

Nehemiah Devotionals-Ray Stedman

Nehemiah Devotionals by Ray Stedman

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Nehemiah: Principles of Reconstruction

Introduction Ray Stedman

The Old Testament book of Nehemiah, along with Ezra and Esther, covers the period after the Babylonian captivity when Israel had returned to Jerusalem and had begun again the worship of Jehovah in the restored temple. Ezra, the priest, led an early return to Israel and restored worship in the rebuilt temple in Jerusalem. Nehemiah, who was a contemporary of Ezra, led a later return. Nehemiah was a layman, a butler to the Persian emperor, Artaxerxes I. Persia is now the modern nation of Iran.

Nehemiah is the historic account of the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem, which took place in the fifth century before Christ. But Nehemiah did more than rebuild a wall. This book is also the story of restoring a people from ruin and despair to a new walk with God. Jerusalem is not only an historic city that for centuries has been the center of the life of the nation of Israel (and, in fact, the center of the biblical record), it is also a symbolic city. Jerusalem is also used in a pictorial sense throughout the Scriptures. What it pictures is the place where God desires to dwell. When God first designated to King David that Jerusalem was the place where He wanted him to build the temple, he was told that this was the place where God would dwell among His people. However, it is only a picture--it is not the actual place where God dwells--for, according to the New Testament, people are to be the dwelling place of God. God seeks to dwell in the human spirit. That is the great secret that humanity has largely lost today but which New Testament Christianity seeks to restore. Paul's great statement in the letter to the Colossians is, "Christ in you, the hope of glory" (Colossians 1:27). This is God's provision and desire for us.

Jerusalem-in-ruins, therefore, is a picture of a life that has lost its defenses against attack and lies open to repeated hurt and misery. The book of Nehemiah depicts the way of recovery from breakdown and ruin to a condition of peace, security, restored order, and usefulness.

This introduction was inspired by one of Ray's sermons. Please read [Nehemiah: Rebuilding the Walls](#) (or listen to the audio file) for more on this portion of scripture.

Nehemiah 1:1-3

Broken Walls, Broken Lives

The wall of Jerusalem is broken down, and its gates have been burned with fire (Nehemiah 1:3b)

Notice the description of Jerusalem. The people were in trouble and were feeling a great sense of disgrace and reproach. The walls of the city were broken down. The gates had been burned with fire and were no longer usable.

If we take Jerusalem as a symbol of our own lives, there are many of us who fit this description. You look back on your life, and you see there are places where the walls have been broken down. There is no longer any ability left to resist destructive attacks. You have fallen victim to sinful habits that you now find difficult to break. That is the kind of ruin that is described here.

Perhaps you have gone along with the ways of the world. You have fallen into practices that the Bible says are wrong, and you know they are wrong. But you have difficulty stopping them. Perhaps your drift began innocently. You did not realize you were forming a

habit, but now you no longer can stop it. Your defenses are gone. The walls of your city are broken down, and perhaps your gates are also burned. Gates are ways in and out. They are the way by which other people get to know you as you really are. Perhaps your gates have been destroyed by wrong habits.

Perhaps you were abused as a child. This phenomenon seems to be surfacing frequently in our day. The shame and the scarring of it have kept you a recluse. Your gates are burned, and nobody has access to you. Perhaps you were a victim of divorce or rape or of some bitter experience, and you feel betrayed or sabotaged.

You want to run and hide. No one can reach you. You have been so badly burned, you are now touchy and inaccessible. There are parts of your life you cannot talk about. You do not want anyone to know. You have a sense of great personal distress and are feeling reproach and disgrace. You have been scarred emotionally. No one may know about it. To others you appear to be a success. They think you are doing fine, but inwardly you know you are not. As you examine the walls and the gates of your life, you find much of it in ruins. How do you handle that?

That is the great question many face. But that is why the Scriptures are given to us. The men and women of the past have been through these same difficulties, and they have told us how to handle them. This great book of Nehemiah is one of the most helpful pictures we have of how to recover from broken lives. The steps that Nehemiah took covers seven chapters of this book. They are specific steps, orderly--and very effective! Taken in order they will lead to a full recovery of usefulness.

Thank You, Father, that You reveal my own brokenness, not in order to condemn me, but to rebuild my life. I give to You all that is in ruins and ask that You rebuild me into the person You want me to be.

This daily devotion was inspired by one of Ray's sermons. Please read [Don't Despair - Begin to Repair](#) for more on this portion of scripture.

Are we ready and willing to allow God to expose our brokenness and lead us in paths of healing and usefulness?

Nehemiah 1:4-11

The Place To Start

Are we experiencing the healing power of contrite repentance? Do we acknowledge the effects of our sins on others' lives?

When I heard these things, I sat down and wept. For some days I mourned and fasted and prayed before the God of heaven (Nehemiah 1:4).

Nehemiah clearly has a deep sense of personal concern. He is willing to face the facts, to weep over them and tell God about them. That is always the place to begin. There is nothing superficial about this. A famous song says, "Don't worry, Be happy." But that is mere salve over a deep cancer. What is needed is honestly facing the ruin, whatever it may be, and, without blaming or attempting to involve somebody else, telling it all to God. God always welcomes a broken spirit and a contrite heart.

Follow the pattern of Nehemiah's prayer. First, he recognized the character of God. The ruin you are concerned with may not always be yours personally. You feel like Nehemiah, and you want to weep and mourn and tell God about it. That is always the place to start, for God is a responsive God. He gives attention to the prayers of His people.

The second thing Nehemiah did was to repent of all personal and corporate sins. This was honestly facing his own guilt. Notice the absence of self-righteousness. He did not say, "Lord, I am thinking of those terrible sinners back there in Jerusalem. Be gracious to them because they have fallen into wrong actions." No, he put himself into this picture, saying, "I confess before you, Lord, the sins of myself and my father's house." There was no attempt to blame others for this. It was a simple acknowledgment of wrong.

Then, third, Nehemiah reminded God of His gracious promises. In the book of Deuteronomy 28-30 Moses prophetically outlines the entire history of Israel. He said they would disobey God; they would be scattered among the nations; they would go into exile. But if they would turn and acknowledge their evil, God would bring them back to the land. Nehemiah reminded God of that gracious promise.

The fourth thing Nehemiah did was request specific help to begin this process. It was not going to be easy, but he knew what he had to do. It was going to take the authority of the top power in the whole empire. That was not easy to arrange. But Nehemiah believed that God would help him. And so he started to pray and asked for grace and strength to carry out the steps that were necessary to begin recovery.

Thank You, Father, for this wonderfully practical book that sets out a safe guideline to recovery and usefulness. Help me to begin where Nehemiah began: to tell the whole story in Your ear and thus begin the process of recovery.

This daily devotion was inspired by one of Ray's sermons. Please read [Don't Despair - Begin to Repair](#) for more on this portion of scripture.

Honest Assessment

Nehemiah 2:1-8

Have we assessed the costs to our pride and self-reliance in rebuilding parts of our lives? Are we trusting God to show us His way through Christ?

If it pleases the king and if your servant has found favor in his sight, let him send me to the city in Judah where my fathers are buried so that I can rebuild it (Nehemiah 2:5).

Observe how tactful Nehemiah's presentation is. Twice he refers to Jerusalem, not as the capital of Judah or even by its name, for it had a reputation as a troublesome city and had been the source of revolt in the empire before, but he designates it as "the city where my fathers are buried." That is an accommodation to the emperor's own concerns. These ancient kings were greatly concerned about their burial. The pyramids in Egypt that the pharaohs have left are ample evidence of that. This king would be immediately sympathetic to Nehemiah's desire to go and restore the city where his fathers were buried. Nehemiah wisely plays upon that interest and presents his case in the best possible light.

Note also the thoroughness with which he had thought out all that he would need. He knew it would require a lengthy period of time, so he asked for the time he needed. He was actually gone for twelve years. I doubt if he asked for that long a time, but it took that long in the working out of his plans. He must have known it would take at least a number of years, and whatever he asked for, he was granted that amount of time.

Not only did Nehemiah need sufficient time for this expedition, but he needed secure travel. So he asked for letters to the governors of the provinces that he would have to pass through to provide safe conduct for him. We learn later in this book that this not only gave him diplomatic immunity, but it also meant that he was appointed as the governor of Judah. This would give him diplomatic status as he traveled. From secular sources we learn that there had been trouble in the province of Syria (just north of Judah) two years earlier. The satrap (governor) of that province had rebelled against Artaxerxes. It is likely that the king welcomed this opportunity to place a trusted man in the governorship of Judah and interpose a buffer between Syria and Egypt, who were often at war. Thus this journey of Nehemiah was something the king found very satisfying.

Finally, Nehemiah knew he would need some special supplies that only the king's authority could provide. He asked for special timbers to be cut for him out of the king's forest. Some believe that was located in the mountains of Lebanon. But others say it was probably a local forest, south of Jerusalem, from which King Solomon had taken wood for the building of his temple. At any rate, Nehemiah got what he asked for. He had done his homework thoroughly.

This suggests to us that if we are truly concerned about rebuilding parts of our life, we need to think seriously about what it will require. We must assess what we will actually need, what steps we should take, and what may be involved in changing our habits so that we can be freed to be what God wants us to be. Nehemiah teaches us that we need to face honestly our situation.

Lord, help me to make an honest assessment of my situation and boldly come before Your throne and depend on You for all that I need.

This daily devotion was inspired by one of Ray's sermons. Please read [Don't Hesitate - Investigate!](#) (or listen to the audio file) for more on this portion of scripture.

Unexpected Help

Nehemiah 2:9-10

Do we believe that God works in our lives? Do we rely on His power and provision given to us through Jesus to help us in every situation?

The king had also sent army officers and cavalry with me (Nehemiah 2:9b).

Nehemiah not only came with a full military escort, but also it is apparent from this account that he came with the full authority of the throne of Persia behind him. If you set out to change something in your life for the better, you have the full authority of the throne of God behind you; you may proceed with full confidence that the unseen, but real, power of God is backing you up!

Nehemiah met two very troublesome enemies when he got there: Sanballat the Horonite and Tobiah the Ammonite. A Horonite was a devotee of the god Horon, a local deity of Palestine. This indicates Sanballat was a pagan. Tobiah was a citizen of Ammon, which

was the country that we now call Jordan. Ammon was one of the tribes descended from Lot, the nephew of Abraham, and thus related to Israel, but still an enemy.

This situation sounds very much like normal Christianity. I have always enjoyed the definition of a Christian as one who is completely fearless, continually cheerful, and constantly in trouble! It is God's way to let us face troublesome difficulties. But He also has unknown provisions waiting for us, as we will see in Nehemiah's case.

I shall never forget once sitting at lunch with Cameron Townsend, the founder of Wycliffe Bible Translators, and hearing from his own lips the story of how the Wycliffe organization came into Mexico. This was back in the 1920s at a time when Mexico was very sensitive to anything religious. The Mexican people had just thrown off the shackles of the church, and they were very opposed to public preaching or the building up of churches. Townsend went to a tiny Indian village up in the mountains and began to work there, translating the Scriptures into their language. Although he could do no preaching, he found that he could help the people. Their economy was suffering because they had poor crops, and he taught them how to dam up a stream and divert the water to their fields. He also taught them certain industries they could establish right there in the village. Soon word of the changes there got back to Lazaro Cardenas, who had just been elected president of Mexico. One day the president drove out in his limousine to the Indian village, and, when Townsend saw the presidential limousine, he went up to it to greet the president and introduce himself. The president said, "You're the very man I came to see." He invited Townsend to come to the capital, and they became close friends. He opened a wide door to the entire work of Wycliffe Translators, and later presidents continued that support.

In many wonderful ways God demonstrates that He can work in our lives! This is what Nehemiah relied upon. If you are struggling with some habit, some attitude of mind or heart that has possessed you, limited you, and made you difficult to live with, and you want to be free from it, you can expect God to help, often in ways that you cannot anticipate.

Lord, teach me to be open and aware of the different ways You are looking out for me and providing for me. May I never refuse an offer of help that comes from You.

This daily devotion was inspired by one of Ray's sermons. Please read [Don't Hesitate - Investigate!](#) (or listen to the audio file) for more on this portion of scripture.

Standing Up To The Enemy

Nehemiah 2:11-20

When we face ridicule and opposition, do we recognize their ultimate source? What steps can we take to recover from destructive habits or ruin in our lives?

"The God of heaven will give us success. We his servants will start rebuilding, but as for you, you have no share in Jerusalem or any claim or historic right to it" (Nehemiah 2:20).

The men who opposed the rebuilding of the wall stood outside the covenant of promise. None of the three had any claim to the promise of God to inherit the land. That is why Nehemiah took this stand.

The form their opposition took is also prophetic of our struggles. They first "mocked and ridiculed." This is usually the first weapon the enemy employs. You may have felt it when you began to recover from your ruin. Your friends laughed at your desires to change. They may have ridiculed your religious convictions and resented with scorn your implied criticisms of their conduct.

Also, Nehemiah's enemies began to threaten and slander him with charges of rebellion and disloyalty. If ridicule does not work, then the opposition stiffens and becomes openly unfriendly and threatening. It is the next level of resistance that those who seek to rebuild will encounter.

These are but pictures for us. They picture the opposition and the resistance that we will experience from Satan himself. What was true of these opposing forces in Nehemiah's case is true also of Satan. He is a usurper who has tricked us and led us astray. Yet he has no right to do so. Jesus came to restore God's property to Him and to loose the hold of the devil upon the human race. That is what He does in our lives. So when we face resistance, we must see it as something God allows to strengthen us, but Satan has no real right to our lives.

We do not need to be bound by habits from the past. No matter how innocently they may have begun, we do not need to be slaves to drugs, sex, alcohol, tobacco, or whatever may be controlling and limiting us. Remember Paul's great cry, "I will not be mastered by anything" (1 Corinthians 6:12). Why? Because he was under the power of God. This is what Nehemiah declares here. There is no necessity to be a slave to a hot temper or a critical attitude or a complaining spirit. These areas of ruin in our lives can be set aside because we are expecting God to grant us the grace to stand.

That is why, with great determination, Nehemiah clenches his fist and says, "Look, the God of heaven is with us. He will give us success. We, his servants, will start rebuilding. Do what you like. It is not going to stop us. You are usurpers and have no right to this land."

What we are tracing here are the steps of recovery from ruin. There are three of them that we have covered so far: First, a deep concern that leads us to prayer and sorrow; then, an opportunity for change to which we must make response; and then, the facing of the facts of our situation honestly and squarely. When we begin these steps, we have well begun the process of change. Let us take them with confidence that God will enable us to rebuild our walls and restore our gates to His praise and glory and our grateful relief.

Thank You, Father, that I can face the enemy with boldness and confidence, knowing that I am free, and he has no right or power over me.

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Working Together

Nehemiah 3:1-27

We enjoy going on mission trips, but how well do we work together to spend time with our neighbors? Do our excuses reveal a shirking of responsibility?

The men of Jericho built the adjoining section, and Zaccur son of Imri built next to them (Nehemiah 3:2).

Chapter 3 is one of those chapters that consists largely of unpronounceable names and long-forgotten people! It can be discouraging to come to a chapter like this. But it tells the story of the work of repairing the gates and walls of Jerusalem that Nehemiah had been sent there to do.

They worked together. All through this account you will find the phrase "next to him" worked so and so, and "next to them" worked others. The writer takes note not only of the workers but also the shirkers, however. Verse 5 says of the men of Tekoa: "their nobles would not put their shoulders to the work under their supervisors." Did you know that God records slackers too? When people will not take up their ministry, God puts their name down in that column as well. But the rest all worked together. They helped one another. Nehemiah had so marvelously organized this that each one had a section of the wall or a gate assigned to him.

Notice also they worked near their home. Look at verse 10: Jedaiah "made repairs opposite his house." Verse 23 tells of certain men who "made repairs in front of their house." The important truth that emerges is that this is God's design for ministry. God has placed us all strategically where He wants us to be. Your neighborhood, office, or home is where your ministry should be. That is why God put you there. In John 15 Jesus said to His disciples that He had appointed them, and the word means "strategically placed them." He had put them in the place where He wanted them to be. This is brought out beautifully here as we watch these people laboring in their own neighborhood.

Finally, each one completed his assigned task. They kept on until they had finished the work. Some had more to do than others, but no one failed--except the "nobles" of Tekoa who would not dirty their hands. I have learned through the years that responsibility is always the mark of spiritual maturity. The most mature members in a congregation are those who stay with the work that has been assigned to them until it is done.

Lord, help me to discover the place I have in Your great work. Grant that I might be faithful in the assignment You have given me in cooperation with others in the body of Christ.

This daily devotion was inspired by one of Ray's sermons. Please read [Don't Be Paralyzed - Get Organized!](#) for more on this portion of scripture.

The Need For Each Other

Nehemiah 3:28-32

Where is it wonderful to seek help from others instead of trying to be independent of them? Which people does the ministry of the Church belong to?

Next to them, Zadok son of Immer made repairs opposite his house. Next to him, Shemaiah son of Shecaniah, the guard at the East Gate, made repairs (Nehemiah 3:29).

One commentator has said, "God is a great believer in putting names down." That is true. There are many chapters like this in the Scriptures. But that should really encourage us. It means that God has not forgotten our names either. He loves to record the names of obscure people.

The central teaching of a chapter like this is that in putting lives back together, we need and must seek help from each other. This is a great chapter about cooperation. It illustrates the New Testament truth concerning the body of Christ. First Corinthians 12, Romans 12, and other chapters teach that believers in Christ are part of a worldwide body made up of many members. We belong to each other, and so we are to help one another and bear one another's burdens. This is portrayed in a very dramatic way throughout this chapter.

We learn from the New Testament that there are two things you cannot say any longer when you become a Christian. The first is, "You do not need me." Everyone in the body of Christ needs everyone else. The second thing is, "I do not need you." You do need others! It is the awareness of that truth that makes a church a living, warm, vital, loving fellowship.

In the summoning of the people of Jerusalem to rebuild their walls and their gates, we learn that all the people were involved in the project. That portrays for us an important principle of the New Testament: that the ministry of the church belongs to everyone in the congregation. Often people think that only the pastor and the hired staff are to do the work of evangelizing, teaching, counseling, healing the hurts of others, and serving the needy. Because we have followed that practice far too long, the church is in trouble all over the world. But the ministry belongs to the whole congregation. I do not know any truth more important for the accomplishing of God's work than that. Yet in church after church, it is difficult to get people to understand that. You have the great privilege of reaching out in your own neighborhood and doing the work of the ministry there. Where churches do not understand that, one finds a very distorted condition. People have no ministry of their own and, therefore, little excitement or interest in life.

Lord, thank You for those You have placed around me for support and encouragement. Teach me that not only do I need You, but I need others if I am to have the impact You want me to have.

This daily devotion was inspired by one of Ray's sermons. Please read [Don't Be Paralyzed - Get Organized!](#) for more on this portion of scripture.

How To Handle An Attack

Nehemiah 4:1-6

How do we respond when we are ridiculed or scorned? What is a better way to respond than in fear, anger, hurt, or rebuttal?

He ridiculed the Jews, and in the presence of his associates and the army of Samaria, he said, "What are those feeble Jews doing?" (Nehemiah 4:1b-2a).

Most of us have had experience with what is called Murphy's Law, the idea that if anything can go wrong, it will. There are many applications of it. For instance, if you try to fix something, Murphy's Law says it will take longer than you anticipated; it will cost more than you expected; it will break down before it is paid for; and someone will not like it when it is done! We have come to such a circumstance in chapter 4 of the book of Nehemiah. Here Nehemiah faces severe and violent opposition to his work of rebuilding the walls and gates of Jerusalem. The opposition takes off its gloves, and the real battle begins. We, like Nehemiah, have an enemy who opposes us with craftiness and power. Against every effort on our part to get our lives together and recover from damage, hurt, and ruin, we will experience opposition from the enemy. Almost invariably his first attempt to halt such recovery is to discourage us through ridicule, derision, or rejection.

Hear the scorn, derision, and sarcasm in those comments! Many of us, perhaps, have experienced this kind of attack. I know personally of people who are unwilling to do what is right because they fear their friends will laugh at them or mock them. I know a man who is unable to stop drinking because his drinking friends make fun of him. Yet drink is destroying his life. I know of others who are hooked on drugs, but they do not want to stop because they are afraid they will be laughed at. These are the powerful weapons the enemy employs here.

Most of us have had some experience with this weapon of ridicule and mockery that the enemy employs here. Perhaps you have had someone say to you when you are trying to stop something that was wrong, "Who do you think you are, anyhow? Do you think you are better than us?" Or perhaps someone says, "You've made a good start, but you won't hold out. You won't last."

Nehemiah regards this attack as an insult against God Himself. Note that he does not argue back nor does he retaliate. He does not blister these men with angry rebuttal. He simply responds by praying. It reminds us of Peter's words about Jesus: "When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats" (1 Peter 2:23). This is a helpful picture of how to handle that kind of attack.

Dear Father, strengthen me to do what is right regardless of the ridicule I receive, and help me to respond to that ridicule in prayer and faith.

This daily devotion was inspired by one of Ray's sermons. Please read [Don't Back Down - Build Up](#) for more on this portion of scripture.

Prayer And Preparedness

Nehemiah 4:7-23

What are two necessary responses when we are under attack? When we feel a bitterness of spirit, what spiritual resources are available to be victorious?

But we prayed to our God and posted a guard day and night to meet this threat (Nehemiah 4:9).

The enemy mobilizes its forces, escalating the attack, and begins to plan direct violence. When you begin to move with God to change things in your life for the better, you will find that you are met first with derision, and if you keep persisting, someone is going to get very upset with you and attack you in a vicious, perhaps physical, way.

But see how Nehemiah reacts, He still relies on prayer (Nehemiah 4:9). But he does more than pray. He posts a guard as well. Prayer and preparedness! This blending of the resources of the spiritual life with those of the material world is a marvelous picture of how believers ought to face threats, recognizing that we need action on both levels.

Still the enemy persists, and he launches a propaganda campaign. There was an enormous amount of debris and broken stones that had to be cleared away before they could get to the walls. It must have been very discouraging.

The enemy immediately takes advantage of that weakness and discouragement (Nehemiah 4:11). Have you ever faced something like that? Were you ever threatened at work when you tried to correct an immoral or illegal practice that was being carried on around you? Perhaps someone said to you, "Keep that up, and you may lose your job here." You may have been threatened with demotion or with eviction from your apartment. You may even have been invited out in the parking lot to face a physical attack. These kinds of things are possible when we begin to right wrongs.

Nehemiah's response is very deliberate. First, he carefully looks over the situation and evaluates what is needed. This approach is necessary if we are going to improve our own lives. We must observe exactly where we are under attack. What are we addicted to? A wrong habit, a drug, an attitude of mind? Bitterness of spirit? When we have identified the source of attack, we must post a guard at that point.

Then, second, Nehemiah reviews the spiritual resources available to them. They had a power at work in their lives that their enemies knew nothing about. The great and awesome God who was with them would stand with them in their peril. When they remembered this, they became reassured and renewed in courage. The enemy saw that they could achieve nothing with their attacks.

One of my favorite passages of the New Testament is found in Paul's second letter to Timothy. Paul is a prisoner in Rome, and Timothy, a rather timid young man, is all alone and feeling discouraged in the great pagan city of Ephesus. The great apostle writes to him this word of advice: "Remember Jesus Christ, raised from the dead" (2 Timothy 2:8). Timothy was not alone. God was with him. Jesus is risen! He is awesome. He is strong. He is powerful. Reckon upon Him, and you will be able to stand against the most subtle temptation and the most dangerous threats that come against you.

Thank You, Father, for how practical and helpful the Scriptures

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Internal Strife

Nehemiah 5

Are we honestly confronting greed in all areas of our lives? Are we able to honestly, even bluntly, confront those we are in relationship with to help them?

Now the men and their wives raised a great outcry against their Jewish brothers (Nehemiah 5:1).

In chapter 5, the Unseen Enemy tries yet another approach. Nehemiah has successfully handled the threatened attack from without, but now he runs into a problem from within his own ranks. You may experience that too in your struggle to recover some area of

your life. You may run into family problems, pressures, and problems with those who work with you, perhaps even from other brothers and sisters in the Lord. In this case it was a clash between the workers and the officials, the laborers and the overseers who were working on this project.

To a great degree these were justified complaints. Nehemiah deals with them earnestly and forthrightly. He could not change the conditions, but he reveals the real problem--usury. Usury is charging interest for money that has been loaned--a common practice in our day. The Jews were allowed to do this with other races, but Moses said that when Jews lent money to other Jews, they were not to charge any interest. Nehemiah is upset by this usury and demands that they stop. This was more than a demand to end the practice of usury. He was insisting on restitution as well. They must give back their unjust gains. Their reaction was surprising. They were stricken by conscience because they knew from the Scriptures that what they were doing was wrong.

Believers ought to be very careful about taking advantage of others, especially other Christians, and getting rich at their expense. Scripture condemns this practice as uncaring and heedless of the poor testimony it presents to others.

Nehemiah is encouraged by their promise that they will not do this. He has first uncovered the real cause. He shows that it is simple greed that is the problem. He confronts the overseers with it, rebuking them and showing them it is wrong. There is a place and time for forthright, blunt confrontation in our relationships with others. Sometimes we need to point out to people that what they are doing is wrong and help them to see what needs to be done. That is what Nehemiah does.

Father, strengthen us to act like Nehemiah of old and be willing to confront the greed in our own lives. Help us to be men and women who visibly live according to what we profess.

This daily devotion was inspired by one of Ray's sermons. Please read [Don't Back Down - Build Up](#) for more on this portion of scripture.

A Great Work

Nehemiah 6:1-9

Do we place supreme value on God's work in us and through us? How do we react under repeated opposition or the pressure of uncertainty?

"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 6:3b).

These erstwhile enemies suddenly become Nehemiah's friends and invite him to a conference down on the plain of Ono. It is located down on the seacoast near the Gaza strip. But Nehemiah senses danger: "they were scheming to harm me" he says (Nehemiah 6:2). Some commentators suggest that they were trying to trick him into leaving Jerusalem, where he had armed support, to come to a conference where they could set upon him and perhaps kill him. Nehemiah evidently senses this. He firmly declines, saying, "I am carrying on a great project, and I cannot go down."

That is a great answer. Note the reasons he gives. On the surface it seems a surly response to their invitation to meet together. It sounds brusque and blunt. But Nehemiah sees through their scheme and refuses to go along, even though they pressure him four different times.

You too may experience continuing pressure to change your mind and go along with something that is wrong. Many have fallen after a proper refusal simply because they gave in to repeated pressure. But Nehemiah persists in his refusal. Here is his reason: "I am doing a great work," he says. "I have a great calling. God has committed a tremendous project to me, and if I leave, it will be threatened."

One of the most helpful things that we can do to resist temptation is to remember that God has called us to a great task. This is true of every believer in Christ. I do not care how young or how old you are in the Lord, you are called to a tremendous work today. That task is to model a different lifestyle so that those who are being ruined by wrongful practices will see something that offers them hope and deliverance. If they see in you peace in the midst of confusion, an invisible support that keeps you steady and firm under pressure, they will learn that there is another way to live than the destructive way they have chosen. That is the great work that God has called us to. We ought never to give allegiance to anything less.

I read years ago of a missionary in China, a capable young man who did a great job as a linguist and diplomat in his work for the Lord. His abilities were so outstanding that one of the American companies in China tried to hire him. They offered him an attractive job with a salary to match, but he turned them down. He told them that God had sent him to China as a missionary and that was what he was going to do. He thought that would end the matter, but instead they came back with a better offer and an increase in salary. He turned that down too, but again they came back, doubling the salary that had originally been proposed. Finally he said,

"It's not your salary that is too little. It's the job that's too small!"

This is what Nehemiah is saying here. He has a great work, and he is not going to forsake it for anything less. He is confronted with an offer that seems to promise peace and support and yet is filled with danger, which he successfully avoids by refusing to leave his calling.

Father, You have given me a great work to do. Help me to see through the seeming "golden opportunities" that come my way to divert me from that which You have called me to do.

This daily devotion was inspired by one of Ray's sermons. Please read [Don't Vacillate - Perpetuate!](#) for more on this portion of scripture.

When Not To Run Away

Nehemiah 6:10-14

How important is it to know or remember our true identity as a believer? Where can we find out who we are in Christ?

Once again the enemy switches his tactics, reverting again to subterfuge. A word comes in the form of a prophecy, but this man is a false prophet. He claims to have hidden knowledge that men are coming to kill Nehemiah and advises him to go into the temple to save his life. This false prophet may be involved in the occult, because that is what is suggested here by the explanation that he was "shut in" at his home (Nehemiah 6:10). Being "shut in" suggests that for some religious reason he was secluding himself.

What he says sounds logical. "Some people are out to get you. They are going to kill you," he charges. Nehemiah certainly knows that! The man suggests, "Come on up here, and we will go into the temple and shut the doors. They will not dare attack you there." That sounds good, but immediately Nehemiah detects something wrong. He knows that as a layman, he is not permitted to go into the temple, for only priests could enter the temple. It was simply not right for him to enter the temple.

He realizes that a prophet who was really from the Lord wouldn't say anything that was not in line with the commands of God. There was an altar of asylum in the temple courtyard to which people who were under threat could flee and be safe, but this man is proposing they actually go into the temple and shut the doors.

Nehemiah says it was all part of a plan to discourage the people from following his lead. Fueled by jealousy and ambition, these enemies slandered him and tried to trick him into yielding to their demands. We must be aware of this kind of attack on our lives in these days. Do not take people's advice just because they are friendly to you. It may be completely wrong advice. Nothing substitutes for a knowledge of the Word of God. That is how you can detect error and tell what is wrong. The best response to such an approach is what Nehemiah uses here--a deep sense of his true identity as a believer. "Should a man like me run and hide and try to save his life by wrong approaches and unlawful practices?" He falls back upon his clear consciousness of who he is. He is a believer in the living God, and thus he need not resort to trickery to save his life.

This is exactly what the New Testament calls us to as well. Writing to the Thessalonians, faced with the normal pressures and problems of life, the apostle Paul's word is, "live lives worthy of God" (1 Thessalonians 2:12). We are called to walk with God. You are a child of His. You belong to Him. You are therefore living at a different level from those around you. If you remember who you are, you will not go along with the wrong things that people are being pressured into today.

Henry David Thoreau wrote in Walden Pond, "If I seem not to keep step with others, it is because I am listening to another drumbeat." Christians also listen to another drumbeat. They are following their Lord, not the voices they hear around them. Nothing will free us more from the subtle pressures and temptations of today than to remember who we are.

There are so many voices, Lord. Help me to discern Your voice. Help me to act in accordance with Your Word and my true identity as Your child.

This daily devotion was inspired by one of Ray's sermons. Please read [Don't Vacillate - Perpetuate!](#) for more on this portion of scripture.

The Power And Peril Of A Witness

Nehemiah 6:15-19

In our present circumstance, can we expect opposition from the world, our old habits, and the devil to cease? How does faith in Jesus enable victory?

So the wall was completed... When all our enemies heard about this, all the surrounding nations were afraid and lost their self-confidence, because they realized that this work had been done with the help of our God (Nehemiah 6:15-16).

Even their enemies had to admit that God was at work in His people's lives. He was what accounted for their amazing success. This entire project was finished in just fifty-two days! Nehemiah had left Persia in April, and it took him several months to journey to Jerusalem. Yet on October 2 in the year 445 BC, the wall was completed. They finished the work in fifty-two days because they put their minds and shoulders to the task and looked to God for wisdom and power to achieve. "When our enemies heard about this, they lost their self-confidence and they realized that they were battling against God himself," says Nehemiah. What a beautiful picture of the power of Christian witness in a community! Even their enemies must agree that God is at work among them.

But the enemies are still not through. Notice how they continue their tactics of opposition. Tobiah had intermarried with the Israelites. Taking advantage of that relationship, he was seeking to undermine Nehemiah's influence by nothing more than mere gossip.

The devil never quits. He is never going to give up while we are still alive. Even those Christians who have lived over seventy years will tell you the battle is just as intense, sometimes more so, than it ever was. Christians cannot expect the battle to end until the Lord calls them to glory, because that is the nature of life.

God has wonderful blessings and much encouragement and joy for us along the way, but we must never cease battling against the world, the flesh, and the devil until we get home. Do not expect your retirement days to be without difficulty or struggle. That is what the world seeks, and that is a confused and distorted view of life. But it is not ours. The enemies will never quit. If they cannot undermine us with fear and flattery, they will try gossip and false rumors. This is what Nehemiah demonstrates for us.

Teach me, Father to be grateful for victories won, but never to become complacent as if the battle were over.

This daily devotion was inspired by one of Ray's sermons. Please read [Don't Vacillate - Perpetuate!](#) for more on this portion of scripture.

The Need To Belong

Nehemiah 7

How does truly knowing Jesus and why we belong to God make our good deeds fruitful and effective? Do our acts of service stem from a response to God?

So my God put it into my heart to assemble the nobles, the officials and the common people for registration by families (Nehemiah 7:5a).

It was necessary to ensure that only true Israelites lived within Jerusalem. There follows a list of names of all the families of those who came back from Persia to Jerusalem under the leadership of Ezra, some thirty years before the time of Nehemiah. These were among the ones who helped him build the wall. He is not only giving credit to them but is also recognizing that they will be responsible to carry on what he has begun. So having appointed leaders who would succeed him--men of integrity, courage, and faithfulness--he now sees to it that their followers are also true Israelites.

The spiritual application is that we need to know that we really belong to God. You will never be a successful servant of Christ nor ever faithfully work for Him and serve Him until you are assured that you know Him and belong to Him. This is not only necessary for leaders but for the common people as well. We all need to know our spiritual pedigree; otherwise, our service will be weak and largely ineffective.

Verse 61 lists some who could not prove their ancestry and were therefore not permitted to live in the city of Jerusalem. Certain ones among the priests were denied the right to minister because they could not prove their ancestry. Many try to minister in the church of God today who are uncertain that they belong to God. Sometimes pastors, seminary professors, and leaders in the Christian community do not themselves know that they are true Christians. These always wreak havoc in the churches they seek to serve.

The reference to the Urim and Thummim is interesting (Nehemiah 7:65). These were two stones (their names mean "lights" and "perfections") that the high priest wore on his garment by which he could discern the mind of God. No one really knows how they worked. Nehemiah says these suspect priests were not allowed to minister "until a high priest arrives who has the Urim and Thummim." I think this is a hidden reference to our Lord Jesus. In the book of Hebrews, Jesus is said to be "a high priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek" (Hebrews 6:20), meaning one who lives forever and who fully knows the mind of God. He can restore suspect priests to a place of assurance in their ministry and give them back their office. He can bring them the assurance that they belong.

Father, thank You that I can rely on the promise of Your Word that I do belong. "Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God" (John 1:12).

This daily devotion was inspired by one of Ray's sermons. Please read [Don't Vacillate - Perpetuate!](#) for more on this portion of scripture.

Hunger For The Word

Nehemiah 8:1-8

When our souls are undernourished and we suffer spiritual indigestion, do we turn to the Word of God to feed and restore us to wholeness?

They told Ezra the scribe to bring out the Book of the Law of Moses, which the LORD had commanded for Israel (Nehemiah 8:1b)

It is not surprising that chapter 8 opens with a manifestation of a great hunger for the Word among these people in Jerusalem. Notice that this seems to be a spontaneous gathering. No invitations were sent out. No public notice was given. People were hungry for answers to their problems and for guidelines from the Word of God, and with one accord they gathered in this great square before the Water Gate. They asked Ezra the priest to bring the Law of the Lord and to read it to them. This would undoubtedly be the entire Pentateuch--the first five books of the Bible. This indicates the tremendous desire of these people for truth. They listened, while standing, from daybreak until noon! Certainly this long attention indicates how deeply they were aware of their ignorance about life and how much they needed answers from God. They were simply crying out for the Word.

Ezra, the priest, the author of the book of Ezra, appears for the first time in the book of Nehemiah. Thirteen years earlier he had led a return from Persia to rebuild the temple and to teach the Law of God. Apparently he had been occupied in that task all through the time of the rebuilding of the wall. But when the people had finished their work, they were desperate to hear from the Word of God, so they sent for Ezra to lead them.

It seems to me that we have come to such a time as this again. The prophet Amos predicted that there would come a famine in the world for the Word of God. People would actually be starving for answers to the problems of life. I find everywhere a deep hunger among non-churched people to hear the Word of God. Wherever it is taught with any degree of understanding, they are immediately attracted to it.

In Singapore I was invited to speak to a group of young Chinese professionals. About forty or fifty doctors, lawyers, engineers, and others met in one of the high-rise apartments in the city. As I opened up the Bible to them, I quickly discovered that they were absolutely fascinated with it. When I had to leave for another appointment, many of them crowded into the elevator with me, and others came on other elevators down to the lobby, asking questions all the way. I got in the car, and as we were driving off, they ran alongside, still shouting questions through the open windows. I have never forgotten that display of hunger for God's Word among people who had not yet been taught the Scriptures.

When the Word is opened up, people begin to understand themselves. When you know God you begin to understand yourself, because you are made in the image of God. These people in Jerusalem were soon growing in self-knowledge as they began to hunger for the Word of God. The great tragedy of our day is how few churches seem to understand this power of Scripture.

Lord, create in me a hunger for Your Word. Forgive me for so often taking it for granted.

This daily devotion was inspired by one of Ray's sermons. Please read [The Shining Light](#) for more on this portion of scripture.

The Joy Of The Lord

Nehemiah 8:9-12

What does 'the joy of the Lord' mean? What can heal our life? Do we both celebrate and share with others the Joy which is our heritage?

Go and enjoy choice food and sweet drinks, and send some to those who have nothing prepared. This day is sacred to our Lord. Do not grieve, for the joy of the LORD is your strength (Nehemiah 8:10).

Though weeping is necessary, it is not the final message God has for us. To show this, Nehemiah and Ezra speak up and correct the people. What a powerful statement of the effect of the Word of God! When people understand it, it brings joy. "The joy of the LORD is your strength." What a great word for grieving people who see the evil in their lives and the lives of those around them and mourn over what it has produced! The word that brings joy is that of forgiveness. God can forgive! He does, and He will restore. That is what Jesus meant when He said, "Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted" (Matthew 5:4). I don't think you will ever be comforted until you learn to mourn. When you see the hurt, pain, and despair that sin can produce and you grieve over it, then you are ready for the comfort of forgiveness.

What does "the joy of the LORD" mean? It is the fact that God has found a solution to these problems of sin. He has provided a way back to sensible, sober, wise, helpful, wholesome living. How? By learning to think like He thinks. Begin to see the world from His point of view. Listen no longer to the clamoring voices of the media. Do not take your philosophy of life from what people are saying or the advice others are giving. Listen to the Word of God.

That is the answer. It will heal your life. "He sent forth his word and healed them," writes the psalmist (Psalm 107:20). The ministry of the Word of God is to heal us and create in us a desire to share that healing with others. Nehemiah urges the people to send portions of food to those who had nothing prepared. This is invariably the result in those who find their lives beginning to be healed by the Word of God. They start thinking of others who are hurting and want to share with them what they have learned.

Thank You, Lord, for the joy of forgiveness and restoration. Thank

This daily devotion was inspired by one of Ray's sermons. Please read [The Shining Light](#) for more on this portion of scripture.

The Way Of Health Nehemiah 8:13-18

Are we owned by our earthly possessions? Are we learning to hold them lightly? How can we recognize the unhealthy delusions of a mistaken and confused world?

They found written in the Law, which the LORD had commanded through Moses, that the Israelites were to live in booths during the feast of the seventh month (Nehemiah 8:14).

The way of health is dramatically demonstrated for us in the closing verses of this chapter. God had anticipated the needs of these people. Centuries before, He had provided a most remarkable visual aid to remind them of the truth that would keep them from further destruction. This is the Feast of Tabernacles, a reminder that they were called as a people out of Egypt. Their departure was sudden and precipitous. They were not even to sit down when they ate the Passover meal. They had to eat it standing, with their staffs in their hands, dressed in traveling clothes, ready to leave. They went out at a word of command and left Egypt in one night. When they got into the desert, one day's journey out, and night fell, where were they to find shelter? Moses had been told by God that they were to collect boughs and tree limbs and build booths for shelter. Then God ordained that they were to do this once every year. Even though later they had homes to dwell in, they were to build these booths and live in them for seven days. This was to teach them that they were always pilgrims and strangers on the earth. This world was not their home. All the great blessings of life would not necessarily be found in this present time but were waiting for them in glory. Therefore, they did not need to be distressed if they did not have everything that those around them were trying to get in this life.

That is the truth that will deliver us from the pressures of the times. We must hold things lightly. We must not think that houses, cars, money, and material gain are all that important. Even if we lack these things, the great treasures of our life remain untouched. To strive constantly to gain what everyone else has is a mistake. God teaches us to hold these things lightly. We must never forget that we are in the world but not of it. We are never to settle down here for good. I love the way C. S. Lewis has put it: "Our kind heavenly Father has provided many wonderful inns for us along our journey, but he takes special care to see that we never mistake any of them for home." We are pilgrims and strangers, passing through this world. We are involved in it, deeply sometimes, but we are never to see ourselves as a part of it.

What will enable us to remember that? Verse 18 gives us the answer. Every day they read the Scripture. Every day they saturated themselves in the thinking of God. That is what makes for realism: When you think like God thinks, you are thinking realistically. You are beginning to see yourself the way you really are. You are seeing your children, your home, and your nation the way they really are. For the first time you are able to divest yourself of the illusions and delusions of a mistaken, confused world. You are beginning to work toward wholeness, healing, and strengthening of the things that abide.

What a wonderful picture this is, Lord, of the fact that I am a stranger on this earth. Far too often I have lived as if this were my home. Renew my mind with Your truth that there is so much more to live for than what this world offers

This daily devotion was inspired by one of Ray's sermons. Please read [The Shining Light](#) for more on this portion of scripture.

Where To Begin Nehemiah 9:1-15

As we understand God's attributes we are better able to know and worship Him. Are our hearts tuned to praise God as the One from whom all blessings flow?

Blessed be your glorious name, and may it be exalted above all blessing and praise (Nehemiah 9:5b).

This prayer in the book of Nehemiah is a great model that will teach us much for our own prayer life. It begins with a great section of praise. First, God is praised as the Creator and Maker of everything. Beginning with the life He gave you is a great place to start when you are praising God. It seems strange to me that people who are dependent every moment on God to give them life allow themselves so easily to forget that fact. God sustains us moment by moment. We ought to be grateful for that. Let us never forget that our very breath comes from Him.

The next section praises God as the caller and chooser of people. He is the one who gives undeserved blessings to those He chooses. God is the keeper of promises. Not one of us would be here today if it were not for that merciful, sovereign call of God. Jesus said, "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him" (John 6:44). We are here today because the Spirit of God in wondrous grace has drawn us to Himself.

Then the people praise God as the deliverer from sin and its enslavement. They retell the history of this nation, beginning with the call of Abraham and their deliverance from Egypt. Some of us have forgotten the lessons God has taught us and have returned to the same sins, plunging ourselves once more into rebellion and slavery. Let us never forget that we have been wonderfully, even miraculously, delivered by the great hand of God.

Praise for God as the great provider of wisdom and the necessities of life follows. Here is God's providential care of His own. He taught this people how to live in the midst of great wickedness. He knew he was sending them into a land inhabited by tribes who were morally degraded to a degree that is appalling to us today. They offered their children to the god Molech by throwing them alive into a furnace of fire. It was among these people that the Israelites had to live. Yet God taught them how to avoid defilement from those things. He taught them how to be friends with these people but not be destroyed by their immorality. It is exactly the situation we are called to live in today. God has given us this wonderful book that teaches us the rules of life, health, salvation, and deliverance and the inner strength that can resist the temptations that abound all around us. To neglect it is folly.

God also supplied their needs. He gave them bread to eat when there was none. He gave them water from the rock in the middle of the desert. That is not only an account of meeting physical needs, but it describes the meeting of spiritual needs as well. The New Testament tells us these are pictures of Christ: He is the bread of life; He is the water of life. As the Israelites learned the meaning of these symbols, they began to understand that there was One coming who would fully meet the need of the human heart.

Father, I praise and worship You as the Creator and Sustainer of the universe, as the One who has chosen me and drawn me to Yourself and the One who provides all that I need.

This daily devotion was inspired by one of Ray's sermons. Please read [Let Us Bow Before Our Maker](#) for more on this portion of scripture.

Time After Time

Nehemiah 9:16-37

How do we respond to God's tough love in others' lives as well as our own? Are we able to recognize and be thankful for the tough love of God?

But as soon as they were at rest, they again did what was evil in your sight. Then you abandoned them to the hand of their enemies so that they ruled over them. And when they cried out to you again, you heard from heaven, and in your compassion you delivered them time after time (Nehemiah 9:28).

What a marvelous picture of the patience of God! He lets us taste the results of our evil. He gets our attention sometimes by letting disaster strike. But it is only in order that we might hear what He is saying and be delivered. He warns us in order to keep us free.

One evening the president of the Gay People's Union of a university was invited to come and speak to a church's group of young people on what the Bible says about homosexuality. The group gave him the opportunity to defend the position that the Bible endorses homosexuality as an alternate lifestyle. Although this man was the president of his university's debating club, he struggled as he tried to present his case. He went all through the Bible trying to prove his cause, but he floundered and could not get anything together.

The group leader made an agreement with him that when he finished, one of the church's pastors would speak on the same subject. The pastor graciously opened the Scriptures and pointed out that when God forbids something it is not because He wants to limit us or narrow our lives. It is because He is protecting us from something that we cannot handle, something so devastating it will ruin us. He demonstrated from the Word how homosexuality destroys human beings and turns them into something God never intended them to be. Eventually those embracing a homosexual lifestyle would be locked into pain, hurt, misery, loneliness, and death.

Out of that episode came opportunity for members of this church to reach out to those who were struggling with homosexual tendencies. A great number of these people were delivered by the mercy and grace of God. That is what this passage describes--the tough love of God, who will not let ruin overtake us without adequate warning.

The closing paragraph, beginning with verse 32, connects the history of earlier generations with the present generation. Here we find a change of pronouns from they and them to we and our as the Israelites begin to look at their own generation.

This is where we find ourselves today. Our cities are torn with violence and strife of such intensity that people hardly dare to go outside their homes. The only recovery is to do as these people did--confess our wrongdoing to God and praise Him for His compassionate mercy.

Notice how specific the Israelites are. "You have acted faithfully, but we did wrong." There is no "if" in true confession. You say, "Lord, I did it. I walked in my own willful way." Then God hears, forgives, and restores.

Lord, thank You for Your promise that as I confess my sin, You are faithful and righteous to forgive and restore

This daily devotion was inspired by one of Ray's sermons. Please read [Let Us Bow Before Our Maker](#) for more on this portion of scripture.

The Oath

Nehemiah 9:38-10:29

How fully set apart and committed are we to knowing Jesus Christ? When we consent to God's will, do we fully count on His power to keep us faithful and fruitful?

In view of all this, we are making a binding agreement, putting it in writing, and our leaders, our Levites and our priests are affixing their seals to it (Nehemiah 9:38).

This verse includes a list of what might be termed the company of the committed. These people see a need for preserving and perpetuating the changes in their lifestyles so as to keep in step with God; thus, they sign this agreement to bind themselves to that end. This agreement represents a kind of universal urge found among humans to publicly pledge themselves to be loyal to a cause they feel is right.

When the Pilgrims were about to land at Plymouth, they formed what they called the Mayflower Compact. They drew up rules for living in the new land, and they all signed it as an agreement to live by these principles and laws.

Probably the most famous document in American history is the Declaration of Independence. Our forefathers signed that great statement setting forth the reasons they felt God was leading them to establish a new nation upon this continent. Recall the closing words of that document: "For the support of this Declaration, with a firm reliance on the protection of Divine Providence, we mutually pledge to each other our lives, our fortunes and our sacred honor." History records that most of those signers of the Declaration actually did have to give up their lives. Those who did not lost their fortunes. But all of them retained their sacred honor. Perhaps you have done something like that in your own life. There came a time when you realized you needed to make some changes in your behavior. Some of the greatest saints of the past did this. They drew up rules for their own conduct that they felt would help them to walk with God and to grow in grace and favor before Him.

But there is one other very important point here. Ultimately these people failed to follow through with their commitment. Subsequent history reveals that all the old habits returned. The nation once again lost the blessing of God upon it. Why? We discover the key in Nehemiah 10:29. They said, "All these now join their brothers the nobles, and bind themselves with a curse and an oath to follow the Law of God given through Moses." They were depending on their own efforts to obey. They bound themselves with a curse and an oath. They were saying, "We will do this or else." They were relying upon their own will power. They were gritting their teeth and swearing to perform. There is no expression of any need of help from God or of any provision for failure and return.

That is what the New Testament adds. It is right to vow. It is right to write it down for your own benefit and remind yourself frequently of your goal. But we must always add the words that Paul uses of himself, "I can do everything through him who gives me strength" (Philippians 4:13). That is what makes the difference.

Lord, I can do nothing apart from You. I commit myself to You and what You desire for me, but I realize that even the desire to do that comes from You.

This daily devotion was inspired by one of Ray's sermons. Please read [The New Resolve](#) for more on this portion of scripture.

The Need For A Sacrifice

Nehemiah 10:30-33

Can we daily and joyfully choose to sacrifice our will for His will? Do all of our choices reflect the ownership rights of the Lord Jesus who bought us at infinite cost?

We assume the responsibility. For the holy offerings; for sin offerings to make atonement for Israel; and for all the duties of the house of our God (Nehemiah 10:32-33).

The people recognized the need for offerings and sacrifices. The history of Israel clearly reveals that this nation emphasized shedding the blood of animals and offering up their crops and grain to God. By so doing they were never allowed to forget the cost of redemption. Blood shed means a death has occurred. God is teaching His people that their problem with sin within is of such a serious nature it cannot be solved by merely instructing the mind. Only death can cure it.

These bloody offerings prepared the way for the death of Jesus and even our remembrance of that death at the Lord's table. We ought to meditate on this every day. We should never allow ourselves to forget the cost of our redemption. It took all that God had to open a door that we might return to Him. As Peter put it, "For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect" (1 Peter 1:18-19).

Very closely related to the blood offerings was the promise of these people to bring the firstfruits of their crops, herds, flocks, and even their sons to God. What they were doing was recognizing the ownership and rights of God in their lives. A corresponding truth for us today is, "You are not your own; you were bought at a price" (1 Corinthians 6:19b-20a). God owns us. We do not own ourselves. The world says, "You are your own. If you are pregnant and you do not want the baby, you can kill it, because you have a right to do what you please with your own body." But the Bible says, "No, you are not your own. You do not have a right to do anything you like with the body God gave you."

This is true in other aspects of life as well. We are not our own. We have no right to determine what we are going to do with our lives or even whom we are going to marry, apart from God's limitations. We have certain choices granted to us, but not all choices. One of the important aspects of becoming a Christian is to recognize the rights of God and to live our lives within the limits He establishes. This is what this great passage is teaching. It is the way by which Israel recognized frequently and continually that their lives were not their own. They too "were bought with a price." They belonged to God. He has the right to direct their affairs and make many choices for them.

Thank You, Lord, for this reminder that I am not my own; I have been bought with a price. I surrender my life to You, knowing that You have redeemed me with the precious blood of Christ

This daily devotion was inspired by one of Ray's sermons. Please read [The New Resolve](#) for more on this portion of scripture.

The House Of God

Nehemiah 10:34-39

Have we learned patience and received blessing from believers who are different from us? Are we faithfully meeting and ministering with others in the body of Christ?

We will not neglect the house of our God (Nehemiah 10:39b).

Throughout the history of Israel, the temple, or the tabernacle before that, was called "the house of God." God signified His presence there by the shekinah glory that was located in the Holy of Holies. Today, under the New Testament, no building is ever to be called "the house of God." This has been ignored by churches throughout the centuries, and temples, cathedrals, tabernacles, and church buildings have all been called "the house of God." If you look at the teaching of the New Testament, however, you will find that it is not a building but the people who are the house of God. At one point, we even changed the sign in front of our building to reflect this truth. Where it says "Peninsula Bible Church," we added the words "Meets Here." Thus, it is not the building that is the church--it is the people who gather here. They are "the house of God."

Notice the commitment of these people to attend faithfully the worship services of the temple. We all need the ministry of the saints. Paul prayed that the Ephesians "may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge--that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God" (Ephesians 3:18-19). You cannot do that without the ministry of other people. Hebrews has a specific admonition to that end: "Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another--and all the more as you see the Day approaching" (Hebrews 10:25). The writer is referring to the return of Jesus. As we see it nearing, we need all the more to

gather together because we need each other's support.

Two men of widely different temperaments work together. Normally they would not get along very well, and they might not even like each other. But they work together, and both agree that having to work with someone with whom they do not particularly have an affinity has been a blessing to them. They have learned how to appreciate someone different from themselves. They have learned how to be tolerant and patient with one another. Though it has been a struggle and they have had their moments, they both agree that God has used this to teach them how to grow. So even those in "the house of God" who irritate us can be of benefit to us.

Father, thank You for the house of God--for those men and women You have placed around me, who in one way or another I desperately need. May I learn to appreciate and love them

This daily devotion was inspired by one of Ray's sermons. Please read [The New Resolve](#) for more on this portion of scripture.

Any Volunteers?

Nehemiah 11

God calls and equips His people to serve voluntarily. Will we miss the grandeur of His calling to minister both in the Church and the world, by default?

Now the leaders of the people settled in Jerusalem, and the rest of the people cast lots to bring one out of every ten to live in Jerusalem, the holy city, while the remaining nine were to stay in their own towns. The people commended all the men who volunteered to live in Jerusalem (Nehemiah 11:1-2).

The great principle to remember in reading the Old Testament is that what happens to Israel on a physical level pictures what is happening to us on the spiritual level. God too is a builder. The New Testament tells us that He is building a city with inhabitants called the New Jerusalem. It is not like the old one, made of bricks and mortar, but a new city built of spiritual stones--"living stones," according to the New Testament (1 Peter 2:5). It is intended to be inhabited by redeemed people. If you draw that parallel, you will begin to see some of the teaching of this passage in Nehemiah.

Chapter 11 is the account of Nehemiah's efforts to repopulate Jerusalem. Although the city wall had been rebuilt at this point, Nehemiah discovered that he had a problem. He had a fine, well-defended city--but without people! His solution was to draft families to move there, for a capital must be inhabited since it is the heart of the nation. As the governor, he simply issued an edict: "One out of every ten people living in the suburbs must move to Jerusalem." He went through the towns and numbered the people, counting them off by tens, and then they threw a die with ten numbers on it. The man who had the same number that came up on the die was expected to move his family into Jerusalem.

If you read this carefully, it is apparent that when a man was chosen to move into Jerusalem, he was permitted to decline if he wanted to. That is because God wanted volunteers for this. So a man could be chosen but could decide against moving. Then the lot would be cast again and another name chosen. Sooner or later someone would be found who consented freely to go. According to the account, those who chose to go were commended by the people. They honored them because they volunteered to do what God called them to do.

The same principle applies in the church today. According to the New Testament, we are all called into the ministry--all of us! The ministry belongs to the saints! The minute you become a Christian, you are moved into God's new Jerusalem. You are asked to take up labor there, to do work according to the spiritual gift God has given you. But you must also volunteer to do it. God does not force His people to do what they are asked to do. He gave us all spiritual gifts, but He does not force us to use them. Yet if you want to be respected or honored and commended at last by the Lord Himself and by all His people, then the wise thing is to volunteer to perform the realm of ministry He has opened up for you.

Lord I want to be apart of what You are building. Thank You for the gifts and talents You have given me. Show me how best to put them to use.

This daily devotion was inspired by one of Ray's sermons. Please read [The Way God Works](#) for more on this portion of scripture.

Real Heroes And Real Life

Nehemiah 12:1-26

Studying and remembering God-made history can be far more fruitful than dwelling on man-made philosophy. What lessons are we learning from the Bible each day?

These were the priests and Levites who returned with Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel and with Jeshua (Nehemiah 12:1a).

This takes us back to the heroes of the past. Zerubbabel led the first return from Babylonian captivity to Jerusalem in 538 BC, almost one hundred years earlier than Nehemiah's day. Nehemiah is looking back at these men who led that procession. Zerubbabel was a priest, and Jeshua was a Levite. They led a company of Israelites back to the city of Jerusalem to rebuild the temple. Verse 7 says that they were the "leaders of the priests and their associates in the days of Jeshua."

Verses 22-26 give the chronological time when the records that we have just looked at were recorded. The passage does not sound very interesting, but we are told that for the first group, "the family heads of the Levites... were recorded in the reign of Darius the Persian." That meant that there was a time when their names were kept as temple records, but they were not actually recorded permanently until the days of Darius the Second. This would put that record somewhere between 423 and 404 BC, somewhat later than Nehemiah. Evidently some later hand added this so that we might know when it was written.

Then there is another mention in verse 23 of "the book of the annals," meaning the annals of the kings of Judah. One of them is especially mentioned in the reference to "David, the man of God." What a remarkable influence David had! F. B. Meyer says, "How long the influence of David has lingered over the world, like the afterglow of a sunset." Yet David had a terrible record of evil in his life. He fell into adultery with Bathsheba and was involved in the murder of her husband. Because his heart was set on God, however, and he took advantage of God's provision for forgiveness, David is known to history as "the man after God's own heart."

The passage teaches us that we must not forget past heroes, the men and women of fame and glory whom God has used in former days. I have been reading again the writings of some of my early spiritual heroes. I would urge you, on the basis of a passage like this, to read biography! It will bless you. It will challenge you and strengthen you to see how God has used men and women of the past to stand against the temptations and pressures of the world and accomplish much for His glory.

This passage also teaches us that the deeds of God are part of the record of history. That is one of the great advantages of Christianity over all the other religions of the world. Most of them are religious philosophies or simply the musings of men meditating upon various aspects of life. Many of them are a record of visions and dreams of dubious origin. But when you come to the record of the Bible, it is based upon facts. It is not legend, myth, or fiction. It is not a record of philosophies or the inventions of humans. It is made up of historic facts. God grounds these great events in the history of the world itself.

Lord thank You for the lessons I can learn from those who have served You in the past and for the very real facts of history, which teach me so much about You.

This daily devotion was inspired by one of Ray's sermons. Please read [The Way God Works](#) for more on this portion of scripture.

How To Celebrate Nehemiah 12:27-43

How do we distinguish joy from happiness? What are three elements in celebrating life as God intended? Do our lives reflect these three elements?

At the dedication of the wall of Jerusalem, the Levites were sought out from where they lived and were brought to Jerusalem to celebrate joyfully the dedication with songs of thanksgiving and with the music of cymbals, harps and lyres (Nehemiah 12:27).

It is proper to dedicate. And it is proper also to celebrate when God has brought us to a place of achievement. The Holy Spirit has been careful to include in this account the three aspects that make up true celebration. One of the primary elements of true celebration is the expression of joy. It is amazing to me how many Christians never appear to be joyful. They are always gloomy and grim. I am reminded of what a little girl said upon seeing a mule for the first time: "I don't know what you are, but you must be a Christian because you took just like Grandpa!" There are a lot of long-faced Christians around. There are times of sorrow and sadness, of course, but Christians ought frequently to exude a sense of joy because they have something to be joyful about. Joy is not the same as happiness. Happiness is liking the present moment because it pleases us. But joy is much deeper and more long-range. Joy appreciates the past, the present, and the future, not because the circumstances are pleasing, but because the heart is right with God. These people were happy because the wall was finished. But they were joyful because God had helped them to finish it. Aware of God's love and acceptance, they therefore were joyful.

There is another clue hidden in this paragraph that tells us what celebration should be based on. Verse 30 tells us that purification is necessary to celebrate. You cannot do it with a hypocritical heart. It becomes a festival of empty words. Many people seem to be afraid of this word purity. They think it describes a self-righteous kind of person. But purification in the Christian life stems from the same philosophy that motivates us when we wash dishes. You do not set your table with dirty dishes, do you? God does not do His work with dirty vessels! We need a periodic cleansing of our lives and hearts. In the New Testament, it is a simple process. It is not by ritual but by confessing our faults and believing that God has forgiven them. Confess your sins. Then believe that God cleanses you, that He forgives you, that He has restored you to His favor. This is what fills the heart with joy.

There is still a third element in this that is found in verse 31. Thankfulness is always part of true celebration. These people were thankful. Are we properly thankful? Do we give thanks every day to God for the blessings we are enjoying at the moment? We are so trained by the media to grumble and complain, to insist on something we do not have, to focus on that instead of on all we do have. One of the first signs of a growing, maturing spirit in young Christians is that they begin to give thanks to God for what He has poured into their life; for the opportunities that are before them; and for the present blessings and liberties that they do enjoy. So there are the elements that make up celebration: joyfulness purity, and thanksgiving.

Lord, forgive me for so often forgetting all that I have to celebrate. Teach me to celebrate all You have done for me with joy, purity, and thanksgiving.

This daily devotion was inspired by one of Ray's sermons. Please read [The Sound of Rejoicing](#) for more on this portion of scripture.

Giving Cheerfully **Nehemiah 12:44-47**

What motive is at the true center of our heart in our giving? Are we so grateful for God's gifts to us that we give willingly, cheerfully, generously, and with compassion?

From the fields around the towns they were to bring into the storerooms the portions required by the Law for the priests and the Levites, for Judah was pleased with the ministering priests and Levites (Nehemiah 12:44b).

Those offerings and contributions were given with pleasure. The Scriptures carefully inform us that offerings mean nothing if they are not given cheerfully. If you are not giving with pleasure, God does not want your gift. He does not care how big or small it is. If all you are after is to make an impression on others by the size of your gift, God is not interested in that. Jesus told of a widow who put two tiny pieces of money into the treasury, saying that she had given more than all that the rich people had cast in that day. God would pick up that insignificant amount and use it more mightily than He would the larger gifts of the wealthy. What God looks for always is a note of pleasure, of delight, of cheerfully returning funds to him out of a thankful heart.

Dr. H. A. Ironside used to tell the story of an old Scotsman who inadvertently dropped a gold sovereign in the collection bag at a church service. In Scotland, when the ushers take up the offering, they use a long pole with a bag on the end of it, which they pass among the pews. This old Scotsman put in a gold sovereign by mistake when he meant to put in only a shilling. As soon as he realized his mistake, he tried to retrieve his sovereign. But the usher pulled the bag back and said, "Nah, once in, always in!" The old man said, "Ah well, I'll get credit for it in glory." The usher replied, "Nah, you'll get credit for the shilling!" That is all the old man intended to give. So we are to give as God has given, freely and gladly.

The closing sentence of this paragraph says, "They also set aside the portion for the other Levites." They were careful to take care of others who were not able to be there or who were busy performing and therefore did not have opportunity to share in the offerings. This is a beautiful picture of the oneness of the nation of Israel. God was constantly seeking to teach these people that they belonged to each other. They were not individualists, doing their own thing, but they were workers together with God. I do not know any truth that is more important in the body of Christ than to recognize that God uses people different from us. We must recognize that our way of serving God is not the only way but that we belong to and need one another.

Father, thank You that out of the abundance of what You have given to me, I can give to others, knowing that You will continue to provide for my needs.

This daily devotion was inspired by one of Ray's sermons. Please read [The Sound of Rejoicing](#) for more on this portion of scripture.

Drastic Action **Nehemiah 13:1-9**

Do we have the requisite credibility, courage and wisdom for expressing outrage in our decadent culture? Are we blinded by tolerance so as not to see the wrongness?

I was greatly displeased and threw all Tobiah's household goods out of the room. I gave orders to purify the rooms, and then I put back into them the equipment of the house of God, with the grain offerings and the incense (Nehemiah 13:8-9).

The high priest had allowed his grandson to marry the daughter of Sanballat, the governor of Samaria, who was an ally of Tobiah the Ammonite. Both of these were vitriolic, bitter enemies of Nehemiah. This cozy alliance led to an invitation to Tobiah to actually move into the temple itself. To make room for him, the high priest took over the storeroom that was set apart for the grain, oil, and incense used by the Levites in their purification and ritual ceremonies. So there were two wrongs involved. An Ammonite and his

family were actually living in the temple, contrary to the Law of Moses; and, they had deliberately defrauded the Levites of their rights of storage.

When Nehemiah returned he went into prompt and passionate action. He threw the baggage out, fumigated the room, and returned the oil, grain, and incense to their proper place. Many people feel that he overreacted. Today we do not get upset by the presence of evil and think it strange that a man should act like Nehemiah did. We have lost to a great degree our ability to express outrage and public indignation over things that are wrong.

We must remember, however, that this is similar to the incident in the New Testament when Jesus came into the temple and found it filled with moneychangers. Jesus reacted in a way similar to Nehemiah. He made a whip and went around the temple, upsetting tables and driving the moneychangers out. It indicates that there is a time for strong stands against the evils that others have indifferently accepted.

Evil invades us quietly. Before we are aware of it, we have compromised and gone along with standards widely accepted. We find the people of God have often been corrupted by this kind of thing. When it comes down to individuals, this is a picture of our struggle with our flesh. We must be prepared to be drastic and take often painful action to clear up the things that are wrong in our own affairs. Many Christians allow evil to take root in their own lives. This story pictures the way these false forces can invade our lives and take up rooms in the very temple of our spirit, polluting and destroying us in the process. Take action. Do not allow these evil things to remain. Even if it takes painful effort to do so, end it! That is what this great story teaches us.

Lord, forgive me for the ways in which I allow subtle compromises to creep into my thinking and my choices. Help me to be as ruthless in judging and dealing with my own sin.

This daily devotion was inspired by one of Ray's sermons. Please read [Looking For A Few Good Men](#) for more on this portion of scripture.

Are You Faithful?

Nehemiah 13:10-14

In a culture where unfaithfulness is rampant, are we thoughtfully alert, humbly motivated, and faithfully committed to be counter-cultural?

I put Shelemiah the priest, Zadok the scribe, and a Levite named Pedaiah in charge of the storerooms and made Hanan son of Zaccur, the son of Mattaniah, their assistant, because these men were considered trustworthy (Nehemiah 13:13a).

Notice how representative this group is that he chooses. There is a priest, a scribe, a Levite, and a layman. All four represent various aspects of the life of Israel and share one great quality. He tells us, "these men were considered trustworthy" (Nehemiah 13:13b). They were faithful men. I have discovered that today faithfulness is a quality not highly esteemed, although we often pay lip service to it. It is disheartening to me at times to see how few people take seriously the responsibility to carry through faithfully what they have undertaken.

Faithfulness is the quality that God admires. Paul says in 1 Corinthians of those who minister in the church: "Now it is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful" (1 Corinthians 4:2). That is the primary thing God looks for: the ability to hang in with an assignment until you are through; the willingness to fulfill responsibility year after year, not needing to be praised or thanked or publicly encouraged in order to do so; to work unto the Lord; to show up on time and to not leave until the work is done.

I have learned through the years to look for four qualities in leaders, whether they are men or women. I look first for a searching mind: a person who is mentally alert, who has curiosity about life, who wants to learn all the time. Such a person is always reading, always listening, always thinking about what he or she hears, and trying to reason out what is behind it.

Second, I look for a humble heart--someone whose ego is not on the line all the time, who must be praised and honored and encouraged in order to get him to do anything at all; who gets disgruntled and turned off if she does not get recognized. I look for someone who understands that service is a privilege; that power is not conferred upon a person by an office but by serving people.

Third, I look for an evident gift: God's people are gifted people. There is not one of the members of the body of Christ who has not been equipped by the Holy Spirit with a special ability to do something. When Christians know what it is, they always enjoy doing it. It is not a burden any more than wings are a burden to a bird. It is a delight to them. I look for people who have the gift for what we are asking them to do because they will stay with it and enjoy it to the end.

And then, fourth, undergirding all the others and making them possible, is a faithful spirit--someone who will not quit; someone who sees her work as a ministry of service to the Lord Himself; who has undertaken it out of gratitude in his own life and heart, and no

matter how tough it gets, will not quit.

God looks for these kind of people to change the age in which they live. That is what we are called to do today. We are all included in this calling, not just the obvious, visible leaders. What is required are faithful men and women who are willing to carry this through to the end.

Father, I ask that You would develop in me a spirit faithfulness. Help me to stick with the responsibilities You give to the end

This daily devotion was inspired by one of Ray's sermons. Please read [Looking For A Few Good Men](#) for more on this portion of scripture.

The True Sabbath Rest

Nehemiah 13:15-22

Are we at rest because of the work God has done and is doing in us? Are we relying on our own strength rather than understanding His power as the source?

In those days I saw men in Judah treading winepresses on the Sabbath and bringing in grain and loading it on donkeys, together with wine, grapes, figs and all other kinds of loads. And they were bringing all this into Jerusalem on the Sabbath, Therefore I warned them against selling food on that day (Nehemiah 13:15).

Nehemiah was concerned by this disregard for the Law. He is trying to correct the difficulties that had caused problems for Israel in the past. So he orders the gates to be closed at sunset on Friday. He requires the Levites to cleanse themselves and to guard the gates so that no one violates the Sabbath.

Should we also keep the Sabbath by refraining from work and travel? As we have seen throughout this book, these regulations imposed upon Israel were what the New Testament calls "shadows," pictures of something even more important that God wants observed. You observe the Sabbath when you fulfill what the Sabbath portrays.

At the heart of the Sabbath is the word rest. The Sabbath is intended for people, that they may learn to rest. The Sabbath is God's stress management program! It is how to prevent burnout--how to recover from too much pressure and catch up with yourself. It is how to gather yourself together and become able to handle the work you must do.

There are two reasons given in the Scripture for the Sabbath. The first one is found in Exodus 20:11. There we are told that because God finished creation in six days and then rested on the seventh day, He asked His people to rest after six days of labor. Why did God rest? He accomplished His objective. People too must recognize a limit to their work. There is a need to stop, to allow the body, mind, and spirit to recognize their limitations.

The second reason the Sabbath was given is often ignored. God said to Israel, "Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and that the LORD your God brought you out of there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. Therefore the LORD your God has commanded you to observe the Sabbath day" (Deuteronomy 5:15). They were to rest in order to reflect on God's ability to work beyond the labors they had already completed.

So there are two aspects of the Sabbath--creation and redemption. There is a rest of cessation; a ceasing from our own works. But then there is the rest of rejoicing in the mighty delivering power of God.

Father, in the midst of the hustle and bustle of my life, teach me that I need to enter into the rest of creation and redemption, always remembering that Your work comes before my work.

This daily devotion was inspired by one of Ray's sermons. Please read [Preventing Burnout And Preserving Power](#) for more on this portion of scripture.

The Unequal Yoke

Nehemiah 13:23-29

Are we actively seeking the profound and practical wisdom of the Word for all our relationships, and to avail ourselves of His wise and loving protection?

Must we hear now that you too are doing all this terrible wickedness and are being unfaithful to our God by marrying foreign women? (Nehemiah 13:27).

The nations among whom Israel was called to live were unusually degenerate. They practiced public lewdness. Their immorality had

spread diseases among their people. They killed their children by throwing them alive into furnaces of fire in worship to their god Molech. To protect the Israelites from these dangerous practices, God had told them not to intermarry with these peoples. Though intermarriage might look right and proper to us, it would introduce to the Israelites attitudes and concepts that would ultimately undermine their faith and destroy them and their nation. This is what happened. Though Solomon, David's own son, was said to be the wisest man who ever lived, he contracted over a thousand marriages with foreign women who brought their gods with them and eventually introduced pagan practices into the worship of Israel. By the time Solomon's son came to the throne, the nation was so divided it could no longer exist as one but was separated into two. So this was a very wise pledge to make.

This command is actually repeated in Paul's second letter to the Corinthians, not concerning racial distinctions, but religious. He says, "Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness? What harmony is there between Christ and Belial? What does a believer have in common with an unbeliever? What agreement is there between the temple of God and idols? (2 Corinthians 6:14-16). Many Christians have ignored that to their own detriment by intermarrying with others of a different faith. They have thereby so undermined their own faith that evil in many ways has ultimately crept in and destroyed their marriages. There is no guarantee that if you marry a Christian you are going to have a happy marriage, because there are other principles involved. But it is much more likely that two Christians will be happy together because there are principles and practices taught to us in the Word that make for happiness in marriage. It is certain that if you disobey this command, however, you are opening the door to much heartache, struggle, and misery. There are passages designed to help people who have disobeyed this principle because God is very practical and merciful. He recognizes that for various reasons, intermarriage may occur. There are guidelines to help handle those situations. But by and large this is practical wisdom that needs to be adhered to today. Marry those who share the same faith you have, because faith is the basis for all of life.

Lord, the guidelines You have given for living are good and right. Thank You that You love enough to protect me from that which ultimately would bring hurt and misery to me and to others.

This daily devotion was inspired by one of Ray's sermons. Please read [Preventing Burnout And Preserving Power](#) for more on this portion of scripture.

Remember Me

Nehemiah 13:30-31

How prone are we to self-deception? Are we really able to be honest with ourselves as we talk with God? Do we remember daily the true source of our righteousness?

Remember me with favor, O my God (Nehemiah 13:31b).

Some people think this sounds self-serving, that Nehemiah is concerned that God is going to forget him and not reward him adequately. But that is the wrong way to read this prayer. What he is doing is recognizing his own frailty and his own tendency to self-deception. He is saying in effect, "Lord, I have done all this, but you may see it differently than I. You may see something in me that would cause you to blot this all out of your book. If you feel that way, show it to me." That is what he is asking.

It is really the same prayer that David prayed at the end of the much-loved Psalm 139. It is a great psalm about how we are fearfully and wonderfully made; how well God knows us; our sitting and our rising; that if we take the wings of the morning and travel to the uttermost parts of the earth, still God is there; how He watches over us; how He guards us and keeps us and knows our thoughts. Then it ends with this wonderful prayer, "Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting" (Psalm 139:23-24). That is a wonderfully honest prayer. It is saying, "Lord, I do not know myself very well. I deceive myself easily. I think I am doing fine, but you may see a lot of things that are terribly wrong with what I am doing. So Lord, search me and know me and see if there is any wicked way in me, and lead me to the point where I can see that, too." That is what the psalmist is asking.

And that is what Nehemiah is praying here. It is a great prayer for all of us. God has placed us in a critical moment of human history. The voices of all the great leaders of the past are silent, as far as this generation is concerned. Who is going to reach the drug addicts? Who is going to reach those who are trying to climb the ladder of success, seeking to satisfy themselves by material gain and possessions? Who is going to reach the hundreds of thousands of spiritually bankrupt people all around us? They do not come to church. Who is going to talk to them? God has called us to a ministry to reach out to them. And we need God's help in doing so.

Remember me with favor, O my God.

This daily devotion was inspired by one of Ray's sermons. Please read [Preventing Burnout And Preserving Power](#) for more on this portion of scripture.

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