, but relied completely on the "gracious hand of God" to provide the way of fulfilling that need (Nehemiah 2:8).

It's vital that our plans reveal that type of reliance. We sometimes settle for partial success, especially when it allows for some personal glory. Instead, may we take our plans to God and seek His wisdom and blessing. Without Him at the center, our plans will surely fail.

### **Nehemiah 1**

#### **Today in the Word**

I mourned and fasted and prayed before the God of heaven. Nehemiah 1:4

Memoirs have become a best-selling category of books. People love to read behind-the-scenes accounts from politicians and military leaders. Stories of overcoming dramatic obstacles in life enchant others. And some people just enjoy reading a well-written personal narrative about another person's inner thoughts and feelings.

The book of Nehemiah, which is primarily a memoir of his time in Jerusalem, contains all of these elements of a captivating memoir. His story begins 13 years after the last events recounted in the book of Ezra.

The first thing we find about the Jewish people who returned from exile is distressing, and Nehemiah reacted with the kind of heartfelt passion as if his own home had been vandalized (Nehemiah 1:1–4). From the very beginning of this book, we see that a godly leader identifies himself with God's people and doesn't stay at a distance from their struggles and pain.

Next, Nehemiah demonstrated the proper action in response to spiritual crisis. Nehemiah responded with mourning, fasting, and praying (see Ezra 9–10). This introduces a theme running throughout this memoir: Nehemiah's reliance on God and the priority of prayer. As we'll see, Nehemiah was a confident, successful, talented man—but he exercised his gifts and talents out of a dependence on God, committing himself to seeking God first.

Nehemiah's prayer in this passage gives us a peek inside the spiritual life of a godly leader. The prayer begins with an acknowledgment of who God is ("great and awesome") and what He does ("keeps his covenant of love," Nehemiah 1:5). Next, Nehemiah showed spiritual insight by recognizing that the condition of the walls of Jerusalem reflected the spiritual condition of the Israelites. He acknowledged that both personal and corporate sins had broken the clear command of God (Nehemiah 1:6–9).

Finally, Nehemiah didn't view prayer as an excuse not to follow up with action. He had confessed and committed the matter to the Lord. Now he committed himself to act on behalf of his disgraced and distressed people (Nehemiah 1:10).

Apply the Word - Nehemiah provides example of prayer and action. We might be tempted to act in a situation without first committing it to the Lord. We might also be tempted to pray but then refuse to follow up with action. Spend time in prayer, allowing the Holy Spirit to prompt your heart for any issues you need to confess or petition. Use the model of Nehemiah's prayer to shape your own words. Then follow through on any actions you need to take, especially on behalf of others who are hurting.

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### **Nehemiah 1:1-4 Walls**

The wall of Jerusalem has been torn down, and the gates have been destroyed by fire (Nehemiah 1:3).

Walls are designed to keep people safe. But walls also divide, keeping people apart. The 96-mile (155 km) Berlin Wall kept the East



Germans in. The Great Wall of China, which was believed to be 5,500 miles long (8,850 km) and is now estimated to be 13,170 miles long (21,196 km), kept enemies out.

In 586 BC, the Babylonians tore down Jerusalem's walls and destroyed the city. Nehemiah experienced many sleepless nights as he considered the ramifications of the broken-down barriers (Nehemiah 1:4). But what was all the fuss about a broken wall? (Nehemiah 1:3). Without the safety and security of the wall, very few Jews wanted to live in the city.

So Jerusalem, the city of God, remained a deserted and dead city, a disgrace and a shame. Her enemies taunted and mocked the people saying that Israel's God was too weak to protect her (Psalm 79:1-4; Lamentations 2:15-16; Joel 2:17). In fact, lots were cast to force people to relocate to the city (Nehemiah 11:1-2). So it was imperative that the wall be rebuilt so that Jerusalem could once again be the glorious city of God (Psalm 48:1-14).

Today, we need to be wall-builders if we're going to survive and thrive in the broken and dangerous world around us. We need to build ... a wall of protection to keep us from the attacks of Satan, giving us safety and victory; a wall of separation to keep worldliness out, excelling in our purity and integrity; a wall of devotion to keep and protect our fellowship and communion with God, growing in our spirituality and maturity; a wall of unification to keep God's people together, dwelling in unity and community.

What about your "Jerusalem"? Are your walls torn down and in need of urgent repair? "Let us rebuild the [walls] and end this disgrace!" (Nehemiah 2:17).

More: Ezra 4:6-23 tells of an earlier attempt to rebuild the walls that ended in failure. What might hinder or stop you from rebuilding the walls in your life?

Next: What are you trying to keep in and what are you trying to keep out with your walls? What walls do you need to rebuild?

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#### **Nehemiah 1:11. For I was the king's cupbearer.**

He counts this as a high privilege, that he would be able to speak for his people to the great king who would give him the opportunity to go and rebuild the walls of Jerusalem.

#### **Today in the Word**

**Nehemiah 1:5** Then I said: "O LORD, God of heaven, the great and awesome God, who keeps his covenant of love with those who love him and obey his commands... Andrew Murray, the late pastor and noted author on prayer... has another stirring challenge for us to consider today. He writes:

"So much of our prayer is vague and pointless. Some cry for mercy, but do not take the trouble to know exactly why they want it. Others ask to be delivered from sin, but do not name any sin from which a deliverance can be claimed. Still others pray for God's blessing...on their land or on the world, and yet have no special field where they can wait and expect to see the answer. To everyone the Lord says, 'What do you really want, and what do you expect Me to do?' ""

Murray's challenge is especially timely for... the need of intercessory prayer for America. Nehemiah's prayer for his homeland is a model any godly person in any generation can imitate. It meets all the criteria Murray named. There is nothing vague or pointless about it. Nehemiah named the sin Israel was guilty of: acting wickedly and failing to obey the Law God gave through Moses. (Today in the Word)

#### **Nehemiah 1:5-11**

**June 15, 2004**

#### **Praying And Waiting**

**READ: Nehemiah 1:5-11**

Rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for Him. —Psalm 37:7

A Christian couple was deeply distressed because their married son and his family had quit going to church and were giving God no place in their lives. As their friend, I advised them to continue showing love, to pray, and to avoid starting arguments. But at the family's annual Christmas gathering, the father gave his son a lecture in the presence of the other siblings. The son and his family left in anger and broke off all contact with his parents. It's hard to rely on prayer alone when you want something to happen right now. But that is what Nehemiah did. He was distraught by the news that the Israelites in Jerusalem were in grave danger (Nehemiah 1:3-4). He was a man with great leadership ability and in a favorable position to receive help from the king he served, so he was

eager to help his people. But he knew that he could be executed for coming into the presence of a Persian king without being invited. Therefore, though he had asked God to give him the opportunity immediately, he trusted God enough to wait. Four months later, the king opened the door for him to make his request (Neh 2:1,4).

It's not always easy to be patient, but God can be trusted. Wait patiently for Him.—Herbert Vander Lugt

Praying, resting, waiting, trusting—

These are words that tell a story;

As we wait for God to lead us,

He responds, "Just seek My glory." —Hess

Delay is not denial—pray on!

**Nehemiah 1:11 I was the king's cupbearer.**

**F B Meyer: Our Daily Homily**

The post was an important one. It gave its occupant the opportunity of coming into close contact with the king; it implied a character of unusual trustworthiness, since Oriental despots were very afraid of poison. But no one expected a royal cupbearer to do anything very heroic. He lived in the inner part of the palace, and was necessarily excluded from the great deeds of the stirring outward world. Nehemiah also was evidently a humble and retiring man. His response to the story of the ruined condition of Jerusalem was just a flood of tears and prayer to the God of heaven. And had you seen those tears and heard that prayer, you might have thought that just another flower was drooping, another seed falling into the ground to die.

But this was not all. These prayers and tears were supplemented by an earnest purpose, which was maturing with every hour. He gave himself to God to be used, if God would have it so, as an instrument in the execution of His recorded purpose. He was a man of faith. It mattered little enough that he was only a cupbearer, for that was no barrier to God; indeed, God might work more efficiently through a frail, weak man, than through the prince, the soldier, or the orator, since He cannot give His glory to another. What a glorious faith was his, which dared to believe that through his yielded life God could pour His mighty rivers! Why do we not yield ourselves in our helplessness to God, and ask Him to work through us, to fulfill His mighty purposes?

We kneel, how weak! We rise, how full of power! Why therefore should we do ourselves this wrong Or others— that we are not always strong!"

**Nehemiah 1:11**

**Pray and Plan**

A recently widowed woman wants to remain in the house where she and her husband raised their children. Because she lives alone, she purchased a home alarm system. Now she feels hypocritical when she prays for protection. But she need not feel guilty. In the Bible, wise planning and humble dependence on God go hand-in-hand.

Nehemiah provides us with a biblical illustration of how to combine planning with prayer. He was a Jew far from home, working as cupbearer to the king of Persia. After the nation of Israel had been in captivity for 70 years, Cyrus, the first Persian king, allowed a number of Jews to go back home. Later, Ezra took more Jews back to Jerusalem and rebuilt the temple. In the first chapter of Nehemiah, though, we read that the returned captives were having a terrible time, and the walls of the once great city of Jerusalem lay in ruins (Neh 1:3).

Nehemiah wept, fasted, and prayed when he heard about the distress of the Jews who had returned to Jerusalem from exile. But he also acted, making careful plans and taking a great risk in asking the king for permission to help the Jews.

So too, if we maintain a humble dependence on God, it's wise to do what we can. So pray--and plan! —Herbert Vander Lugt

Faith does not rule out common sense

In facing life each day,

But takes it by the hand and says,

"We'll trust, we'll plan, we'll pray!" --DJD

The best plans begin and end with God.

When Napoleon returned from Elba, a man at work in a garden recognized the emperor, and at once followed him. Napoleon welcomed him cheerfully, saying, "Here we have our first recruit." When even one person begins to pray for us, however feeble his prayers, we ought to welcome him. He who prays for me enriches me.

The gospel ministry is so dependent upon the power of prayer that it should be a pastor's main object to educate the praying faculty among his people. There should be numerous prayer meetings, and these of a varied order, that women, youths, children, and illiterate persons may unite in the holy exercise. Every little helps. Grains of sand and drops of rain combine for the greatest of purposes, and achieve them. There may be more real prayer in a little gathering of obscure desirers than in the great assembly where everything is done with ability rather than with agony of desire.

Never let your pastor lose his prayer book. It should be written in the hearts of his people. If you cannot preach, or give largely, or become a church officer, you can, at least, pray without ceasing.

## NEHEMIAH 2

### Nehemiah 2:4

**So I prayed to the God of heaven. And I said unto the king.—Nehemiah. 2.4-5** (Morgan, G. C. Life Applications from Every Chapter of the Bible)

This was practical, and that in both facts. Prayer is always practical, for it reaches and apprehends the actual and final forces. Prayer ever demands action which is in harmony with its desires. Having sought the help of God, he spoke to the king with perfect honesty when the opportunity came. In the presence of the king, the sadness of Nehemiah's heart could not be wholly hidden. He had not been naturally or habitually a sad man, as he himself declares, but his sorrow for his nation was so real that it was manifest to the king. It has been suggested that this was part of his method, but such an interpretation strains the narrative, for he confessed that when the king detected the evidences of his sorrow, he was filled with fear. Yet, having had audience of God, courage splendidly overcame fear, and he told the king the cause of his grief and boldly asked to be allowed to go up and help his brethren. His request was granted, for his prayer was answered, and he took his departure for Jerusalem. All this is very illuminative. In all our endeavours, prayer is our first and principal line of activity. But more is necessary. God expects our co-operation. He will touch the heart of the king, but Nehemiah must make his venture. There is a profound truth in the commonplace and hackneyed statement that God helps those who help themselves. It is along the line of the use of our reason or common sense, that God works for us, and with us, for the accomplishment of all that we ask of Him.

### Nehemiah 2

**G K Chesterton** wrote that "The Bible tells us to love our neighbors, and also to love our enemies; probably because they are generally the same people."

This certainly was true in Nehemiah 2. Nehemiah's arrival in Jerusalem was a threat to Sanballat and his associates (Neh. 2:10), who wanted to keep the Jews weak and dependent. A strong Jerusalem would endanger the balance of power in the region, and would also rob Sanballat and his friends of influence and wealth. When things are going well, get ready for trouble, because the enemy doesn't want to see the work of the Lord make progress. As long as the people in Jerusalem were content with their sad lot, the enemy left them alone; but, when the Jews began to serve the Lord and bring glory to God's name, the enemy became active.

Opposition is not only evidence that God is blessing, but it is also an opportunity for us to grow. The difficulties that came to the work brought out the best in Nehemiah and his people. Satan wanted to use these problems as weapons to destroy the work, but God used them as tools to build His people.

As **Spurgeon** said "God had one Son without sin, but He never had a son without trial."

If we spend time pondering the enemy's attacks, we will give Satan a foothold from which he can launch another attack even closer to home. The best thing to do is to pray and commit the whole thing to the Lord; and then get back to your work! Anything that keeps you from doing what God has called you to do will only help the enemy.

### Nehemiah 2:1-8 Cupbearer To The King

Why is your face sad? ... What do you request? —Nehemiah 2:2,4

One of my favorite Bible passages that applies to work is Nehemiah 1–2. King Artaxerxes' employee Nehemiah had been such an

exemplary worker that the king wanted to honor him by helping him when he was sad that Jerusalem was still in ruins. He asked Nehemiah, "Why is your face sad? ... What do you request?" (Neh 2:2,4). He wasn't just any worker for the king, he was the cupbearer, the man who tasted the king's drink to protect him from being poisoned. In order to have earned such a position, he apparently worked hard and honored God in everything he did. And the king granted his requests.

God cares about the way we work. Colossians 3:23 tells us, "Whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men." We can follow Nehemiah's example in these ways: Be such a competent and trusted worker that God is honored (Neh. 1:11–2:6). Care passionately about others and what's important to them. Take action, occasionally even risky action, to honor what's important to God and to fellow believers (Neh 2:3-6).

When we honor God in work, our employers may notice. But even if they don't, our heart's desire and purpose should be to honor the One we really serve—the Lord our God (Col. 3:17,23).

O Lord, may the way I serve tell Your story!

I want to bring You all the glory in my work,

at home, and everywhere I go. Fill me and use

me to bless others and honor You today.

God honors faith because faith honors God.

### **Nehemiah 2:1-20**

Former president Dwight Eisenhower once remarked that leadership requires "persuasion, and conciliation, and education, and patience. It's long, slow, tough work."

Given these requirements and the hard work involved in leadership, it's not surprising that the list of effective leaders in history is relatively short. And if you want to narrow that list even further, limit it to those leaders who accomplished the most amazing things under the toughest circumstances imaginable. Nehemiah's name would be on this short list. He was a captive in a foreign country who had no way to return to his devastated homeland and no resources to rebuild it even if he were able to go back. Nehemiah also served a pagan king who had already stopped the rebuilding of Jerusalem once (Ezra 4:17–21) and had heard on more than one occasion that those Jews in the Persian province of Judah were rebels.

In other words, Nehemiah had a lot going against him, just as we often do when we're facing tough times. But Nehemiah had the weapon of prayer, which was effective because he served the God of the universe who can turn even a king's heart around. God caused Artaxerxes to be compassionate toward Nehemiah's concern and favorable to his request. The king gave his cupbearer the time, the authority, and the military protection Nehemiah needed to return to Jerusalem and do something about the city's plight. ([Today in the Word](#))

### **Nehemiah 2:4 So I prayed to the God of Heaven.**

#### **F B Meyer: Our Daily Homily**

All around the apartment in which this interview took place were effigies of idol gods: perhaps incense was burning before a shrine, and filling the air with its aroma. But Nehemiah, though standing amid these heathen emblems, and in the presence of the greatest king on earth, thought little of either one or the other, and prostrated himself in spirit before the throne of heaven. Remember that thou hast within thee a shrine, a temple into which at any moment, even amid the excitement of an earthly court, thou mayest retire and ask direction of thy King and Friend.

He had been sorely startled by the king's question; he did not know that his face had betrayed him. He had, doubtless, intended to seek an interview with the king, and formally state the whole case (see Nehemiah 1:11). But to be taken thus at unawares, to have to state his case on the spur of the moment, appeared to take him at a great disadvantage; and he instinctively turned to prayer.

How little the king knew what was transpiring, or what had happened between his question and the reply which was given, apparently, without the loss of a moment. But how beautiful is the example for ourselves! You cannot acquire this habit of ejaculatory prayer unless you spend prolonged periods in holy fellowship. But when you are much with God in private, you will not find it difficult at any moment to step aside to ask Him a question. The busy mart or the crowded street may at any time become the place of prayer.

"A touch divine And the scaled eyeball owns the mystic rod; Visibly through His garden walketh God."

#### **Always Listening**

The Lord is near to all who call on him, to all who call on him in truth. Psalm 145:18

Today's Scripture: Nehemiah 2:1–9

Dad was a man of few words. He had hearing damage due to years of military duty and wore hearing aids. One afternoon when Mom and I were talking a little longer than he thought necessary, he responded playfully, "Whenever I want peace and quiet, all I have to do is this." Lifting both hands in a single motion, he turned off both hearing aids, folded his hands behind his head and closed his eyes in a serene smile.

We laughed. As far as he was concerned, the conversation was over!

My father's actions that day remind me how different God is from us. He always wants to hear His children. This is underscored by one of the shortest prayers in the Bible. One day Nehemiah, a servant to King Artaxerxes of Persia, was visibly sad in the king's presence. Fearful when the king asked him why, Nehemiah confessed it was because Jerusalem, the conquered city of his ancestors, lay in ruins. Nehemiah recounts, "The king said to me, 'What is it you want?' Then I prayed to the God of heaven, and I answered the king..." (Neh. 2:4–5, italics added).

Nehemiah's prayer lasted only a moment, but God heard it. It set in motion God's merciful response to the many prayers Nehemiah had already offered for Jerusalem. In that moment, Artaxerxes granted Nehemiah's request to rebuild the city.

Isn't it comforting to know that God cares enough to listen to all of our prayers—from the shortest to the longest? By: James Banks

Thank You, loving Father, for blessing me with the beautiful privilege and opportunity of prayer.

Our God is big enough to hear the smallest voice.

## **Nehemiah 2:1-10**

### **Today in the Word**

Then I prayed to the God of heaven. Nehemiah 2:4

The kings of Persia demanded absolute obedience and deference. The father of King Artaxerxes, Xerxes the Great, is a major character in the book of Esther, and a central drama swirls over whether he will permit her to live once she commits the capital offense of approaching his throne unbidden. Artaxerxes himself murdered two of his brothers in asserting his claim to the throne—and according to the ancient historian Plutarch, he was considered one of the gentlest Persian kings!

As cupbearer to the king, Nehemiah had daily, immediate access to Artaxerxes. The position required the king's full trust, and it also meant that Nehemiah was responsible for the king's safety from any who might try to tamper with his wine (Nehemiah 1:11–2:1). In keeping with the protocol to please the king, Nehemiah always had a pleasant demeanor. But he could not hide his grief at the news from Jerusalem (Nehemiah 2:2).

The conversation between Artaxerxes and Nehemiah offers several insights into the right way to approach the throne of men and the throne of God. First, Nehemiah displayed the appropriate respect to the king (Nehemiah 2:3, 7). We might not like our mayor, or president, or boss, but we do not have license to be disrespectful to those in leadership positions (see Rom. 13:1).

Second, Nehemiah placed his ultimate trust in God, not the king. Notice the brief, millisecond prayer that he offers before answering the king in Nehemiah 2:4. Even as he prepared to make a bold request that could change his life, he sought to place himself under the authority of the Lord. Nehemiah also credited God with the favorable response from the king: "Because the gracious hand of my God was on me, the king granted my requests" (Nehemiah 2:8).

Finally, when the Lord opened a door of opportunity for Nehemiah to make a difference, he was willing to walk through boldly. He requested the king's permission to rebuild Jerusalem, then asked for letters of protection, and then petitioned the king for materials from his own forest (Nehemiah 2:5–9). Nehemiah understood that God can work through anyone—even a Persian king—to accomplish His will.

Nehemiah 2: - God can use Artaxerxes, Nehemiah, and you! He has put you where you are for a reason. Nehemiah might have been a cupbearer for years before this moment came. When it did, Nehemiah was prepared because of his relationship with God through prayer. If you are waiting to see what God will do, you can prepare by cultivating your prayer life. If God has shown you the opportunity to make a difference for His kingdom, take it boldly, for His gracious hand is on you!

## **Nehemiah 2:1-18 Hope to rebuild**

When I heard this, I sat down and wept” (Nehemiah 1:4). These words, written by the prophet Nehemiah, expressed his sorrow over the broken-down condition of Jerusalem—the sacred city where his forefathers were buried. Jerusalem had been leveled and the mighty walls that once protected God’s holy city lay in ruins (Neh 1:3).

The news broke Nehemiah’s heart. After mourning and fasting for several days, however, the prophet sensed the Lord’s direction. God put a desire in his heart to step up and begin the job of restoration.

Refusing to accept the destruction that scarred his homeland as final, he prayed to God for help (Neh 1:5-11). He requested (and received) divine favor as he sought permission and assistance from his boss, King Artaxerxes, to travel back to Jerusalem and rebuild the city (Neh 2:1-6).

After 52 days of hard work, plenty of prayer, and some serious opposition, Nehemiah and his crew rebuilt the walls of Jerusalem (Neh 6:15).

It can seem impossible at times to put back together the shattered pieces of this life. The fractures appear to be too complex or the opposition to rebuild too strong. Nehemiah’s account reminds us that in the midst of great disrepair there is always hope—hope to restore.

The same all-powerful God who Nehemiah prayed to for help in rebuilding the city walls, is the God we seek in prayer today. He is all about building up what has been torn down. He’s in the business of rebuilding faith, relationships, and self-confidence—to name a few of His restoration projects.

Is there something in your life that lies broken and ruined? Do you feel the temptation to believe that it’s beyond repair? Remember Nehemiah’s story and seek God’s help in starting to rebuild today.

More: The Lord says, “I will give you back what you lost to the swarming locusts” (Joel 2:25).

Next: What inspires you about Nehemiah’s example? How will you seek God’s help in restoring something that’s broken in your life?

### **Nehemiah 2:11-18 Night hours**

I slipped out during the night, taking only a few others with me. I had not told anyone about the plans God had put in my heart for Jerusalem. (Neh 2:12).

When our first child was born, my husband determined to share in the care of our child. While we have different parenting strengths and styles, we have carried the responsibilities together, with the exception of one area. My husband decided that although nature’s design made it impossible for him to physically feed our baby, he would at least help with the late-night feedings in spirit by waking up to keep me and our firstborn company. Though his efforts were valiant, a week later he was back to snoozing through most of them. Looking back, I have learned that not everything can be done together; some places we must walk alone.

Returning from exile to restore the wall around God’s holy city, Nehemiah faced a formidable task. His enemies were waiting to disrupt his mission, so Nehemiah chose to survey the city at night with only a few trusted people at his side. He couldn’t risk interruption; nor could he risk having the wrong people involved in the planning of the wall reconstruction.

The more relational we are, the more we look to involve other people in whatever we undertake in life. While we’re called to help carry the load for one another (Galatians 6:2)—and the Bible talks about the need for encouragement within the body of Christ (Hebrews 10:24- 25)—there are some places we must travel on our own in order to know that God alone is our stronghold.

Consider Psalm 134:1, which says, “Oh, praise the Lord, all you servants of the Lord, you who serve at night in the house of the Lord.” Separated from others, a night watchman serves when everyone else is at rest. This verse, however, teaches us that a night hour becomes a blessing, not a hardship, as we learn to trust God to be our validation and to carry our burdens.

More: Read Luke 22:41-44 and John 16:31-32 to see how Jesus experienced times of serving alone. He understands our aloneness and has given us the promise of His peace.

Next: What are some places you’ve had to walk alone? Why does the enemy love to tempt us with bitterness when we are (or feel) alone?

### **How to Rebuild**

They replied, “Let us start rebuilding.” So they began this good work. Nehemiah 2:18

Today’s Scripture & Insight: Nehemiah 2:11–18

It was nighttime when the leader set out by horseback to inspect the work that lay ahead. As he toured the destruction all around him, he saw city walls that had been destroyed and gates that had been burned. In some areas, the vast debris made it tough for his horse to get through. Saddened, the rider turned toward home.

When it came time to report the damage to the officials of the city, he began by saying, “You see the trouble we are in” (Nehemiah 2:17). He reported that the city was in ruins, and the protecting city wall had been rendered useless.

But then he made a statement that energized the troubled citizens: “I also told them about the gracious hand of my God on me.” Immediately, the people replied, “Let us start rebuilding” (v. 18).

And they did.

With faith in God and all-out effort, despite enemy opposition and a seemingly impossible task, the people of Jerusalem—under Nehemiah’s leadership—rebuilt the wall in just fifty-two days (6:15).

As you consider your circumstances, is there something that looks difficult but that you know God wants you to do? A sin you can’t seem to get rid of? A relationship rift that’s not God-honoring? A task for Him that looks too hard?

Ask God for guidance (2:4–5), analyze the problem (vv. 11–15), and recognize His involvement (v. 18). Then start rebuilding.  
By: Dave Branon

What are a couple of “destroyed wall” situations that are troubling you? How will prayerfully asking for God’s help and guidance help you start the rebuilding process?

God, I need Your help. I can’t fix these problems alone. Help me to understand the situation, and then to seek Your help and guidance in resolving the challenges before me.

## **Nehemiah 2:11-20**

### **Today in the Word**

He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion. Philippians 1:6

When Justin Smith was appointed president of the Atlantic Media Company in 2007, one of his biggest challenges was trying to restore profitability to The Atlantic, one of the oldest magazines in the United States. The losses were around \$7 million each year, and Mr. Smith immediately upended the conventional wisdom about magazine management, and as a result of his changes The Atlantic now nets nearly \$2 million in profit, an impressive feat in a difficult publishing environment.

When Nehemiah arrived in Jerusalem, he needed to upend the conventional wisdom about how to rebuild and protect the city. He began by personally inspecting the damaged walls and gates (Nehemiah 2:11-16). He did not immediately announce himself and demand to be in charge, nor did he start giving orders without first assessing the situation.

After taking time to review that crumbling wall and burned gates, he met with the Jewish officials. Notice the content of his inspiring pep talk. First, Nehemiah appealed to their honor as the people of God: “we will no longer be in disgrace” (Nehemiah 2:17). He knew that the disrepair of Jerusalem reflected poorly on the relationship between the people and God.

Then, Nehemiah informed the officials about God’s hand of protection and provision (Nehemiah 2:8). He could already testify to God opening a door for him to speak to the king and secure supplies. That testimony of God’s hand in the past would be vitally important as they faced challenges in the future. Knowing that God had led Nehemiah this far was a tremendous encouragement for the officials.

Finally, Nehemiah assured them that Artaxerxes had authorized this project (Nehemiah 2:8). This became immediately relevant when Sanballat and Tobiah (whom we’ll examine in more detail later) challenged the rebuilding project: “Are you rebelling against the king?” (Nehemiah 2:19). Nehemiah and the Jewish officials could declare that they had the king’s permission—and what’s more, they were obeying God (Nehemiah 2:20). They responded: “Let us start rebuilding!” (Nehemiah 2:8).

**Apply the Word** -Many churches have done away with time in the service for people to share testimonies of what God has done. Hearing those stories can be important reminders of how God has worked and an encouragement that He will be faithful to His people (see Phil. 1:6). Perhaps your Sunday school class or small group could take some time to share about “the gracious hand of my God.” Use the time to give the glory to God for the specific ways He has led and sustained you.

## **Nehemiah 2:11-18**

### **Leadership**

When asked the secret to his success, restaurateur and chef Andre Soltner of the famed Lutece in New York replied, "I cook from my heart, with love. It must be the same with service. The waiter must serve with love. Otherwise the food is nothing... Many times, I leave my kitchen and go to the tables to take orders myself. It starts right then and there ... there is nothing mysterious about Lutece. I put love in my ... serving. That is all."

Nehemiah knew how to put love in his serving. Under his leadership, the Israelites successfully rebuilt the wall of Jerusalem after they returned from captivity. Nehemiah organized the people, encouraged them, and artfully handled all opposition. Yet his greatest achievement may have been his loving leadership. He worked alongside the people, and to identify with them in their great need he refused to take the food that was due him as governor.

The kings of ancient near-eastern countries normally ruled with harshness and cruelty. The Romans of New Testament times often treated their subjects unfairly and brutally. And leaders today sometimes consider their own interests and finances before that of their followers. In contrast to these unloving, me-first forms of leadership, Jesus called leaders to give up their own rights, to serve instead of dictate, and to risk everything for others.

We like being the head pin, but falling first is not our game. Mark says that Jesus took the blame for us. And in so doing, He demonstrated loving leadership (Mark 10:45). All would-be leaders should fall in behind Him.

### **Nehemiah 2:11-18; 7:73-8:12**

**I will bring my people ... back from captivity and restore them to the land I gave their forefathers to possess. - Jeremiah 30:3**

### **TODAY IN THE WORD**

At about 11,000 feet, the highest vehicular tunnel in the world is the Eisenhower Memorial Tunnel in Colorado. As many as 1,140 workers spread over three shifts worked intensely for five years before it was first opened to traffic in 1973. To construct the 1.69-mile tunnel, engineers overcame a number of unexpected challenges, used approximately 38,000 tons of steel, and spent \$108 million in tax money.

The Eisenhower tunnel building project required a great deal of effort and perseverance. Sound familiar? Nehemiah took on a similar project to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem.

In His plan and time, God did what He promised and in His mercy brought His people back from their exile. When King Artaxerxes gave approval for the rebuilding plans, God opened the door for Nehemiah.

Nehemiah was an outstanding leader. He was discreet and didn't discuss his plans; he knew Israel's enemies would not be happy to see Jerusalem rebuilt. He also wanted time for advance intelligence gathering. At just the right time, he motivated his countrymen for the project and shared the vision that God had given him (Neh. 2:17-18).

The people rebuilt not only physical walls, but also spiritual walls. All Israel assembled to hear Ezra read aloud the Book of the Law, most likely all or part of the Pentateuch. When they saw him open the scroll, they stood up to honor God's Word and bowed down to worship the Lord (Neh 8:5-6). They were so hungry to listen that they stayed for five or six hours, with the Levites circulating among the crowd translating, interpreting, and instructing as necessary.

**TODAY ALONG THE WAY** - The people of Israel were so hungry to hear the Word of God that they listened to Ezra for five or six hours! What a lesson for us, who often feel fatigued if the sermon goes more than 30 minutes.

### **Nehemiah 2:11-20**

China recently found a new section of its famous Great Wall. Covered by sand for centuries in northwestern Ningxia Province, it was uncovered by archaeologists in the fall of 2002. It's fifty miles long and was built in the 1530s. One of its watchtowers was said to still be in good condition. Constructed from the seventh century B.C. onwards, the Great Wall stretches for 3,700 miles and was built to protect the country from northern invaders. The section north of Beijing is a popular tourist destination these days. Nehemiah would have loved it! (Today in the Word)

### **Nehemiah 2:19-20; Nehemiah 4:6.**

### **F B Meyer: Our Daily Walk**

### **RELIGION AND RIDICULE**

"When Sanballat ... and Tobiah ... and Geshem ... heard it, they laughed us to scorn and despised us, and said what is this thing



that ye do? Then answered I them, The God of Heaven, He will prosper us; therefore we His servants will arise and build. So built we the wall; for the people had a mind to work." -- Nehemiah 2:19-20; Nehemiah 4:6.

THE BUILDING of the ruined walls of Jerusalem, as the record shows, was undertaken in troublous times. Some of the petty rulers in the neighbourhood, exulted in the low estate of the city, because it left room for the exercise of their authority, and they viewed these renewed activities with chagrin. They plotted for the overthrow of the work, and had to be met by incessant watchfulness.

If you are endeavouring to do God's work in the world, to clear away the rubbish of sin, to rebuild the walls that are broken down, and to seek the welfare of God's people, do not be surprised if your steps are beset with scorn and ridicule, by the secret or open malice of Sanballat and Tobiah. For some it is easier to face bitter opposition than to bear mockery and ridicule. If only these scornful and carping tongues were silenced, we could make more headway, but such persecution drives us back on God, makes Him a living fact in life, and opens the door to the manifestation of the saving health of His right hand (Neh4:4, Neh4:9, Neh4:20). How good it is, at such times, to cease from man, and to remember the Lord who is the great and terrible One (Neh1:5; Isa51:12-13). Be quite sure that you are on His plan, doing His work in His way; then go forward in His Name, and he will make all the mountains a way.

The lesson for us all is the threefold aspect of the Christian life. There is our up-look into God's face--"I prayed to the God of Heaven." We must never forget to pray, for more things are wrought by prayer than we realize. Second, there is our up-look against our foes and the foes of God--"we made our prayer unto our God, and set a watch against them day and night." We must watch as well as pray. Lastly, there is our dawn-look towards the work entrusted to us, at which we must labour with unslacking devotion, in fellowship with our Lord (1Cor 3:9). Let each inquire: "Am I inside the city amongst its builders, or outside amongst its detractors and foes?"

**PRAYER** - O God, teach us day by day what Thou wouldst have us to do, and give us grace and power to fulfil the same. May we never from love of ease, decline the path which Thou pointest out, nor, for fear of shame, turn way from it. AMEN.

### **Nehemiah 2:6 C H Spurgeon**

He was a valued servant. They did not wish to part with him, and if he would go for a time to do this business, yet they take security that he should return. There are some servants that I know of, who, if they were to go away, their masters would not be particularly anxious that they should come back again. It is well when a man is so in favor with God that his piety acts upon his ordinary life, and he becomes in favor with men also. That is a poor, miserable religion that does not make its possessor a good servant. Yes, in whatever station of life we may be placed, we ought to be far more valuable to those round about us on account of our fearing God. May we always be of such a character that, if we were gone, we should be missed. "I set him a time."

### **Nehemiah 2:11-18; 7:73-8:12**

At about 11,000 feet, the highest vehicular tunnel in the world is the Eisenhower Memorial Tunnel in Colorado. As many as 1,140 workers spread over three shifts worked intensely for five years before it was first opened to traffic in 1973. To construct the 1.69-mile tunnel, engineers overcame a number of unexpected challenges, used approximately 38,000 tons of steel, and spent \$108 million in tax money. The Eisenhower tunnel building project required a great deal of effort and perseverance. Sound familiar? Nehemiah took on a similar project to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem. (Today in the Word)

## **NEHEMIAH 3**

### **Nehemiah 3:1-16**

If one of the secrets of great leadership is the ability to delegate effectively, then Nehemiah deserves to be in the Leadership Hall of Fame for this quality alone. He organized the work on the walls and gates of Jerusalem in a masterful manner. ([Today in the Word](#))

### **Side by Side**

Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their labor. Ecclesiastes 4:9

Today's Scripture & Insight: Nehemiah 3:1–12

In ancient times, a city with broken walls revealed a defeated people, exposed to danger and shame. That is why the Jews rebuilt the walls of Jerusalem. How? By working side by side, an expression that can well describe Nehemiah 3.

At first glance, chapter 3 might appear to be a boring account of who did what in the reconstruction. However, a closer look highlights how people worked together. Priests were working alongside rulers. Perfume-makers were helping as well as goldsmiths. There were some who lived in nearby towns and came to give a hand. Others made repairs opposite their houses. Shallum's

daughters, for example, worked alongside the men (3:12), and some people repaired two sections, like the men of Tekoa (vv. 5, 27).

Two things stand out from this chapter. First, they all worked together for a common goal. Second, all of them are commended for being part of the work, not for how much or little they did as compared to others.

Today we see damaged families and a broken society. But Jesus came to build the kingdom of God through the transformation of lives. We can help to rebuild our neighborhoods by showing others they can find hope and new life in Jesus. All of us have something to do. So let us work side by side and do our part—whether big or small—to create a community of love where people can find Jesus. By: Keila Ochoa

Dear Lord, help me to work with others, side by side, by showing love and pointing others to Jesus.

Let's work together to build the kingdom of God.

## **Nehemiah 3:2**

**Next unto him.—Nehemiah. 3.2** (Morgan, G. C. Life Applications from Every Chapter of the Bible)

This is the first occurrence in this chapter of this phrase. It, or its equivalent, "next unto them," runs on through the first half of it, occurring no fewer than fifteen times. Then another pair of phrases "after him" and "after them" emerges, and one or the other continues to the end, occurring sixteen times. These phrases mark the unity of the work. By this linking up of groups of workers the whole wall was built. The description is in itself orderly, and proceeds round the entire enclosure of the city, including all the gates, and the connecting parts of the wall. Beginning at the sheep-gate, which was near the Temple, and through which the sacrifices passed, we pass the fish-gate in the merchant quarter, on by the old gate in the ancient part of the city, and then successively come to the valley-gate, the dung-gate, the gate of the fountain, the water-gate, the horse-gate, the east-gate, the gate Miphkad, until we arrive again at the sheep-gate, when the chapter ends. All this is supremely interesting in its revelation of method. The unifying fact was the wall. All were inspired by the one desire and intention to see it completed. In order to realization, the work was systematically divided. Each group was united, as to its own workers, in the effort to do the particular portion allotted to them. All the groups were united to each other in the effort to complete the wall. It is a striking picture of the unity of diversity, and has its lessons for us. There was no sense of separation. Each worked "next to," or "after" some other; and so the complete union of workers and work was realized.

## **Nehemiah 3**

### **Today in the Word**

The whole body...grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.

Ephesians 4:16

Terrell Owens, a wide receiver in the National Football League, has amassed impressive Hall of Fame statistics. He's recognized as one of the most talented players at that position. But as the 2010 season was about to begin, Owens still hadn't been signed to a team. He was healthy and ready to play, and the problem wasn't his football skills—it was his reputation as a divisive showboat who cared only about his own accomplishments and not the fortunes of the team. Although he has amazing athletic ability, few teams feel like he will focus on helping them achieve their shared goals.

Some Christians seem to think that being a spiritual superstar is all that's required for success. They act like their gifts are the most important and assume they can function just fine without any help from God's people. Today's passage provides an illustration that this kind of thinking will lead to frustration, not success. Nehemiah inspired the people to work together to accomplish the daunting task of repairing the gates of Jerusalem.

We might be tempted to think that this chapter is a dry rehearsal of information. But if we look carefully, Scripture gives us interesting clues about how the people of God should function. First, notice that the high priest himself, Eliashib, was part of the work crew for the Sheep Gate (Neh 3:1). The spiritual leader of Israel didn't consider himself too good for manual labor, or above the lowly task of rebuilding the gate.

Others followed his example. Perfume-makers and goldsmiths, Levites and merchants, all pitched in to help (Neh 3:8, 17, 32). Many of these people were probably not skilled masons or construction workers, but they didn't use that as an excuse to shirk the community effort. The daughters of Shallum even joined in to help repair a section of the wall (Neh 3:12). There's a place for everyone in the work of God.

This list of people and the part of the wall they worked on gives us a rich picture of how individuals contribute to the larger work of God's people. Spiritual teamwork means putting the needs of the community above any desire for personal glory.

**Apply the Word** - What project in your spiritual community can you be part of? It might not be glamorous—but then repairing the Sheep Gate probably didn't seem very glamorous either. It might not be a perfect match with your gifts, but then Malkijah the goldsmith probably never thought he would end up repairing the Tower of the Ovens (Neh 3:11). If this is the season of rolling up your sleeves to join with others to accomplish something for God, don't make an excuse like the nobles of Neh 3:5.

### **Nehemiah 3-4**

In his First Inaugural Address, on March 4, 1933, President Franklin D Roosevelt said to a nation in the grip of an economic depression,

The only thing we have to fear is fear itself.

Why is this true? We all have experience the paralyzing grip of fear. Not only that, but fear is contagious and paralyzes others. Fear cancels out faith as Jesus taught declaring

Why are you fearful, O you of little faith? (Matt. 8:26)

Frightened people discourage others and help bring defeat as Moses recorded...

Then the officers shall speak further to the people, and they shall say, 'Who is the man that is afraid and fainthearted? Let him depart and return to his house, so that he might not make his brothers' hearts melt like his heart. (Deut. 20:8).

In Nehemiah 3, Nehemiah addressed the fear by posting guards at the most conspicuous and vulnerable points along the wall around the city. This action gave clear warning to the enemy that the Jews were prepared to fight. In addition, Nehemiah armed entire families, knowing that they would stand together and encourage one another.

After looking the situation over, Nehemiah encouraged the people not to be afraid but to look to the Lord for help. Nehemiah knew the principle that if one fears the Lord, he need not fear the enemy. Nehemiah's heart was captivated by the "great and awesome" God of Israel as he recorded...

When I saw their fear, I rose and spoke to the nobles, the officials, and the rest of the people: "Do not be afraid of them; remember the Lord who is great and awesome, and fight for your brothers, your sons, your daughters, your wives, and your houses." (Neh 4:14)

Nehemiah knew that his "great and awesome" God was powerful enough to meet any and every challenge to His people and His work. Nehemiah also reminded the people that they were fighting for their nation, their city, and their families. When the enemy learned that Jerusalem was armed and ready, they backed off (see Nehemiah 4:15). God had frustrated their plot. As the Psalmist recorded

The Lord brings the counsel of the nations to nothing; He makes the plans of the peoples of no effect. The counsel of the Lord stands forever, the plans of His heart to all generation? (Ps. 33:10-11)

It is good to remind ourselves that the will of God comes from the heart of God and that we need not be afraid if we are in the center of His will, no matter how terrible the storm winds blow.

God speaking to Israel declared...

Do not fear, for I am with you; Do not anxiously look about you, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, surely I will help you, Surely I will uphold you with My righteous right hand. (Isa. 41:10)

If you are attacked by fear and/or anxiety, Isaiah 41:10 would be a good verse to memorize. Then walk forth in eyes of faith, believing what God says and continuing to recall to your mind throughout the day that the God Who made this promise is with you and will never leave you, nor forsake you.

### **Nehemiah 3:8**

#### **C H Spurgeon: Morning and evening**

"And they fortified Jerusalem unto the broad wall." — Nehemiah 3:8

Cities well fortified have broad walls, and so had Jerusalem in her glory. The New Jerusalem must, in like manner, be surrounded and preserved by a broad wall of nonconformity to the world, and separation from its customs and spirit. The tendency of these days break down the holy barrier, and make the distinction between the church and the world merely nominal. Professors are no longer strict and Puritanical, questionable literature is read on all hands, frivolous pastimes are currently indulged, and a general laxity

threatens to deprive the Lord's peculiar people of those sacred singularities which separate them from sinners. It will be an ill day for the church and the world when the proposed amalgamation shall be complete, and the sons of God and the daughters of men shall be as one: then shall another deluge of wrath be ushered in. Beloved reader, be it your aim in heart, in word, in dress, in action to maintain the broad wall, remembering that the friendship of this world is enmity against God.

The broad wall afforded a pleasant place of resort for the inhabitants of Jerusalem, from which they could command prospects of the surrounding country. This reminds us of the Lord's exceeding broad commandments, in which we walk at liberty in communion with Jesus, overlooking the scenes of earth, and looking out towards the glories of heaven. Separated from the world, and denying ourselves all ungodliness and fleshly lusts, we are nevertheless not in prison, nor restricted within narrow bounds; nay, we walk at liberty, because we keep his precepts. Come, reader, this evening walk with God in his statutes. As friend met friend upon the city wall, so meet thou thy God in the way of holy prayer and meditation. The bulwarks of salvation thou hast a right to traverse, for thou art a freeman of the royal burgh, a citizen of the metropolis of the universe.

### **Nehemiah 3:15**

#### **C H Spurgeon: Morning and evening**

"The king's garden." — Nehemiah 3:15

Mention of the king's garden by Nehemiah brings to mind the paradise which the King of kings prepared for Adam. Sin has utterly ruined that fair abode of all delights, and driven forth the children of men to till the ground, which yields thorns and briars unto them. My soul, remember the fall, for it was thy fall. Weep much because the Lord of love was so shamefully ill-treated by the head of the human race, of which thou art a member, as undeserving as any. Behold how dragons and demons dwell on this fair earth, which once was a garden of delights.

See yonder another King's garden, which the King waters with his bloody sweat—Gethsemane, whose bitter herbs are sweeter far to renewed souls than even Eden's luscious fruits. There the mischief of the serpent in the first garden was undone: there the curse was lifted from earth, and borne by the woman's promised seed. My soul, bethink thee much of the agony and the passion; resort to the garden of the olive-press, and view thy great Redeemer rescuing thee from thy lost estate. This is the garden of gardens indeed, wherein the soul may see the guilt of sin and the power of love, two sights which surpass all others.

Is there no other King's garden? Yes, my heart, thou art, or shouldst be such. How do the flowers flourish? Do any choice fruits appear? Does the King walk within, and rest in the bowers of my spirit? Let me see that the plants are trimmed and watered, and the mischievous foxes hunted out. Come, Lord, and let the heavenly wind blow at thy coming, that the spices of thy garden may flow abroad. Nor must I forget the King's garden of the church. O Lord, send prosperity unto it. Rebuild her walls, nourish her plants, ripen her fruits, and from the huge wilderness, reclaim the barren waste, and make thereof "a King's garden."

### **Nehemiah 3:1-32 What to do?**

Each one repaired the section immediately across from his own house (Nehemiah 3:28).

You might be in one of those times in life where you're not sure what to do. Do I go to school? Do I get a job or pursue another career? In his book *The Way I Was Made*, songwriter Chris Tomlin writes, "Right now, the God who made you knows your heart, knows your desires, your strengths, your limitations ... and this God has only good in mind for your future." Chris points to Jeremiah 29:11 which reveals that God has good plans for us.

You might not know the next step to take, but take some counsel from Nehemiah and the wall builders (sounds like a rock band!). Nehemiah had received permission from King Artaxerxes of Persia to return to Jerusalem to oversee the continued rebuilding of the city that Ezra had started decades before (Ezra 1:2-4; Nehemiah 2:1-6). He and other formerly exiled members of God's people returned and tackled the rebuilding of the city walls first (Nehemiah 2:17-19).

I'm guessing this crew must have felt overwhelmed—not sure what to do upon arrival. They could have been paralyzed by indecision and the unknown that lay ahead. But here's what happened: Regardless of their backgrounds or abilities, they simply joined in and served. They had the high priest and other priests (Nehemiah 3:1,22,28), a city leader and his daughters (Nehemiah 3:12), goldsmiths (Nehemiah 3:8,31-32), other merchants (Nehemiah 3:32), and even a dude who worked with perfumes (Nehemiah 3:8), all hoisting rocks and digging in the debris. And, as they worked with all their heart, something amazing happened—the crew rebuilt the entire wall in just 52 days! (Nehemiah 6:15).

Regardless of where you are in life, you're part of Jesus' kingdom-building work. Your next opportunity might be simply "across from [your] own house" or with that team at church. Serve God with all you have wherever you are today (Colossians 3:23).

More: Note the differing people groups and the common bond that allowed them to build one another up in Colossians 3:11.

Next: What can you do for Jesus today, even as you face questions about some big issues in life? How can questions and indecision keep us from serving Jesus with all our heart?

**Nehemiah 3:28 Every one over against his house.**

**F B Meyer: Our Daily Homily**

This is the way to deal with the evil of this world. We are all fonder of starting schemes, forming committees, and discussing methods of work, than in setting definitely to work for our selves. There is a lack of definiteness, and we hardly know where to begin. But this verse suggests that every one should begin over against his own house. Try and make your own neighborhood a little more like what God would have it. It may be that you have gone too far afield in search of work; you are applying to the Foreign Missionary Society, or are waiting for a sphere of service; yet, all the time, there is that wretched neighborhood, like a piece of ruined wall before you. Arise and repair it!

Meshullam repaired over against his chamber (Nehemiah 3:30). Perhaps he was not rich enough to have a whole house; he lived in a single room, but he discovered that there was a little bit of the wall just opposite his window, which would not be, built unless he set to it. Is not that a hint for college students, and for those who live in flats, or industrial dwellings?

The best way is not immediately to begin giving tracts, good though that is in its place. Ask God to give you an opportunity of showing kindness to your neighbors, so that they get to understand and trust you; and wait upon God until the answer comes— until He shall show you what step He would have you take next. This is the foundation of your bit of wall. Then plod on step by step, tier by tier. God will show you how. You may be unpracticed in wall-building; but He is the Architect and Builder, and you are but a bricklayer's laborer at the best. Do as He tells you.

## NEHEMIAH 4

**Nehemiah 4:1-6**

**September 18, 1998**

**The Problem With Critics**

There is one who speaks like the piercings of a sword, but the tongue of the wise promotes health. --Proverbs 12:18

Critics talk much and do little that is constructive. They are more interested in trying to make themselves look good by making others look bad.

If Nehemiah had listened to his critics, the wall around the city of Jerusalem would never have been rebuilt. Some of what those critics said to him was accurate. The wall was rubble, and fire had burned the stones and caused them to crack and crumble (4:2-3). But the critics talked much and did absolutely nothing to help.

Years ago, Theodore Roosevelt noted, "It is not the critic who counts, not the man who points out how the strong man stumbled or where the doer of deeds could have done them better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred with dust and sweat and blood; ... and who, ... if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly, so that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who know neither victory nor defeat."

Where do you see yourself in this picture? Are you being pelted by unfair criticism as you are serving Christ? If so, keep on going and God will reward your efforts. Or do you recognize yourself as one who tends to be critical of others? If so, it's time to quit the demolition team and join the construction crew. —Haddon W. Robinson

I would not criticize the one who works,

The one who listens to God's Word and heeds;

But I would criticize myself, dear Lord,

Confess to you my faithless words and deeds. --Hess

Any spectator can criticize the players; it takes skill and dedication to play the game.

**Nehemiah 4**

**Today in the Word**

All who see me mock me; they hurl insults, shaking their heads: "He trusts in the Lord; let the Lord rescue him." Psalm 22:7-8

Marion Donovan was born into a family of inventors in Fort Wayne, Indiana. She received numerous patents for her own inventions, including the Zippity-Doo, designed to help women zip up the backs of their skirts or dresses. But one product earned nearly universal scorn when she first introduced it: the disposable diaper. Critics laughed. Manufacturers didn't want to produce what they thought would be a huge waste of money. Donovan persevered, and in 2009 sales of disposable diapers in the United States approached nearly \$2 billion.

Not every project or product is welcomed with open arms at first. The ridicule found in our passage today, however, was motivated by anger at the success of God's people (Neh 4:1). This was not doubt about whether the project would succeed—this was an attempt to intentionally derail the construction of Jerusalem by undermining the confidence of the Jews.

Sanballat the Horonite and Tobiah the Ammonite have appeared in our reading before (see Neh. 2:10, 19). They were leaders of people who had settled in the land that had been Israel and Judah, and so the return of the Jews from exile posed a threat to their own power and control over the territory. Their opposition to Nehemiah, introduced in Neh 2, runs throughout the book and escalates in this text from ridicule to plans for assault.

In response to the taunts, Nehemiah followed the example of the psalms and prayed to the Lord for justice (Neh 4:4–5; see Psalm 75). When Sanballat and Tobiah threatened to attack, Nehemiah and the builders prayed to God and posted a guard (Neh 4:6–9). And after the report came that their enemies planned to exploit any weakness by killing the workers, Nehemiah assessed his resources. True, he armed the builders and stationed people strategically around the wall. But more importantly, he reminded the people of their ultimate resource: "Don't be afraid of them. Remember the Lord, who is great and awesome... Our God will fight for us!" (Neh 4:14, 20). With a plan for action and the promise of the Lord's help, the construction continued.

**Apply the Word** - When we encounter opposition, we need spiritual wisdom to discern if it is warranted criticism or ungodly taunting. Does it seek to undermine our commitment to God's instruction? Does it attack the character of God and His promises? Our response should be like Nehemiah's: seeking the Lord and focusing on His character. If you are struggling with opposition to your spiritual growth, write Neh 4:14 on a card to remind you to "remember the Lord, who is great and awesome."

#### **Nehemiah 4:1-10**

##### **Rubbish Piles**

He who covers his sins will not prosper, but whoever confesses and forsakes them will have mercy. --Proverbs 28:13

Nehemiah, the cupbearer of King Artaxerxes, had received permission to return to the city of Jerusalem with a company of workers. It had been destroyed some 70 years before. Its wall lay in ruins, the temple in ashes, while Judah pined away in captivity.

In answer to prayer, Nehemiah was allowed to return to rebuild Jerusalem. When he arrived he found the city devastated. The men of Judah came to Nehemiah and cried, "There is so much rubbish that we are not able to build the wall" (Nehemiah 4:10).

We too are builders. Sin has caused utter ruin of the house of humanity. We have the remedy for this lost world in the Word of the gospel. Yet how ineffective our work often is because of the rubbish in our own lives. The rubbish of indifference, spiritual apathy, laziness, sinful pleasure, materialism, worldliness, questionable habits, doubt and worry, and lack of prayer and Bible study. All this must be cleared away before we can serve the Lord effectively.

On our knees we must confess our sin, accept His forgiveness, and begin building on a clean foundation. Then we will be able to offer Him something that will abide forever. --M. R. De Haan

Search me, O God, and know my heart today;  
Try me, O Savior, know my thoughts, I pray.  
See if there be some wicked way in me;  
Cleanse me from every sin and set me free. --Orr

**God's grace in the heart brings forth  
good deeds in the life.**

#### **Nehemiah 4:6 "So we built the wall"**

When Deborah, Israel's fourth judge, sang her song in celebration of Israel's victory over the Canaanites (Judges 5:2-31), she mentioned the tribe of Reuben. They had "great resolves of heart," but were content to sit "among the sheepfolds."

The tribe of Reuben was like the boy who sat at his mother's desk, carefully drawing a picture. Soon he laid down his pen and

proudly showed his mother his sketch of the family dog. She commented on the fine likeness, then noticed that something was missing. "Where is Rover's tail?" she asked. "It's still in the bottle," the boy explained.

Many important things in the Christian life are left undone because we don't put our plans into action. No matter how good our intentions, they can't glorify God if they are "still in the bottle." —P R Van Gorder

WE MAY BE ON THE RIGHT TRACK, BUT WE WON'T GET ANYWHERE IF WE JUST SIT THERE

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On our knees we must confess our sin, accept His forgiveness, and begin building on a clean foundation. Then we will be able to offer Him something that will abide forever. By: M.R. DeHaan

Search me, O God, and know my heart today;  
Try me, O Savior, know my thoughts, I pray.  
See if there be some wicked way in me;  
Cleanse me from every sin and set me free. —Orr

God's grace In the heart brings forth good deeds in the life.

### **Nehemiah 4:1-14 Crushing Responsibilities**

Do not be afraid of them. Remember the Lord, great and awesome. —Nehemiah 4:14

While the outcome of the Second World War was still uncertain, Franklin Roosevelt died and Harry Truman was sworn in as the next president of the United States. The following day, President Truman told reporters, "When they told me yesterday what had happened, I felt like the moon, the stars, and all the planets had fallen on me." Certainly Truman faced crushing responsibilities.

Nehemiah was a great leader who also faced overwhelming burdens. Accompanied by Jewish exiles who had returned from Babylon, Nehemiah was given the task of rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem. Amid terrible opposition, he refused to be intimidated by the jeers and threats of the enemy. Instead, the man of God organized a dual strategy of construction and military defense—bathing their efforts in prayer: "We made our prayer to our God, and because of them we set a watch against them day and night" (Neh. 4:9). Nehemiah addressed the ongoing threats the workers faced by getting their focus back on God: "Do not be afraid of them. Remember the Lord, great and awesome" (v.14).

Are you facing crushing responsibilities today? Praying for God's help and putting together a practical plan can give you strength to complete the task.

Lord, the newness of the day

Calls me to an untried way;

Let me gladly take the road,

Give me strength to bear my load. —Anon.

God invites us to burden Him with what burdens us.

### **Quieting the Critic**

Hear us, our God, for we are despised. Turn their insults back on their own heads. Nehemiah 4:4

Today's Scripture & Insight: Nehemiah 4:1–6

I work with a team to put on an annual community event. We spend eleven months plotting many details to ensure the event's success. We choose the date and venue. We set ticket prices. We select everything from food vendors to sound technicians. As the event approaches, we answer public questions and provide directions. Afterward we collect feedback. Some good. Some that is hard to hear. Our team hears excitement from attendees and also fields complaints. The negative feedback can be discouraging and sometimes tempts us to give up.

Nehemiah had critics too as he led a team to rebuild the wall of Jerusalem. They actually mocked Nehemiah and those working alongside him saying, "Even a fox climbing up on it would break down [your] wall of stones" (Nehemiah 4:3). His response to the critics helps me handle my own: Instead of feeling dejected or trying to refute their comments, he turned to God for help. Instead of responding directly, he asked God to hear the way His people were being treated and to defend them (v. 4). After entrusting those concerns to God, he and his co-laborers continued to work steadily on the wall "with all their heart" (v. 6).

We can learn from Nehemiah not to be distracted by criticism of our work. When we're criticized or mocked, instead of responding to our critics out of hurt or anger, we can prayerfully ask God to defend us from discouragement so we can continue with a whole heart.  
By: Kirsten Holmberg

Help me to evaluate the good and bad in the criticism, to trust You, and to continue in my work wholeheartedly.

God is our best defense against criticism.

### **Nehemiah 4:1-10 A Deadly Weapon:**

Those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength; ... they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint. —Isaiah 40:31

Boxing legend Muhammad Ali used several ring tactics to defeat his opponents; one tactic was taunting. In his fight with George Foreman in 1974, Ali taunted Foreman, "Hit harder! Show me something, George. That don't hurt. I thought you were supposed to be bad." Fuming, Foreman punched away furiously, wasting his energy and weakening his confidence.

It's an old tactic. By referring to Nehemiah's efforts at rebuilding the broken wall of Jerusalem as nothing more than a fox's playground (Neh. 4:3), Tobiah intended to weaken the workers with poisonous words of discouragement. Goliath tried it on David by despising the boy's simple weapons of a sling and stones (1 Sam. 17:41-44).

A discouraging remark can be a deadly weapon. Nehemiah refused to surrender to Tobiah's discouragements, just as David rejected Goliath's diabolical teasing. Focusing on God and His help rather than on their discouraging situations, David and Nehemiah both achieved victory.

Taunting can come from anybody, including those who are close to us. Responding to them negatively only saps our energy. But God encourages us through His promises: He will never forsake us (Ps. 9:10; Heb. 13:5), and He invites us to rely on His help (Heb. 4:16).

Lord, it's easy to let discouragement sap my energy and joy. Help me to reject all agents of discouragement in my life and to trust in You for comfort and strength.

If you're in a tunnel of discouragement, keep walking toward the Light.

INSIGHT: Despite the taunting that the Israelites faced from multiple sources when rebuilding the walls and city of Jerusalem, they had courage and confidence in God. They had returned to Jerusalem just as God had promised through the prophet Jeremiah (Jer. 29:10).

### **Nehemiah 4:6 A Mind To Work**

Nehemiah 4:1-23

So we built the wall ... , for the people had a mind to work. --Nehemiah 4:6

Some people, like the comic-strip character Beetle Bailey, work hard to avoid working. In real life, we know that work "makes the world go round." God placed Adam in the Garden of Eden "to tend and keep it" (Gen. 2:15), which shows us that work is essential to our well-being.



God wants us to work, and He wants us to put our hearts into what we do. That's easy for some people, like former Detroit Tiger baseball player Alan Trammell. He once said it was easy for him to be enthusiastic about his work because he was paid for doing what he would enjoy doing for nothing.

But how can a person put his heart into a job that is drearily monotonous, or so stressful that it brings on high blood pressure or ulcers? The apostle Paul gave these answers to followers of Christ: "Work with your own hands, ... that you may lack nothing" (1 Th. 4:11-12). To another church he wrote, "Whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men" (Col. 3:23).

If you think of your job as a blessing by which you can provide for yourself and others, and that your diligence is honoring to the Lord, you too will have "a mind to work" (Neh. 4:6). —Herbert Vander Lugt

Whatever you are working on,

Engage in it with zest,

Because your work is for the Lord

And He expects your best. --Sper

Work becomes worship when you work for the Lord.

#### **Nehemiah 4:6**

When Deborah, Israel's fourth judge, sang her song in celebration of Israel's victory over the Canaanites (Judges 5:2-31), she mentioned the tribe of Reuben. They had "great resolves of heart," but were content to sit "among the sheepfolds."

The tribe of Reuben was like the boy who sat at his mother's desk, carefully drawing a picture. Soon he laid down his pen and proudly showed his mother his sketch of the family dog. She commented on the fine likeness, then noticed that something was missing. "Where is Rover's tail?" she asked. "It's still in the bottle," the boy explained.

Many important things in the Christian life are left undone because we don't put our plans into action. No matter how good our intentions, they can't glorify God if they are "still in the bottle." —P R. Van Gorder

We may be on the right track, but we won't get anywhere if we just sit there.

#### **Nehemiah 4:6**

**February 4, 2007**

#### **A Unifying Wall**

**READ: Nehemiah 4:10-18**

So we built the wall, ... for the people had a mind to work. —Nehemiah 4:6

Walls divide. That's the reason they're built. The Great Wall of China was built to keep back marauding tribes. That remarkable line of defense once snaked for 4,000 miles across Asia, and much of it still stands. In contrast, the Berlin Wall kept people in instead of out. Its destruction in 1989 brought people together in a joyous celebration.

Centuries ago, the reconstruction of another wall served to bring people together. God had told Nehemiah to rebuild the wall around Jerusalem. It was essential for protection but had been demolished during the Babylonian invasion. But the enemies of the Jews opposed the reconstruction project and looked for ways to sabotage their efforts (Neh. 4:7-8). While half the men worked, the others stood guard to protect them.

In addition to providing protection, this wall was a demonstration of teamwork and unity (Neh. 3). All the team members brought their talents and skills, blending them together to accomplish far more than they could have achieved as individuals.

It should be that way in the church today. Our talents are gifts from God to be used for building His kingdom. We work better when we work together. —Cindy Hess Kasper

God builds His church with different stones

And makes each one belong;

All shapes and sizes fit in place

To make the structure strong. —Sper

Coming together is a beginning; keeping together is progress; working together is success.

### **Our Divine Defense**

Take . . . the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. Ephesians 6:17

Today's Scripture: Nehemiah 4:7-18

Under Nehemiah's supervision, the Israelite workers were rebuilding the wall around Jerusalem. When they were nearly half finished, however, they learned that their enemies were plotting to attack Jerusalem. This news demoralized the already exhausted workers.

Nehemiah had to do something. First, he prayed and posted numerous guards in strategic places. Then, he armed his workers. "Those who carried materials did their work with one hand and held a weapon in the other, and each of the builders wore his sword at his side as he worked" (Neh. 4:17-18).

We who are building God's kingdom need to arm ourselves against the attack of our spiritual enemy, Satan. Our protection is the sword of the Spirit, which is God's Word. Memorizing Scripture and meditating on it enable us to "take [our] stand against the devil's schemes" (Eph. 6:11). If we think that working for God doesn't matter, we should turn to the promise that what we do for Jesus will last for eternity (1 Cor. 3:11-15). If we fear we've sinned too greatly for God to use us, we must remember we've been forgiven by the power of Jesus' blood (Matt. 26:28). And if we're worried we might fail if we try to serve God, we can recall that Jesus said we will bear fruit as we abide in Him (John 15:5).

God's Word is our divine defense! By: Jennifer Benson Schuldt

God, thank You for the Bible. I believe that Your Word is alive and active. Please help me to remember it when I am worried or fearful, when I need encouragement and inspiration.

God's Word is a divine defense against attacks from the Enemy.

### **Nehemiah 4:7-18 A Breach In The Wall**

The lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father. —1 John 2:16

The 4,000-mile-long Great Wall of China was built to keep out invaders from the north. The first wall was constructed by Shi Huangdi, the first emperor of China, who lived between 259 and 210 bc. But in ad 1644 the Manchus broke through the Great Wall and overran China. They did this by bribing a general of the Ming dynasty to open the gates.

During the reconstruction of ancient Jerusalem, Nehemiah understood the acute danger posed by those who opposed the rebuilding of the city's ruined walls. So he commanded constant vigilance. Half of the workers were to stand watch while half rebuilt the walls (Neh. 4:13-18).

As Christians, we must be vigilant that nothing breaches our spiritual defenses. Even the most mature believer can never afford to let down his guard.

The apostle John warns us of enemies from three quarters. He identifies them as "the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life" (1 John 2:16). These enemies lure us away from God and His Word and leave a gap for the enemy to sneak in.

Let's be alert to what entices us today. A lapse opens the door to sin, which in turn may develop into a habit that overwhelms us. Don't permit a breach in the wall.

It may not be some heinous deed

That chills our hearts and chokes the seed;

It's often just a trifling toy

That grabs our eye and steals our joy. —Gustafson

The world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever. —1 John 2:17

### **Nehemiah 4:9**

**We made our prayer unto our God, and set a watch.—Nehemiah. 4.9** (Morgan, G. C. Life Applications from Every Chapter of the

Bible)

That is ever the true attitude of those who are called upon to work for God in face of danger. As the work proceeded, the opposition of the enemies of the people, which first expressed itself in derision, passed to anger mingled with contempt. Nehemiah was conscious of the menace of this attitude to the work he had in hand, and lifted his heart in prayer to his God. An illuminative sentence in the narrative at this point shows how completely Nehemiah had captured and inspired the people. It declares that "The people had a mind to work." Thus the work went forward, until the wall was raised to half its height. At this point the opposition became more fierce, and a determined attempt was made by conspiracy to stay its progress. With immediateness, and a keen sense of the necessity created by this fact, Nehemiah says, "We made our prayer unto our God and set a watch." In this method there was neither foolish independence of God, nor foolhardy neglect of human responsibility and precaution. Everything was done to insure that two-fold attitude of complete faith in God, and determined dependence upon personal effort, which always makes for success. How often God's workers fail for lack of one or the other of these important elements!

#### **Nehemiah 4:14 Remember the Lord.**

#### **F B Meyer: Our Daily Homily**

It was uncommonly good advice. Amid all the wise precautions taken by this man of sanctified common-sense, he kept bringing the people back to God. God was amongst them. God would fight for them. God was going to bring the counsel of their enemies to naught.

This would make a good motto for daily living. If in all circumstances we would remember the Lord, the way would be brightened; the burdens would fall; our spirits would never droop; and songs of joy would take the place of sadness. Whenever enemies assail and difficulties gather like storm-clouds, look away from them and remember the Lord. When hemmed in on every side, be sure that He can help you from His holy heaven; remember the Lord. When heart and flesh fail, and you do not know what to do for the best, be sure to remember the Lord, and act as in His most holy presence. What a comfort and strength it is to see a friend, when standing amid a crowd of adversaries intent on your destruction, and to know that he will act and speak for you! But remember that Jesus is always like that.

You say that you forget so soon; that you would remember, though at the critical moment you are betrayed into forgetfulness. But you must recall His precious promise, that the Holy Spirit will bring all things to remembrance. If only you will trust the difficulty into His hands, you will find that He will gladly undertake it; and as long as you leave it with Him, you will hear His voice rising in your heart, and saying, "Remember the Lord."

"Watch with me, Jesus, in my loneliness, Though others say me Nay, yet say Thou, Yes; Though others pass me by, stop Thou to bless,"

#### **Nehemiah 4:6-18 ([Our Daily Bread](#))**

#### **"GOD'S MINUTEMEN"**

With one hand they worked at construction, and with the other held a weapon. - Nehemiah 4:17

Remember studying about the Minutemen? During the American Revolution, ordinary citizens banded together to form an effective army. They were farmers and merchants and bankers and blacksmiths. When they heard of trouble, they would drop their work, grab their muskets, and head into battle.

No rummaging through the attic looking for that powder horn. No searching the shed for wadding and shot. No stopping to clean their guns. They were ready in a minute.

They remind me of the workmen of Nehemiah's day who held their tools in one hand and their swords or spears in the other. Even as they worked, they were ready for conflict.

We need to be God's minutemen. We should be prepared for action. It may be an opportunity to witness or to encourage a fellow believer facing fierce temptation. Someone in the workplace may be attacking the cause of Christ. Are we ready?

We shouldn't have to revive our prayer-life or take care of unresolved issues with God. No hunting for dusty Bibles. No forgiveness to seek or offer. No last-minute confession of sin.

If He calls, are you one of God's minutemen? D C Egener

Sound the battle cry! See, the foe is nigh;  
Raise the standard high for the Lord;

Gird your armor on, stand firm, everyone;  
Rest your cause upon His holy Word.- Sherwin

**In God's service, our greatest ability is our availability.**

## NEHEMIAH 5

### Nehemiah 5:1-16 Lead With Your Life

Believers exert a positive influence on others by setting a good example with the consistency of their lives. Will Houghton, president of Moody Bible Institute during the 1940s, was such a person.

Before Houghton became president of Moody, he pastored a church in New York City. An agnostic living there was contemplating suicide, but he decided that if he could find a minister who lived what he professed, he would listen to him. Since Will Houghton was a prominent figure in the city and a pastor, the man chose Houghton for his case study. He hired a private detective to watch him. When the investigator's report came back, it revealed that Houghton's life was above reproach. The agnostic went to Houghton's church, accepted Christ, and later sent his daughter to Moody Bible Institute.

Nehemiah was another believer who dramatically affected the lives of those around him. Even rich nobles and high officials listened respectfully as he rebuked them. Why? Because of the quality of his life. Whatever he asked of others, he was willing to do himself. And because Nehemiah joined in the hard work and refrained from using his position to accumulate wealth, the leaders couldn't help but listen to what he said.

An exemplary life awakens spiritual and moral sensitivity in those who observe us, and it gives power to our words of witness. —H. V. Lugt

We can preach a better sermon with our lives than with our lips.

### Nehemiah 5

#### Fear of God Curtails Fear of Man

The **fear of our God** is not like the dread of a slave toward a master but the loving respect of a child toward their father. To fear the Lord means to seek to glorify God in everything we do, listening to, honoring, and obeying His Word of Truth.

**Oswald Chambers** once wrote that...

The remarkable thing about fearing God is that when you fear God, you fear nothing else, whereas if you do not fear God, you fear everything else.

Nehemiah was motivated by the fear of the Lord (Neh. 5:15), and so he did not fear what the enemy might do (Neh 5:14,19). The fear of the Lord moved Nehemiah to be a faithful servant of the Lord.

To walk in the fear of God means to walk by faith, trusting God to deal with your enemies and one day (in this life or the life to come) balance the accounts. It means believing Matthew 6:33 and having the right priorities in life.

But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added to you.

Solomon stated the principle that - The fear of the LORD leads to life, So that one may sleep satisfied, untouched by evil. (Proverbs 19:23).

### Nehemiah 5

#### Today in the Word

If you lend money to one of my people among you who is needy, do not treat is like a business deal; charge no interest. Exodus 22:25

Debt bondage continues in many parts of the world. For example, a farmer is given a loan during a bad harvest season, but then the exorbitant interest entraps him in lifelong debt. He and his children become sharecroppers earning money for someone else. In the United States the campaign "10% Is Enough" has targeted the largest banks and credit card companies, petitioning that interest rates be capped at no more than 10 percent so people do not become mired forever in credit card debt.

Our reading is consistent with God's repeated instructions in His Word regarding economic bondage and charging interest. Nehemiah had just organized a community-wide effort to rebuild Jerusalem and inspired the people to trust God in the face of

threats from their enemies. But now he discovered that something else threatened the stability of this group of Jews struggling to resettle in their land, and this challenge came from within the community.

The charges of enslavement, usury, and economic manipulation went to the heart of the identity of the people of God. The Law expressly forbade charging interest to each other (Deut. 23:20–21). By taking fields and vineyards as a repayment for food, it was impossible for the poor to ever redeem a family member who had been sold into slavery, and they were trapped in a never-ending cycle of impoverished dependence.

Nehemiah went to the heart of the problem: this violated the express commandment of God and was inconsistent with the practices of God's people (Neh 5:17–9). Even economic activity is subject to the authority of the Lord. Nehemiah put his money where his mouth was, so to speak. Not only did he challenge the leaders to enforce the ban on charging interest and the process of restoring property, but he also extended generosity to the poor and needy (Neh 5:14–18).

Nehemiah exemplified generosity, not greed. He didn't accumulate property or take advantage of his official position to collect extra food or money. Ultimately, he was concerned with "reverence for God," not reaping financial gain (Neh 5:15).

**Apply the Word** - Are we eager to claim our own rights, even at the expense of others who are hurting? Do we search for ways to stand for justice because we are part of God's people? As Christians, our economic activity reflects what we believe about God. As employers, we should pay a fair wage. We should not keep people in our financial or emotional debt, manipulating them into serving us. We should extend generosity. Then we can say, "Remember me with favor, O God" (Neh 5:19).

### **Nehemiah 5:7**

**I consulted with myself, and con-tended with the nobles.—Nehemiah. 5.7** (Morgan, G. C. Life Applications from Every Chapter of the Bible)

A new difficulty, constituting a yet more dangerous element, now presented itself. It arose within the borders of the workers, among the people themselves. The rich men among them exacted usury from their poorer brethren to such an extent as to oppress and impoverish them. Perhaps nowhere in the story does the nobility of Nehemiah's character shine out more clearly than in this connection. There is a fine touch in this declaration, "I consulted with myself, and contended with the nobles." His consultation with himself resulted in his determination to set an example of self-denial, in that he took no usury, nor even the things which were his right as the appointed governor of the people. This high and disinterested example produced immediate results, in that all the nobles did the same. Thus the people were relieved, and filled with joy, and consequently went forward with the work with new enthusiasm, ultimately completing it. It is from the vantage point of personal rectitude that a man is really strong to deal effectively with wrong in others. Contention with nobles who are violating principles of justice, which is not preceded by consultation with self, is of no avail. When the life is free from all complicity with evil, it is strong to smite and overcome it in others. It is equally true that consultation with self which produces right personal action, is not enough. No man has any right to be satisfied with his own rectitude. In the interest of those who are being wronged, he must be prepared to contend with the nobles, or with any that are inflicting wrong.

**Nehemiah 5:9** Again I (Nehemiah) said, "The thing which you are doing is not good; should you not walk in the fear of our God because of the reproach (idea of casting blame or scorn upon) of the nations, our enemies?"

WATCHED by the world's malignant eye

WATCHED by the world's malignant eye,

Who load us with reproach and shame.

As servants of the Lord most High,

As zealous for His glorious name,

We ought in all His paths to move,

With holy fear and humble love.

That wisdom, Lord, on us bestow,

From every evil to depart;

To stop the mouth of every foe,

While, upright both in life and heart,

The proofs of godly fear we give,

And show them how the Christians live.

**Nehemiah 5:15 So did not I, because of the fear of God .**

#### **F B Meyer: Our Daily Homily**

These were great words. Nehemiah had a perfect right to take this money. Not a word could be said even by his critics, if he did. He was doing a priceless work, and might justly claim his maintenance. On the other hand, the people were very poor, and he would have a larger influence over them if he were prepared to stand on their level, and to share with them. It was just so that the Apostle argued in 1 Corinthians 9. And from both we learn that often we must forego our evident rights and liberties in order to influence others for Christ. Do not always stand on your rights; but live for others, making any sacrifice in order to save some— even as Christ loved us, and gave Himself for us.

If Nehemiah did so much for the holy fear of God, what ought not we to do for love? Love is more inexorable than law. Its exactions are more stringent and searching. Are we doing as much for love of Jesus as generations before did simply on the score of duty? It is much to be questioned if Jesus does not get less, of outward service at least, out of his followers, than Mahomet or Buddha does. But what He does get is infinitely sweet to Him, in so far as love prompts it.

All around you people are doing things that they say are perfectly legitimate; they call you narrow and bigoted because you do not join with them; they are always arguing with you to prove you are wrong. But your supreme law is your attitude to your Master. "I cannot do otherwise for the love of Jesus."

"Not I, because of the fear of God."

"Not I, but the grace of God that was with me."

"Not I, but Christ liveth in me."

**Nehemiah 5:15 J C Ryle in [Holiness](#)**

"So did not I, because of the fear of God" (Neh. 5:15)

A holy man will follow after the fear of God. I do not mean the fear of a slave, who only works because he is afraid of punishment and would be idle if he did not dread discovery. I mean rather the fear of a child, who wishes to live and move as if he was always before his father's face, because he loves him. What a noble example Nehemiah gives us of this! When he became governor at Jerusalem, he might have been chargeable to the Jews and required of them money for his support. The former governors had done so. There was none to blame him if he did. But he says, "So did not I, because of the fear of God" (Neh. 5:15).

#### **Nehemiah 5:15**

#### **Walking in Fear of the Lord**

#### **Warren Wiersbe**

'The fear of our God' is not the servile dread of a slave toward a master but the loving respect of a child toward a parent. To fear the Lord means to seek to glorify God in everything we do. It means listening to His Word, honoring it, and obeying it. 'The remarkable thing about fearing God,' wrote Oswald Chambers, 'is that when you fear God, you fear nothing else, whereas if you do not fear God, you fear everything else.' Because Nehemiah's life was motivated by the fear of the Lord (Neh. 5:15), he did not fear what the enemy might do (Neh 5:14, 19). The fear of the Lord moved Nehemiah to be a faithful servant of the Lord.

To walk in the fear of God, of course, means to walk by faith, trusting God to deal with your enemies and one day balance the accounts. It means claiming Matthew 6:33 and having the right priorities in life. 'The fear of the Lord leads to life, and he who has it will abide in satisfaction; he will not be visited with evil' (Pr. 19:23).

Christ says: "Seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well" (Mt. 6:33, niv).

This description of God's servants — "who desire to fear thy name"- reminds us how largely their religion in this world consists of "desire." They have real piety, but are dissatisfied with their attainments, and aspire to better things. Their desire is, however, to be carefully distinguished from that of many who substitute occasional good wishes for actual piety. The real Christian's desire impels him to the diligent use of all those means by which a higher life is reached. He "exercises himself unto godliness"; and what he attains he employs in spiritual and moral living. But the word used rather dignifies "delight," expressing the pleasure which God's servants feel in their religion. — Pulpit Commentary

## Nehemiah 5:15 A Leader Who Serves

Nehemiah 5:14-19

I did not do so, because of the fear of God. --Nehemiah 5:15

A youth pastor was leading a group of young people on a short-term mission trip to a poor community in Peru. The only comfortable room available was assigned to the pastor, but he refused it.

When it came time to pour concrete in the 100-degree heat, he didn't stand under a tree and drink lemonade—he took his turn pushing the wheelbarrow up the ramp and shoveling out the concrete. He gained great respect from both the Peruvians and his youth group by joining in the hard work with them.

When Israel was rebuilding the wall of Jerusalem under hard and dangerous conditions, their leader Nehemiah took his turn at both building and standing guard. Special food was allotted to him as the leader, but he refused to accept it, unlike his predecessors. He ate from the same rations that were offered to everyone else (Nehemiah 5:18).

Two options come with leadership: the temptation to serve yourself, and the opportunity to serve the people you lead. Nehemiah chose to be a servant-leader, and it earned for him enormous respect.

If the Lord ever places you in a position of leadership, ask for His help to be a leader who serves. —David C. Egner

All those who have authority

Should use their power to lead;

By taking orders from the Lord

And serving those in need. —D. De Haan

Leaders who serve will serve as good leaders.

## Nehemiah 5:18

### REBUILDING THE WALLS

I did not demand the governor's provisions, because the bondage was heavy on this people (Nehemiah 5:18).

When asked the secret to his success, restaurateur and chef Andre Soltner of the famed Lutece in New York replied, "I cook from my heart, with love. It must be the same with service. The waiter must serve with love. Otherwise the food is nothing... Many times, I leave my kitchen and go to the tables to take orders myself. It starts right then and there ... there is nothing mysterious about Lutece. I put love in my ... serving. That is all."

Nehemiah knew how to put love in his serving. Under his leadership, the Israelites successfully rebuilt the wall of Jerusalem after they returned from captivity. Nehemiah organized the people, encouraged them, and artfully handled all opposition. Yet his greatest achievement may have been his loving leadership. He worked alongside the people, and to identify with them in their great need he refused to take the food that was due him as governor.

The kings of ancient near-eastern countries normally ruled with harshness and cruelty. The Romans of New Testament times often treated their subjects unfairly and brutally. And leaders today sometimes consider their own interests and finances before that of their followers. In contrast to these unloving, me-first forms of leadership, Jesus called leaders to give up their own rights, to serve instead of dictate, and to risk everything for others.

We like being the head pin, but falling first is not our game. Mark says that Jesus took the blame for us. And in so doing, He demonstrated loving leadership (10:45). All would-be leaders should fall in behind Him.

## NEHEMIAH 6

### Nehemiah 6

"So and So"

**Nehemiah provides the perfect template of a godly leader.** Are we the kind of leaders and followers God wants us to be? Like Nehemiah, do we have a burden in our hearts for the work God has called us to do? (Neh. 2:12). Are we willing to sacrifice to see

His will accomplished? Are we patient in gathering facts and in planning our work? Do we enlist the help of others or try to do everything ourselves? Do we motivate people on the basis of the spiritual—what God is doing—or simply on the basis of the personal? Are they following us or the Lord as He leads us?

As followers, do we listen to what our leaders say as they share their burdens? Do we cling to the past or desire to see God do something new? Are we cooperating in any way with the enemy and thus weakening the work? Have we found the job God wants us to complete?

Anyone can go through life as a destroyer; God has called His people to be builders. What an example Nehemiah is to us! Trace his **so** statements and see how God used him

**So** I prayed (Neh 2:4)

**So** I came to Jerusalem" (Neh 2:11)

**So** they strengthened their hands for this good work" (Neh 2:18)

**So** built we the wall" (Neh 4:6)

**So** we labored in the work" (Neh 4:21)

**So** the wall was finished" (Neh 6:15)

Were it not for the determination that came from his faith in the great and awesome God, Nehemiah would never have finished the work.

As V R Edman said...

It is always too soon to quit.

Is God calling you to build a "wall"? Some task that is difficult? Do any of the questions in the first paragraph of today's reading apply to your situation? Talk to the Lord about it. Ask Him for strength and wisdom. Determine to complete the task.

#### **Nehemiah 6:1-14**

#### **Today in the Word**

But I prayed, "Now strengthen my hands."

Nehemiah 6:9

Robert Sternberg was a mediocre student in his Introduction to Psychology class—in fact, he earned a C in the course. His professor wrote on his paper, "There was a famous Sternberg in psychology and it is obvious there will not be another." But three years later, Sternberg graduated summa cum laude from Stanford University with exceptional distinction in psychology. In 2002, proving his professor's prophecy wrong, he became the president of the American Psychological Association.

In our reading, we see more of the opposition against the work of Nehemiah, and the attacks included schemes, lies, and false prophecies. Nehemiah had to choose whether he would believe the word of his enemies or remain steadfast in God's call.

First, Sanballat and his cronies conspired to trap Nehemiah outside Jerusalem (Neh 6:2). The text hints that this was proposed as a sort of negotiation, a scheme intended to lure Nehemiah by the promise of a truce or peace settlement. Nehemiah saw the trap for what it was and refused to leave his work (Neh 6:3–4).

Next, Sanballat issued a threat: he was circulating a story that Nehemiah had declared himself king of Judah in defiance of the Persian authorities. Sanballat would communicate this information to the Persians if Nehemiah refused to meet with him (Neh 6:5–7). Again, Nehemiah resisted the bait, recognizing that Sanballat's plot was intended to frighten him and the people away from completing the work on the wall of Jerusalem. Instead of being manipulated by Sanballat, Nehemiah responded with prayer: "Now strengthen my hands" (Neh 6:9).

Finally, Sanballat and Tobiah hired a Jewish man to tempt Nehemiah to go into hiding. Shemaiah alleged that a plot on Nehemiah's life required that he hide in the temple for safety (Neh 6:10). Nehemiah had confidence in God's protection and wisdom to recognize deceit; he refused to cower and abandon the work (Neh 6:11–13). Notice Nehemiah's prayers in 5:19 ("Remember me") and in Neh 6:14 ("Remember Tobiah and Sanballat"). He could trust the Lord to know his heart and judge him and his enemies justly.

**Apply the Word** - Nehemiah was determined to believe the call of God, not the false prophecies of failure. When we have committed the truth of God's Word to our hearts and minds, we can reject the claims of Satan that we will never serve God, never be forgiven, or never amount to anything for God. Choose one of these verses to keep you focused on God's love and care for you:



Philippians 1:6; Jeremiah 29:11; or Deuteronomy 31:8.

## **Nehemiah 6:1-15 Power-trippers**

Josh Evans never existed. Still, he befriended 13-year-old Megan Meier through an online network. Eventually, he sent this message, "I don't know if I want to be friends with you... I hear you're not nice to your friends." Josh posted increasingly cruel notes until Megan committed suicide. As it turned out, "Josh" was actually the mother of one of Megan's friends, posing as a teenage bully.

If you've ever encountered a bully, you understand the fear and humiliation these power-trippers thrive on. Nehemiah understood it too. When he and the Israelites were rebuilding Jerusalem's wall, he said his harassers were "just trying to intimidate us, imagining that they could discourage us" (Neh 6:9).

Sanballat and Geshem sent messages asking Nehemiah to meet with them so they could derail his work. He saw through their device answering, "I am engaged in a great work, so I can't come" (Neh 6:3).

After sending their message four separate times, Nehemiah's bullies changed tactics. They threatened to tell the king that Nehemiah was planning a rebellion. Nehemiah replied, "There is no truth in any part of your story. You are making up the whole thing" (Neh 6:8). Nehemiah then prayed, "Remember, O my God, all the evil things that [they] have done" (Neh 6:14). Like Nehemiah, we need to call on the One who is "glorious in power" (Exodus 15:6), seeking His strength to complete the work He has for us.

Power-trippers are everywhere—at work, at school, and even at the dinner table. They may pick on us for a while, but no one can ultimately thwart the work God has called us to do (Ro 8:31-33). Nehemiah proved it. When he and the Israelites finished the wall, his bullies were the ones who were "frightened and humiliated" (Nehemiah 6:16). Does being a Christian mean being a doormat? How can we bring glory to God when we deal with people who want to control us?

## **Nehemiah 6**

### **A Trusted Friend**

Now therefore, O God, strengthen my hands. —Nehemiah 6:9

The newspaper has often been a trusted friend. It arrives with regularity and tells me about the people and events of the day. A few days without it and I feel out of touch. Without its summary of government, business, sports, and international affairs, I feel handicapped in conversation.

Yet, an interesting thing happened one day. This "trusted friend" brought news of an event I already knew about, but only the core facts were correct. The report also included an analysis by an authority who said more than he knew. It was a good reminder that we need to live by something more reliable than the daily newspaper.

Nehemiah also read information that he knew was wrong (Nehemiah 6:6-8). He knew that the letter from an enemy leader contained lies designed to scare him and his countrymen off the job of rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem. But Nehemiah was wise. He responded by continuing to do what he knew was right. He was sure his motives were correct. So he asked the Lord to strengthen his hands for the work that remained (v.9).

When falsely accused or disturbed by the powerful forces of evil, let's not live on the basis of the ever-changing news. Instead, let's listen to God and keep doing what He has called us to do. —M R De Haan II ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

They're saying things that are not true;  
"O blessed Lord, what shall I do?"  
He answers, "What is that to thee?  
Your duty is to follow Me." —Anon.

**If God is for you, it doesn't matter how many are against you.**

[How Does God Keep His Promises?](#)

[God Our Father](#)

## **Nehemiah 6:1-7:3**

The Lord is my light and my salvation--whom shall I fear? - Psalm 27:1

After the American colonists' victory over the British in the Revolutionary War, conditions in the new nation were far from perfect. Rampant inflation and other severe problems led one army officer to write a letter to George Washington on May 22, 1782. The

letter suggested that the commander seize power with the help of the army, declare himself king or dictator, and establish a stable government that could meet its financial obligations. Washington reacted to the idea with scorn.

"I must view [the proposals] with abhorrence and reprehend with severity," he wrote back. "I am much at a loss to conceive what part of my conduct could have given encouragement to [this idea] which to me seems big with the greatest mischiefs that can befall my Country."

The officer quickly dashed off a letter of apology. Washington's reply is strikingly similar to the answer Nehemiah gave to those who charged that he was scheming to set himself up as king of Judah. Nothing in his conduct as governor of the province could have given anyone reason to think he was making a grab for power. The charge that Nehemiah was plotting treason against King Artaxerxes was just one of the tactics of his enemies trying to destroy him and God's people. ([Today in the Word](#))

## **Nehemiah 6:3 A Great Work**

### **A B Simpson**

When work is pressing, there are many little things that will come and seem to need attention. It is a very blessed thing to be quiet and still, work on and entrust the little things to God. He answers such trust in a wonderful way. The believer who has no time to fret and worry and harbor care has learned the secret of faith in God. A desperate desire to change some difficult circumstance may take our eyes off God and His glory. Some suffering Christians have been so anxious to get well and have spent so much time in trying to claim healing, that they have lost their spiritual blessing. God sometimes has to teach such persons that there must be a willingness to be sick before they are yielded enough to receive His fullest blessing. The enemy keeps at this work. Sanballat came four times to Nehemiah, always receiving the same answer. How many fears we have stopped to fight which ultimately have proved to be nothing. Nehemiah recognized that fear is sin and did not dare to yield to it.

## **Nehemiah 6:3 I am doing a great work, so that I cannot come down.**

### **F B Meyer: Our Daily Homily**

It was a sublime answer. Below was the Plain of Ono; where Nehemiah's foes awaited him. Let him once descend into it and he would become their easy prey; but he withstood their fourfold solicitation by considering the greatness of the work he was doing and the responsible position he was called to fill. Other worldliness is the best cure for worldliness. Those whose affections are set on things above will have no difficulty in refusing the appeals of sense. Get your heart and hands deeply engaged in the great work of building God's Temple, and you will be proof to the most flattering proposals ever made by Madam Bubble.

Oh, children of the Great King, let us pray that we may know the grandeur of our position before Him; the high calling with which we have been called; the vast responsibilities with which we are entrusted; the great work of coöperating with God in erecting the city of God. Heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ! Called to sit with Christ in the Heavenlies! Risen, ascended, crowned in Him! Sitting with Christ, far above all principality and power! How can we go down—down to the world that rejected Him; down to the level of the first Adam, from which, at so great cost, we have been raised; down to the quarry from which we were hewn, and the hole of the pit whence we were digged! No, it cannot be; and as we make our choice, let us look to the living and ascended Christ to make it good. Put your will on His side, and expect that the energy of the power that raised Him from the dead will raise and maintain you in union with Him. For "your life is hid with Christ in God."

## **Nehemiah 6:1-9,15 Strengthen My Hands**

Singapore's first Prime Minister, Lee Kuan Yew, is the man credited with making Singapore what it is today. During his leadership, Singapore grew to be rich and prosperous and one of the most developed nations in Asia. Asked if he ever felt like giving up when he faced criticism and challenges during his many years of public service, he replied, "This is a life-long commitment."

Nehemiah, who led in the rebuilding of the wall of Jerusalem, refused to give up. He faced insults and intimidation from the enemies all around him as well as injustices from his own people (Neh. 4–5). His enemies even insinuated that he had a personal agenda (6:6-7). He sought help from God while taking every defensive step he could.

Despite the challenges, the wall was completed in 52 days (6:15). But Nehemiah's work was not complete. He encouraged the Israelites to study the Scriptures, to worship, and to keep God's law. After completing 12 years as governor (5:14), he returned to make sure his reforms were continuing (13:6). Nehemiah had a life-long commitment to leading the people.

We all face challenges and difficulties in life. But as God helped Nehemiah, He will also strengthen our hands (6:9) for the rest of our lives in whatever tasks He gives to us.

Dear Lord, sometimes it's easy to get discouraged

when faced with criticism or challenges. Help  
me to persevere and grant me the strength to be  
faithful to what You have called me to do.

Life's challenges are designed not to break us but to bend us toward God.

### **A Great Work**

"I am carrying on a great project and cannot go down. Why should the work stop while I leave it and go down to you?" Nehemiah 6:3

Today's Scripture & Insight: Nehemiah 6:1–4

The security guard found and removed a piece of tape that was keeping a door from clicking shut. Later, when he checked the door, he found it had been taped again. He called the police, who arrived and arrested five burglars.

Working at the Watergate building in Washington, DC, the headquarters of a major political party in the US, the young guard had just uncovered the biggest political scandal of his lifetime simply by taking his job seriously—and doing it well.

Nehemiah began rebuilding the wall around Jerusalem—a task he took very seriously. Toward the end of the project, neighboring rivals asked him to meet with them in a nearby village. Under the guise of a friendly invitation was an insidious trap (Nehemiah 6:1–2). Yet Nehemiah's response shows the depth of his conviction: "I am carrying on a great project and cannot go down. Why should the work stop while I leave it and go down to you?" (v. 3).

Although he certainly possessed some authority, Nehemiah may not have rated very high on the hero scale. He wasn't a great warrior, not a poet or a prophet, not a king or a sage. He was a cupbearer-turned-contractor. Yet he believed he was doing something vital for God. May we take seriously what He's given us to do and do it well in His power and provision. By: Glenn Packiam

What has God called you to do? Why is it important for you to take it seriously—seeing it as a great work?

Dear God, help me to believe that I'm doing a great work. I trust that You've called me to this in this season. Give me the focus to stay the course.

### **Nehemiah 6:15–19**

#### **Today in the Word**

This work had been done with the help of our God. Nehemiah 6:16

Shane was a college student preparing for a lucrative career in law when he knew God was nudging him toward seminary instead. After wrestling with the decision for several weeks, he finally prayed, "Okay, God, I'll go to seminary on one condition: you have to help me learn Greek." Never a strong student in languages, Shane began to study Greek—at which he excelled. He went on to seminary and today is an ordained minister and seminary professor training other pastors—to-be in the Greek New Testament.

Following God's call doesn't mean we get to sit back, put our feet up, and wait to see what happens. Instead, it means we "put our shoulder to the plow" and trust that God will enable our work to bear spiritual results (Luke 9:62). God blessed Shane's studies—but he actually had to study; he didn't wake up one morning proficient in Greek. Nehemiah had to actually build the wall; he didn't simply pray and then open his eyes to see a completed wall surrounding the city.

Our passage reveals the spiritual consequences of our obedience. The announcement of the completed wall almost seems like an afterthought, a simple statement of fact (Nehemiah 6:15; see Ezra 6:15). After threats, opposition, and exhaustion, the wall had been built in 52 days. The text focuses our attention on the most important detail: the significance of the completed wall.

The enemies of Nehemiah had persistently tried to undermine the confidence of God's people, but when the wall was finished, it was their own self-confidence that lay shattered (v. 16). The people they had derided as "feeble" had accomplished a construction feat (Nehemiah 4:2). There was no denying that they were empowered by a strong and mighty God.

The final verses illustrate the problem of intermarriage that we saw in the book of Ezra. Tobiah, the foe of the Jewish resettlement and rebuilding, had married a Jewish woman (Nehemiah 6:18). This meant a number of the Jewish nobles and officials found themselves under legal or financial obligation to a spiritual enemy. He continued to threaten Nehemiah and to attempt to coerce Jewish leaders to align with him.

**Apply the Word** - Our obedience to God doesn't just accomplish His work in our lives. It also testifies to others about His power and His faithfulness. If you've seen a spiritual "wall" completed in your life, share that story with others, and write it down in a spiritual journal so that you can remember the great work of God. Praise God that He specializes in strengthening His people to finish the good works to which He calls them! (see Eph. 2:10).

### **Overcoming Challenges**

So the wall was completed on the twenty-fifth of Elul, in fifty-two days. Nehemiah 6:15

Today's Scripture & Insight: Nehemiah 6:1–9, 15

We gathered monthly to hold one another accountable to our individual goals. My friend Mary wanted to reupholster the seats of her dining room chairs before the year's end. At our November meeting she wittily reported her progress from October: "It took ten months and two hours to recover my chairs." After months of not being able to obtain the materials required, or find the quiet hours away from her demanding job and her toddler's needs, the project took merely two hours of committed work to finish.

The Lord called Nehemiah to a far greater project: to bring restoration to Jerusalem after its walls had lain in ruin for 150 years (Nehemiah 2:3–5, 12). As he led the people in the labor, they experienced mockery, attacks, distraction, and temptation to sin (4:3, 8; 6:10–12). Yet God equipped them to stand firm—resolute in their efforts—completing a daunting task in just fifty-two days.

Overcoming such challenges requires much more than a personal desire or goal; Nehemiah was driven by an understanding that God appointed him to the task. His sense of purpose invigorated the people to follow his leadership despite incredible opposition. When God charges us with a task—whether to repair a relationship or share what He's done in our lives—He gives us whatever skills and strength are necessary to continue in our effort to do what He's asked, no matter what challenges come our way.  
By: Kirsten Holmberg

Lord, please equip me with Your strength to persevere and finish the tasks You've given me. May my labors bring You glory.

God equips us to overcome obstacles and complete the tasks He's given us to do.

### **Failure Is Impossible**

This work had been done with the help of our God. Nehemiah 6:16

Today's Scripture & Insight: Nehemiah 6:1–9

"Failure is impossible!" These words were spoken by Susan B. Anthony (1820–1906), known for her immovable stance on women's rights in the US. Though she faced constant criticism and later an arrest, trial, and guilty verdict for voting illegally, Anthony vowed to never give up the fight to gain women the right to vote, believing her cause was just. Though she didn't live to see the fruit of her labor, her declaration proved true. In 1920, the nineteenth amendment to the Constitution gave women the right to vote.

Failure wasn't an option for Nehemiah either, mainly because he had a Powerful Helper: God. After asking Him to bless his cause—rebuilding the wall of Jerusalem—Nehemiah and those who had returned to Jerusalem from exile in Babylon worked to make that happen. The wall was needed to keep the people safe from enemies. But opposition to the cause came in the form of deception and threats. Nehemiah refused to let opposition deter him. He informed those who opposed the work, "I am carrying on a great project" (Nehemiah 6:3). After that, he prayed, "Now strengthen my hands" (v. 9). Thanks to perseverance, the work was completed (v. 15).

God gave Nehemiah the strength to persevere in the face of opposition. Is there a task for which you're tempted to give up? Ask God to provide whatever you need to keep going. By: Linda Washington

How do you normally handle opposition? What cause are you willing to fight for, no matter how tough the opposition?

Precious God, I need Your help to keep going with the work You've given me to do, no matter what the cost may be.

### **Nehemiah 6:15**

**So the wall was finished.—Nehemiah. 6.15**

### **G Campbell Morgan**

The significant word in the statement is the word "so," as it calls us to reconsideration of how the dangerous and difficult work was accomplished. Inclusively and exhaustively, we may at once say, the work was of God. That wall was the out-ward and visible symbol of the inclusion and guarding of the Remnant, until the Messiah should come, and the Faith should appear. From now until then, this remnant was to be kept in ward. The Law was the custodian to bring them to Christ. The wall was the material expression

of that isolation and security. When we turn from that consideration of the building of the wall by the will and through the overruling of God, to the human agencies, we find that the wall was built through the patriotism and high devotion of one man; and through the fact that he was able, by his influence and leadership, to weld the people into a unity of heart and purpose and endeavour which carried the sacred work to completion. The efforts of this man and the people were characterized by caution and courage, and passionate persistence against all opposing forces. Perhaps this latter quality is the most out-standing. By all means the enemies of the work sought to prevent its carrying out. Having begun in contempt, and proceeded through conspiracy, they turned to subtlety. Against every method, Nehemiah and his helpers were proof. Nothing turned them aside until the wall was finished. This strength against opposition was the outcome of a clear sense of the greatness of their task. Thus God's walls are ever built, God's work is always done. He leads and guides and compels circumstances to aid His workers; and they respond in agreement with His purpose, and in resolute refusal to allow anything from without or within to hinder them.

## NEHEMIAH 7

### Nehemiah 7:2

**For he was a faithful man, and feared God above many. Nehemiah. 7.2**

#### G Campbell Morgan

This is a description of the man whom Nehemiah placed in authority over the city of Jerusalem, after the wall was completed. The whole of the arrangements for the safety of the city, as here recorded, were characterized by statesmanlike caution. Through all the country round about there were enemies, and the position of the partially restored city therefore was one of perpetual peril. Nehemiah was conscious of this, and made the most careful provision as to the hour for the opening and closing of the city gates, and as to the arrangements for the watchers. No greater mistake can ever be made in connection with work for God in difficult places, than that of lack of caution. Carelessness is never the sign of courage. True bravery prepares for the possibility of attack. The man who had built, sword in hand, to completion, did not imagine that with the swinging of the gates on their hinges, the time for anything like relaxation in watchfulness had come. His choice of the governor was characteristic. He was chosen for two reasons; his fidelity to duty, and his fear of God. If we speak of these as two, they yet are but the two sides of one fact. Fidelity to duty is the outcome of the fear of God. The fear of God always produces fidelity. There is no sanction sufficiently strong to produce true fidelity other than that of this holy and loving fear. If a man is unfaithful to his appointed task, while yet declaring his loyalty to God, he lies, and the truth is not in him. The secret of the courage that is cautious, of the caution that is courageous, is ever that of a complete fear of God.

### Nehemiah 7:1-3 Leading integrity

In 2012, a think-tank held a search for 1,000 people of integrity in their country. From that group they identified 20 who they felt could become key governmental leaders. This was in reaction to the widespread dismay over the fact that one-third of the country's regents and mayors were under investigation for graft. In a country of hundreds of millions, there was no shortage of leader applicants, but the think-tank believed it was imperative that they help elect leaders who possessed integrity.

Integrity was an important issue in Nehemiah's day as well. With the walls completed and gates restored, the city of Jerusalem was secure once again (Nehemiah 7:1-3). But Nehemiah had two more tasks to do. First, he appointed "the gatekeepers, singers, and Levites" (Nehemiah 7:1). Why gatekeepers? Weren't they simply security guards who were ignored by most people? No, their contribution should have been highly valued. For what good were impregnable walls if the one controlling the gates wasn't trustworthy? The Great Wall of China was breached many times, simply because the gatekeepers were bribed to let in the invaders. Walls and gates are only as good as the people guarding them (Nehemiah 7:3).

Second, Nehemiah appointed leaders who were people of integrity (Nehemiah 7:2). Today, there is no shortage of talented people in our churches. And often these gifted ones are appointed as leaders because they're deemed to be successful in their professional fields. But are they people of integrity, people who fear God? They should certainly be individuals who "fear God more than most" (Neh 7:2).

In appointing people to key positions, Nehemiah looked for people of integrity who feared God more than most. May we do the same in our churches.

More: What kind of people did Moses appoint as leaders in Exodus 18:19-26?

Next: What does it mean for you to be a person of integrity? How does a person who fears God more than most lead others well?

**Nehemiah 7:64 It was not found.**

**F B Meyer: Our Daily Homily**

Certain claimed the maintenance of the priests, and were challenged to show their name in the register of the priestly line. In all likelihood they were descended from the sons of Aaron, but through marriage outside the priestly clan, and through the fact also of the name of the mother's father being adopted, their names were not reckoned in the priestly genealogy; consequently, their claim for priestly maintenance and service could not be established.

Is there not something like this still? Men, who were called to be God's priests, drop out of the register of those who serve before Him. It may be they are not sure of their genealogy, and have lost the assurance of sonship; their spirit is no longer filled with the blessed co-witness of the Holy Ghost. God is afar from them, and, being out of harmony with Him, they are out of sympathy with their fellows. They are, therefore, rightly put out of the priesthood.

Now trace this matter back to its beginning. As likely as not you will find it originated in some worldly alliance. He that will be a friend of the world is necessarily an enemy with God. For a mess of pottage Esau loses his birthright.

But all this can be put right. There has arisen a Priest, who holds the Urim and Thummim in His hand; God's own Priest after the order of Melchizedek. "Wherefore it behoved Him in all things to be made like unto His brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God." He waits to reinstate the erring soul, restore it to the priestly office, and give it priestly food and maintenance.

### **Nehemiah 7:1-73**

#### **Today in the Word**

Now the overseer is to be above reproach. 1 Timothy 3:2

Some elementary school students chafe at learning multiplication tables. Few teenagers enjoy studying for their written driving exam. No one goes to culinary school simply because they want to learn how to peel potatoes or chop onions. But all of this basic information is necessary in order to progress to important material: algebra and geometry, driving a car, or preparing gourmet meals.

Our passage transitions between the account of the rebuilding of the wall and the book's climax in Nehemiah 8 through Nehemiah 10. We might wonder what devotional benefit could possibly be found in reading this list of names—especially since we've already read this list in Ezra 2! But as it sets the scene for the coming events, this chapter also includes helpful reminders for us about the nature of spiritual leadership.

First, notice the criterion that Nehemiah used to select other leaders. He chose Hananiah as commander of the citadel because "he was a man of integrity and feared God more than most people do" (Nehemiah 7:2). He understood that spiritual qualifications are most important for carrying out God's work (see also 1 Timothy 3:1-16).

Next, we see Nehemiah's concern for the restoration and protection of God's people. He gave instructions to appoint gatekeepers and guards (Nehemiah 7:1, 3). He also addressed population issues confronting Jerusalem: surrounded by hostile people who felt threatened by the return of the Jews, Jerusalem needed to regain population in order to establish God's people in the land again. Otherwise, they would be susceptible to attacks from outside the city and infiltration and intermarriage within the city.

Nehemiah discovered the records of the first families who returned after the decree of Cyrus (Nehemiah 7:5). The diligence and care of a spiritual leader are manifested in this bit of the story—Nehemiah could have ignored this history from some 90 years earlier. But his priorities were obeying God and serving His people, not promoting himself as the sole architect of the reconstruction. He took the record of the past into account before forging ahead with decisions for the future.

**Apply the Word** - Spiritual leadership has times when grateful people offer thanks. Other times feature dramatic confrontation with those who oppose the work of God. And other moments are like today's passage: the "grunt work" of ministry that's often not noticed or appreciated but is necessary for the spiritual growth of God's people. Take a moment to write a note of thanks to your pastor and other spiritual leaders for their faithful ministry.

## **NEHEMIAH 8**

### **Nehemiah 8**

#### **JOYOUS CELEBRATION**

"The whole assembly... made booths... And there was very great gladness." -- Nehemiah 8:17

Joe Carter's dramatic ninth-inning home run touched off a time of joyous celebration for the Toronto Blue Jay players and fans. It turned out to be the final game of the 1993 World Series. The winners were ecstatic. Watching the game on television, I was

captivated by the enthusiasm that marked the victory celebration, both on the field and in the clubhouse. I thought, why don't we see that kind of spontaneity in our worship of God?

The Lord must have delighted in His people as they celebrated the Feast of Tabernacles. Israelites by the thousands laughed and talked with one another as they trekked to Jerusalem. There they made booths from tree branches and camped out for 7 days. They presented gifts in the temple as a thanksgiving offering, and they did it with joy and singing (Deuteronomy 16:13-15; Nehemiah 8:17).

First-century Christians carried this spirit into their observance of the Lord's Day. Historians tell us that those joyous meetings gave pagan persecutors an excuse to accuse believers of drunkenness. They

were enthusiastic because they kept fresh in their minds the fact that every Sunday was a commemoration of Christ's resurrection.

Let's make this a day of joyous celebration! -- H V Lugt

What a God we have to worship!  
What a Son we have to praise!  
What a future lies before us --  
Everlasting love-filled days! -- Maynard

**Christ's resurrection is cause for our celebration.**

**Nehemiah 8:8**

**October 9, 2006**

**The Scrabble Syndrome**

**READ: Nehemiah 8:5-11**

They read distinctly from the book, in the Law of God; and they gave the sense, and helped them to understand the reading. — Nehemiah 8:8

A contender at the 2005 World Scrabble Championship Finals in London said mathematics and a good memory are necessary to win, but not a good vocabulary. A New York Times journalist described the event as "a time when language divorced itself from meaning" because a champion may create a high score using obscure English words such as zobo and ogive without knowing their meaning.

All of us are susceptible to what might be called "The Scrabble Syndrome"—using words to win religious arguments without understanding and demonstrating their meaning. Bible verses can become weapons against those who disagree rather than life-altering truths to be lived.

During a critical period in Israel's history, Ezra instructed the people and was assisted by others who "read distinctly from the book, in the Law of God; and they gave the sense, and helped them to understand the reading" (Neh. 8:8). As the people grasped what they heard, they had a deep sense of sorrow for their sins, followed by a joyful response to God's mercy (vv.9-11).

Biblical words divorced from meaning undermine our relationship with God and others. Understanding with obedience brings wisdom, repentance, and joy. —David C. McCasland

God's Word, when it is understood,

Can keep us free from strife;

And when obeyed, it brings us joy

And nourishes our life. —Sper

Knowing God's Word should result in obeying God's Word.

**Nehemiah 8:1-18**

**Today in the Word**

All the people lifted their hands and responded, "Amen! Amen!" they bowed down and worshiped the Lord. Nehemiah 8:6

The Jewish festival of Purim was established by Mordecai and Esther after God's deliverance of the Jewish people from Haman's evil plot to destroy them (see Esther 9). The celebration, which continues among Jews today, includes sharing gifts and food with both friends and the needy so that all may participate in the joy.

We've reached the focal point in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah (which were originally compiled as one book). It would be a mistake to think of these accounts as primarily about rebuilding the temple, rebuilding the wall, or describing the return of the people. While all of those things happen in these chapters, they point to the critical event of the spiritual restoration of the people of God. The Lord was not simply bringing them back into the land; He was bringing them back into relationship with Him.

The people requested the public reading of the Law (Nehemiah 8:1). The text underscores the spiritual unity here; go through the passage and note how many times the words "all the people" or "the whole company" occur. This unity centered on the Word of God and their hunger to hear it proclaimed.

The people were also unified in their praise (Nehemiah 8:6). Their worship, led by Ezra, centered on "the LORD, the great God." After hearing the Word explained, Nehemiah instructed the people that it was time to rejoice! There would be time for grieving and mourning to come (we'll study this tomorrow), but for the time being, worship of the Lord was to be accompanied with joy (Nehemiah 8:10–12, 17).

This joy should also be shared with those in need. Using language that echoes the instructions of Purim, established only a few decades earlier, Nehemiah instructed the people to share food and drink with others (Nehemiah 8:10, 12). Expressions of joy from worship are intended to praise God as well as to promote generosity.

Finally, the people were unified in their obedience. By keeping the Feast of Booths they demonstrated a willingness to follow God's commands and to identify with the long history of the people of God.

**Apply the Word** - We might not associate a "sacred day" with joy and celebration and feasting, but Nehemiah declared that "the joy of the LORD is your strength" (Nehemiah 8:10)! Take time for an intentional meal of celebration with family and friends, and rejoice in the goodness of God. With hectic schedules and cultural notions of "perfect" entertaining, we can easily let the habit of gathering to share together slip by. As part of your celebration, you could volunteer at a soup kitchen or food pantry together to extend help to others.

#### **Nehemiah 8:1-12**

**Then all the people went... to celebrate with great joy, because they now understood the words that had been made known. - Nehemiah 8:12**

#### **TODAY IN THE WORD**

"What would you do for one million dollars?," writer Beatrice Kanner asked Americans as part of a recent book project. Sixty-five percent would live on a deserted island for a year. Sixty percent would serve six months in prison for someone else. Ten percent would "lend" their spouse for the night, and another 16 percent would consider doing so. For ten million dollars, 25 percent would desert their friends or church, and 7 percent would even commit murder.

What about ourselves? This is a soul-searching question, revealing where our values lie. When the Spirit and the Word search our hearts, what do they find? Sins that displease God, most likely, but the good news is that they not only find the disease but also bring the cure. Righteousness and revival can be brought about through the power of God.

The historical context of today's reading is the Israelites' return from exile. Ezra, a priest and rabbi, arrived in Jerusalem about 458 b.c., apparently with a copy of the Pentateuch in his possession. When Nehemiah arrived as governor some thirteen years later in 445 b.c., he got things organized enough to proclaim a public Scripture reading on October 8, 444 b.c. Today known as Rosh Hashanah, this was a special day—New Year's Day on the Jewish civil calendar, the start of the Feast of Trumpets (see Nu 29:1-6).

On this occasion, Ezra read aloud and the people "listened attentively" for about six hours (Nehemiah 8:3). The Levites moved among them, explaining and interpreting what was said (Nehemiah 8:7-8). The people stayed standing as a sign of respect, raised their hands to exhibit praise, bowed down in humility, and wept from conviction of sin. Nehemiah, though, ordered the celebration to continue, as there would be another day for confession and repentance (Nehemiah 8:9). Their greatest reason for joy is explained in today's verse—they now understood God's Word!

**TODAY ALONG THE WAY** - If you can, recall about ten biblical commands and list them on a sheet of paper. (If you can't, search until you find at least ten.) Then, as the Israelites did in today's reading, allow the Word to search your heart. How obedient are you to these commands? Do you understand them fully? Do you obey wholeheartedly or grudgingly? If there is an area of disobedience, are you praying for strength against temptation?

#### **Nehemiah 8:1-12 Savor The Flavor**

All the people went their way to eat and drink ... and rejoice greatly. —Nehemiah 8:12



In a fast-paced culture of “eat and run,” few people make time to enjoy a leisurely meal in the company of friends. Someone has even remarked that the only way to enjoy a seven-course meal today is to get it all between two pieces of bread!

After many of the Israelite exiles in Babylon returned to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple and the walls of the city, they gathered to hear Ezra read from the Book of the Law given by God through Moses (Neh. 8:1). They listened to God’s Word for hours, while teachers among them “gave the sense, and helped them to understand the reading” (Nehemiah 8:8).

When they wept because of their shortcomings, Ezra, along with Nehemiah the governor, told them this was not a time for sorrow but a time for rejoicing. The people were told to prepare a feast and share it with those who had nothing, “for the joy of the Lord is your strength” (Neh. 8:10). Then “all the people went their way to eat and drink, to send portions and rejoice greatly, because they understood the words that were declared to them” (Neh. 8:12).

The spiritual banquet God has prepared for us in His Word is a cause for great joy. It is worth taking time to savor.

Lord, give us a hunger and a thirst to know You more

that can be satisfied only by time spent with You in Your

Word. Help us to savor that time and, as we do,

to grow more in love with You each day.

Christ the Living Bread satisfies our spiritual hunger through the Living Word.

Nehemiah 8:10 My Utmost for His Highest

Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me... —Matthew 11:29

“Whom the Lord loves He chastens...” (Hebrews 12:6). How petty our complaining is! Our Lord begins to bring us to the point where we can have fellowship with Him, only to hear us moan and groan, saying, “Oh Lord, just let me be like other people!” Jesus is asking us to get beside Him and take one end of the yoke, so that we can pull together. That’s why Jesus says to us, “My yoke is easy and My burden is light” (Matthew 11:30). Are you closely identified with the Lord Jesus like that? If so, you will thank God when you feel the pressure of His hand upon you.

“...to those who have no might He increases strength” (Isaiah 40:29). God comes and takes us out of our emotionalism, and then our complaining turns into a hymn of praise. The only way to know the strength of God is to take the yoke of Jesus upon us and to learn from Him.

“...the joy of the Lord is your strength” (Nehemiah 8:10). Where do the saints get their joy? If we did not know some Christians well, we might think from just observing them that they have no burdens at all to bear. But we must lift the veil from our eyes. The fact that the peace, light, and joy of God is in them is proof that a burden is there as well. The burden that God places on us squeezes the grapes in our lives and produces the wine, but most of us see only the wine and not the burden. No power on earth or in hell can conquer the Spirit of God living within the human spirit; it creates an inner invincibility.

If your life is producing only a whine, instead of the wine, then ruthlessly kick it out. It is definitely a crime for a Christian to be weak in God’s strength.

Jesus Christ is always unyielding to my claim to my right to myself. The one essential element in all our Lord’s teaching about discipleship is abandon, no calculation, no trace of self-interest.

### **Nehemiah 8:1-12 No Appetite**

As newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby. —1 Peter 2:2

When I was battling a bad cold recently, I lost my appetite. I could go through an entire day without eating much food. Water would suffice. But I knew I couldn’t survive long on water alone. I needed to regain my appetite because my body needed nourishment.

When the people of Israel came back from exile in Babylon, their spiritual appetite was weak. They had departed from God and His ways. To get the people back to spiritual health, Nehemiah organized a Bible seminar, and Ezra was the teacher.

Ezra read from the book of the law of Moses from morning until midday, feeding the people with the truth of God (Neh. 8:3). And the people listened attentively. In fact, their appetite for God’s Word was so stirred that the family leaders and the priests and Levites met with Ezra the following day to study the law in greater detail because they wanted to understand it (Neh. 8:13).

When we feel estranged from God or spiritually weak, we can find spiritual nourishment from God's Word. "As newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby" (1Pe 2:2). Ask God to give you a renewed desire for relationship with Him, and begin feeding your heart, soul, and mind with His Word.

Break Thou the Bread of life, dear Lord, to me,

As Thou didst break the loaves beside the sea;

Beyond the sacred page I seek Thee, Lord,

My spirit pants for Thee, O living Word. —Lathbury

Feeding on God's Word keeps us strong and healthy in the Lord.

### **Nehemiah 8:5–12 Letters Home**

They read from the Book of the Law of God, making it clear and giving the meaning so that the people understood what was being read. Nehemiah 8:8

Today's Scripture & Insight: Nehemiah 8:5–12

Far from home and training for World War II, American recruits in basic training turned to humor and correspondence to cope with the challenges they faced. In one letter home a young man described the vaccination process with wonderful exaggeration: "Two medical officers chased us with harpoons. They grabbed us and pinned us to the floor and stuck one in each arm."

Yet one soldier began to realize that humor could only take him so far. Then he received a Bible. "I enjoy it very much and I read it every night," he wrote. "I never realized you could learn so much from a Bible."

Long ago, the Jewish exiles returned home after years of slavery in Babylon to find their problems came with them. As they struggled to rebuild Jerusalem's walls, they faced opposition from enemies, famine, and their own sin. Amid their trouble, they turned to God's Word. They were surprised at what they learned. When the priests read from the Book of the Law of God, the people were moved to tears (Nehemiah 8:9). But they also found comfort. Nehemiah the governor told them, "Do not grieve, for the joy of the Lord is your strength" (v. 10).

We don't need to wait for trouble to hear from God. The Bible is where we learn about His character, His forgiveness, and His comfort. As we read it, we'll be surprised at what God's Spirit will show us in its pages. By: Tim Gustafson

### **Nehemiah 8:1–8 Marathon Reading**

They read from the Book of the Law of God, making it clear and giving the meaning so that the people understood what was being read. Nehemiah 8:8

Today's Scripture & Insight: Nehemiah 8:1–8

When the sun came up on the first day of the seventh month in 444 bc, Ezra started reading the law of Moses (what we know as the first five books of the Bible). Standing on a platform in front of the people in Jerusalem, he read it straight through for the next six hours.

Men, women, and children had gathered at the entrance to the city known as the Water Gate to observe the Festival of Trumpets—one of the feasts prescribed for them by God. As they listened, four reactions stand out.

They stood up in reverence for the Book of the Law (Neh. 8:5). They praised God by lifting their hands and saying "Amen." They bowed down in humble worship (v. 6). Then they listened carefully as the Scriptures were both read and explained to them (v. 8). What an amazing day as the book that "the Lord had commanded for Israel" (v. 1) was read aloud inside Jerusalem's newly rebuilt walls!

Ezra's marathon reading session can remind us that God's words to us are still meant to be a source of praise, worship, and learning. When we open the Bible and learn more about Christ, let's praise God, worship Him, and seek to discover what He is saying to us now. By: Dave Branon

Lord, thank You for this amazing book we call the Bible. Thank You for inspiring its creation by the writers You chose to pen its words. Thank You for preserving this book through the ages so we can learn Your people's story and the good news of Your love.

The goal of Bible study is not just learning but living.

## **Nehemiah 8:2–6 Pay Close Attention**

All the people listened attentively to the Book of the Law. Nehemiah 8:3

Today's Scripture & Insight: Nehemiah 8:2–6; Acts 8:4–8

As I sat in the auditorium, I faced the pastor with my eyes fixed on him. My posture suggested I was absorbing everything he was saying. Suddenly I heard everybody laughing and clapping. Surprised, I looked about. The preacher had apparently said something humorous, but I had no clue what it might have been. From all appearances I had been listening carefully, but in reality my mind was far away.

It's possible to hear what is being said but not listen, to watch but not see, to be present and yet absent. In such a condition, we may miss important messages meant for us.

As Ezra read God's instructions to the people of Judah, "All the people listened attentively to the Book of the Law" (Neh. 8:3). Their attention to the explanation produced understanding (v. 8), which resulted in their repentance and revival. In another situation in Samaria, Philip, after persecution of the believers broke out in Jerusalem (Acts 8:1), reached out to the Samaritan people. The crowd not only observed the miraculous signs he did, but they also "paid close attention to what he said" (v. 6). "So there was great joy in that city" (v. 8).

The mind can be like a wandering adventurer that misses a lot of excitement close by. Nothing deserves more attention than words that help us discover the joy and wonder of our Father in heaven. By: Lawrence Darmani

Lord, our minds are so prone to distraction. Help us to be present in the moment, especially when listening to those who instruct us in Your ways.

The receiving of the Word consists in two parts: attention of the mind and intention of the will. William Ames

## **Nehemiah 8:10**

### **F B Meyer: Our Daily Walk**

#### **THE JOY OF THE LORD**

"This day is holy unto our Lord: neither be ye sorry; for the joy of the Lord is your strength."-- Nehemiah 8:10.

JOY AND gladness is a very necessary element in human well-being. We cannot live our best life if sorrow and depression holds undisputed sway. There are three sources of joy mentioned in this chapter.

The people understood the Divine Word and profited by it. Their eagerness to hear, as Ezra opened the Sacred Book, was remarkable (Nehemiah 8:3,5,12,18,10). Let us also delight in God through His Word. Let us not read the Bible as a task, but dwell upon it, until its beauties become woven into our thoughts and lives. It is thus that life becomes purified and enriched. We shall no longer desire base or corrupting things, but God will give us the desires of our heart, and we shall be satisfied, if we delight ourselves in Him.

They communicated good things to those for whom nothing was prepared (Neh8:10-12). There is no cure for sorrow and heart-break like healing broken hearts. There is no such comfort for ourselves as that which we administer to others. Nehemiah could not have given better advice than when he bade his people share their joys and sweets with those whose lives were bare of comfort and luxuries.

Of course Christianity has within it other sources of joy. Our Saviour gives us His joy, because He reveals the Father to us, makes us to rest in Him, and gives a worthy object for our lives; He makes work light because He has appointed it, sorrow supportable because He shares it, and death desirable because He has opened the door of the Father's Home. In His joy we may participate (John15:11; John16:22-24).

Their obedience. As soon as they understood the words they heard, they began to put them into practice. No wonder there was joy, for in the keeping of God's commandments there is great reward. It was during the Feast of Tabernacles that our Lord spoke of the Holy Spirit entering the heart to remove its thirst, and to pour forth as rivers to a dying world (John7:37-39). We cannot do much apart from the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Only through Him can we be right with God; only through Him can we be really glad; only through Him can we pass on joy and comfort to others.

**PRAYER-** We thank Thee, O God, that we may have fellowship with our Lord in His redemptive purpose. May the gifts which He has received even for the rebellious fill our hearts and lives with joy and gladness. AMEN.

## Nehemiah 8:10

### The joy of the Lord is your strength. —Nehemiah. 8.10

#### G C Morgan

The material side of Nehemiah's work being completed, the spiritual and moral work of bringing the people back more intelligently under the influence of the Law, went forward. Ezra now appeared upon the scene, and we have the account of a most interesting and remarkable religious Convention. The first day witnessed the assembling of the people. The phrase "gathered as one man" indicates their unity of purpose. They had assembled to hear the reading of the Law. This was not merely the reading aloud of passages from the Law, or even the reading of the Law. It was reading, accompanied by exposition, which was undertaken by men specially appointed. It would seem as though there were, first, a public reading, and then a breaking up into groups under the direction of selected Levites. Their work was that of translation and interpretation. The Law was written in Hebrew, and the people spoke in Aramaic. Hence the need for translation. It was a day of conviction, resulting in great sadness, as the people discovered how serious their failure had been, and how severe were the terms of the Law of their God. It was to this state of mind that these words were addressed, and they constitute an interpretation of the real nature and value of the Law. The joy of Jehovah is that which gives Him satisfaction, and that was expressed in His Law. Thus the Law was their strength. Only as they obeyed it could they be strong. This surely was the thought of the Psalmist when he sang: "Thy statutes have been my songs" (119. S4). Because the Law of Jehovah is the method by which He makes known to men the way of strength to them, it is the joy of Jehovah. When we discover that, the statutes which fill us with fear, become our delight, our song. They are indeed our strength.

#### Nehemiah 8:10 Secret of Joy

The secret of Christian joy is to believe what God says in His Word and act upon it. Faith that is based on anything other than the pure milk of God's Word of Truth is not faith at all. Instead it is mere presumption or at best superstition. In the same way, joy that is not the result of faith is not joy at all, but is only a 'good feeling'. And feelings are deceiving for they soon disappear. Faith based on God's Word (see note Romans 10:17, see also **F B Meyer's** message entitled [Fact! Faith! Feeling!](#)) will produce joy that will weather the storms of life.

Beloved, it is not enough to read the Word or receive the Word as others expound it, but we must also rejoice in the Word as the psalmist who wrote...

I rejoice at Your word as one who finds great treasure (Psalm 119:162)

In ancient times (and even today), some people would hide their wealth in jars buried in the ground (Mt. 13:44; Jer. 41:8). Imagine the farmer plowing his field and suddenly plowing up a jar filled with gold. Surely he would rejoice! In the same way, there are great treasures buried in throughout God's Word, waiting for us to dig them up, using the tools of reading inductively (inductive Bible study), meditating, and praying. And as we practice these disciplines we begin to find these invaluable treasures and it causes us to rejoice and give thanks.

Do not seek to study the Word of God only from a sense of duty which is only a veiled form of legalism, for the rich treasures may never be revealed. Scripture is clear that the believer who rejoices in the Word and who delights in reading and meditating on it daily, is the one who will find God's hidden treasures

Blessed is the man who fears the Lord, who finds great delight in his commands' (Ps. 112:1)

But his delight is in the law of the Lord, and in His law he meditates day and night' (Psalm 1:2)

Do you delight in God's Word? Would you rather have God's Word than food (Ps. 119:103; Luke 10:38-42), or sleep (Ps 119:55, 62, Psalm 119:147-148), or wealth (Psalm 119:14, 72, 137, 162)?

Let this be your declaration and you will begin to experience the joy of the Lord as your strength...

Oh, how I love Your law! I meditate on it all day long (Psalm 119:97).

#### Nehemiah 8:10 The joy of the Lord is your strength.

#### F B Meyer: Our Daily Homily

"The sad heart tires in a mile," is a frequent proverb. What a difference there is between the energy of the healthy, joyous heart and the forced activity of the morbid and depressed One! The one leaps to its task, the other creeps to it. The one discovers its meat and drink in self-sacrifice, the other limps, and stoops, and crawls. If you want to be strong for life's work, be sure to keep a glad heart. But, be equally sure to be glad with the joy of the Lord. There is a counterfeit of it in the world, of which we must beware— an outward merry-making, jesting, and mad laughter, which hides an aching and miserable heart. Solomon compares the joy of the

world to the crackling of thorns under a pot, which flare up with great speed, but burn out before the water in the pot is warm.

Ours must be the joy of the Lord. It begins with the assurance of forgiveness and acceptance in the Beloved. It is nourished in trial and tribulation, which veil outward sources of consolation, and lead us to rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus. It is independent of circumstances, so that its possessors can sing in the stocks. It lives not in the gifts of God, but in God Himself. It is the fruit of the Spirit, who begets in us love, joy, peace, long-suffering. Get the Lord Himself to fill your soul, and joy will be as natural as the murmur of a brook to its flow.

And such joy will always reveal itself to others. You will desire to send portions to those for whom nothing is prepared. Your joy will be contagious; it will shed its kindly light on sad and weary hearts. As Rutherford said, we have a new heaven in the heaven of every soul we bring there.

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It is a bad fireplace where all the heat goes up the chimney: true religion spreads joy over all around. Yet the fire warms first the chimney in which it burns, and grace comforts the heart in which it dwells. Nobody will be warmed by a cold hearth.

That the Christian religion is favorable to human happiness, is, I believe, the secret conviction even of many who may not openly confess it; hence it is no uncommon thing to hear even the openly wicked say, "I believe that the real Christian is the happiest man in the world." I recollect the remark of a certain skeptic, made to myself, in the hour of affliction: "Oh, sir, you Christians have the advantage of us." — Addresses to Young Men by Rev. Daniel Baker

Mr. Moody says, "I never knew a case where God used a discouraged man or woman to accomplish any great thing for him. Let a minister go into the pulpit in a discouraged state of mind, and it becomes contagious: it will soon reach the pews, and the whole church will be discouraged. So with a Sabbath-school teacher: I never knew a worker of any kind who was full of discouragement, and who met with great success in the Lord's work. It seems as if God cannot make large use of such men."

When we are weakened by sadness we do not speak attractively. Our statements lack certainty, and energy. We are apt to quarrel over trifles, to be turned aside by discouragements, and in general to do our work badly. Soldiers march best to music, and sailors work most happily when they can join in a cheery note; and I am sure we do the same.

Joyful Christians set the sinner's mouth a watering for the dainties of true religion. When the prodigal returned, he was shod, and clothed, and adorned, but we do not read that the servants were to put meat into his mouth. Yet they were to feed him, and they did so by themselves feasting: "Let us eat and be merry." This would be the surest way to induce the poor hungry son to make a meal. If saints were happier, sinners would be far more ready to believe.

## **Nehemiah 8:10**

### **Self-Pity Or Rejoicing?**

Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice! —Philippians 4:4

Temperament seems to be something that each of us is born with. Some of us have upbeat dispositions, while others play the music of life in a minor key. Yet how we respond to life's trials also affects our overall disposition.

For example, Fanny Crosby lost her sight when she was only 6 weeks old. She lived into her nineties, composing thousands of beloved hymns. On her 92nd birthday she cheerfully said, "If in all the world you can find a happier person than I am, do bring him to me. I should like to shake his hand."

What enabled Fanny Crosby to experience such joy in the face of what many would term a "tragedy"? At an early age she chose to "rejoice in the Lord always" (Philippians 4:4). In fact, Fanny carried out a resolution she made when she was only 8 years old: "How many blessings I enjoy that other people don't. To weep and sigh because I'm blind, I cannot and I won't."

Let's remember that "the joy of the Lord is [our] strength" (**Nehemiah 8:10**). Let's also take comfort in the teachings of Jesus, who in John 15:11 said, "These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may remain in you, and that your joy may be full." When faced with the choice of self-pity or rejoicing, let's respond with rejoicing. —Vernon Grounds

Be this the purpose of my soul,

My solemn, my determined choice:

To yield to God's supreme control,

And in my every trial rejoice. —Anon.

Rather than complain about the thorns on roses, be thankful for roses among the thorns.

### **Nehemiah 8:1-12 Knowing + Obeying = Joy**

The people went their way to ... rejoice greatly, because they understood the words that were declared to them. —Nehemiah 8:12

A woman who had been a staunch church member for years was asked, "Tell me, just what do you believe?" She replied, "I believe what my church believes."

"But what does your church believe?" came the question. "My church believes what I believe."

The inquirer then asked, "Since you believe what your church believes, and your church believes what you believe, what do you and your church believe?" She quickly answered, "We both believe the same thing."

The Jews who came back from exile to resettle Jerusalem and Israel likewise knew little about their faith. But when Ezra read from the book of the Law, and the Levites explained the text, the people listened for hours. The Word of God brought a powerful conviction of sin. The Israelites began to weep. But they were told not to shed tears. This was a day for feasting "because they understood the words that were declared to them" (Neh. 8:12).

A vague faith can never fill us with joy. We must clearly hear God's truth so that it can change our hearts. As we gain knowledge of His Word and obey it, we will experience the joy of the Lord (Neh 8:10).

No truth of God stored in the mind

Will ever meet our needs

Until that truth gives birth to faith

And faith gives birth to deeds. —DJD

Obedience is the pathway to joy.

**Nehemiah 8:12, Nehemiah 8:17-18.**

**F B Meyer: Our Daily Walk**

### **DAYS OF GLADNESS**

"All the people went their way to eat, and to drink, and to send portions, and to make great mirth, because they had understood the words that were declared unto them. And there was very great gladness. Also day by day, from the first day unto the last day, he read in the book of the law of God. And they kept the feast seven days."-- Nehemiah 8:12, Nehemiah 8:17, Nehemiah 8:18.

GLADNESS IS health. If you can get a patient to look on the bright side of things, you have done a great deal to bring back the tides of life.

Whenever we are optimistic and glad we are looking at things from the divine side, and imbibing some of God's eternal gladness. And cherishing this temperament, we shall know what Nehemiah and Ezra meant when they said: "The joy of the Lord is your strength" (Nehemiah 8:10).

If you have some secret sorrow, tell it to God, but do not impose it needlessly upon men. Anoint your head and wash your face, that you appear not to men to fast, and He who sees the secret tears will comfort you openly (Matt6:17-18). The pain and sorrow of the world is undeniable, even worse than many of us realise, but this is largely due to the intrusion of sin and selfishness which can only be expelled by Love. But even this gives opportunity for that unselfish ministry and devotion which are the keys of the blessed life. In so far as we dedicate our lives to help Christ in His redeeming work of delivering souls out of the power of darkness and translating them into the Kingdom of Life and Light, we share in His perennial blessedness.

It must have been a time of unusual joy when the returned exiles reviewed the finished wall which now engirded the city. There was the consciousness of a finished work. It is always delightful when we have done to the very best of our ability a piece of work that needed doing. One of the elements of a thoroughly enjoyable holiday is to be able to look back on a bit of good construction, a piece of brick or stone work which will endure in the edifice of our own lives or of other people's.

In addition, there was the Book of the Law of God, in which they read from day to day. Let us take the Bible with us on our holidays! We shall find that it will yield new meaning as we study it by lake or mountain; as we ponder it in country lanes, or by the seashore, One like the Son of Man will walk beside us, and apply its teaching till our hearts burn within us, and we are no more sad.

**PRAYER** - We thank Thee for eyes that see, and hearts that love, and natures that can enjoy Thy good and perfect gifts. O Father, in Whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning. AMEN.

## NEHEMIAH 9

### Nehemiah 9:1-21

Someone has said that the most miserable person on earth has to be an atheist who suddenly feels grateful and has no one to thank. That's one problem God's people don't have. In fact, we are commanded to live in an atmosphere of continual thanksgiving (1 Thess. 5:18). The community of God's people who had been restored to their land had a long list of reasons to praise God. ([Today in the Word](#))

**Nehemiah 9:2 The seed of Israel separated themselves.**

### F B Meyer: Our Daily Homily

This is the beginning of the true life. Turn to the story of creation, and you learn, first, that God divided the light from the darkness; next, the waters of the clouds from those on the earth; and next, the seas from the land. It was only thus that He could effect His purpose of substituting kosmos for chaos. So, in the development of the inner life, there must be separation and judgment; the discrimination of the false from the true, the evil from the good. "Separate Me... for the work whereunto I have called them."

When God put His hand to man's highest culture, He separated Shem from his brethren; Terah's house from other kindred clans; and Abraham from his people. What weight this gave to those solemn words, "I am the Lord your God, which have separated you from other people. And ye shall be holy unto Me; for I the Lord am holy, and have severed you from other people that ye should be Mine" (Leviticus 20:24, 26). It was not that God had no care for the great world; but that He desired to concentrate His attention on a few, that when they had fully caught His thought they might pass it on to mankind.

This accounts for the cry of the Holy Ghost through the Apostle, "Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, and touch not the unclean thing." We must be separate in our practices, cleansing ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit; in our pursuits, going with Christ without the camp; in our pleasures; and in our alliances. "Follow the Christ— the King! Live pure! Speak true! Right wrong! Follow the King! Else, wherefore born!"

### Nehemiah 9:5

**Stand up and bless the Lord your God from everlasting to everlasting; and blessed be Thy glorious name, which is exalted above all blessing and praise. Nehemiah. 9.5**

### G C Morgan

The wall being completed, the Law expounded, the Feast of Tabernacles was observed. Then, after a brief interval, came a great Day of Humiliation. The people separated themselves entirely from all those who were not actually within the Covenant, and then gave themselves to humbling and confession before God. In all this they were led by the Levites, and this chapter is largely occupied with the great prayer they offered upon this occasion. It may have been a prayer specially prepared for them; or perhaps, in the form in which we have it, it is a condensed account of the line along which they proceeded in their approach to God. The remarkable thing about it is that a prayer of humbling and confession is largely an utterance of praise. Observe its movement. The first section was wholly of praise (Nehemiah. 9.5-15). It praised God; for what He is in Himself, in majesty (Nehemiah. 9.5-6); for His founding of the Nation through Abraham (Nehemiah. 9.7-8); for His deliverance of the people from Egyptian bondage (Nehemiah. 9.9-11); for His constant guidance (Nehemiah. 9.12-15). The second section sets forth His grace as in constant contrast with the repeated failure of His people (Nehemiah. 9.16-31). This section is a frank, full, and humble confession of repeated sin, and yet the burden of it is that of the readiness of God to pardon. The final movement was that of definite seeking for the continuance of His goodness and help, in the form of a new covenant (Nehemiah. 9.32-38). All this is most suggestive, as it gives us a true model of the way of approach to God in confession. The heart is strengthened in the contemplation of His essential glory, and His constant grace. To see God in glory and in grace, is to know our sin, and to be driven to confession and repentance.

### Nehemiah 9:6

**January 1, 2000**

**Creator Praise**

**READ: Genesis 1:1-13**

You alone are the Lord; You have made heaven, ... the earth and everything on it. --Nehemiah 9:6

In the beginning" (Gen. 1:1) is not the only place in the Bible where we read about creation. The remarkable work of God's creation is not a one-passage phenomenon. Woven throughout Scripture are reminders that God fashioned our world--telling us again and again how vital it is to believe that the universe and everything in it came through the masterful work of His mighty hand.

We need that reminder. Otherwise, we could easily be influenced by the teaching we hear continually from some educators who hold to a view of origins that rules out God.

Yet that's not the primary reason to explore what God's Word says about creation. No, the main reason we need to acknowledge God's role in bringing everything into existence is so that we will give Him praise.

The Bible tells us that God created: "the foundations of the earth" (Ps. 104:5); sun, moon, stars, and the heavens (Ps. 148:1-5); "the ends of the earth" (Isa. 40:28); lightning, rain, wind (Jer. 10:13); people (Mal. 2:10); "all things" (Eph. 3:9; Col. 1:16).

Look around. Look in the Bible, God's Word. See the hand of Almighty God. And praise Him for His powerful, creative work. —Dave Branon ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

The greatness of our God is seen

In sky and sea and forest green;

All living creatures great and small

Reveal the God who made them all. --DJJ

God's work of creating is done; our work of praising has just begun.

### **Nehemiah 9:17 Slow for a Reason**

You are a forgiving God, gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love. Nehemiah 9:17

Today's Scripture & Insight: Nehemiah 9:9, 13–21

In the BBC video series *The Life of Mammals*, host David Attenborough climbs a tree to take a humorous look at a three-toed sloth. Getting face to face with the world's slowest moving mammal, he greets it with a "boo!" Failing to get a reaction, he explains that going slow is what you do if you are a three-toed sloth living primarily on leaves that are not easily digested and not very nutritious.

In a rehearsal of Israel's history, Nehemiah reminds us of another example and explanation for going slow (9:9–21), but this one isn't comical. According to Nehemiah, our God is the ultimate example of going slow—when it comes to anger. Nehemiah recounted how God cared for His people, instructing them with life-giving laws, sustaining them on their journey out of Egypt and providing them with the Promised Land (vv. 9–15). Although Israel constantly rebelled (v. 16), God never stopped loving them. Nehemiah's explanation? Our Creator is by nature "gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love" (v. 17). Why else would He have borne so patiently His people's complaints, disbelief, and distrust for forty years? (v. 21). It was because of God's "great compassion" (v. 19).

What about us? A hot temper signals a cold heart. But the greatness of God's heart gives us room to patiently live and love with Him. By: Mart DeHaan

In what areas of your life do you need to practice being slow to anger? How does it make you feel that God is slow to anger with you?

Father in heaven, fill us with the Spirit of Your graciousness, compassion, mercy, and love so that others can see not just our restraint, but our love because of You.

### **Nehemiah 9:7-21 Welcome Back**

You are God, ready to pardon, gracious and merciful. —Nehemiah 9:17

Jim decided to follow Christ at the age of 10. Fifteen years later his commitment had faded. He had adopted a live-for-the-moment philosophy and developed some bad habits. Then his life seemed to fall apart. He had problems at work. Three family members died almost simultaneously. Fears and doubts began to plague Jim, and nothing seemed to help—until one day when he read Psalm 121:2, "My help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth." These words cut through the fear and confusion in his heart. He turned back to God for help, and God welcomed him.



Jim's spiritual journey reminds me of ancient Israel's history. The Israelites had a unique relationship with God—they were His chosen people (Neh. 9:1-15). However, they spent many years rebelling and ignoring God's goodness, turning away to follow their own path (vv.16-21). Yet when they returned to Him and repented, God was "ready to pardon, gracious and merciful, slow to anger, abundant in kindness" (v.17).

These divine qualities encourage us to draw near to God—even after we have wandered away from Him. When we humbly abandon our rebellious ways and recommit ourselves to God's ways, He will show compassion and welcome us back to closeness with Him.

Softly and tenderly Jesus is calling,

Calling for you and for me;

See on the portals He's waiting and watching,

Watching for you and for me. —Thompson

God's arms of welcome are always open.

### **Nehemiah 9:16–38**

#### **Today in the Word**

You are a forgiving God, gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love. Nehemiah 9:17

After a terrifying incident in which Martin Luther was nearly struck by a lightning bolt, he decided to enter a monastery, hoping to find peace and relief from his fear of death and divine judgment. Luther took his monastic vows seriously and participated in a rigorous regimen of fasting, pilgrimage, and confession. Yet his deep, spiritual despair only deepened. Later Luther said, "I lost touch with Christ the Savior and Comforter, and made of him the jailor and hangman of my poor soul."

Our passage provides an account of corporate confession to restore a relationship with God. As we saw yesterday, this confession occurs in a context that is focused on the character and work of God. Without this, confession can simply become a process of spiritual and mental agony; but when the focus is on the Lord, confession allows the joy and comfort of a life with God to be renewed.

The text opens with a phrase that reveals the contrast between the character of God and the response of His people: "But they ..." (Nehemiah 9:16). This is always the gap that produces the need for confession. God, in His holiness and love, makes every provision for His people—but they fail to follow, obey, and love Him in response. The Israelites had been arrogant, stubborn, disobedient, rebellious, and blasphemous.

While these sins are named, the focus remains on God's character. Our hope of forgiveness doesn't lie in our exhaustive iteration of our sin. It's important to be honest about the ways we have fallen short, but our hope is the great compassion of God (Nehemiah 9:17, 19, 27–28, 31). Even in the face of heinous rebellion, the Lord is faithful to instruct, provide, and deliver His beloved people.

The core of the confession lies in Nehemiah 9:33: "You have been just; you have acted faithfully, while we did wrong." The people acknowledge that their exile and oppression was the deserved consequence of sustained disobedience, and God's character is still gracious and merciful. They could confess their sin and appeal for forgiveness because they understood the truth about a God who "keeps His covenant of love" (Nehemiah 9:32).

**Apply the Word** - If we understand the truth about God, we will take confession of our sins seriously—not as a way to grovel or beat ourselves up, but because we have hope that He forgives, and we want to restore a relationship with our Lord who loves and provides and cares for us. If you have resisted making confession a regular part of your prayer life with God, confess your sins before Him. This should prompt greater joy as you experience His forgiveness in a powerful way (see 1John 1:9).

### **Nehemiah 9:20**

#### **C H Spurgeon: Morning and Evening**

"Thy good Spirit." — Nehemiah 9:20

Common, too common is the sin of forgetting the Holy Spirit. This is folly and ingratitude. He deserves well at our hands, for he is good, supremely good. As God, he is good essentially. He shares in the threefold ascription of Holy, holy, holy, which ascends to the Triune Jehovah. Unmixed purity and truth, and grace is he. He is good benevolently, tenderly bearing with our waywardness, striving with our rebellious wills; quickening us from our death in sin, and then training us for the skies as a loving nurse fosters her child. How generous, forgiving, and tender is this patient Spirit of God. He is good operatively. All his works are good in the most eminent

degree: he suggests good thoughts, prompts good actions, reveals good truths, applies good promises, assists in good attainments, and leads to good results. There is no spiritual good in all the world of which he is not the author and sustainer, and heaven itself will owe the perfect character of its redeemed inhabitants to his work. He is good officially; whether as Comforter, Instructor, Guide, Sanctifier, Quickener, or Intercessor, he fulfils his office well, and each work is fraught with the highest good to the church of God. They who yield to his influences become good, they who obey his impulses do good, they who live under his power receive good. Let us then act towards so good a person according to the dictates of gratitude. Let us revere his person, and adore him as God over all, blessed for ever; let us own his power, and our need of him by waiting upon him in all our holy enterprises; let us hourly seek his aid, and never grieve him; and let us speak to his praise whenever occasion occurs. The church will never prosper until more reverently it believes in the Holy Ghost. He is so good and kind, that it is sad indeed that he should be grieved by slights and negligences.

## **Never Too Sinful**

You are a forgiving God . . . abounding in love. Nehemiah 9:17

Today's Scripture & Insight: Nehemiah 9:17, 27–31

"If I touched a Bible, it would catch fire in my hands," said my community college English professor. My heart sank. The novel we'd been reading that morning referenced a Bible verse, and when I pulled out my Bible to look it up, she noticed and commented. My professor seemed to think she was too sinful to be forgiven. Yet I wasn't bold enough to tell her about God's love—and that the Bible tells us we can always seek God's forgiveness.

There's an example of repentance and forgiveness in Nehemiah. The Israelites had been exiled because of their sin, but now they were allowed to return to Jerusalem. When they'd "settled in," Ezra the scribe read the law to them (Nehemiah 7:73–8:3). They confessed their sins, remembering that despite their sin God "did not desert" or "abandon them" (9:17, 19). He "heard them" when they cried out; and in compassion and mercy, He was patient with them (vv. 27–31).

In a similar way, God is patient with us. He won't abandon us if we choose to confess our sin and turn to Him. I wish I could go back and tell my professor that, no matter her past, Jesus loves her and wants her to be part of His family. He feels the same way about you and me. We can approach Him seeking forgiveness—and He will give it! By: Julie Schwab

Do you know someone who feels they're too sinful for Jesus to forgive them? How does the truth that Jesus has come not for "the righteous, but sinners" (Mark 2:17) speak to this way of thinking?

Dear Father, thank You for forgiving my sins and for Your assurance that no one is too sinful to be forgiven.

To learn more about forgiveness in the Christian life, visit [ChristianUniversity.org/SF107](http://ChristianUniversity.org/SF107).

## **Nehemiah 9:22-38**

The American elm tree has had an amazing history. George Washington transplanted these tall, majestic shade trees from the shores of the Potomac River, where they grew wild, to his home at Mount Vernon. American settlers often left elm trees standing when clearing the land, and they were a popular feature of the American landscape until the 1960s. At that time, American elms were almost wiped out by Dutch elm disease that had been accidentally imported into the United States from Europe in the 1930s. But elm trees have not totally disappeared, as horticultural specialists have had some success in finding and developing strains of the American elm that can withstand the onslaught of Dutch elm disease. The history of this beautiful tree reminds us in some ways of the history of Old Testament Israel. The Bible says that God "planted" Israel in her land (Ps. 80:8), and the nation grew and flourished under God's blessing. This blessing was praised in the prayer that the former exiles of Nehemiah's day offered in their worship to God. ([Today in the Word](#))

## **Nehemiah 9:32-37 Confession And Thanksgiving**

They have not served You ... in the many good things that You gave them. —Nehemiah 9:35

During a Sunday worship service, our congregation said this prayer of confession in unison: "Gracious God, like many believers before us, we complain when things do not go our way. We want abundance of everything rather than what is sufficient to sustain us. We would rather be elsewhere than where we are at the moment. We would rather have the gifts You give to others than what You provide for us. We would rather have You serve us than serve You. Forgive our lack of gratitude for what You give."

Abundance is no guarantee of gratefulness or thanksgiving. Prosperity may even turn our hearts away from the Lord.

When a group of Jewish exiles returned from Babylon with Nehemiah to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem, they gathered to confess their sins and those of their fathers. They prayed: "Neither our kings nor our princes, our priests nor our fathers, have kept Your law

... For they have not served You in their kingdom, or in the many good things that You gave them, or in the large and rich land which You set before them, nor did they turn from their wicked works" (Neh. 9:34-35).

Confession is a powerful prelude to a prayer of thanks-giving. Obedience is the Amen.

Lord, before we come to ask Your blessing

On this special day we call Thanksgiving,

We would bow to You, our sins confessing,

Then we'll lift our praise in grateful living. —Hess

Confession opens the door to thanksgiving.

### **Nehemiah 9:38**

#### **C H Spurgeon: Morning and Evening**

"And because of all this we make a sure covenant." — Nehemiah 9:38

There are many occasions in our experience when we may very rightly, and with benefit, renew our covenant with God. After recovery from sickness when, like Hezekiah, we have had a new term of years added to our life, we may fitly do it. After any deliverance from trouble, when our joys bud forth anew, let us again visit the foot of the cross, and renew our consecration. Especially, let us do this after any sin which has grieved the Holy Spirit, or brought dishonour upon the cause of God; let us then look to that blood which can make us whiter than snow, and again offer ourselves unto the Lord. We should not only let our troubles confirm our dedication to God, but our prosperity should do the same. If we ever meet with occasions which deserve to be called "crowning mercies" then, surely, if he hath crowned us, we ought also to crown our God; let us bring forth anew all the jewels of the divine regalia which have been stored in the jewel-closet of our heart, and let our God sit upon the throne of our love, arrayed in royal apparel. If we would learn to profit by our prosperity, we should not need so much adversity. If we would gather from a kiss all the good it might confer upon us, we should not so often smart under the rod. Have we lately received some blessing which we little expected? Has the Lord put our feet in a large room? Can we sing of mercies multiplied? Then this is the day to put our hand upon the horns of the altar, and say, "Bind me here, my God; bind me here with cords, even for ever." Inasmuch as we need the fulfilment of new promises from God, let us offer renewed prayers that our old vows may not be dishonoured. Let us this morning make with him a sure covenant, because of the pains of Jesus which for the last month we have been considering with gratitude.

### **Nehemiah 9:38**

#### **F B Meyer: Our Daily Walk**

#### **MAKING A COVENANT WITH GOD**

"We make a sure covenant, and write it."-- Nehemiah 9:38.

"He is the Mediator of a better covenant."-- Hebrews 8:6.

IT IS good for a soul to make a covenant with God. On his twenty-third birthday Milton wrote these memorable words:

"Yet be it less or more, or soon or slow,  
It shall be still in strictest measure even  
To that same lot, however mean or high,  
Toward which Time leads me and the will of Heaven.  
All is, if I have grace to use it so,  
As ever in my great Taskmaster's eye."

This was his covenant with God; and through all the years, now in his prime under Cromwell, and again in his lovely old age under Charles II, he never swerved from the path he had selected.

Who can forget those magnificent lines of Wordsworth, which tell how he was returning from a village merry-making, which had lasted through the night, and lo, the glory of a summer-dawn was breaking over the hills! He describes its beauty, and adds:

"Vows were made for me,  
That I should be, else sinning greatly,  
A dedicated spirit."

There are certain principles outlined in these chapters in Nehemiah, which may well be included in our covenant with God:

- (1) Never to allow anything in private or business life which is not in keeping with the high ideals of the Bible.
- (2) To set aside a certain proportion of our income and time for the maintenance of the Work and House of God.
- (3) To observe the Rest-Day.

But a covenant is between two. No resolution of ours is strong enough to keep us true. The most fervent protestations and vows may fail us in the day of trial, and our covenants are permanent only so far as God is party to them. But if Jesus is our Co-Signatory, there will be a safe-guard and certainty which all the powers of evil will not be able to overthrow.

Livingstone's covenant with God was that he might heal the open plague-spot of the Arab slave-trade. A covenant like this, in some cases, has been signed with blood. This was D. L. Moody's prayer, as a young man: "Great God, let the world learn, through my life, what Thou canst do by a man wholly devoted to Thee!"

PRAYER - We present to Thee, O God, ourselves to be a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable, our reasonable service. Fulfill through us the good pleasure of Thy goodness, and the work of faith with power. Amen

## NEHEMIAH 10

### Nehemiah 10:39

**We will not forsake the house of our God.—Nehemiah. 10.39**

**G C Morgan**

In this chapter we have some further particulars of the Covenant which the people made with Jehovah, following upon the great Day of Humiliation. This Covenant was sealed representatively by the priests (Nehemiah. 10.3-8); by the Levites (Nehemiah. 10.9-13); by the rulers (Nehemiah. 10.14-27); and to its terms all the people agreed (Nehemiah. 10.28). These terms are set forth in general phrases and in some particular applications. Generally, the people promised "to walk in God's law ... to observe and do all His commandments." Particularly, the Covenant referred to matters in which the people had already failed—those, namely, of inter-marriage with the surrounding idolatrous peoples, of neglect of the Sabbath, of Temple maintenance and arrangement, and of the offering of first-fruits and tithes. It would seem as though Nehemiah laid special emphasis on these later things, and these concluding words give the reason for this stress. He knew the supreme importance of the house of God to the national life, and therefore he said: "We will not forsake the house of our God." The maintenance in strength of the worship of God is of supreme importance, principally for the sake of the worshippers. There is a very true sense in which it may be affirmed that our worship cannot enrich God. But there is yet another sense in which He is robbed if we cease to worship, for whenever we do, we suffer impoverishment in our deepest life, and that results in moral breakdown. Therefore let us also ever say, "We will not forsake the house of our God."

### Nehemiah 10:1-39

#### Today in the Word

Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. James 1:22

In 2003, New York Times journalist Nicholas Kristof was reporting on the sexual trafficking of women and children in Cambodia when he called the legal team at the paper's offices. "I asked them if they had a policy about purchasing human beings—turns out they didn't!" For \$350, he purchased the freedom of two 15-year-old girls who had been trafficked into brothels. He returned them to their families and gave them seed money to start businesses so that they could earn a living apart from the sex trade. One girl opened a small grocery, but the other ended up returning to the degradation and abuse of the brothel. Though she had been freed, she could not grasp a life out of bondage.

We may gasp in horror at someone given a chance at freedom and life choosing instead to be enslaved and oppressed. Yet when we refuse to confess our sins, or then refuse to live in the truth of our spiritual freedom, we are returning to the slavery and bondage of sin. In our passage today, the people wanted to go beyond praise and confession and take action to change their relationship with God from egregious sin to eager service.

This community agreement was a serious commitment (Nehemiah 9:38). Nehemiah led the political and religious leaders in sealing this accord to obey the Lord (Nehemiah 10:–29). After being plagued with spiritually corrupt worship, the people pledged not to

permit intermarriage with the pagan people, which had led to the idolatrous abominations of false gods and child sacrifice (Nehemiah 10:30). Additionally, the people committed to honor the Lord and His Law by observing the Sabbath, even though it would mean counter-cultural business practices and inconvenience (Nehemiah 10:31).

Finally, the people took seriously the need to provide for the Lord's house, spiritual ministry, and worship (Nehemiah 10:32–39). They contributed their tithes and offerings to the Lord. While it might seem like service for God costs a great deal, it is a joy compared to the weighty demands of sin. After praise and confession, the people were committed to living in a way that made worship and service to God a priority.

**Apply the Word** - If you spent time confessing your sins before our gracious, merciful God, then you are forgiven! Don't return to the bondage of sin; choose to obey the commands of the Lord. Is there something you know you should do for God that you've resisted? Perhaps your giving to the ministry of the Lord has been anemic or begrudging. Or maybe you've been comfortable with a life of cultural convenience rather than holiness. Choose the freedom of a life of worship and service today!

### **Nehemiah 10:28-31 Resolutions**

[They] entered into ... an oath to walk in God's Law, ... and to observe and do all the commandments of the Lord our Lord. — Nehemiah 10:29

In 1722, Jonathan Edwards drew up a list of 70 resolutions, dedicating himself to live in harmony with God and others. The following resolutions give a picture of the serious purpose with which Edwards approached his relationship with God. He resolved:

- To do whatever is most to God's glory.
- To do my duty, for the good of mankind in general.
- Never to do anything, which I should be afraid to do, if it were the last hour of my life.
- To study the Scriptures steadily, constantly, and frequently.
- To ask myself at the end of every day, week, month, and year if I could possibly have done better.
- Until I die, not to act as if I were my own, but entirely and altogether God's.

In Nehemiah 10, God's people made an oath, vowing to follow all the commands, laws, and regulations of the Lord. This oath was so serious that they were willing to accept the curse of God if they failed to keep these commands.

Our resolutions need not be so serious as that. But any resolution to follow God is not a casual promise. Rather, it is a solemn and serious declaration that—with the help of the Holy Spirit—we can renew every day.

My Resolutions This Year Are:

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

Act on your resolutions!

**Nehemiah 10:39** The children of Israel and the children of Levi shall bring the offering.

### **F B Meyer: Our Daily Homily**

It was about this time that Malachi wrote the memorable words, "Bring ye all the tithes into my storehouse, that there may be meat in my house; and prove Me now herewith, saith the Lord, if I will not pour you out a blessing." When a people has separated itself to God, there will be no lack in its house, no failure in its supplies, no lack for its ministers. So with the individual. All they that had separated themselves entered into an oath to charge themselves yearly for the service of the house of God. Separation is the negative side of consecration.

How does this touch you, my friend? What proportion of your income are you setting apart for the service of God? The amount that a man gives in proportion to his income is a sure test of the genuineness and depth of his religious life. The Jew gave about a third of his yearly income to God; do we come up to this standard? Yet we speak of the Jews with contempt, as hard fisted and miserly. These old Jews might set an example to us newer Christians. How often we reverse our position from God's ideal! He puts us over His estate that we should send Him all the produce, after deducting what is necessary for our maintenance, and that of our families.

But we engross the entire proceeds for ourselves, sending Him an odd guinea, or half-crown, when we can easily spare it. Let us see that we give at least a fixed proportion of our income, and as much more as we can. Do not forsake the House of your God; so shall the heavens be opened in blessing. "There is that giveth and yet increaseth; there is that withholdeth more than is meet, and it sendeth to poverty."

## NEHEMIAH 11

### Nehemiah 11:2

**The people blessed all the men that willingly offered themselves to dwell in Jerusalem.—Nehemiah. 11:2.**

#### G C Morgan

In this, and the next two chapters, the arrangements made for the settlement of the cities are set forth. These are the last pages of history in the Old Testament. Some revelations of later conditions are found in the writings of the prophets, but nothing more is distinctly historic until, after a lapse of four centuries, we have the events recorded in the New Testament. The first section of the chapter is devoted to the account of the settlement of Jerusalem particularly. It should be remembered that perhaps not more than fifty thousand, all told, had returned from captivity, and by no means all of these had come to Jerusalem itself. Many of them had taken up their abode in the surrounding cities. Jerusalem was particularly difficult of settlement, seeing that it was the centre of danger, and peculiarly liable to attack. It was, therefore, arranged that the princes should dwell in the city, and that 10 per cent. of the people, selected by lot, must take up their abode there. In addition to these there were some who voluntarily came forward to dwell in the place of danger, and these were specially honoured by the people. The statement is one which gives occasion for some heart-searching. It really is an easy thing, for those who do not volunteer for places of danger, to applaud those who do, but it does seem to be a somewhat unworthy proceeding. Applause of heroism is neither costly nor valuable. It is a good thing that great enterprises are not dependent upon such people. The heroes are always to be found. Their reward is in their deed, rather than in the approbation of those who admire, but who do not help.

### Nehemiah 11:1-36

#### Today in the Word

Take possession of the land and settle in it, for I have given you the land to possess. Numbers 33:53

When the State of Israel was founded in 1948, the government proclaimed "the renewal of the Jewish State in the Land of Israel, which would open wide the gates of the homeland to every Jew." In 1950, the Law of Return granted every Jew in the world the right to come to Israel as an *oleh* (Jew immigrating to Israel) and become an Israeli citizen. Today, nearly 30 percent of the Jewish population of Israel are immigrants from around the world, some fleeing persecution and others wishing to participate in the world's only Jewish state.

After the high point of the book in the preceding three chapters, today's text returns to Nehemiah's concern in Nehemiah 7 (Nehemiah 7:4–5). Major construction projects had been completed. The people had confessed sin and committed themselves to service. Now it was time to sort out the organizational details that would make the resettlement of God's people in Judah a successful, long-term endeavor.

The people had settled in their ancestral towns, but Jerusalem remained under populated, likely because until the wall was rebuilt the people had significant security concerns. Now that provision had been made for greater protection, the leaders settled in Jerusalem, and the people volunteered one tenth of the population of their towns to now reside in the capital (Nehemiah 11:1–2).

The rest of this chapter reveals something about Nehemiah's concerns and his leadership. First, his record of the settlements and population shows his commitment to organization and detail. He did not treat the matter of God's people settling into their land as a haphazard affair. The people had been commanded to settle the land after the Exodus; now Nehemiah was recording that process again after the return from Exile (see Num. 33:53; Deut. 10:11; Joshua 13–21).

Second, Nehemiah exhibited spiritual concern that the resettlement would facilitate the spiritual stability of the people. He detailed the provision for Levites in Jerusalem (Nehemiah 11:15–18) as well as enough priests and singers to conduct worship in the temple (Nehemiah 11:12, 22).

**Apply the Word** - The praise and worship of the Lord on Sunday is an important part of our spiritual obedience. But God also cares about how we're living from Monday through Saturday. The details might not seem glamorous or spiritually significant, but every part of our lives, from how we conduct ourselves at work to our attitudes toward our family members to how we organize our finances, matters to God.

**Nehemiah 11:23** A certain portion should be for the singers.

#### **F B Meyer: Our Daily Homily**

It was the king's command, and it was very right and sensible, because they enlivened and quickened the life of the entire community. A mere utilitarian spirit might have refused to maintain them, because they did not contribute to the handicrafts of the community. They only sang the praises of God; but they fulfilled a very important part in the life of the city, and they deserved the portion which was regularly contributed to them.

You sometimes feel your life to be comparatively useless. You can only say a kind word to those who are doing the main business of the world. When the brothers had wrought all day at the clearing for the farm, their sister Hope sang through the evening hours to cheer them and drive away their sense of fatigue. That was all she could do; but was she not deserving of maintenance? You can only sing your song of hope, and keep the heart of the toilers sweet and fresh. You can only get inspiration from God's heart and pass it on. You can do little but learn to detect, and translate into music that men love, the deep undertones of God's creation. But it is well. You are needed in God's world.

There are invalids, who lie on their back through weary months and years, that are the inspiration of their homes, and to their side the elders and the children come for counsel and comfort. Sing on, ye sweet choristers, that alleviate our depressions and start our hearts to high endeavor. Ye that by night, in sleepless hours, stand in the house of the Lord, praise ye the Lord when all the busy life of men is hushed! The King will see to it that ye do not miss your maintenance, your portion day by day.

## **NEHEMIAH 12**

### **Nehemiah 12:43**

**The joy of Jerusalem was heard even afar off. Nehemiah 12:43.**

#### **G C Morgan**

In this chapter we have an account of the commencement of the solemn dedication of the wall. It would seem as though it had been postponed for some considerable time. Differences of opinion exist as to the length of time. Some place this dedication ceremony in immediate relation to that which is recorded in the following chapter, which would place it twelve years after the first coming of Nehemiah. Others say that the account given here has reference to what took place within a few months of the actual completion of the work. It is difficult to decide, and really the matter is of no vital importance. The ceremony, whenever it took place, proceeded in three stages. First, there were two great processions, in which the appointed singers chanted the praises of God. This was followed by the reading of the Law, and the consequent separation of the mixed multitude from the people of God (Nehemiah 13). The present chapter is principally occupied with the rejoicing, and in this connection the statement is made that "The joy of Jerusalem was heard even afar off. It was great day, greater even than these people knew. The reformers had sought to bring the remnant, weak and small though it was numerically, back to a recognition of the deepest truth concerning the national life that, namely, of its relation to God. Their joy that day was the joy of the Lord, and that was indeed their strength. All the pomp and pageantry and material splendour of the days of the monarchy had passed; but in that devotion to the Law, and to the purposes of God as manifested in the building of the wall, there was more of moral power than the old days had ever known, since the time when in their folly, the people had clamoured for a "king like the nations."

### **Nehemiah 12:1-47**

#### **Today in the Word**

God had given them great joy. Nehemiah 12:43

The Psalms have been described as the songbook of Israel. The final psalm is a crescendo of praise: "Praise the Lord. Praise God in his sanctuary; praise him in his mighty heavens. Praise him for his acts of power; praise him for his surpassing greatness. Praise him with the sounding of the trumpet, praise him with the harp and lyre, praise him with timbrel and dancing, praise him with the strings and pipe, praise him with the clash of cymbals, praise him with resounding cymbals. Let everything that has breath praise the Lord. Praise the Lord."

From the account in our reading today of the dedication of the Jerusalem wall, it seems that Nehemiah was certainly familiar with Psalm 150! Just as this psalm builds into a chorus of praise, the description of this celebration almost bursts off the page with music and joy.

Instruments of cymbals, harps, lyres, and trumpets were appointed for praise (Nehemiah 12:27, 35–36, 41). Singers gathered from around Judah, and Nehemiah divided them into two large choirs "to give thanks" (Nehemiah 12:31). Then he sent them in opposite

directions around the wall, in effect surrounding the city with a citadel of praise. What a beautiful picture of the power of praise literally encircling the city along with the rebuilt wall! The rejoicing was so full, rich, and loud that it could “be heard far away” (Nehemiah 12:43).

Not only was the celebration full of joy, it was also concerned with appropriate worship. The priests and Levites ensured their own ritual purity as well as that of the people (Nehemiah 12:30, 45). This outpouring of praise to dedicate the wall extended to acts of generosity and service to ensure that the ministry of the temple was provided for (Nehemiah 12:44–47). The people didn’t stop with songs and rejoicing; they were willing to bring their firstfruits and tithes required by the Law.

By the end of this dedication, we see that the spiritual life of Judah has been ordered according to God’s instructions. “All Israel contributed,” rejoicing “because God had given them great joy” (Nehemiah 12:47).

**Apply the Word** - If you have breath in your body, you have reason to praise the Lord! Take some time today to praise Him with music. You might choose to gather with friends or family to sing or play musical instruments. Or you could listen to some praise music throughout the day, whether at work, home, or in your car. Thank the Lord for the works He has completed in your life, and thank Him for “every good and perfect gift” (James 1:17).

**Nehemiah 12:43**

**November 27, 2003**

**The Music Of Joy**

**READ: Nehemiah 12:27-43**

God had made them rejoice with great joy ... , so that the joy of Jerusalem was heard afar off. —Nehemiah 12:43

Several years ago, during a Christian men's conference in Boulder, Colorado, I stood with 50,000 men as we sang "All Hail the Power of Jesus' Name." The volume of the singing was incredible in the football stadium, and I've often wondered how it sounded outside. Could people hear it as they walked through a nearby park, sat on their patios, or drove by in cars? What impression did it leave with them?

That great sound of praise reminded me of what is described in today's Bible reading. The book of Nehemiah begins with a confession, continues with a construction project, and ends with a concert. The entire story is a study in God's faithfulness and power.

After years of hard work despite opposition, the wall of Jerusalem was rebuilt. At the dedication, two "thanksgiving choirs" stood on the wall to praise God. We are told that "the singers sang loudly ... God had made them rejoice with great joy ... , so that the joy of Jerusalem was heard afar off" (Nehemiah 12:42-43).

Joy cannot be contained. It must break out in praise to God through songs of thanksgiving. Whether those who hear our outpouring of joy understand it or not, it will resound as a chorus that cannot be ignored—the music of lives lived out in praise to God. —David C. McCasland ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

Let us celebrate together,

Lift our voice in one accord,

Singing of God's grace and mercy

And the goodness of the Lord. —Sper

Each new day gives us new reasons to sing God's praise.

**Nehemiah 12:24, 36–37, 45–46** David, the man of God.

**F B Meyer: Our Daily Homily**

How long the influence of David has lingered over the world, like the afterglow of a sunset! Mark the characteristic in him which laid the foundation of his supremacy over the hearts of his countrymen. He was preëminently “a man of God.” Notwithstanding his terrible fall, his people recognized that his salient characteristic was Godward. Would you be one of God’s men?

(1) Give all to God.— Too many live lives of piecemeal consecration, giving a bit here and a bit there, but never all. David surrendered himself to do God’s will utterly, and in all, and so became a man after God’s own heart. With what joy God’s voice seems to quiver, as He says “I have found David, the son of Jesse, a man after Mine own heart, who shall fulfill all My will” (Acts



13:22). Without reserve, holding nothing back, yield yourself to God, to be, and do, and suffer His will, whatever it may be.

(2) Take all from God.— It is not what we give to Jesus, but what we take from Him, that makes us strong, helpful, and victorious day by day.” Accept this as a fact, that in Jesus God has made all His fullness dwell. There is nothing we require, for life or godliness, that is not stored in Him; but the terrible loss of our lives is that we take so little. We have ourselves to blame if we are poor, and miserable, and blind, and naked.

(3) Use all for God.— It sometimes appears as though Christian people were urged to yield themselves to God, only that their lives might be more comfortable. But the supreme and final end in all surrender must be that His will be done, His glory promoted, and Himself, magnified whether in life or death.

#### **Nehemiah 12:27-47**

At the opening ceremonies of the 1984 summer Olympic Games in Los Angeles, the crowd in the stadium and television viewers were greeted by the sight of eighty-four grand pianos situated on various levels of a huge stage, with each instrument being played simultaneously. It was an amazing sight and one that the organizers of the games felt was a worthy tribute to the importance of the Olympics. Ezra, Nehemiah, and Israel’s worship leaders produced a celebration of their own that must have been an amazing sight. It was time to dedicate the walls of Jerusalem that the people had rebuilt in just under two months, and no expression of verbal praise, sacrifice, or music was left out. ([Today in the Word](#))

#### **Nehemiah 12:27–43 Surround Sound**

The sound of rejoicing in Jerusalem could be heard far away. Nehemiah 12:43

Today’s Scripture & Insight: Nehemiah 12:27–43

Walt Disney Studios was the first to introduce a new concept in listening to movies. It was called “stereophonic sound” or surround sound, and it was developed because producers wanted the movie-going audience to hear the music in a new way.

But this wasn’t the first use of “surround sound.” Thousands of years earlier, Nehemiah introduced the idea at the dedication of the rebuilt wall of Jerusalem. “I had the leaders of Judah go up on top of the wall,” he explained. “I also assigned two large choirs to give thanks” (Neh. 12:31). The two choirs began at the southern part of the wall, at the Dung Gate. One went to the left, one went to the right, and they surrounded the city of Jerusalem in praise as they marched toward the temple (vv. 31, 37–40).

The choirs led the people in rejoicing because “God had given them great joy” (v. 43). In fact, their rejoicing “could be heard far away” (v. 43).

Their praise resulted from God’s help as the people overcame the opposition of enemies like Sanballat and rebuilt the wall. What has God given us that causes our joy to overflow into praise? God’s clear direction in our lives? The comfort He alone can provide in times of trouble? Or our ultimate gift: salvation?

Perhaps we can’t create “surround sound” with our praise, but we can rejoice in the joy God has given us. Then others can hear us praise God and see how He works. By: Dave Branon

We praise You, O Lord—with words, with song, and with our lives. We offer You our hearts in response to Your great power, loving provision, and constant care.

We can never praise Jesus too much!

## **NEHEMIAH 13**

#### **Nehemiah 13:7**

**I came to Jerusalem, and understood. Nehemiah.13.7**

**G C Morgan**

This chapter records Nehemiah’s last visit to Jerusalem. After the building of the wall, he had evidently gone back to the court of the king. Twelve years later, seeking permission, he returned, and his last deeds reveal the continued strength and loyalty of the man. Coming to the city, he understood. His viewpoint was still that of the Divine purpose, and therefore he was not deceived—he understood! There were four abuses which he discovered, and without the slightest hesitation or any sign of weakness, but with characteristic energy, he set himself to correct them. Eliashib, the priest, had given a place within the very Temple of God to the man Tobiah, who had done so much to hinder the work of building the wall. Nehemiah flung out the occupant and his furniture, and

restored the chamber to its proper use. He found, in the second place, that the Levites, instead of being able to devote their whole time to the service of the Temple, had to earn their living, because the tithes were not being paid. He contended with the nobles and corrected this abuse. He found, moreover that the Sabbath was violated, and restored the Divine order in this matter. Finally, he found that the people had again been making mixed marriages, and with unsparing force he dealt with the evil. The man who looks at conditions from the standpoint of agreement with the Divine intention, is ever the man who truly understands. Such a man is not careful to seek soft and easy methods in dealing with abuses. To be quick of understanding in the fear of Jehovah, is ever to be merciless to all that is contrary to the will of God.

## **Nehemiah 13:1–14**

### **Today in the Word**

Lord, I love the house where you live, the place where your glory dwells. Psalm 26:8

At its peak, an estimated 24 million listeners tuned in to Paul Harvey's radio programs, The Rest of the Story, News and Comment, and Paul Harvey News. He was probably best known for The Rest of the Story, which was sometimes described as part history and part mystery. With his trademark delivery, Harvey would have millions of Americans on the edge of their seats when he began, "Hello Americans, I'm Paul Harvey. You know what the news is. In a minute, you're going to hear ... the rest of the story."

After the glorious celebration in yesterday's reading, our text today is like the rest of the story. And in many ways, we might wish that the book of Nehemiah had just ended on the high note of praise and joy and worship. But instead, we have the unvarnished truth about the way that spiritual community began to disintegrate over time.

The first three verses pick up where Nehemiah 12 ended. When the people heard the instructions in the Law to keep separate from the idolatrous enemies of true worship, they complied. Then things went downhill. After 12 years as governor in Jerusalem, Nehemiah was recalled to the court of Artaxerxes (Nehemiah 13:6). We're not told how long he stayed in Persia, but at some later point he was given permission to return to Jerusalem.

He discovered that one of his chief opponents, Tobiah the Ammonite, was being housed inside the very temple of God (Nehemiah 13:4–7)! This directly contradicted the command of God that no Ammonite should be allowed in the assembly of God (see Nehemiah 13:1; Judges 10:6). Now this foe of righteousness had wormed his way into the heart of Jewish worship and identity.

Nehemiah responded by forcefully removing Tobiah and all his possessions and ordering the rooms to be purified again (Nehemiah 13:8–9). He then learned that the commitment to provide for the Levites and singers had been neglected, forcing the spiritual leaders to leave the temple in order to provide their own food (Nehemiah 13:10). Nehemiah installed new leadership to ensure that the house of God and its service would be provided for and respected.

**Apply the Word** - Scripture is honest with us about the reality of the spiritual life. A great high point of fellowship with God might be followed by a drift away from our commitment to serve Him. Do you have a sustained passion for the work of God, or have you grown complacent about things in your life that contradict a life of faith? If you resemble Eliashib, who let Tobiah into the temple, repent and return to your commitment to the Lord. Pray to have Nehemiah's zeal for the things of God.

## **Nehemiah 13:15–31**

### **Today in the Word**

Remember me with favor, my God. Nehemiah 13:31

John 2 describes Jesus' passionate purification of the temple: "To those who sold doves he said, 'Get these out of here! Stop turning my Father's house into a market!' His disciples remembered that it is written: 'Zeal for your house will consume me'" (John 2:16–17). The passage the disciples recalled comes from Psalm 69:9, and the end of that psalm concludes: "For God will save Zion and rebuild the cities of Judah. Then people will settle there and possess it; the children of his servants will inherit it, and those who love his name will dwell there" (Ps 69:35–36).

Throughout the book of Nehemiah we've seen his dedication to the Law of the Lord and his frequent prayers to God. In Nehemiah 12, it seems evident that Nehemiah knew the psalms and modeled the celebration after their prescriptions for praise. In Nehemiah 13, Nehemiah's heart for the temple and Sabbath of God are consistent with Psalm 69, and it is reasonable to think that he believed the prophetic words that God would rebuild the cities and resettle the people in Zion. Nehemiah's passion for the things of God foreshadows the passion of Jesus Himself.

In today's reading, Nehemiah discovered that the commitment to keep the Sabbath, made in Nehemiah 10:31, was now ignored (Nehemiah 13:15–18). Both Jews and foreigners were trading on the Sabbath instead of consecrating the day to the worship of God. Nehemiah didn't merely bemoan this state of affairs—he took zealous action to ensure that the Sabbath observance would be in

keeping with the commands of a holy God. He shut the gates, posted a guard, and warned the merchants that they would be removed by force (Nehemiah 13:9–22).

The plague of intermarriage had again afflicted the people, even including a marriage between a priest and the daughter of Sanballat. As Nehemiah noted, if even the wise king Solomon couldn't maintain his loyalty to God when surrounded by his foreign wives, how did these men expect to be obedient to the Lord (Nehemiah 13:23–31). Again, Nehemiah demonstrated that spiritual leadership requires a commitment to doing God's work in God's way.

**Apply the Word** - Twice in this passage Nehemiah prayed for God to remember him (Nehemiah 13:22, 31). This was evidence of God's faithfulness and ability to judge his heart and deeds accurately. Are we more concerned with what God thinks of us or what others think of us? As we conclude our study of Ezra and Nehemiah, spend time in prayer and reflection on your heart for the things of God. By His grace and power, resolve to serve the Lord and others with joy and commitment.

**Nehemiah 13:14, 22, 31 Remember me, O my God.**

### **F B Meyer: Our Daily Homily**

Thrice in this chapter this humble man asks to be remembered. We cannot think that he expected to purchase God's favor because of his sacrifices and endeavors. Of this he was already assured. But being a redeemed soul, he desired that his works might come up in remembrance before God, and secure a reward. There is no harm in keeping the eye fixed on the reward for faithful toil in the Lord's service. It was a constant incentive in the life of the great Apostle that he might so run as to obtain; so finish his work that he might win the crown.

Note the three departments of service mentioned in this chapter, in connection with which Nehemiah breathed this petition. He had turned all Tobiah's household stuff out of the temple, so that the whole structure should be given up to the service of God. He had secured the Sabbath from desecration, so that its holy rest and calm were preserved intact. And he insisted on the purity of the holy seed being untainted by foreign alliances. Consecration to God, the Rest of Faith in the inner life, and the separation of God's children from the world, are the counterparts of these in our own time.

Shall we not humbly set ourselves to seek them for the professing Church? Nehemiah was an ungifted, simple-hearted man, but he was able to secure them as the instrument and channel of God's purposes. Why should not God work through us for the same ends. But, first, let us see to it that each of these particulars is being realized in our own personal character and life. Let every room of the heart be for God; let no voice break the inner peace. Then what God has done, for us, we may confidently plead as within His scheme for others.

## **Fact! Faith! Feeling!**

### **by F B Meyer**

(Chapter 4 in his book [The Secret of Guidance](#))

These three words stand for three most important factors in character and life. We all have to do with them in one form or another, but it is above all things necessary that we should place them in the right order.

Most people try to put Feeling first, with as much success as if they tried to build the top story of a house before laying its foundations. Their order is-

**FEELING, FACT, or FAITH**

**or, FACT, FEELING, or FAITH**

Others seek Faith first, without considering the Facts on which alone Faith and Feeling can rest. They resemble the man, who desiring to get warm on a frosty night, refuses to approach the fire which burns brightly on the hearth. The only possible order that will bring blessing and comfort to the heart is that indicated in our title (Fact! Faith! Feeling!)

God's Facts are adamant.

Our Faith, apprehending and resting on them.

Joyous Feelings, coming, it may be at once, or after the lapse of days and months, as God will.

**FACT**

The facts of which we are told in the Bible are like steppingstones across a brook. Before you reach the shallows where they lie, you wonder how you will get over, but on stepping down to the margin of the water, they span the space from bank to bank. When you have reached one you can step to another, and so across. It is absurd to consult feeling, or look for faith, while still at a distance from the brookside, or if you persist in going above or below that primitive bridge of stones. You must come down to them, consider them see how strongly fixed they are in the cozy bed, notice how easily the villagers pass and repass; then you will feel able to trust them, and finally, with a light heart and great sense of relief, step from one to another.

**Let us recall a few facts which may help us first to faith, and then to feeling.**

It is a fact that God loves each of us with the tenderest and most particular love. You may not believe or feel it ; the warm summer sun may be shining against your shuttered and curtained window without making itself seen or felt within; but your failure to realize and appreciate the fact of God's love toward you cannot alter its being so.

It is a fact that in Jesus every obstacle has been removed out of the way of your immediate forgiveness and acceptance. God was in the dying Saviour, putting away sin, bearing our sins in His own body on the tree, reconciling the world to Himself. You may not believe this, or feel the joy of it, but that does not alter the fact that it is so.

After the peace was signed between the North and the South, ending the Civil War, there were soldiers hiding in the woods, starving on berries, who might have returned to their homes. They either did not know, or did not credit, the good news, and they went on starving long after their comrades had been welcomed by their wives and children. Theirs was the loss, but their failure in knowledge or belief did not alter the fact that peace was proclaimed and that the door was wide open for their return.

A friend may have paid all my debts in my native village, from which I have fled, fearing arrest and disgrace. He may have done it so speedily that my credit has never been impaired, or my good name forfeited. There may be all the old love and honor waiting to greet me. He may have told me so; but if I still absent myself, and refuse to return, my folly in this respect cannot undo those beneficent acts, though it perpetuates my misery.

It is a fact that the moment a soul trusts Christ, he is born into God's family and becomes a child. There is no doubt about this. You may not feel good, or earnest, or anxious; you may even be conscious of a recent failure; you may be spending your days under a pall of somber depression; but if you have received Christ, and have truly trusted in Him, you have been born again, not of man, or of the will of the flesh, but of God (John 1:12) . You may be a prodigal or inconsistent child, but you are a child. If you were wise you would take the child's place at the Father's table, and enjoy His smile. They await you. But if you still remain out in the cold, as the elder brother in the parable, you do not alter the fact that your place is ready for you to occupy when you will.

It is a fact that God takes what we give, and as soon as we give it. There is no long interval. When we let go, He receives. When we place ourselves on His altar, we are immediately sealed as His. When we consecrate ourselves, He accepts. The divine act is instantaneous. You may not be aware of this, and continue giving yourself day after day. If you do, you burden yourself with needless anxiety; you continue offering what is not now yours to give, and you lose the blessedness of realizing what it is to be the absolute property, chattel and slave of the blessed Master; but your mistake cannot alter the fact that God took you at your word when first you made yourself over to Him in a solemn act of dedication. Shall our want of faith make of no effect the faithfulness of God?

It is a fact that in Jesus Christ we are seated in heavenly places. We cannot alter this. We may not believe it, or avail ourselves of all the privileges which it implies, or enjoy the blessedness of nearness to Jesus; but such is, nevertheless, our rightful position in the divine order. If we are united with Jesus by the slenderest strand of faith, we are as much one with Him as the loftiest saints; and where the Head is, there is also the Body. In Him we died on the cross, and so met the righteous demands of the holy law. In Him we lay in the grave, and so passed out of the region ruled by the Prince of the Power of the air. In Him we rose and ascended far above all might and dominion, principality and power.

Is Satan under Christ's feet? In God's purpose he is under ours also. Are death and the grave for ever behind Christ? So, in God's purpose, we have passed to the Easter side of them both, and are to the windward of the storm. As far as their sting or terror is concerned they are like the Egyptians dead on the sea shore. Has the great High Priest passed through the heavens within the veil? So, in the purpose of God, we too have passed from the outer court into the Holy Place, where we offer gifts, sacrifices, supplications, and intercessions for all men.

All this may appear unreal and impossible, as the idea of being the bride of a prince to a poor Cinderella, but is nevertheless our true position. These are the facts of the eternal world, whether you avail yourself of them or not. There are not a few cases on record of slaves starving in bondage because they would not avail themselves of freedom; and of noblemen living a hard and difficult life because they would not claim their rights!

It is a fact that there is a share in the gift of Pentecost waiting for each member of Christ. He received gifts even for the rebellious. To each grace has been given. The promise of the Holy Ghost is to as many as the Lord our God shall call. Without doubt you have a share in that infilling, that divine unction, that marvelous power in service, which transformed the apostles from being timid sheep to lions in fight. You may never have put in your claim, but there is no grace that others have which you may not obtain. All things are yours. God has made over to you the unsearchable riches of Christ. Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man conceived, all the stores of grace and love and power which are yours in Christ, accumulating for you in the Divine Deposit Bank. It seems a thousand pities that you should live a beggar's life when such wealth and power are yours; but if you persist in doing so, your folly and blindness do not alter the fact that the fullness of God is yours in Christ.

These are some of those facts, made known to us in the Word of God, which will conduct us over the brook of turbid emotion to firm standing ground. Let us give up worrying about our faith, or feeling the pulse of emotion, and come to rest on them, assured that they are more stable than heaven or earth.

## FAITH

If you want a true faith, do not think about it, but look away to the facts of which we have been speaking. We find no difficulty in trusting our friends, because we open our hearts, like south windows, to their love. We recall all their interpositions in our behalf. We remember all they have promised and performed. Where would be our difficulty about faith if we ceased worrying about it, and were occupied with the object of faith--Jesus Christ our Lord?

Faith is more than Creed. In a creed we believe about a person or circumstance; but in faith we repose our trust upon a person. We must not believe about Christ only, but in Him, as Livingstone did, when on one occasion he was opposed at nightfall by an army of infuriated savages, and was tempted to steal away in the dark; but his eye lit on the promise, "I will be with you all the days," and he wrote, "I went to sleep because I knew it was the word of a perfect gentleman." Do not believe about Christ, but in Him.

Faith concerns itself with a person. We are saved and blessed by the faith that passes through the facts of our Saviour's life to Himself. We rest not on the atonement, but on Him who made it; not on the death, but on Him who died; not on the resurrection, but on Him who rose, ascended, and ever liveth to make intercession; not in statements about Him, but in Him of whom they are made.

Many a time the question is asked by the inquirer, "Have I the right kind of faith?" It is a needful question, because there is a dead and spurious faith which will fail us in the supreme crisis, as the badly-canned meats did the Arctic exploration party, who on returning to their heap of stores, found them useless, and starved.

There is one simple reply, "All faith that turns towards Jesus is the right faith." It may bring no conscious rapture. It may be as weak as the woman's touch on His garment's hem. It may be small and insignificant as a grain of mustard seed. It may be despairful as Peter's cry, "Lord, save, or I perish!"

But if its deepest yearning be Christ-Christ-Christ, it is the tiny thread which will bring the lost soul through subterranean passages, in which it had been well-nigh overwhelmed, into the light of life.

True Faith reckons on God's Faith. In earlier life I used to seek after greater faith by considering how great God was, how rich, how strong; why should He not give me money for His work, since He was so rich? Why not carry the entire burden of my responsibilities, since He was so mighty? These considerations helped me less, however, than my now certain conviction that He is absolutely faithful; faithful to His covenant engagements in Christ, faithful to His promises, and faithful to the soul that at His clear call has stepped out into any enterprise for Him. We may lose heart and hope, our head may turn dizzy and our heart faint, lover and friend may stand at a distance, the mocking voices of our foes suggest that God has forgotten or forsaken; but He abideth faithful, He cannot deny Himself, He cannot disown the helpless child whom He has begotten, because it ails. He cannot throw aside responsibilities He has assumed. He has made, and He must bear.

Oftentimes I have gone to God in dire need, aggravated by nervous depression and heart-sickness, and said, "My faith is flickering out. Its hand seems paralyzed, its eye blinded, its old glad song silenced forever. But Thou art faithful, and I am reckoning on Thee!" The soul loves to go behind the promises of God to Himself who made them, as the wife needs not quote the pledges made by her husband in the marriage-service when she is sure of him, and feels the pressure of his hand.

Do not trouble about your Faith; reckon on God's Faithfulness. If He bids you step out on the water, He knows that He can bring you safely back to the boat. When an Alpine guide takes you over a ragged piece of ice, he considers whether, in the event of your utter collapse, he is not able to carry you through by the strength of his iron grasp and sinewy frame. What iron is to the blood, that the thought of God's faithfulness is to faith. "Sarah ... received power ... since she counted him faithful who had promised" (Heb 11:11, ASV); Abraham "waxed strong through faith, giving glory to God" (Ro 4:20, ASV).

Faith bears Fruit. It cannot help it, because it links the soul with Christ, so that the energy of His life pours into it through the artery of faith, and, as it comes in, so it must make a way for itself out. Fruit is (so to speak) forced from the believing soul. Why does the lark sing? It cannot help it, because the spirit of spring has been poured into its heart. Why does the branch bear fruit? It cannot help it, because the life-forces are ever pouring up from the root. Why does a child run to meet its mother? It cannot help it, because its heart has imbibed her nature. So the believer, united to Christ, receives grace upon grace from His heart, and from the abundance of His indwelling his life speaks.

It is not difficult to obtain faith like this. Put your will on the side of Christ--not a passing wish, but the whole desire and choice of your being. Be willing to believe; or be willing to be made willing to believe. Lift your eyes toward Christ. If you cannot see Him, look toward the place where you think He is. Remind Him that He is the Author of faith, and that it is His gift. Claim it from Him, and reckon that in answer to your appeal He does confer this priceless boon. You may not feel faith, but you will find yourself unconsciously thinking of Christ, counting on Christ, going out toward Christ; and that engagement of the soul with Christ is faith.

Be careful of the tender plant which has thus been planted within you. Give it plenty of sunshine. Live outside yourself in the consideration of what Christ is. Feed faith on her native food of promise, and let her breathe her native air on the hills of communion.

Treat all suggestions of doubt as you would questions as to the fidelity of your dearest friend. Avoid the cold blast that sets in from skeptical books and talk. Be sure to live up to your highest conceptions of duty toward God and man. Your faith will be in exact proportion to your obedience. Inability to trust almost always denotes some failure to obey. If faith is faltering, ask yourself whether you have not dropped the thread of obedience, and go back to the place where you lost it. Christian (from Pilgrim's progress) could not face the lions till he had sorrowfully retraced his steps to the arbor where he slept and had recovered his roll.

Faith is pre-eminently the receptive faculty. It not only reckons that God gives, but it stretches out its hand to take. "As many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name" (John 1:12). We receive the at-one-ment from the Lord who died, and we receive the abundance of God's grace from the Lord who ever lives, so that we reign in this mortal life as we hope to reign when the heavens and earth have fled away, and there is no more sea to divide us from our beloved (Rom. 8 :17) . The beautiful garments are prepared, faith arrays herself in them. The armor hangs on the wall, faith girds herself in it. The water of life gushes at her feet, but faith catches it up, as did Gideon's three hundred men. Faith thus deals definitely with God. She does not simply see His gifts as the passer-by the jewels in the shop window, but she knows that all the regalia of God's kingdom are hers, and she takes them as she will. She hears the voice of her Father saying: "Thou art ever with Me, and all that I have is thine."

It was not enough that God should give the land of Canaan by promise and covenant to the chosen race. They had to go in to possess it, to put their foot down on its soil, to till its acres, and to live in its rich products. So it must be with the believer. He is first united with Jesus by a living faith, which rests in Him as Saviour, Friend, and King; then he reckons that the Son of God is well able to make him His joint-heir of all His boundless wealth, and, lastly, he learns the art of receiving and using the plenteous heritage, and year by year presses the fences of his possession farther back, taking in more and more of that vast extent of territory which has been assigned to him in Jesus.

Oh! Settler on the boundless continent of God's fullness in Jesus, get thee up into the high mountain. Look northward, southward, eastward and westward, over the lengths, and breadths, and depths, and heights of the love of God. It is all yours from the river of Time which rises at your foot to the utmost sea of Eternity. Be not slack to go up and possess the land, and to inherit all which God has freely bestowed on you in the Son of His love.

## FEELING

Our feelings are very deceptive, because so easily wrought on from without. They are affected by the state of our health, changes in the weather, the society or absence of those who love. When the air is light, and the sun shines, and we have slept well, we are more likely to feel disposed toward God than when the dripping November fog drenches the wood lands. The Father who made us and knows our frame, understands this; so much so, that when Elijah, after the strain of Carmel, his swift flight, and his disappointment at Jezebel's continued obduracy, threw himself beneath the juniper tree and asked for a swift death, God sent him sleep for his exhausted nervous system, and food for his hunger.

As a rule, Faith fruits in Feeling. "Being justified by faith, we have peace with God ... and not only so but we joy in God, through our Lord Jesus Christ. "Believing we rejoice with joy unspeakable, and full of glory." When the prodigal returned, the father bade them slay the fatted calf, saying: "Let us eat and be merry." There is relief from a heavy burden of sin, the ecstasy of pardon, the light of the Father's face, the sense of rightness, the calm outlook on the future. When the King comes to His own the bells ring out their peals on the waiting air, as though intoxicated with delight.

Happy and blessed feeling is the effect of the Spirit's work on the soul . "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace." He is the earnest of our inheritance, and though in our minority we cannot expect to enter on the fullness of our heritage, we are privileged to enjoy its first fruits. There are prelibations of the river of His pleasures, and stray notes from the full chorus of bliss. When the Holy Ghost reveals the Bridegroom, the loving heart is glad, even though the nuptials are not yet celebrated.

But the lack of feeling does not always indicate we are wrong. There may be causes, as we have seen, which account for our depression. It may be that Christ would teach us to distinguish between love and the emotion of love, between joy and the rapture of joy, between peace and the sense of peace. Or perhaps He may desire to ascertain whether we cling to Him for Himself or for His gifts.

Children greet their father from the window, as he turns the corner and comes down the street. He hears the rush of their feet along the hall as he inserts his key in the door. But one day he begins to question whether they greet him for the love they bear him or for the gifts with which he never forgets to fill his pockets. One day, therefore, he gives them due notice that there will be no gifts when he returns at night. Their faces fall, but when the hour of return arrives they are at the window as usual, and there is the same tramping of little feet to the door. "Ah," he says, "my children love me for myself," and he is glad.

Our Father sometimes cuts off the supply of joy, and suffers us to hunger, that He may know what is in our hearts, and whether we love Him for Himself. If we still cling to Him as Job did, He is glad, and restores comforts to His mourners with both hands.

Seek feeling, and you will miss it; be content to live without it, and you will have all you require. If you are always noticing your heart-beats, you will bring on heart disease. If you are always muffling against cold, you will become very subject to chills. If you are perpetually thinking about your health, you will induce disease. If you are always consulting your feelings, you will live in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is. He that saveth his soul shall lose it.

Be indifferent to emotion. If it is there, be thankful; if it is absent, go on doing the will of God, reckoning on Him, speaking well of Him behind His back, and, above all, giving no signs of what you are suffering, lest you be a stumbling block to others. Then joy will overtake you as a flood. He will make you sit at His table, and gird Himself to come forth and serve you.

## CAUTIONS

There are five concluding cautions for the culture of the devout life, attention to which will generally result in holy joy and peace.

### **1. We must be still before God.** (cf Psalm 46:10)

The life around us, in this age, is preeminently one of rush and effort. It is the age of the express train and telegraph. Years are crowded into months, and weeks into days. This feverish haste threatens the religious life. The stream has already entered our churches, and stirred their quiet pools. Meetings crowd on meetings. The same energetic souls are found at them all, and engaged in many good works beside. But we must beware that we do not substitute the active for the contemplative, the valley for the mountaintop. Neither can with safety be divorced from the other. The sheep must go in and out. The blood must come back to the heart to be recharged, and fitted to be impelled again to the extremities.

### **We must make time to be alone with God.**

The closet and the shut door are indispensable. We must lose the glare of the sunny piazza that we may see the calm angel-figures bending above the altar. We must escape the din of the world, to become accustomed to the accents of the still, small voice. Like David, we must sit before the Lord. Happy are they who have an observatory in their heart-house to which they can often retire beneath the great arch of Eternity, turning their telescope to the mighty constellations that turn beyond life's fever, and reaching regions where the breath of human applause or censure cannot follow!

It is only in such moments that the best spiritual gifts will loom in our vision, or we shall have grace to receive them. It is impossible to rush into God's presence, catch up anything we fancy, and run off with it. To attempt this will end in mere delusion and disappointment. Nature will not unveil her rarest beauty to the chance tourist. Pictures which are the result of a life of work do not disclose their secret loveliness to the saunterer down a gallery. No charter can be read at a glance. And God's best can be ours apart from patient waiting in His Holy presence. The superficial may be put off with a parable, a pretty story, but it is not given such to know the mysteries of the Kingdom of Heaven.

### **2. We must be possessed by an eager desire.**

There is a difference between wishing for a thing and willing it. In a single hour we may wish for a hundred differing objects, and forget them. But how different from this is the fixed determination, the settled purpose of the will!

The lad catches sight of some equipment for his fort, the student of a precious book, the lover of a jeweled ornament which he covets for the one he loves-and in each case the will is wrought upon till it resolves to acquire at any cost. Then privation and self-sacrifice and delay are cheerfully encountered. Nothing can extinguish or slacken the determination that follows hard after its quest. So with us. We must hunger and thirst; we must be possessed by strong and passionate desire; we must be resolved even to use violence to take the Kingdom of Heaven. The expressions of Scripture are all so tense--the heart pants for the water brooks; Jacob will not let the angel go; the widow troubles the unjust judge day and night. We too may have this strong desire if we will let the Spirit of God produce within our hearts. But the merchantman must be bent on seeking and finding the goodly pearl. We must strive to enter the strait gate. We must agonize (to use the Apostle's word) as the athlete for the crown.

### **3. We must have a promise in our hand. a**

This is the true method of dealing with God. Search the Bible for some Holy Word which exactly fits your case. It will not be hard to find one, since it abounds with personal incidents, culled from every conceivable variety of life. Then, when it has been discovered, and perhaps borne in on you by the divine Spirit, take it with you into the presence of God, or place your finger upon it as you pass into the presence-chamber with hushed and reverent step. The promises are our inventory of possession, and our need should make us look up for and claim the blessing intended to meet it.

## **SERMONS BY ROBERT MORGAN NEHEMIAH**

### **Whatever Happened To Integrity? Nehemiah 7:1-2**

September 13, 1998

This has been a traumatic week for the people of the United States, as the report of Independent Counsel Kenneth Starr has now been released to the Congress. It charges our president with possible impeachable offenses, and we do not yet know what the outcome will be. But as long as our nation endures, the events of the past several months will be analyzed by historians, politicians, and moralists, asking themselves how such a thing could possibly have happened. Today I'd like to suggest that the unfolding events in Washington should not surprise any of us, for they are but a reflection of the morality and mentality of our modern society and of our popular culture.

There is a lie going around the country today like a virulent disease: that what we are on the outside is what we are, that image is everything, that appearance is reality. And that philosophy reached its political apex in the American presidency of Bill Clinton. The word "spin-miester" has become a household term as White House agents work day and night to put their spin on events, to create perceptions and images and appearances, regardless of what the reality may be.

For example, we know who the President called for advice in the early stage of the Lewinsky matter, when the allegations first surfaced. It wasn't a minister or a moralist or an ethicist. It was a Hollywood television producer, his friend Harry Thomason, who came to the White House that very night. The two men walked about in the darkness on the White House grounds, discussing ways to create images, appearances, and impressions. And based on Thomason's advice, the president made his famous, forceful statement the next day, wagging his finger and saying passionately, "I did not have sexual relations with that woman, Miss Lewinsky." But we now know that his outward denials were at variance with his inward, secret conduct.

The purpose of my message this morning is not to bash or criticize the president, for in many ways I still have admiration for him, and the Bible says that we should respect those in authority over us. I don't want to be unkind, unforgiving, or disrespectful. But I do want to attack this venomous lie that what we are on the outside is what we are.

I recently heard of a mailing that went out to churches from an agency wanting to help churches with their advertising. The slogan said, "Let's face it: appearance is everything. Let us help you enhance your image."

That's the spirit of the age. You buy a house that has been finished out lavishly, with beautiful trim and carpets and wallpaper. But soon you discover that behind the external fixtures is shoddy workmanship and cheap materials.

You purchase a product that has been widely advertised to do this or that, only to discover that it doesn't live up to its promise. It was 90% hype and advertising.

Go through the supermarket checkout line and thumb through GQ or Cosmopolitan. It's all about cosmetics and clothes and the outward appearances of life.

Of course we want to take proper care of our appearance. There's no virtue in being dirty and disheveled. But do you remember what the Lord said to Samuel in the Old Testament, when Samuel was wondering which of Jesse's sons was to be anointed king of



Israel. The Lord said to Samuel, "Do not consider his appearance or his height, for... the Lord does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart."

Today I'd like to talk about the heart, about personal integrity, about what needs to be beneath the three-piece suit, behind the make-up--the reality behind the image. What kind of leaders do we need to have? And what kind of people do we need to be?

There is someone in the Bible you probably have never heard of. He is only given one verse in Scripture, and that one verse is in a seldom-read portion of Scripture. But it is one of those verses that says a mouthful, and I'd like for us to look at it this morning. It is in the book of Nehemiah. Nehemiah was a politician in the Persian empire, but he was a Jew and a godly man. While in the Persian capital, he heard that the city of Jerusalem was in sad shape, the walls broken down, the gates burned with fire, the people demoralized. Nehemiah personally traveled to Jerusalem with the king's assistance and mounted a great enterprise to rebuild the walls. Having accomplished the task, he needed good people and strong leaders in whose hands he could entrust the city. He found two men. One was his brother Hanani who would serve as mayor of the city. The other was this man Hananiah whom Nehemiah appointed as the military general to protect the city from its dangerous Palestinian neighbors.

After the wall had been rebuilt and I had set the doors in place, the gatekeepers and the singers and the Levites were appointed. I put in charge of Jerusalem my brother Hanani, along with Hananiah the commander of the citadel, because he was a man of integrity and feared God more than most men do (Nehemiah 7:1-2).

From this one verse, Nehemiah 7:3, we can learn the three qualities in Hananiah's life that made him a person Nehemiah could trust. These are the very same three qualities so needed today, 2400 years later.

We Understand God's Majesty So As To Fear Him

The verse says, "...he was a man of integrity and feared God more than most men do." He was living in a day and age in which few people were gripped by the fear of God. They lived as though God didn't even exist, as though God were sleeping or dead. But the Bible says:

- The eyes of the Lord are everywhere, keeping watch on the wicked and the good (Prov. 15:3).
- For the ways of man are before the eyes of the Lord, and He ponders all his paths (Prov. 5:21).
- For His eyes are on the ways of man, and He sees all his steps (Job 34:21).
- Does He not see my ways, And count all my steps (Job 31:4).
- The Lord is in his holy temple, the Lord's throne is in heaven; His eyes behold, his eyelids test the sons of men (Ps. 11:4).
- Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account (Heb. 4:13).
- For My eyes are on all their ways; they are not hidden from My face, nor is their iniquity hidden from My eyes. And first I will repay double for their iniquity and their sin, because they have defiled my land (Jer. 16:17).
- The Lord our God is righteous in all he does (Dan. 9:14).
- The Lord Almighty is the one you are to regard as holy, he is the one you are to fear, he is the one you are to dread (Is. 8:13).
- Who would not fear you, O Lord, and bring glory to your name? For you alone are holy (Rev. 15:4).

When the Bible says we are to fear the Lord, it does not mean we are to fear him as we fear something menacing, but as we fear something majestic. We aren't to fear God the way we fear a rapist or stalker or assassin; but the way we fear something that staggers and overwhelms us. When I was a boy, my parents took us to Niagara Falls. We rode the "Maid of the Mist" boat right out into the basin of the falls, and we also tramped down the steps to the edge of the bottom of the falls, and my dad even took me into the caves behind the falls where openings had been cut out. It is a terrifying thing to stand there, only inches from such power and from possible death, deafened by a thunderous roar, the ground trembling from 6 million cubic feet of water bursting over the falls every minute and falling 170 feet into the basin below.

If we feel that kind of fear and awe and excitement over a mere waterfall, how much more should we feel that way about the Lord who is a million times more powerful, a billion times more pure, and a trillion times more overwhelming and all-engulfing?

And it is that fear of God that keeps sin at bay in our lives. There is a very interesting verse in Exodus 20, when the Ten Commandments are given at Mount Sinai. The presence of God came down onto the mountain, with dark clouds and lightning bolts and deafening thunder and the piercing sound of a constant trumpet. The people were terrified and overwhelmed by it all, but Moses said to them, "Do you be afraid. God has come to test you so that the fear of God will keep you from sinning."

Compare that with Hananiah in Nehemiah 7:2—"he was a man of integrity and feared God more than most men do."

We Experience God's Grace So As To Be Saved

But there is something else in this verse, a little secret hidden away in the meaning of the Hebrew name Hananiah. Do you know what that name means? To the Hebrews, names were very significant, and they paid a lot of attention to the meaning of the titles by which they called one another. The name Hananiah means, "Jehovah is Gracious." It is a name that speaks of the grace of God. Hananiah is very much like our English words Hannah or Anna or Ann. It means one who is the recipient or beneficiary of God's Grace.

I told you a moment ago about my boyhood visit to Niagara Falls. I want to tell you about another boy, 7-year-old Roger Woodward, who visited the Falls a year or two before I did. A man from Niagara Falls, New York, took him and his 17-year-old sister on a boat ride on the Niagara River above the Falls. But boat developed motor trouble and capsized, and all three were thrown into the river.

The man went over the falls and was killed. Roger's sister was plucked from the river about 20 feet from the edge of the Falls by two tourists. But Roger went over the falls wearing nothing but his swimming suit and an orange life preserver. The "Maid of the Mist" tourist boat was just turning away from the Falls when the crew spotted him, floating in the basin. They pulled him from the water and rushed him to the hospital where he remained three days with a slight concussion and was released.

Thirty years passed and Roger Woodward returned to Niagara Falls to give his testimony at the Glengate Alliance Church. The audience was hushed as he told his miraculous story, the panic he felt as he drifted helpless toward the precipice, the anger he felt because no one on the shoreline could help him, the flashbacks he experienced as he inwardly said goodbye to his parents and his dog and his toys.

He said, "It wasn't the hand of fate (that saved me). It wasn't the hand of luck. It was the Spirit of the Living God that saved my life that day and saved my sister and gave us hope that one day we could come to know Him."

All of us are headed toward the thunderous, earth-shaking, terrifying cataract of God's judgment, but the nail-scarred hand of Jesus Christ can reach out, grab us in the grip of grace, and pluck us to safety.

We Must Then Exhibit Integrity In Life So As To Represent Him To The World

Now, let's put this all together. When we understand the majesty of God so as to fear Him more than most people, and when we experience his grace so as to be saved by his nail-pierced hand, we become people of integrity so as to represent Him to this world.

Hananiah, whose name spoke of the grace of God, feared God more than most people and was thus known as a man of integrity.

The word "integrity" is defined in the dictionary as "an unimpaired condition; soundness; firm adherence to a code of moral values; incorruptibility." This is a very important thing in the all-seeing eyes of God.

I Chronicles 29:17 says that God tests the heart and is pleased with integrity.

In 1 Kings 9, the Lord told the young, newly-anointed King Solomon, "As for you, if you walk before me in integrity of heart and uprightness, as David your father did, and do all I command and observe my decrees and laws, I will establish your royal throne over Israel forever."

Psalms 25 says that integrity and uprightness will protect us.

Proverbs 11:3 says, "The integrity of the upright guides them." And Proverbs 10:9 says, "The man of integrity walks securely, but he who takes crooked paths will be found out."

Jesus was described in Mark 12 as "a man of integrity" who wasn't swayed by men.

Integrity, first of all, implies honesty. Psalm 15:4 talks about the man who tells the truth and keeps his promises even when it hurts to do so. But Proverbs 28:13 says, "He who conceals his sins does not prosper, but whoever confesses and renounces them finds mercy." I want to read to you an e-mail we received this week. It is from a man I don't know, but we wrote back, answered his correspondence, and asked if we could share this letter. It said, Several months ago I did something wrong. As manager of a small business with responsibility for deposits, I forged some bogus checks and deposited them, taking the money out for myself. A few weeks later, ashamed of my behavior and feeling that I couldn't provide effective management anymore, I resigned. About a month later, the police called me in and I was arrested on 19 counts of forgery. I met with a lawyer and told him I was innocent and that this was a set up and he assured me he could get me out of it. As I sat in his office, though, I became physically ill from the lies I was telling him. I had recently begun praying and studying the Bible and had even signed up for Bible correspondence courses. I felt that I was betraying all that I was moving toward. I have a wife and children, and my wife is pregnant. My court date is next Thursday. I feel that I should tell my lawyer the truth and accept the consequences, but my family will be devastated if I'm sent to jail. I've never done anything like this before. I'm so scared. I'm so ashamed. Do you have any suggestions for what I should do?

Tell the truth, confess your sin, and start where you right now are to rebuild your life in Jesus Christ. Proverbs 28:13, again, says, "He who conceals his sins shall not prosper, but whoever confesses and renounces them finds mercy." The Bible says, "If we confess our sins he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and will cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

Perhaps someone here has lost your integrity. You have fallen into sin, and you're working so hard now to cover it up, to lie about it, to create a false appearance. You can't hide it from God. And you're so scared, you're so ashamed. Come clean with God.

## Verses That Have Helped Me In Preaching

**Nehemiah 8:8; 1 Samuel 17:38-39; Matthew 13:34; 1 John 2:20; Luke 6:45**

Some time ago I found a cache of old audiocassettes I'd recorded in college, some of them containing a handful of my earliest sermons. I took a deep breath and punched one into my player. As I listened, I was struck by three things: How good the content was (I realized my core message of the Victorious Life in Christ hasn't changed over the years), how terrible the delivery was, and how little I've improved!

Through the years, I've read book after book in an effort to become a better preacher, and maybe in reality I have gotten a little better. All the books have helped, as have the advice, the critics, the practice sessions, and the benefit of doing something several times a week, year after year. But one book has helped more than any other—the best homiletics text of them all—the Bible.

Tonight I'd like to share some verses that have helped me be a better preacher. I'm doing this for two reasons. First, it will help you understand the pulpit ministry of this church a little better; second, many of the things I've learned are transferable to you in your own professional or spiritual situation.

### **Nehemiah 8:8**

My favorite verse in all the Bible on the subject of preaching is Nehemiah 8:8. In this passage, the remnant of the Jews who had returned to Jerusalem assembled before the Water Gate for a service of reading and preaching the Word of God. Ezra the scribe stood on a high wooden platform built for the occasion (verse 4). Verse 5 says: Ezra opened the book. All the people could see him because he was standing above them; and as he opened it, the people stood up. Ezra praised the Lord, the great God; and all the people lifted their hands and responded, "Amen! 'Amen!'" Then they bowed down and worshipped the Lord with their faces to the ground. The Levites... instructed the people in the Law while the people were standing there.

And how did they do it? What was their method? How did they go about this craft of preaching? Verse 8 says: They read from the Book of the Law of God, making it clear and giving the meaning so that the people could understand what was being read.

In this instance, my favorite translation is the old King James: So they read in the book of the law of God distinctly, and gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading.

Ruth Bell Graham, when asked for advice about preaching, once said, "Preach expository sermons, keep them short, and use a lot of illustrations."

When I heard that as a newly-committed Christian I wasn't sure what expository sermons were, so I began doing some investigating. An exposition sermon, in its classic sense, is taking a paragraph of the Bible, reading it distinctly, giving the sense, and causing the people to understand it.

The early Bible translator William Tyndale wrote, "I had perceived by experience, how that it was impossible to establish the lay people in any truth, except the Scripture were plainly laid before their eyes in their mother tongue, that they might see the process, order, and meaning of the text..."

Why a paragraph? Because in literature the paragraph is the shortest segment of contextualized content. If you preach from only a verse, it is easy to take it out of context. You cannot accurately interpret a sentence or a verse of Scripture except with an awareness of its context, which is the paragraph in which it's contained. By exposing (giving exposition) the paragraph as a whole, we increase the likelihood of accurately interpreting and explaining the individual verses and sentences.

Why a paragraph instead of a chapter or a book? It's short enough to cover in a careful way. Through the years, I've primarily been a "paragraph preacher," for that lends itself to exposition, but I'm in the minority. Few preachers still embrace paragraph exposition as their "default" method of preaching, and many people in the pew do not have a clue as to what an expository sermon really is.

I remember when, in my first pastorate, I announced I was going to preach expository sermons. Afterward one of the men came to me very confused. He thought I'd said "Suppository sermons" and he wanted to know how I was going to deliver them!

Since then I've tried to use the term "Expositional Sermons."

How do we prepare an expositional sermon? No one has ever put it better than Stephen Olford, who divides the process into five steps. We must: (1) Memorize the Scripture; (2) Crystallize the Subject; (3) Analyze the Structure; (4) Organize the Substance; and (5) Finalize the Sermon.

Well, actually, one person did put it better than that. The writer of Nehemiah 8:8 said, So they read in the book of the law of God distinctly, and gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading. It's as simple as that.

### **1 Samuel 17:38-39**

Another passage that has helped me is 1 Samuel 17:38-39: Then Saul dressed David in his own tunic. He put a coat of armor on him and a bronze helmet on his head. David fastened on his sword over the tunic and tried walking around, because he was not used to them. "I cannot go in these," he said to Saul, "because I am not used to them." So he took them off. Then he took his staff in his hand, chose five smooth stones from the stream, put them in his shepherd's bag and, with his sling in his hand, approached the Philistine.

This has been one of my most difficult lessons, but I've slowly learned through the years that I cannot preach like any other person. I cannot preach using another's style or delivery. I have to be myself and do it the way that it comes naturally for me.

I don't know why this has been so hard; but I know that as a young man, both insecure and impressionable, I became a composite of the handful of preachers I most admired. I preached like whoever I'd heard most recently. Only slowly have I developed the ability of sliding off the armor of another and going forth with my own method and style of delivery.

One of the preachers I've appreciated through the years has been the Southern Baptist giant, W. A. Criswell. When he died recently, I saw an interview in which he told of his call to the First Baptist Church of Dallas. His predecessor, Dr. George Truett, a pulpit giant, had pastored that church for decades. No one thought that anyone could take Dr. Truett's place. But young W. A. Criswell came and led First Baptist into its greatest days.

In this interview, Dr. Criswell explained one reason why he had been successful. He said something to this effect: Dr. Truett was a proper and dignified preacher who quietly stood in the pulpit and, with well-modulated tones, delivered profound messages. Criswell then said, as I remember it, "When I came I was not at all like that. I screamed and shouted and hollered and waved my fists and

beat the pulpit. I'd ramble across the platform and down onto the floor. It wasn't a dignified "city" delivery, but one thing is for sure—no one ever accused me of being a 'Little Truett.' And that's why I lasted 48 years."

I hope there is never another preacher like me (a sentiment shared by others). Every preacher is an original. God has never been in the cloning business. Everyone and everything that He makes is unique. God has never made two snowflakes alike, or two planets, or two daffodils, or two preachers.

Of course, this presents a difficulty. How can we learn from others, how can we listen to them, how can we study them, how can we benefit from them without running the risk of unconsciously picking up their specific methods or mannerisms?

We must deliberately and consciously avoid any tendency toward imitating the style of another. I wish that early in my training someone had said to me, "Listen to the greatest preachers in the world, but make sure that you don't stylistically pattern yourself after them. Don't adopt their distinctive mannerisms, voice modulations, particular pronunciations, or characteristic phrases or gestures. By yourself!"

In his autobiography, hotelier Conrad Hilton told of being elected to the state legislature as a young man. He was nervous about giving his first speech, and he invested much time in study and practice, complete with pre-planned dramatic gestures. One evening, his mother overheard him practicing as, with a flourish, he ended with a dramatic recitation of "The Charge of the Light Brigade," hands flying through the air like trapezes.

"Very nice," she replied, "for poetry. But... you'll have to unlearn all this."

"But Mother," he protested. He reminded her that all the great speakers of the day were filled with rhetoric and oratory.

"Connie," she replied, "all those trimmings are sinful. You are hiding yourself behind a lot of gestures. If you're afraid to be you, son, you're throwing dust in God's face. He made you. If you have confidence in Him, you'll relax and be just what you are. You'd do better to pray about it than to practice this." Whereupon she walked off with his oratory textbook.

Hilton later said, "On the opening day of the legislature, I did pray about it. I faced the crowd, kept my hands at my side and my mouth in a normal line, and said simply what I had to say and sat down. It worked out very well that day. It has ever since. And any time, if I've been tempted to phony it up a bit, I remember that that's lack of confidence in Him, and I'll look pretty silly throwing dust in the face of the Infinite."

May God give us all such mothers, wives, friends, or critics.

Our preaching should not be unlike our natural conversation. In his book, *A Preacher's Life*, the old British pulpiter, Joseph Parker, told of a beloved preacher of his era, a man named Norman Macleod, who was older and somewhat of a mentor. Dr. Parker, 32 at the time, asked the venerable Dr. Macleod to come to his church in Manchester and preach one Sunday. That morning when Dr. Macleod opened the vestry door and saw the great size of the building, he stepped back into the vestry and said, "In what tone must I speak in order to fill that space?" Parker replied, "Adopt a conversational base, and rise and fall just as you feel your sentiment requires." Later, in recalling the sermon, Dr. Parker said, "The great man talked to us, talked straight into our hearts."

"Preaching," said Joseph Parker, "should be conversation at its best."

Charles Spurgeon said the same thing to his students: "Just go into the pulpit, and talk to the people as you would in the kitchen, or the drawing-room, and say what you have to tell them in your ordinary tone of voice.... Nothing can succeed with the masses except naturalness and simplicity."

Now, of course, there is considerable difference between having a discussion with two people and presenting a discourse to two hundred or two thousand. But, in general, one's preaching style should not be too different from his or her conversational style, and a conversational sort of delivery, it seems to me, is always the most natural.

I can improve, of course. I can grow. I can get better. I can mature. But I can't be someone that God didn't intend me to be. I need to like myself and to be confident in the gifts and personality and preaching style that God has built into me. We've got to be natural in the pulpit. If a person seldom gestures in normal everyday conversation, you probably wouldn't expect many gestures in the pulpit.

Or vice versa. There's a story about an old Jewish peddler who was ambling down a street in Tel Aviv carrying two large watermelons. A tourist stopped him to ask, "Where is Ben Yehuda Street?" The peddler answered, "Please hold these two watermelons." The tourist managed to get them in his arms, and that allowed the peddler to make an expansive gesture with his hands and exclaim, "How should I know?"

Acts 26:1 in the Living Bible says, Then Agrippa said to Paul, "Go ahead. Tell us your story." So Paul, with many gestures, presented his defense...

Fight in your own armor, preach in your own style, and be an original. That's the only kind of effective preachers there are.

### **Matthew 13:34**

There is one preacher, however, whom we should emulate. Matthew 13:34 says: Jesus spoke all these things to the crowd in parables; He did not say anything to them without using a parable.

There are three good reasons to season one's sermons with parables, stories, and illustrations. First, they wake up people who have drifted off during the more didactic portions of the message. Second, they keep children tuned in. Third, illustrations enable people to see the practicality of what is being preached. Through the use of stories, illustrations, and quotes people see themselves as in a mirror and are better able to personalize the truth of Scripture.

Spurgeon said: "Don't forget to give them a few anecdotes. Anecdotes are very much objected to by critics of sermons, who say

they ought not be used in the pulpit. But some of us know better than that; we know what will wake a congregation up.”

### 1 John 2:20

There is an old word, disdained by newer translators and ignored in homiletics books, but beloved in olden days. The King James rendering of 1 John 2:20 says: But ye have an unction from the Holy One. The Greek word, *chrisma* (*chrisma*, *khris'-mah*) literally means an unguent (ointment) or smearing; it conveyed the idea of rubbing an ointment into the skin. In terms of preaching, it is a special anointing of the Holy Spirit on the message and on the messenger of God, the power, the life-transforming endowment, the unction.

“This divine unction,” writes E. M. Bounds, “is the feature which separates and distinguishes true gospel preaching from all other methods of presenting the truth and which creates a wide spiritual chasm between the preacher who has it and the one who has it not.”

Bounds devotes a chapter in his classic *Preacher and Prayer* to this subject, pointing out that earnestness is often mistaken for unction. “Earnestness and unction look alike from some points of view.... Earnestness may be sincere, serious, ardent, and persevering. It goes at a thing with good will, pursues it with perseverance, and urges it with an ardor; puts force in it. But all these forces do not rise higher than mere human effort....”

Unction, on the other hand, “...is the sweetest exhalation of the Holy Spirit. It impregnates, suffuses, softens, percolates, cuts, and soothes. It carries the Word like dynamite, like salt, like sugar; makes the Word a soother, an arraigner, a revealer, a searcher; makes the hearer a culprit or a saint, makes him weep like a child and live like a giant.”

Genuine unction, says Bounds, “comes to the preacher not in the study but in the closet.”

### Luke 6:45

Finally, I've recently taken Luke 6:45 as my golden rule of preaching: Out of the overflow of his heart his mouth speaks. In other words, preaching is overflow. I shouldn't go to the Bible looking for sermons; I go for my own refreshment, enjoyment, and benefit. I drink from on rivers of God as recorded in His revelation, and the congregation gets the overflow. This is Psalm 23 preaching, when our cup overfloweth.

The other day during my quiet time, I found two verses I'd never before connected. In John 4:14 Jesus told the Samaritan woman, “...whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water, welling up to eternal life.”

Sometime later, Jesus added to His metaphor: “Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him” (John 7:38). The water of life wells up within us, then spills over and becomes rivers of living water, irrigating and refreshing a drought-stricken world. That is preaching!

Paul loved this concept of the overflowing life:

- For if the many died by the trespass of the one man, how much more did God's grace and the gift that came by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, overflow to the many!—Romans 5:15
- May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit—Romans 15:13
- For just as the sufferings of Christ flow over into our lives, so also through Christ our comfort overflows...—2 Corinthians 1:5
- All this is for your benefit, so that the grace that is reaching more and more people may cause thanksgiving to overflow to the glory of God—2 Corinthians 4:15
- so that through my being with you again your joy in Christ Jesus will overflow on account of me—Philippians 1:26
- overflowing with thankfulness—Colossians 2:6
- May the Lord make your love increase and overflow for each other and for everyone else, just as ours does for you—1 Thessalonians 3:12

As it relates to preaching, this is beautifully expressed in Francis Ridley Havergal's 1872 hymn, the prayer of all who wish to be expositional, natural, illustrative, anointed, and overflowing bearers of the Word:

Lord, speak to me that I may speak  
In living echoes of Thy tone;  
As Thou has sought, so let me seek  
Thine erring children lost and lone.  
O lead me, Lord, that I may lead  
The wandering and the wavering feet;  
O feed me, Lord, that I may feed  
Thy hungering ones with manna sweet.  
O teach me, Lord, that I may teach  
The precious things Thou dost impart;

And wing my words, that they may reach  
The hidden depths of many a heart.  
O fill me with Thy fullness, Lord,  
Until my very heart overflow  
In kindling thought and glowing word,  
Thy love to tell, Thy praise to show.  
O use me, Lord, use even me,  
Just as Thou wilt, and when, and where,  
Until Thy blessed face I see,  
Thy rest, Thy joy, Thy glory share.

## OUR DAILY DEVOTIONS

### Nehemiah 8:18

Also day by day, from the first day until the last day, he read from the Book of the Law of God. And they kept the feast seven days; and on the eighth day there was a sacred assembly, according to the prescribed manner. Nehemiah 8:18 (NKJV)

We're in a series of messages on the day-by-day passages of the Bible, because Christianity is a daily thing—a 24/7 lifestyle—and we have to take it day-by-day, step-by-step, and moment-by-moment. Today we're coming to the subject of our daily spiritual diet, and I'd like to show you the context for today's primary verse.

Nehemiah 8 is one of the most wonderful stories from the history of ancient Israel—and there are some great verses for us to carry with us all week. In this particular chapter, the nation of Israel had returned to its ancestral homeland to begin rebuilding their towns and cities following the Babylonian invasion.

They worked very hard and long to rebuild the temple, to rebuild the walls, to rebuild their homes, and to reestablish their nation. In chapter 8 they paused to have a holiday, and they all gathered together for an old-fashioned Bible conference. Look at the way the chapter begins:

Now all the people gathered together as one man in the open square that was in front of the Water Gate...

This was a public square on the hilly east side of Jerusalem just down the mountain from the Temple site. Here they gathered...

...and they told Ezra the scribe to bring the Book of the Law of Moses, which the Lord had commanded Israel.

This is referring to the first five books of the Bible, the Torah, the books of Moses.

So Ezra the priest brought the Law before the assembly of men and women and all who could hear with understanding on the first day of the seventh month. Then he read from it in the open square that was in front of the Water Gate from morning until midday, before the men and women and those who could understand; and the ears of all the people were attentive to the Book of the Law.

The passage goes on to describe how Ezra had built a stage or a platform, and on this platform sat the elders of Israel, and there was a pulpit or a table for the Scroll of the Law of God, and Ezra read to the people what God had told them long ago. For them, it was as though they were hearing it for the first time.

And Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people, for he was standing above all the people; and when he opened it, all the people stood up. And Ezra blessed the Lord, the great God. Then all the people answered, "Amen, Amen!" while lifting up their hands. And they bowed their heads and worshipped the Lord with their faces to the ground.

Verse 8 describes how Ezra presented the Scriptures to them, and I consider this the Bible's most definitive and descriptive word about the activity of preaching:

So they read distinctly from the book, in the Law of God; and they gave the sense, and helped them to understand the reading.

The interesting thing to me is that as the people heard the Word of God, they began to cry. Weeping was heard, and the sounds of sorrow filled the air. I suppose the people were realizing how sinful they were in the light of God's holiness, how much they had lost through their disobedience, how tragic had been their national history because of the stubbornness of their forbearers. Perhaps some were weeping because their hearts had been so hungry for hearing the Law. But look at what Ezra said to them:

And Nehemiah, who was the governor, Ezra the priest and scribe, and the Levites who taught the people said to all the people, "This day is holy to your God; do not mourn or weep." For all the people wept, when they heard the words of the Law.

Then he said to them, "Go your way, eat the fat, drink the sweet, and send portions to those for whom nothing is prepared; for this day is holy to our Lord. Do not sorrow, for the joy of the Lord is your strength."

What a wonderful verse that is! It's the attitude of joy that gives us the enthusiasm, the morale, the strength, and the vigor for each and every day.

So the Levites quieted all the people, saying, "Be still, for the day is holy; do not be grieved." And all the people went their way to eat and drink, to send portions and rejoice greatly, because they understood the words that were declared to them.

The next day, the Bible conference continued, and they came to the passage in the law that described the Feast of Tabernacles. Moses had commanded the people to have an annual holiday in which everyone made little huts and tents out of tree branches and, in essence, everyone went camping. This was to remind the people and to teach the children about the years in which the Israelites lived in tents and traveled through the wilderness toward the Promised Land.

There in Jerusalem on that day, the Israelites realized they had not been keeping this festival. In fact, during the whole of the history of Israel, this festival had not been observed in a consistent way. And they decided they would just do it then and there, and so everyone went out and built little huts and tents—you can imagine how much fun this was for all the children—and they spontaneously observed the Feast of Tabernacles.

Now on the second day the heads of the fathers' houses of all the people, with the priests and Levites, were gathered to Ezra the scribe, in order to understand the words of the Law. And they found written in the Law, which the Lord had commanded by Moses, that the children of Israel should dwell in booths during the feast of the seventh month, and that they should announce and proclaim in all their cities and in Jerusalem, saying, "Go out to the mountain, and bring olive branches, branches of oil trees, myrtle branches, palm branches, and branches of leafy trees, and make booths, as it is written."

Then the people went out and brought them and made themselves booths, each one on the roof of his house or in their courtyards or in the courts of the house of God, and in the open square of the Water Gate and in the open square of the Gate of Ephraim. So the whole assembly of those who had returned from the captivity made booths and sat under the booths; for since the days of Joshua the son of Nun until that day the children of Israel had not done so. And there was very great gladness.

And that's when we come to this wonderful verse that is today's text:

Also day by day, from the first day until the last day, he read from the Book of the Law of God. And they kept the feast seven days; and on the eighth day there was a sacred assembly, according to the prescribed manner.

For me, the most wonderful aspect of this is the daily impact of God's sustaining Word. Some people have called this "Manna in the Morning," because the children of Israel went out day-by-day to gather manna in the wilderness. Acts 17 tells about the people of Berea who searched the Scriptures daily. The Psalmist tells us to meditate on God's word day and night. Proverbs 8:34 says, "Blessed is the person who listens to me, watching daily at my gates, waiting at the posts of my doors."

What I want to tell you today is that day-by-day the Lord has a specific verse or word for you, and our greatest job and our greatest joy is finding it each morning or each evening, as your schedule may demand.

I'd like to read you something written by the great 19th-century humanitarian and Christian, George Mueller. This paragraph has been widely quoted and re-quoted by Christians around the world for many years, but it still bears repeating. I remember the first time I ever read it; it was years ago in Decision Magazine, where it had been reprinted. As I read it, it made so much sense to me and changed the way in which I thought about my daily Bible reading. Muller wrote:

It has recently pleased the Lord to teach me a truth... the benefit of which I have not lost.... I saw more clearly than ever that the

first great and primary business to which I ought to attend every day was to have my soul happy in the Lord. How different, when the soul is refreshed and made happy early in the morning....

The first thing to be concerned about was not how much I might serve the Lord, how I might glorify the Lord; but how I might get my soul into a happy state, and how my inner man might be nourished....

Before this time, my practice had been... as a habitual thing to give myself to prayer, after having dressed myself in the morning. Now, I saw that the most important thing I had to do was to give myself to the reading of the word of God, and to meditation on it, that thus my heart might be comforted, encouraged, warned, reproved, instructed; and that thus, by means of the word of God, whilst meditating on it, my heart might be brought into... communion with the Lord....

The first thing I did, after having asked in a few words the Lord's blessing upon his precious word, was, to begin to meditate on the word of God, searching as it were into every verse, to get blessing out of it; not for the sake of the public ministry of the word, not for the sake of preaching on what I had meditated upon, but for the sake of obtaining food for my own soul.

The result I have found to be almost invariably this, that after a very few minutes my soul has been led to confession, or to thanksgiving, or to intercession, or to supplication; so that, though I did not, as it were, give myself to prayer, but to meditation it turned almost immediately more or less into prayer....

The result of this is... that my inner man almost invariably is... nourished and strengthened, and... by breakfast time, with rare exceptions, I am in a peaceful if not happy state of heart....

It often now astonishes me that I did not sooner see this point. In no book did I ever read about it. No public ministry ever brought the matter before me. No private intercourse with a brother stirred me up to this matter. And yet now, since God has taught me this point, it is as plain to me as anything, that the first thing the child of God has to do morning by morning is, to obtain food for his inner man.

My own practice is to read through the Bible at my own pace. Every morning I start where I left off the day before. I started reading the Bible through again at the beginning of last year, and right now I'm in this book Nehemiah; so you see I'm just sort of taking my time at it. Each morning I may read a paragraph, I might read a chapter; I might read two or three chapters. I may take two or three years to read all the way through to Revelation, but I just take my time, asking God to give me day by day those verses I need every morning. I also have a couple of devotional books I read, and if I don't find a verse that speaks to me in my regular reading, I see if the Lord has one there. If I still don't find a verse for the day there, I review my favorite Scriptures. If I still don't find one, I know that my heart is so dull and resistant that I need to drop everything else and rest and divert myself and get myself straightened out. When we lose our appetites, it's generally a sign of sickness, and the same is true for our appetite for the word of God. Sometimes the best antidote is a biography or autobiography of a Christian or of a missionary.

Several years ago when I was working on a particular book, one of my editors told me I had too many missionary stories in it, and I guess he was right. But some of the most interesting books I've ever read have been missionary biographies, and there's one story that stands out as my favorite, and I'd like to end today's message by telling it to you. It has to do with Dick and Margaret Hillis who were missionaries to China in the days just before World War II. It was a very dangerous time because of the Japanese invasion of China, and by January of 1941, the Japanese army had penetrated deep into the inland provinces of China and was approaching the city of Shenkiu where Dick and Margaret and their two small children were located. It was an extremely dangerous time, because while the Chinese were at risk, foreigners—especially Americans—were special targets.

Reports were constantly coming in of the Japanese advance, and the Chinese nationalist troops seemed unable to stop the invasion. It was right at that moment that Dick Hillis awoke in the middle of the night with searing pain in his stomach. It was his appendix, and he knew that if it ruptured in his town there was nothing that could save him. He would have to make a long and difficult trip by rickshaw to the nearest mission hospital, but to do so would leave Margaret and the children alone to face the onslaught of the Japanese troops.

There seemed to be no choice, and Dick was doubled over in pain as he got in the rickshaw for the 115-mile trip over rutted roads to the hospital, not knowing if he would survive the trip or if his family would survive the invasion.

Margaret saw him off, knowing it would be weeks before she would know of his condition. There was little she could do except work and wait and watch and pray. She noted the date on the wall calendar—January 15th. Going into the kitchen, she began to boil some milk for the children, trying to keep herself busy so as not to worry as much.



Just then the gatekeeper of the mission compound entered and announced the arrival of a guest, his Excellency the colonel. Into the room came the commanding officer of the defending Nationalist troops. He said, "The enemy is advancing in Honan Province, and we have orders not to defend this city. For your own safety you should find refuge in one of the villages away from the city."

Margaret absorbed the news, thanked him, and as he left an icy gust of winter wind whipped into the house. Suddenly the enormity of her danger came over her. She was defenseless, facing a brutal invading army, alone in the interior of China with a one-year-old son and a two-month-old daughter.

The city began evacuating, and by mid-afternoon many people had already left. The church elders came calling on Margaret, saying, "Come with us. We'll take care of you while Pastor Hillis is away." But Margaret had been in China long enough to know that western babies die very quickly in the country homes of Chinese peasants. She had seen it happen many times, and in the dead of winter she knew that becoming a refugee with a one-year-old and a two-month-old would be a death sentence for her children. She decided that her warm kitchen where she could boil the milk and care for her little ones was safer for her children, even under these circumstances.

But that night she went to bed trembling with fear and all night long she was terrified, not knowing if a band of brutal soldiers would burst into her house in the darkness. Finally the sun came up, and Margaret rose out of bed into the freezing chill of morning to warm the house and start the water boiling for the baby's bottle. Automatically she reached up to the wall calendar and tore off yesterday's date. It was a Scripture calendar with a verse for every day, and the Scripture verse for this new day was Psalm 56:3: What time I am afraid, I will trust in Thee.

That verse stopped Margaret in her tracks. "Well, I certainly am afraid," she said. "I fulfill that part of the verse! Now indeed is the time to trust God." And somehow that promise from the Bible sustained her all day and gave her peace and courage. Throughout that day, the city continued to empty as residents became refugees and rumors swirled of the approaching army. Other church members tried to invite Margaret to go with them, but she knew as well as she was standing there that her babies would not survive, yet she did not panic. She trusted.

The next day she awoke to find the entire city virtually deserted. Finally the caretaker of the missions compound came to her with tears in his eyes and said, "I must leave." He begged her to come with him to his village beyond the city. She was tempted, but still felt her place was to stay, and with a heavy heart she watched him disappear through the door and out of the compound.

It was mid-morning before she remembered to pull the page off the wall calendar, and the Scripture verse for the new day was Psalm 9:10: And they that know Thy name will put their trust in Thee: for Thou, Lord, hast not forsaken them that seek Thee.

Margaret claimed that verse and clung to it throughout the day. Her most immediate concern was food. Fresh meat and produce was no longer available, and while the goats were still in the compound, the man who milked them had fled. As she went to bed that night, she wondered how she would feed her children the next day, and she slept uneasily, listening for the sounds of the coming invasion.

The next morning she was awakened by the sounds of distant gunfire. She knew that she had to go out and try to milk those goats before things grew worse, but she was worried about getting enough milk and enough other nourishment for her children. She reached up and pulled the old page from the calendar. The new verse stared down from the wall at her like God's handwriting. It was Genesis 50:21: I will nourish you, and your little ones. It was such a specific and timely and personal word that Margaret took the calendar off the wall and looked at the back of it to see where it had come from. It had been put together in England the year before, but God in His omniscient and loving foreknowledge, had selected the specific words she needed. A few moments later, a woman unexpectedly walked into her kitchen, carrying a steaming pail of goat's milk. It was a neighboring widow who had decided to stay in the city with Margaret. She had already milked the goats, later she found some eggs. Another woman came unexpectedly with some chickens.

That night, Margaret was still reveling in God's ability to promise and to provide, but the invading forces were clearly drawing nearer, because they could hear the canons and gunfire, and shells were bursting in the air. It was hard to sleep.

The next morning, Margaret jumped out of bed and went straight to the wall calendar and tore off the old day. This verse for the new day was Psalm 56:9: When I cry unto Thee, then shall mine enemies turn back; this I know; for God is with me.

It was almost too pointed and too specific to claim, yet it perfectly met her needs. Throughout the day, as the sounds of war grew louder and came closer, Margaret prepared her house for invasion. Any papers that might be construed as having military or political significance were hidden or destroyed, and she searched through the compound for anything that might cause problems if discovered. As night fell, the sounds of invasion were so close and so alarming that the women went to bed dressed, prepared at any moment for the Japanese troops. Somehow at some point during the night she drifted into sleep, and when she awoke the next morning she was startled at the silence. There was no tramping feet, no shells exploding. She awoke the woman staying with her, and they got the children from the cribs, wrapped them up, and ventured to the gate of the compound. There was no one in the streets. Nothing but an eerie stillness.

Suddenly there were footsteps, and the Chinese Colonel appeared. "Pastor's wife," he said with relief, "I have been concerned about you!" He told her that the Japanese had withdrawn. There was no known reason for it; the enemy had just turned back, as Psalm 56 had promised. And Margaret Hillis knew that day by day she had been reading God's handwriting on the wall, day by day He had sustained her with His precious and powerful promises. (Adapted from Jan Winebrenner, *Steel in His Soul: The Dick Hillis Story*(Chicago: Moody Press, 1985), chapter 10.)

The book of Deuteronomy says, "Man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God."

Joshua said, "This book of the Law shall not depart out of your mouth, but you shall meditate in it day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written therein, for then you shall make your way prosperous and successful."

The Psalmist said, "The entrance of Thy Words gives light."

The writer of Proverbs told us to treasure His commandments within us.

Jesus said, "Search the Scriptures for they speak of me."

Paul said, "Continue in the things that you have learned and become convinced of, knowing from whom you have learned them; and how from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures that are able to make you wise unto salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness."

Peter said that God has given us exceeding great and precious promises by which we can participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption that is in the world.

The hymnist prayed:

Break Thou the bread of life, dear Lord, to me,  
As Thou didst break the loaves beside the sea;  
Beyond the sacred page I seek Thee, Lord;  
My spirit pants for Thee, O living Word!

There's still time for you to establish a New Year's resolution, to seek the Lord each day through prayer and daily Bible study. God has a word for you, too, just as specific as handwriting on the wall, and our great job and joy is to discover His promises and His truths for the nourishment and sustaining of our own souls, and to do it day by day by day

## NEHEMIAH 8:10

Joy Dramatically Increases Our Energy

Do not grieve, for the joy of the Lord is your strength (NIV).

In Nehemiah 8, the prophet Ezra called together the remnant of exiles who had returned and rebuilt the temple, and he built a platform on which he stood so that everyone could see him, and from there he read from the Scriptures. Verse 8 says that he read from the book of the law distinctly, gave the sense, and caused the people to understand the reading. When the people heard the words of the law, they wept and they were grieved. But Ezra told them to stop their grieving. He said, "Go enjoy yourselves. Eat and drink and observe this as a happy, holy day; for the joy of the Lord is your strength."

It reminds me of something Francis Schaffer once said, that God intends for Christianity to be fun! Do not grieve, for the joy of the Lord is our strength. Joy is the power plant of the Christian life. It produces energy. It generates a constant stream of strength. When you have the joy of the Lord in you, you can keep on going; you're a much stronger person. You're stronger emotionally. You're stronger spiritually. You're even stronger physically and mentally. The joy of the Lord infuses you with strength.

Psalm 100

Joy Completely Transforms our Worship

But not only does it improve our relationships and increase our strength; it completely transforms our worship. Look at Psalm 100:1: Make a joyful noise unto the Lord, all ye lands (KJV). When we worship with enthusiasm and sing with vigor and even clap our hands and have a sense of gladness to our worship—well, don't you think that what you think it means to make a joyful noise unto the Lord?

The next sentence says: Serve the Lord with gladness—joy! If we make FAITH visits, it should be with joy. If we watch children in the nursery or minister to preschoolers, it should be with joy. If we sing in the choir, we should have a joyful expression on our face.

If we wash the dishes at home or vacuum the living room, we should do it with joy, for even the simplest acts of life are done as unto the Lord. Joy is to our daily Christian duties what blossoms are to a rose bush or what a flag is to a flagpole.

We're to serve the Lord all right; but we aren't just to serve Him with any old attitude we happen to feel. We aren't to serve Him with weariness or drudgery or worry or anger—we're to serve Him with joy.

Do you know that this same truth—which is stated here in the positive—is stated in the negative in Deuteronomy 28:47: Because you did not serve the Lord your God with joy and gladness of heart for the abundance of everything, therefore you shall serve your enemies, whom the Lord will send against you....

How terrible to serve the Lord with any other attitude than a continual source and supply of joy! Not only that, but joy bears us through tough times.

James 1:2

Joy Bears Us Through Tough Times

My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience.

Joy doesn't leave the room when trouble enters. In fact, that's just when joy digs in his heels and takes a stand.

In this verse, the word "count" here is a financial term that means to "evaluate." One of the disciplined habits of faith is that of choosing to look at life's trials in a different sort of way. James begins his book, his epistle, by telling us that if we're encountering various trials, the Lord wants to use those in our lives to develop toughness and faith and perseverance and character and quality. He's going to lead us out of our troubles, but leave behind a deeper reservoir of faith and character—and so by faith we can be cheerful even in trials and count it all joy even when circumstances are not as we would wish.

One of the men I most admire reading about was a leader in the Salvation Army many years ago whose name was Samuel Logan Brengle, and whose writings on holiness are still to this day considered classics on the subject. Late in his life, Brengle's health began to fail. He had always be strong and vigorous, but now he faced a multitude of problems, including failing eyesight and hearing and a weakened heart. But do you know what his attitude was? Writing to a friend, he said: My old eyes get dimmer. The specialist says the light will fade altogether. So I gird myself for darkness, quote James 1:2-4, shout Hallelujah and go on!

That's what Christians do; and that's what it means to count it all joy. We quote James 1:2-4, shout Hallelujah, and go on. I know that many of you are struggle with very deep problems. I know because you tell me; and I'm so thankful that you confide in me. I know about your husband or wife who has left you with the children, about the loss you've suffered, about your financial pressures, about this family crisis you're going through, about your grief and loneliness.

Those are tough realities, but they are not a reason to lose your joy; they are the very reason you should choose joy. You need the strength that joy provides. You need the inner resources of the Holy Spirit. You need the radiance that comes from Christ Himself. You need to remember to make a joyful noise before the Lord and to serve the Lord with gladness. You need to remember that in His presence is fulfilling joy, and that you can even count it all joy when you fall into diverse trials, for the joy of the Lord is your strength, and the fruit of the Spirit is joy.

So choose joy. It improves our personalities, increases our energy, transforms our worship, and bears us through difficulties. It is

joy unspeakable and full of glory. It's the willingness to say:

Joyful, joyful we adore Thee,  
God of glory, Lord of love;  
Hearts unfold like flowers before Thee,  
Opening to the sun above.  
Melt the clouds of sin and sadness,  
Drive the dark of doubt away.  
Giver of immortal gladness,  
Fill us with the light of day.