

VOL. 2 | WEEKS 5-8

NOVEMBER 2018



Lead where
you are

NEHEMIAH

DEVOTIONALS

OSTERVILLE BAPTIST CHURCH

ALSO AVAILABLE

ON THE OBC APP



Available on the
App Store



ANDROID APP ON

Google Play

CONTENTS

4	LETTER FROM PASTOR ROB
6	FINDING THE ANSWERS
10	WEEK 5
22	WEEK 6
36	WEEK 7
48	WEEK 8
60	NEXT STEPS

Dear Friend,

I am so encouraged that you are reading this devotional. Regularly reading the Bible is one of the most important life habits you can cultivate. If you follow that up with the commitment to do what the Bible says, you are now on the greatest adventure this life offers. God's Word deals with the most basic and important questions of life: Who is God? Who am I? How can I have peace with God through Jesus? How can I be transformed by the Holy Spirit? How does this changed life bring about the best sort of life possible? How can I know that I will be eternally secure in the next life? I do not know about you, but I think about these questions.

Here is another encouraging point: it does not require hours and hours each day to cultivate a steady habit of reading God's Word. In fact, a consistent regular habit of reading 5-10 minutes per day can be more useful to you than only occasionally sitting down to read for an hour or two. This is because God's Word is meant to be internalized. It takes time to read, consider, and understand. As you allow God's Word to work on your mind and heart, you will find over time that God's Spirit is also working in you!

Consider the words of Psalm 1:1-3: "Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers; but his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on His law he meditates day and night. He is like a tree planted by streams of water, that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers."

Do you know what Psalm 1 is telling you? When you know God's Word and live God's Word, you will flourish like a tree that is planted just where it needs to be! God's Word is a book unlike any other. It will challenge you, change you, energize you, and comfort you.

Friend, welcome to the adventure!

God bless,

Rob Wheeler – Senior Pastor



ROB WHEELER
rob@ostervillebaptist.org

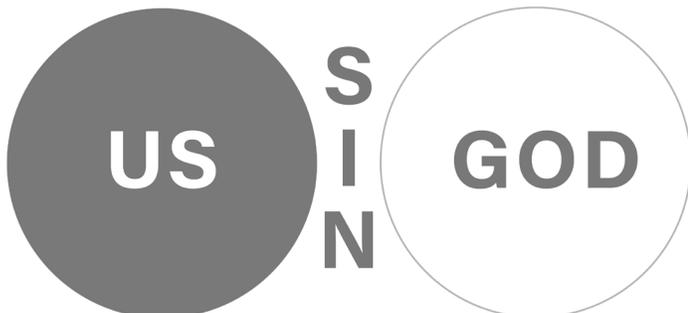
Finding the answers to life's biggest questions

WHERE DID I COME FROM?

God created the world, and that includes you. At first everything was good, exactly as God intended it. But now we all make wrong choices and commit wrong actions. We live in God's world but go our own way. We fail to live up to God's standards, and so we're guilty. The Bible calls this "sin." Our sin separates us from God.

"And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil." John 3:19

We all want to feel good about ourselves, but we only experience true meaning when we connect with our Creator. People try to find their way to God in many ways, but these efforts all fail. Our sins are a barrier between God and us.



WHY AM I HERE?

God loves you very much and wants you to experience the fullness of His love and desire to have a personal relationship with you. Through your own efforts, God the Son, died on the cross for you. He took the punishment that you deserved from God the Father and you.

THE PROBLEM



"I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." John 14:6

AM I HERE?

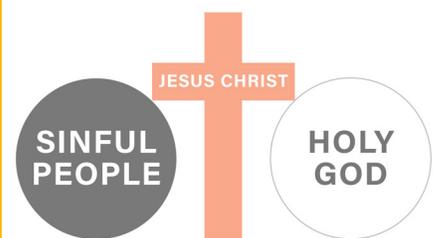
u to love Him in return. You're here because
al relationship with you. What you can't do
Jesus, did by coming to earth to die on the
for your sin. Jesus became the way between

THE WRONG WAY TO GOD



and the life. No one comes to the Father except through

THE ONLY WAY TO GOD



"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes on him should not perish but have eternal life." John 3:16

And God proved that He accepted Jesus's death as the only way to life by raising Jesus from the dead. So, Jesus Christ is the only way for us to reach the Father (John 14:6).

WHERE AM I GOING?

Jesus invites us, but warns us, too: **“Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him.” John 3:36**

If you don't find your way to God through Jesus, you will never know God personally and your life will have no lasting value. When you die, you'll be separated from God forever. The Bible calls this hell.

But if you accept Jesus as your Lord and Savior, you will have a personal relationship with God and live with Him forever. The Bible calls this heaven.

WHICH WAY ARE YOU GOING?

Jesus said: **“Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life.” John 5:24**



How do I find m

THERE ARE 3 STEPS TO TAKE

- 1 Admit that you are a sinner and (see John 8:11).
- 2 Believe (have faith) that when Jesus comes, he will take away the punishment for all your sins and conquer death (see John 1:29).
- 3 Receive (ask) Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior. Who did receive him, who believe in him, have the right to become children of God.”



My way to God?

turn away from sin (see John

Jesus died on the cross He took
sin and He rose to life again to

our Lord and Savior. "But to all
who believed in his name, he gave the
right to become children of God."
John 1:12

A SIMPLE PRAYER

Here is a simple prayer you can use to receive Christ Jesus as your Lord and Savior. It is a suggested prayer. The exact wording doesn't matter. What counts is the attitude of your heart.

"Lord Jesus, thank You for showing me how much I need you. Thank You for dying on the cross for me. Please forgive all my failures and the sins of my past. Make me clean and help me start fresh with you. I now receive You into my life as my Lord and Savior. Help me to love and serve you with all my heart. Amen."

Jesus said: **"All that the Father give me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out."** John 6:37

YOUR DESTINATION: A NEW BEGINNING

Becoming a follower of Jesus is only the beginning of an exciting journey. Jesus called it being "born again" (see John 3:3). It means that you now have a personal relationship with God as your heavenly Father. You are not alone. God sent the Holy Spirit from heaven to be your Counselor, to guide you into all truth (see John 14:26; 15:26; and 16:12-15). He will help you live each day for God and to accept the changes He wants to make in your life. You can depend on His power to enable you to grow as a follower of Jesus. Being a follower of Jesus involves a whole new life. Start now:

- » Read a part of the Bible each day.
- » Pray daily, as if talking to a close friend.
- » Join a local church where the Bible is taught.
- » Carry a portion of God's Word with you.
- » Share your faith in Christ with others.

DAY 1: DON'T TAKE IT PERSONALLY

United States soldiers are trained to face many kinds of opposition, but did you know that they are also warned to be wary of the *lack* of it? When faced with the lack of obstacles the wise military commander asks, "What is the enemy's agenda? Is the path easy because we are doing what the enemy wants?" More times than not, the pathway to victory is not an easy one, rather it is full of opposition.

Similarly, when we are amid God's will for our lives we will face opposition. Jesus hints to this truth in Matthew 7:13-14,

Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few.

Jesus warns His disciples that the absence of opposition is often an indicator that we have taken a detour away from God's path: *the way is hard that leads to life*. This truth is a bit of a reality check for all those who adhere to 'prosperity theology.' This false doctrine teaches that Christians are entitled to an easy life of wealth and physical wellbeing even though scripture clearly states otherwise: *the way is hard that leads to life*.

- How do you view adversity in your life?
- How do you personally handle opposition when you face it?

Nehemiah faced significant adversity while rebuilding the city of Jerusalem. He is a great example of how God wants us to handle opposition as we lead where we are.

DIVE IN:

Read Nehemiah 4

Notice how Nehemiah handled the adversity:

- He chose to respond, not to react rashly.
- He let out his anger in a healthy way, expressing it to God (verses 4-5).
- He prayed (verse 9).
- He continued God's work regardless of the adversity (verse 6).
- He remembered the Lord and His awesome power (verse 14).
- He took rational steps to protect those he was leading (verses 13-23).

GO DEEPER:

Read Ephesians 6:10-12

Take a look at the Greek word for 'schemes' in verse 11.

μεθοδεία (3180)

Occurrences (approximately 2)

1. cunning arts, deceit, craft, trickery

What is the enemy's agenda when he attacks you and the work God has given you to accomplish?

- When you face this kind of opposition, is the attack on you personally or on God?

Read Romans 8:31-39

Take a look at the Greek word for 'Conquerors' in verse 37.

ὑπερνικάω (5245)

Occurrences (approximately 1)

1. to be more than a conqueror, to gain a surpassing victory

- Is God able to defend Himself from all opposition?
- Do you believe He is able to defend you?

Next Steps:

- When facing opposition in your ministry, surrender the problem to God and refocus on what He has called you to do.
- Continue to grow God's kingdom by leading where you are.

Parent Power:

- Ask your child which super hero is his or her favorite.
 - Have fun discussing what makes that super hero so awesome.
- Now tell you child to imagine that it is "take a super hero to school day" and they get to take their favorite hero.
 - Ask them to imagine that there is a bully in his class that starts to pick on him and even says mean things to his favorite hero.
 - Then ask, "Do you think your hero would be able to stick up for himself and you?"
- Explain that super heroes are fun make-believe but God is real and is much more powerful than our pretend super heroes. There will be times when other people say mean things about God. They may even do mean things to those of us who believe in Him. But God is more than able to defend Himself

and you. God will be there with us and give us strength to overcome all hardships.

- Discuss with your child different ways God encourages us in times of opposition such as: giving us Christian friends or family, through the Bible, and by the power of the Holy Spirit living inside of us.

DAY 2: LEAD BY EXAMPLE

In a trip to Kolkata, formerly known as Calcutta, Don Jacobson visited the Missionaries of Charity, the group founded by Mother Teresa. He sat down with Sister Prema, the current Superior General of the ministry, to learn more about the famous leader. As a businessman he hoped to discover the 'Big Hairy Audacious Goal' that made Mother Teresa successful. When he asked Sister Prema if Mother Teresa had set any audacious goals, like eliminating poverty, her response astounded him. She exclaimed, "Oh no! Mother Teresa was completely focused on helping one person at a time."

In Jacobson's article, *One Person at a Time*, he recounts Sister Prema's moving description of her leader, "One of Mother Teresa's great strengths was her relentless focus on the core mission of her organization: helping the poorest of the poor. She spent much of her own time helping individuals in extreme need. Her personal example still serves as the model for the Missionaries of Charity." Mother Teresa knew that the key to successful leadership is to lead by exampleⁱ.

Jesus also leads by example. He told His disciples that the greatest commandment is to LOVE God and then to LOVE our neighbor. Jesus loves completely. He loves unconditionally. He gave all He owned. He gave all He had. And then He gave His life, all for love. That is the example we have been set. That is how we are to love, how we are to live, and how we are to lead. Ralph Waldo Emerson once stated, "What you are speaks so loudly I can't hear what you are saying."ⁱⁱ Lead by example, and you will powerfully influence others, one person at a time.

DIVE IN:

Nehemiah is great example of a leader who knows how to lead by example.

Reread Nehemiah 4:15-23

- What words does Nehemiah use in these passages that indicate that he was leading by example?
- Consider your own life and leadership style. Are you leading by example?

GO DEEPER:

Read 1 Timothy 4:12

Take a look at the Greek word for 'example' in this verse.

<p>τύπος (5179)</p> <p>Occurrences (approximately 17)</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. the mark of a stroke or blow, print 2. a figure formed by a blow or impression <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. of a figure or image b. of the image of the gods 3. an example <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. in the technical sense, the pattern in conformity to which a thing must be made b. in an ethical sense, a dissuasive example, a pattern of warning c. of ruinous events which serve as admonitions or warnings to others 4. an example to be imitated <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. of men worthy of imitation 5. in a doctrinal sense <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. of a type i.e. a person or thing prefiguring a future (Messianic) person or thing

- Which of these definitions do you feel best explains the type of example we are to be as leaders?

Read Philippians 4:9

Take a look at the Greek word for 'practice' in this verse.

πράσσω (4238)

Occurrences (approximately 39)

1. to exercise, practice, to be busy with, carry on
 - a. to undertake, to do
 - b. to accomplish, perform
 - c. to commit, perpetrate
 - d. to manage public affairs, transact public business
 - e. to exact tribute, revenue, debts
 - f. to act

Like Paul, are you able to say to the people you lead, "practice what you have seen in me"?

Next Steps:

- Work on the areas in your life that God does not want others to imitate.
- Pray and ask God to help you lead by example.
- When facing opposition in your ministry, surrender the problem to God and refocus on what He has called you to do.
- Continue to grow God's kingdom by leading where you are.

DAY 3: LISTEN ALL THE WAY TO THE BOTTOM

The other day my 9-year-old son came home from hockey practice in tears. A fellow team mate had bullied him in the locker room and when he defended himself he got into trouble. Later he accidentally shot a puck that hit his coach who made the whole team do 'suicide' drills because of it. I could have interrupted my son's explanation of his woes, at this point, with the usual parental advice about shaking off bad experiences. I chose however, to continue to listen to him describe his terrible day. Finally, through his sobs he revealed the real reason for his tears, "On the way to hockey practice, Aunty said that you can die from cancer." Caught off guard by this departure from hockey-talk I replied, "Yes, you can die from cancer. Her husband died a few years ago from it." At my reply, he began to cry harder, as tears streamed

down his face he said, "But I don't want you to die!" Somehow my son had mistakenly believed that my recent bout of pneumonia was cancer. Because I truly listened, I was able to respond to my son's real concern and reassure him that I was thankfully not terminally illⁱⁱⁱ.

Christians are called to be good listeners. James 1:19 states, "*Let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger.*" But good listening is not easy. It requires discipline, effort, and intentionality. Stephen Covey explains, "[In] empathic listening ... you see the world the way they see the world, you understand their paradigm, you understand how they feel^{iv}."

One author wrote this, "The best ministry you might do today is to listen to someone's pain all the way to the bottom^v." In Nehemiah 5, the people of Israel share their troubles with Nehemiah, and he listens.

DIVE IN:

Read Nehemiah 5:1-14

- What do you do when you hear of another's sincere need?

Nehemiah heard the people's pain all the way to the bottom and learned that:

- Some of the people had large families and struggled to provide for them (verse 2).
- Others mortgaged their homes because of inflation (verse 3).
- Others could not pay back their debt (verse 4-5).

In ancient times, if you could not repay a debt, the custom was to indenture oneself as a servant until the debt was repaid. Parents would also sell children. And as we see in verse 5, some families were even selling their daughters to be second wives to the rich Jews, thus adding further humiliation to their already miserable situation.

WOW! Why were so many people suffering? There are three factors:

- There was a famine. There was a large influx of people in Jerusalem. The ground wasn't adequately farmed to keep up with the new demand. This is a big problem. Add a draught into the mix, and it turns into a crisis (verse 3).
- Artaxerxes was also taxing them heavily. People were borrowing against their land to pay their taxes (verse 4).
- The most troubling factor was that wealthy Jews were loaning to poorer Jews and charging them steep interest rates. It was usury. They were in a vicious cycle of poverty, and their own countrymen were getting rich off their backs (verse 5).

Upon hearing the needs of his followers, Nehemiah has two real options: he can ignore these problems and let them fester, or he can face them head-on. In Nehemiah 5:6-14, Nehemiah chooses option #2 and demonstrates some

remarkable conflict resolution skills. These problems would not have been resolved, if he had not truly listened to the needs of the people he was leading.

GO DEEPER:

Read Psalm 116:1-2

Take a look at the Hebrew word for 'inclined' in verse 2.

<p>נָטָה (5186)</p> <p>Occurrences (approximately 213)</p> <p>3. to stretch out, extend, spread out, pitch, turn, pervert, incline, bend, bow</p> <p>a. (Qal)</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. to stretch out, extend, stretch, offer2. to spread out, pitch (tent)3. to bend, turn, incline4. (Niphal) to be stretched out5. (Hiphil) <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. to turn, incline, influence, bend down, hold out, extend, thrust aside, thrust away

How do you think inclining our ear to others can demonstrate to them the way in which God listens to us?

Next Steps:

- Pray and ask God to help you become a better listener.
- When God brings someone into your life this week who needs a good listener, 'incline' your ear and hear their pain all the way to the bottom.
- Pray and ask God to help you lead by example.
- When facing opposition in your ministry, surrender the problem to God and refocus on what He has called you to do.
- Continue to grow God's kingdom by leading where you are.
- Work on the areas in your life that God does not want others to imitate.

Parent Power:

Listening skills are not something our culture is teaching our children. TV, video games, and social media are about self-gratification and promotion - nothing about

the fine art of hearing the needs of others. As parents, we must be the ones to teach them how to listen. It takes years to do this well. Here are a few pointers:

- Teach by example. Be a good listener. Take the time to hear what your child has to say and don't be afraid to let them know you are listening and that you care about what matters to them.
- Talk to your child about what makes a good listener:
 - Someone who allows other people to share.
 - Someone who pays attention to what other people are saying.
 - Someone who cares about the person and tries to understand why they are saying what they are.
- Give your child opportunities to practice listening to others.
 - Give them a heads up that it is time to listen and ask them questions afterwards about what they heard.

With your help, your child can learn to listen all the way to the bottom.

DAY 4: THE STEPS OF CONFRONTATION

Speaker Graham Cooke tells the story of a church in crisis. He had been called in to help the church discover why it was failing. It didn't take long for Cooke to recognize the problem: the assistant pastor was undermining the senior pastor. Feeling underappreciated and over-worked, the assistant pastor did all he could to slander the senior pastor. The conflict between the church's leaders trickled down into the rest of the church, causing it to be ineffective. Cooke explains that he prayed for weeks on how to best handle the conflict. He could simply tell the senior pastor that his assistant pastor was being divisive, but that would cause further resentment. Cooke also suspected that multiple families in the congregation would leave if the assistant pastor was let go or left. Finally, Cooke had a meeting with the two men. He had them stand back to back and told them that their job as pastors was to protect each other. He warned that the church would continue to decline if they did

not guard one another. After a long uncomfortable silence, the assistant pastor broke down in tears. He confessed his resentment and undermining behavior^{vi}. When conflict is handled correctly, forgiveness and restoration can be the result.

DIVE IN:

There is no way to avoid the fact that conflict is a part of life. As long as man sins, one against another, conflict will ensue. Even Jesus experienced conflict as the Pharisees and Sadducees consistently attacked Him and questioned His authority. Jesus outlines how we are to handle conflict.

Read Matthew 18: 15-17

Nehemiah uses this conflict management model in Nehemiah 5 when faced with the corrupt dealings of the nobles of Israel.

Reread Nehemiah 5:6-13

There are three distinct steps taken in Nehemiah 5 that we can learn from when facing conflict:

1. Step one: Collect yourself (verses 6-7). Nehemiah was angered by the injustice of the situation, but he took time to collect himself, so he could respond to the situation instead of reacting to it.
2. Step two: Confront the situation (verses 7-9). Nehemiah did not ignore the problem or down-play the issues at hand; instead, he confronted them head on.
3. Step three: Outline steps to correct the problem (verses 10-13). Nehemiah outlined clear steps for his people to move forward.

Dr. Kenneth Boa of Reflections Ministries states, "As a leader, as a human being, you can be sure that you'll face relational conflicts. No leadership model exists that will eliminate disagreements or clashes of personality. However, Christians who live up to their calling must keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace^{vii}."

GO DEEPER:

Read Ephesians 4:1-3

Take a look at the Greek word for 'peace' in verse 3.

εἰρήνη (1515)

Occurrences (approximately 93)

1. a state of national tranquility
 - a. exemption from the rage and havoc of war
2. peace between individuals, i.e. harmony, concord
3. security, safety, prosperity, felicity, (because peace and harmony make and keep things safe and prosperous)
4. of the Messiah's peace
 - a. the way that leads to peace (salvation)
5. of Christianity, the tranquil state of a soul assured of its salvation through Christ, and so fearing nothing from God and content with its earthly lot, of whatsoever sort that is

- Consider the relationships in your life. Are you keeping the unity of the spirit through the bond of peace?

Read Ephesians 4:25-32

- Paul advises the Ephesians on what Holy living should look like in these verses. How can this advice help you become better at keeping the unity of the spirit through the bond of peace?

Next Steps:

- Ask God to give you wisdom as you face interpersonal conflicts.
- If you are currently dealing with such a conflict, take the proper steps to confront the situation in a Godly manner, working towards the goal of reconciliation.
- Pray and ask God to help you lead by example.
- When facing opposition in your ministry, surrender the problem to God and refocus on what He has called you to do.
- Continue to grow God's kingdom by leading where you are.
- Work on the areas in your life that God does not want others to imitate.
- Pray and ask God to help you become a better listener.
- When God brings someone into your life this week who needs a good listener, 'incline' your ear and hear their pain all the way to the bottom.

DAY 5: YOUR SPIRITUAL CONDITION

Chuck Swindoll shared this story that well illustrates the consequences of erosion:

A very close friend of mine purchased what he and his wife hoped would be their last home. When the job was finished, he went through the normal procedure of inspecting the work and completing a punch list. A number of workmanship issues were resolved satisfactorily, and he found nothing major. He and his wife signed the final documents and settled into their new home.

Within a few weeks, doors and windows began to stick. Then cracks appeared in the tile and walls—far more and much larger than normal settling would produce. The house deteriorated at a startling pace. Something was very wrong.

My friend hired an engineer to study the problem and his investigation uncovered a terrible secret. Old topographical maps revealed that the house had been constructed over a ravine. The developers had filled it in but, apparently, water continues to run beneath the house, carrying minute amounts of soil with it. Everything looked perfectly fine while, deep down, the earth eroded away. Eventually, the strain on the slab proved to be too much and it cracked with devastating results. The house could not be repaired or sold. It was a complete loss^{viii}.

A similar erosion process happens in the lives of many people. F.B. Meyer once wrote, “No man suddenly becomes base^{ix}.” No, the process is much more insidious.

DIVE IN:

Perhaps, you are finding that there are issues all over your spiritual house. If God has identified real issues in your life consider this advice:

- Start with the gospel. Jesus died for sinners just like you and me. You can't pick yourself up by your boot straps. You can't work a little harder to fix the situation. You need the same forgiveness and grace that you needed when you first trusted Jesus.

GO DEEPER:

Read 1 John 1:5-10

- What is the truth about the sin in your life?

Next Steps:

- Concerning your sin:
 - Ask God to help you to rely on the Holy Spirit.
 - Dig into God's Word.
 - Seek His face in prayer.
 - Surround yourself with some strong Christians you can trust.
- Pray and ask God to help you lead by example.

- When facing opposition in your ministry, surrender the problem to God and refocus on what He has called you to do.
- Continue to grow God's kingdom by leading where you are.
- Work on the areas in your life that God does not want others to imitate.
- Pray and ask God to help you become a better listener.
- When God brings someone into your life this week who needs a good listener, 'incline' your ear and hear their pain all the way to the bottom.
- Ask God to give you wisdom as you face interpersonal conflicts.
- If you are currently dealing with such a conflict, take the proper steps to confront the situation in a Godly manner, working towards the goal of reconciliation.

ⁱ Jacobson, Don: govleaders.org/one-person-at-a-time.htm

ⁱⁱ <https://denisgmclaughlin.com/tag/ralph-waldo-emerson/>

ⁱⁱⁱ Illustration authored by Kristin Baker

^{iv} Covey, Stephen. *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*.

^v <http://www.desiringgod.org/articles/six-lessons-in-good-listening>

^{vi} Cooke, Graham: <https://www.brilliantperspectives.com>

^{vii} Boa, Kenneth: <https://bible.org/seriespage/19-conflict-management>

^{viii} Swindoll, Chuck. *Hand Me Another Bricks*, pp. 102-104.

^{ix} Swindoll, Chuck. *Hand Me Another Bricks*, pp. 102-104.

DAY 1: LEADERSHIP IS SACRIFICE, NOT PRIVILEGE

Among those in Britain who enjoy hiking and rock climbing, Trail Magazine is a popular magazine. The February 2004 issue provided directions for climbers descending Britain's highest peak, Ben Nevis. The summit is 4,409 feet high and coming down in bad weather can be tricky. Trail offered detailed instructions for the descent— but the instructions were wrong.

Roger Wild, of the Mountaineering Council of Scotland, caught the error and immediately contacted the magazine to point it out. Trail admitted that a crucial step in the instructions was somehow left out.

It's a good thing nobody had followed the plan. In poor visibility, climbers would have walked off the edge of a cliff into Gardyloo Gully. The one-thousand-foot drop is one of the longest in Britain. Guy Procter, editor of Trail, apologized for the missing sentence that could have led to catastrophe. He pointed out that Trail advises all climbers to use an Ordnance Survey map and a good compassⁱ.

In the landscape of leadership, much ink has been spilt on how to be a leader and what leadership entails. But often as you read books on leadership, there is a missing sentence that proves to be a crucial piece of instruction. This one missing sentence has proven to be a pitfall for many leaders who have followed the prevailing counsel too closely. What is the missing sentence? Leadership is sacrifice. Yes, leadership is sacrifice.

Not only is this crucial sentence missing, but another sentence has been inserted in its place: Leadership is privilege. The prevailing idea is that leadership is an ascent to personal privilege and not a descent to serving others. David Mathis writes in an article entitled, True Leadership Is Sacrifice, Not Privilege:

From before we can even remember, we have been indoctrinated, at nearly every turn, with the idea that being 'a leader' means getting the gold star. Leadership is a form of recognition, a kind of accomplishment, the path to privilege. Being declared a leader is like winning an award or being identified among the gifted... Leadership means privilege, and no generation has considered itself more entitled to privilege than oursⁱⁱ.

DIVE IN:

Nehemiah's book on leadership will provide some clarity to our understanding of what true leadership entails. To do this, he jumps ahead in his historical account to tell us about his own practices as governor of the people.

Read Nehemiah 5:14-19

- In what ways does Nehemiah show in these passages that leadership is sacrifice, not privilege?

GO DEEPER:

Read Matthew 16:24-27

Jesus made these statements BEFORE He died. It didn't take long, however, for His disciples to realize that Jesus meant 'take up your cross' literally -- meaning both that He was going to suffer on a cross and that they too would sacrifice for following Him.

- In what ways have you sacrificed for your faith?

Take a look at the Greek word for 'deny' in verse 24.

ἀπαρνέομαι (533)

Occurrences (approximately 11)

1. to deny
 - a. to affirm that one has no acquaintance or connection with someone
 - b. to forget one's self, lose sight of one's self and one's own interests

- Are you ready to 'deny' yourself in this way to follow Jesus?

Next Steps:

- Ask God to help you face the sacrifice required to successfully lead where you are.

DAY 2: LEADERS ARE SERVANTS FIRST

In Mark 9, the disciples are having a little scuffle along the road to Capernaum. Likely, Jesus is walking ahead, and they are hanging back having a lively discussion — hands waving, anger flaring. Peter may even shove John a little! Then Jesus confronts them at the house they were staying at, “What were you discussing on the way?”

Basically, “You guys seemed pretty animated back there! Were you talking about how we could better reach people? You remember my teaching, ‘The harvest is plentiful... the workers are few.’ Or how to apply those great commandments, ‘Love God, love people’... What were you so passionately discussing?”

And He’s met with silence. Matthew and James won’t make eye contact. Peter’s humming ‘Rise and Shine’ and watching the dust fly up as he kicks the ground. They hadn’t been passionately discussing love for God and people. No! They had been arguing over who was the greatest among them. Peter was bragging about the time that he was the only one willing to leave the boat and walk on water. John had fired back, “Yeah—and you made it real far, didn’t you Peter? I don’t think I’d use that story to defend my point!” Back and forth... Back and forth...

In Mark 9:31, Jesus sits them down and begins to teach on the real meaning of leadership: *‘If anyone would be first, he must be last of all and servant of all.’*

“There has always been a true elite of God’s leaders,” states John White, quoted by J.I. Packer in, *A Passion for Faithfulness*:

They are the meek who inherit the Earth. They weep and pray in secret and defy Earth and Hell in public. They tremble when faced with danger but die in their tracks rather than turn back. They are like a shepherd defending his sheep or a mother protecting her young. They sacrifice without grumbling, give without calculating, suffer without groaning. To those in their charge they say, “We live if you do well.” Their price is above rubies. And Nehemiah was one of themⁱⁱⁱ.

DIVE IN:

In Nehemiah 5, we see Nehemiah demonstrating servant leadership and he answers the question: ‘Why?’ Why sacrifice? Why serve and be generous? If we’re merely serving others and being generous to expand our influence over them, that’s just a form of manipulation. Nehemiah explains his two main motives for servant leadership:

1. The fear of God, verse 15

Nehemiah states, *"I did not do so, because of the fear of God."* Rightly defined, the fear of God means to stand in awe of God for who He is and what He has done. It's a healthy recognition that we will give an account to Him for how we have lived our lives on earth.

2. A compassion for people, verse 18

In verse 18, Nehemiah explains his other motive: *"Yet for all this I did not demand the food allowance of the governor, because the service was too heavy on this people."* For twelve years, he paid liberally out of his own money. He did not charge the people because he knew that they didn't have two pennies to rub together. He had compassion and the compassion led him to respond rightly to their needs.

GO DEEPER:

There are many other examples of servant leaders in Scripture, but none are as powerful as our Savior. He served humbly, even washed His follower's feet. He served the will of His Heavenly Father, sacrificing all, even His own life.

Read Matthew 5:16

- Like Christ, do you have an internal compulsion to see God glorified?
- Do you do what you do so that He will be the center of attention, even if you are left back stage?

A servant leader does the work and the spotlight shines upon God.

Read Matthew 20:25-28

Take a look at the Greek word for 'serve' in verse 28.

διακονέω (1247)

Occurrences (approximately 34)

1. to be a servant, attendant, domestic, to serve, wait upon
 - a. to minister to one, render ministering offices to
 - b. to be served, ministered unto
 - c. to wait at a table and offer food and drink to the guests, of women preparing food
 - d. to minister i.e. supply food and necessities of life
 - e. to relieve one's necessities (e.g. by collecting alms), to provide take care of, distribute, the things necessary to sustain life
 - i. to take care of the poor and the sick, who administer the office of a deacon
 - ii. in Christian churches to serve as deacons
 - iii. to minister a thing to one, to serve one or by supplying any thing

- In what ways are you serving those whom God has given you to lead?

Next Steps:

- Ask God to give you strength, wisdom and humility as you serve those whom God has given you to lead.
- Go and serve.
- Ask God to help you face the sacrifice required to successfully lead where you are.

Parent Power:

I will never forget the day my father had all of us kids sit in the living room with a big bowl of warm water and a towel; he proceeded to wash our feet! While washing, he told the story of John 13:1-17 where Jesus washed the disciples' feet. As he lathered the soap between my toes, he looked me in the eye and said, "No matter how big or small we are, when we serve others we become like Jesus.^{iv}"

- Follow my father's lead and wash your child's feet.
- Tell him the story of how Jesus washed his disciples' feet and what that means.
- Help him come up with one or two ways he can serve others this week.
- Reward him with encouraging words and or treats when he follows through and serves.

DAY 3: WHAT CAN GOD DO THROUGH YOU?

The hit TV series, *Mad Men*, chronicles the frenzied climb towards success in the advertising business in the 1960s. With lavish costumes and sets you feel as if you step from your living room into the past but the show is far from sentimental. The ambition of both men and women in the series drives them to do anything to advance their careers. This is satire at its most decadent. As TV critic, David Hare states,

But surely the reason that the alcohol, the sexism, the insecurity, the duplicity, the infidelity, the bare-faced lying, and the status anxiety at work have taken such hold on the public imagination is because they so perfectly match our own experiences^y.

If this is what the race for promotion looks like in the secular world, it's no wonder that Christians ask, 'Is it okay to be successful? Should I accept that big promotion? What about a political career? Should I pursue advancement as a Christian?' Like the rest of society, we struggle over the fear of failure. But for us, there is the added fear that we might cave to the increased pressure that can come with advancement and to that flighty temptress: ambition.

DIVE IN:

A Psalm of Asaph provides an answer to these concerns and sheds light on who is ultimately behind any promotion we receive.

Read Psalm 75:5-7

Asaph is reminding us that God is ultimately behind any elevation.

Take a look at the Hebrew word for 'lift up' in verse 5.

רָוַם (7311)

Occurrences (approximately 189)

1. to rise, rise up, be high, be lofty, be exalted
 - a. (Qal)
 - i. to be high, be set on high
 - ii. to be raised, be uplifted, be exalted
 - iii. to be lifted, rise
 - b. (Polal) to be lifted up
 - c. (Hiphil)
 - .to raise, lift, lift up, take up, set up, erect, exalt, set on high
 - i. to lift up (and take away), remove
 - ii. to lift off and present, contribute, offer, contribute
 - d. (Hithpolel) to exalt oneself, magnify oneself
2. (Qal) to be rotten, be wormy

These Hebrew words describe the idea of promotion or 'being made great'. Asaph is reminding us, "Hey! Don't post selfies all over FB if you get promoted. Your success didn't just evolve. Behind your recent exaltation was God's sovereign hand."

What can God do through wholly surrendered Christians in positions of prominence? Much. Joseph was a slave who God elevated to be second only to Pharaoh. His exaltation resulted in the saving of many lives. Esther was a Jewish captive whom God elevated to be queen. Her exaltation was used by God to save the lives of the Jews from the hate of Haman^{vi}.

Read Proverbs 29:2

Solomon is making a profound point here. Do you hear what he says happens when we lead where we are? If God has placed you in a leadership position at your company and you are 'righteous' in your business conduct, it has a trickle-down effect. The people below you 'rejoice'. Your godly conduct in the position of prominence makes their lives better. And get this—the higher the position of leadership, the more people 'rejoicing'.

Nehemiah was also promoted to a position of prominence as governor over his people.

Reread Nehemiah 5:14-19

Notice how he did not abuse his privilege (vv 15). Nehemiah does not detail every abuse of his predecessors. However, we're told enough to know that they were taking advantage of the people and padding their pockets. Nehemiah looked at this system and he knew it was wrong! Changing a corrupt system is an uphill battle, but as a leader, you answer to a Higher Authority.

- Why does Nehemiah hang tough amid the change (see verse 15)?

GO DEEPER:

Being promoted by God is one thing, but what about ambition? Is it sinful to be ambitious?

Read 1 Timothy 6:9, Philippians 2:3-4, and Romans 15:20

- What motive is behind your ambition?

God blesses our ambition to further His kingdom but condemns selfish ambition as sin.

Next Steps:

- Ask God to help you to handle the prominence of leadership with humility and generosity.
- Ask God to help you face the sacrifice required to successfully lead where you are.
- Ask God to give you strength, wisdom, and humility as you serve those whom God has given you to lead.
- Go and serve.

DAY 4: FOR THE SAKE OF OTHERS

Most leadership roles come with certain rights and job perks. Your hard work deserves to be rewarded but there are times when God may ask for you to give up certain rights for the sake of others.

I know a pastor who, on multiple occasions, would forgo a salary increase for the sake of one of the members of his staff. It is no little sacrifice for him. He does not make a mountain of money. However, he knows the situations of the guys serving under him and has forgone raises so that they would have enough to keep up with their bills. He makes no production of it. His staff members don't know about it. When God asks us to give up our rights, it can be a true test of our motives to lead.

DIVE IN:**Reread Nehemiah 5:14-18**

In Nehemiah 5, Nehemiah details the rights and privileges that he has forgone as Governor. Is it wrong to have certain job perks such as an expense account, a company camel, some stock shares in the Judean countryside? Absolutely not! Some of these perks are highly useful. So why give up these rights? Nehemiah is

displaying the most important leadership principle of all: leaders know that leadership is a call to serve others^{vii}.

Nehemiah chose to relinquish his rights to not hinder his ministry. We see something similar in the life of Paul.

Read 1 Corinthians 9

In verse 12, Paul says that he chose to give up his right to receive pay from the church. Why? Jesus taught that those who preach the gospel should live by the gospel. And similarly, the rest of Scripture teaches that pastors have a right to be paid. 1 Tim. 5:17 is a prime example of this.

- What reason then, does Paul give for giving up his right to receive pay in verse 12?

GO DEEPER:

Read Romans 14:21

As we see in this verse, Paul is encouraging us to be willing to give up certain rights. When determining whether to enjoy the perks or give them up, ask yourself these questions:

- Could this potentially harm my witness?
- Will this edify me and others?
- Could this potentially master me or make me addicted?

Next Steps:

- Pray about the perks and privileges you enjoy and ask God if He has given them to you to enjoy or to surrender back to Him.
- Ask God to help you face the sacrifice required to successfully lead where you are.
- Ask God to give you strength, wisdom, and humility as you serve those whom God has given you to lead.
- Go and serve.
- Ask God to help you to handle the prominence of leadership with humility and generosity.

Parent Power:

The other day my son asked to take a new toy with us on a family outing. While there, he quickly made a new friend and the two children had a lot of fun playing with his new toy. On the way home, I noticed that the toy was missing. "Son," I chided, "you need to take better care of your things. Now we have to drive all the

way back to get it.” He replied, “No, I gave it to my new friend. He doesn’t have many toys^{viii}.”

Selfless sacrifice is a difficult concept for adults to implement let alone children. Yet I am continually impressed by our children’s willingness to learn generosity and kindness. As parents we can reinforce this concept.

- One way to do this is by giving your child opportunities to give up her ‘turn’ for a family member or friend. This can be a turn on the computer, a video game, a trampoline, a swing, bike, etc.
 - She should know that it is her turn and that she has a choice. She can take her turn or wait and let someone else have a turn first.
 - Be sure to reward your child every time she chooses to sacrifice for someone else. This can be with words of encouragement, an extra turn, or a special treat.

Just as we reward our children for sacrificing for others, God also blesses us when we put others before ourselves.

True, our motivation should be to bless others through our sacrifice, but being blessed in return is an added bonus.

DAY 5: LEADERS ARE GENEROUS WITH THEIR ABUNDANCE

In their book, “Improving Your Serve: The Art of Unselfish Living” Charles Swindoll and Lee Hough share the following story:

Shortly after World War II came to a close, Europe began picking up the pieces. Much of the Old Country had been ravaged by war and was in ruins. Perhaps the saddest sight of all was that of little orphaned children starving in the streets of those war-torn cities.

Early on a chilly morning, an American soldier was making his way back to the barracks in London. As he turned the corner in his Jeep, he spotted a little lad with his nose pressed to the window of a pastry shop. Inside the cook was kneading dough for a fresh batch of doughnuts. The hungry boy stared in silence, watching every move. The soldier pulled his Jeep to the curb, stopped, got out and walked quietly over to where the little fellow was standing. Through the steamed-up window he could see the mouth-watering morsels as they were being pulled from the oven, piping hot.

The boy salivated and released a slight groan as he watched the cook place them onto the glass-enclosed counter, ever so carefully. The soldier's heart went out to the nameless orphan as he stood beside him. "Son...would you like some of those?" The boy was startled. "Oh, yeah...I would!" The American stepped inside and bought a dozen, put them in a bag, and walked back to where the lad was standing in the foggy cold of the London morning. He smiled, held out the bag, and said simply, "Here you are." As he turned to walk away, he felt a tug on his coat. He looked back and heard the child ask quietly, "Mister...are you God's?"

Good leaders know that we are never more like God than when we give. "God so loved the world, that He gave ..."

DIVE IN:

Nehemiah understood this and showed a disposition of generosity.

Reread Nehemiah 5:17-19

In his book, "Men of Character: Nehemiah", Gene Getz states:

Nehemiah's refusal to take the allowance didn't mean that he had no need to entertain. He still fed 150 Jews regularly at his own table — men and officials who were part of his staff. He also regularly entertained dignitaries from the surrounding nations (verse 17). Imagine the amount of food and drink this took every day! In fact, you don't have to use your imagination. Nehemiah spelled it out (verse 18). Didn't Nehemiah deserve to use his 'expense account'? Wouldn't it have been legitimate? The answer is a decided 'yes!' But—as Nehemiah already noted—he had his reasons^x.

Nehemiah was so committed to God's work that he put his resources towards advancing His kingdom.

- Are you putting your resources to work to advance the kingdom of God?

GO DEEPER:

Many Americans struggle with generosity because they wrestle with stewardship. It's not that they don't want to 'give' to God's Work. They are just underwater.

- If you find yourself in that position, consider attending a proper money management course such as "Financial Peace University" by Dave Ramsey. It is good stuff!

Read 2 Corinthians 9:6-15

Take a look at the Greek word for "generosity" in verse 13.

<p>ἀπλότης (572)</p> <p>Occurrences (approximately 3)</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. singleness, simplicity, sincerity, mental honesty <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. the virtue of one who is free from pretense and hypocrisy 2. not self-seeking, openness of heart manifesting itself by generosity

- Consider your own tithing and giving. Is it done from an "openness of heart"?

Next Steps:

- Look at your budget and ask, "Am I a generous person? Do I have a plan in my budget to be generous?" If you don't have a plan, you are planning to fail.
- Give abundantly and wisely from the resources God has given you to further His kingdom.
- Ask God to help you face the sacrifice required to successfully lead where you are.
- Ask God to give you strength, wisdom, and humility as you serve those whom God has given you to lead.
- Go and serve.
- Ask God to help you to handle the prominence of leadership with humility and generosity.
- Pray about the perks and privileges you enjoy and ask God if He has given them to you to enjoy or to surrender back to Him.

ⁱ Jeremiah, Dr. David. *31 Days To Happiness: How to Find What Really Matters in Life* (p. 264). Thomas Nelson. Kindle Edition.

ⁱⁱ David Mathis' article, 'True Leadership Is Sacrifice, Not Privilege'. Accessed online: <http://www.desiringgod.org/articles/true-leadership-is-sacrifice-not-privilege>

ⁱⁱⁱ Packer, J. I.. *A Passion for Faithfulness: Wisdom From the Book of Nehemiah* (Living Insights Bible Study) (p. 96). Crossway. Kindle Edition

^{iv} Illustration authored by Kristin Baker

^v <https://www.theguardian.com/tv-and-radio/2010/sep/08/mad-men-david-hare>

^{vi} Andy Stanley, *Visioneering*, chapter 14 'Distractions'—pp. 201ff.

^{vii} Getz, Gene. Men of Character: Nehemiah (Kindle Locations 2840-2843). B&H Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.

^{viii} Illustration authored by Kristin Baker

^{ix} Charles R. Swindoll and Lee Hough, *Improving Your Serve: The Art of Unselfish Living: Bible Study Guide*(Anaheim, Calif.: Insight for Living, 1993).

^x Getz, Gene. Men of Character: Nehemiah (Kindle Locations 2840-2843). B&H Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.

DAY 1: OVERCOME DISTRACTIONS

The thrill of the race as arms fly, feet pound, and water sprays are just some of the joys of competitive swimming. It is a demanding sport and it is said that swimmers fail in their head first. They drop back when the lactic acid builds and the person in the next lane appears to be pulling ahead. Yes, it is a competition, but the greatest competitor is you! The guy next to you can try to get into your head, but he can't touch you during the race.

Knowing the nature of this mental sport, my high school swim coach created a drill called the gauntlet. The gauntlet pitted twenty or so cold-blooded boys with kick boards against one loan swimmer in the middle lane. His challenge was to swim 100-yards butterfly. The fiends with the boards were tasked with making the swimmer quit. They could push wake at him and yell at him to quit. There was only one rule — you can't touch him. You touch him and you're next in line, even if you went already.

It was a challenging drill. The chop of the water was disorienting. It would throw my stroke out of balance. If I didn't focus, it was easy to take in a gulp of water. And usually by the third length of the pool, my muscles were shot so the encouragements to quit grew in appeal.

In fact, many boys did quit. Do you know when most of the swimmers stopped? It was in the last 10 yards. The minions with kick boards would go into overdrive. They knew my muscles were burning. They knew how tempted I was to quit. And many swimmers stopped dead in their tracks with 10 yards to go.

Why would they stop when they were so close to completion? They were overcome by distraction. The temptation to be content with the progress they had made, the encouragement to quit, and the fear of failure were enough to take their eyes off the prize.

No doubt you have experienced distraction in your own life. You want to be a focused person. You want your one life to count. You want to lead where you are. Yet, the daily grind of life, the encouragement to quit and the fear of failure can hit you like relentless waves.

DIVE IN:

In Nehemiah 6 we see that Nehemiah knew that good leaders overcome distractions.

Read Nehemiah 6

In this chapter, Nehemiah reminds us of the need to remain focused until the work is done. The wall is now up and only the gates remain to be put into place. It is at this final leg that Nehemiah, personally, faces his most intense opposition.

Nehemiah's enemies pull out all the stops to distract Nehemiah from completing the job.

- What distractions cause you to lose focus in your walk with Christ and prevent you from pursuing what is most important in life?

GO DEEPER:

Samson was ordained by God to deliver the Israelites from the oppression of the Philistines.

Read Judges 13:1-5

God gave Samson divine strength to accomplish God's purposes for His people. By the power of God, he tore a lion to pieces with his bare hands and struck 1,000 men down with only a jawbone of a donkey. But Samson became distracted by the bane of many men: a beautiful woman.

Read Judges 16:4-22

In Samson's case, distraction lead to sin.

- Are there distractions in your own life that not only prevent you from pursuing what is most important but also have lead you into sin?

If you can relate to Samson, be encouraged: God is the great redeemer.

Read Judges 16:23-31

Next Steps:

- Consider the distractions you face and ask God to help you to clear your life from their clutter.
- If the distractions you face have lead you into sin:
 - Repent and be encouraged that, *"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness"* (1 John 1:9).
 - Ask a church leader you trust to help keep you accountable both in clearing the distractions and overcoming the sin.

Parent Power:

With over 40 kid's TV channels, endless YouTube videos, online gaming, game systems, chat rooms, social media, free music downloads, demanding sports, and clubs, our children are overwhelmed by distractions! Helping them to learn how to simplify their lives can allow them to focus on what is most important in life: following God.

- Tell your child that you are going to play a game.

- The goal of the game is to be able to hear you from another room and understand what you are saying. The catch is he must do so while being distracted.
 - Using the devices in your home, have him play a video game, put music on, and even have the TV tuned to his favorite station.
 - Go into another room and say a simple phrase loud enough for him to hear.
 - Return to your child and see if he knows what you said.
 - Repeat the game; each time removing a distraction until your child is in a quiet room just listening for your voice.
-
- Point out to your child that it was easier to accomplish the goal of the game without all the distractions.
 - Discuss with your child how distractions can keep us from hearing God and being able to accomplish the goals He has for our lives, just like it was more difficult to accomplish the goal of the game.
 - Ask your child what distractions he personally faces and discuss ways he can clear his life from them.

DAY 2: LEADERS ARE FOCUSED

Leaders have a clear understanding of what they are about. They are not distracted from the main thing by lesser things. One author wrote, "We are kept from our goal not by obstacles, but by a clear path to a lesser goal."

DIVE IN:

Now, the pull of distracting opportunities can be strong indeed. What opportunity was presented to Nehemiah in chapter 6? Peace. You can just imagine the local Samaritan Daily Sun article:

Nehemiah Says No to Ono

Samaritan officials have disclosed that Nehemiah, governor of Judah, has again turned down the offer of Governor Sanballat of Samaria to meet at one of the villages in Ono, on the Judah-Samaria border. The proposed conference would include the Big Four of the areas: Geshem, leader of the Arabs; Tobiah, leader of the Ammonites; Sanballat, and Nehemiah.

Sanballat issued a statement today in which he sharply criticized Nehemiah for his repeated refusals to cooperate. He reports that the purpose for such a meeting would be to work on a formula for lasting peace in the region. The Samaritan leader said with evident frustration, "This is the fourth time Nehemiah has turned down my invitation to meet and discuss our mutual concerns. These repeated refusals mean that the responsibility for increasing tensions and any violence that may result, rests solely upon Jerusalem!"

Listen to Nehemiah's response again in verse 3, "*I am doing a great work and I cannot come down. Why should the work stop while I leave it and come down to you?*" And four times they tried the same tactic and four times Nehemiah didn't come off his wall.

Oh, that is awesome, "*I am doing a great work and I cannot come down...*"

- Think about every life that you know that has made a mark in this world. Whether they were a friend, a parent, a political figure, a coach, someone in business, or someone in ministry. Were they focused?
- Can you say the same about yourself?
 - Are you someone who: knows what you are doing, why you are doing it and how you are going to do it?
 - Are you going to let anyone or anything divert you from the mission?

GO DEEPER:

Jesus also shows us the power of focus.

Read Matthew 4

This passage of Scripture is so powerful as it retells how Jesus was tempted by Satan after fasting for 40 days in the wilderness. Notice how Satan offers Him food, water, protection, and finally all the kingdoms in the world if He will but worship Satan instead of the Almighty. As a man broken down by His 40 days of self-denial, this must have been tempting. He wouldn't even have to suffer an awful death on the cross if He were to simply accept Satan's offer. Instead He remains focused on the mission God had given Him. He walked the difficult path to Calvary. He suffered, died, and then conquered both sin and death. Thereby, He took all that Satan had offered in the desert and more -- all for God's eternal glory.

Next Steps:

- Pray and ask God to give you clear focus for the mission He has given you.
- Consider the distractions you face and ask God to help you to clear your life from their clutter and any resulting sinful behavior.

DAY 3: LEADERS DEPEND ON THEIR CHARACTER

President Abraham Lincoln, arguably America's greatest President, has often been hailed for his high moral standards. His emphasis on honesty earned him the nickname, Honest Abe. Even this great leader had his critics and haters. Angry Southerners and discontented Northerners criticized him, accusing him of misusing his Executive powers, and attacked his character. However, amid slander and personal attack, Lincoln believed in his own integrity. In July 1864 Lincoln told his aid , John Hay, "At all events, I must keep some standard of principle fixed within myself." Later Joshua Speed wrote, "Unlike all other men there was entire harmony between his public and private life -- He must believe that he was right and that he had truth and justice with him..."

DIVE IN:

Like Lincoln, Nehemiah depended on his character when his enemies attempted to slander his good name in Nehemiah chapter 6.

Reread Nehemiah 6:8-9

In Nehemiah's time, letters were written on papyrus or leatherⁱⁱ. The custom was to roll the writing material, tie it with a string, and seal it with clay. The seal ensured a level of privacy. But this letter was open (v. 5). Sanballat purposely left the letter open so that its contents would be made public. The slander was poignant. His enemies were basically saying: Nehemiah is doing all of this as a power move. He wants to be king.

The not-so-nice thing about a rumor is, you only have to launch it with one gossip, and it will spread like a virus from person to person. Notice however, that an original source for this rumor against Nehemiah is never declared. In verse 6 the letter says, *"It is reported among the nations..."* The vague source 'the nations' adds credence to the rumor and why this rumor is so vicious. It must have been very intimidating for Nehemiah. Sanballat appears to be speaking for the majority, and if this rumor were to make it to King Artaxerxes, Nehemiah could be in big trouble.

However, Nehemiah didn't panic. Instead, he responded by denying the slander and allowed his character to speak for itself. Nehemiah couldn't make the slander go away, and he knew that neither quitting nor getting even would serve to finish the job God had given him. So instead, he calls a spade a spade and allowed his history of moral behavior to speak for itself.

Notice in verse 9, Nehemiah also prays: *"But now, O God, strengthen my hands."* When you are enduring personal attack, the situation often is out of your control. You cannot stop the spread of slander. You cannot make a single person discount it. You can try, but it's ultimately out of your hands. However, nothing is ever out of God's hands and He always knows what is true and what is false. God will carry you through.

God will also carry you through when people attack you with more than just words.

Read Nehemiah 6:10

In this passage Nehemiah is faced with a terrifying dilemma. Now, I'm sure that Nehemiah was a courageous man, but anyone would be fearful of a coming assassin. No one wants to fall asleep at night to be found in the morning wearing a Sicilian neck-tie. The purpose of this plot was to cause Nehemiah to make irrational, fear-based decisions.

Read his response in Nehemiah 6:11-14.

This was an ingenious plot. Priests were the only ones who could go into the Temple of God. Nehemiah was not a priestⁱⁱⁱ. If Nehemiah tried to save himself in this way, it would have lost him honor and could possibly have cost him his life. It certainly would have jeopardized his character and mission. Nehemiah chose not to act out of fear but out of faith.

GO DEEPER:

Read Titus 2:7-8

Take a look at the Greek word for "dignity" in verse 7.

σεμνότης (4587)

Occurrences (approximately 3)

1. the characteristic of a thing or person which entitles to reverence and respect, dignity, majesty, sanctity
2. honor, purity

In what ways does your personal character demonstrate 'dignity'?

Next Steps:

- Pray and ask God to give you the strength of character needed to withstand slander from opponents.
- This week work specifically on demonstrating dignity as described by Paul in Titus 2:7-8.
- Consider the distractions you face and ask God to help you to clear your life from their clutter and any resulting sinful behavior.
- Pray and ask God to give you clear focus for the mission He has given you.

Parent Power:

- Ask your child to describe the kind of things she looks for in a friend. Things like: honesty, kindness, loyalty, etc. Make a list of these things with her.
- Now ask your child the kind of things that other people do that hurt her. Things like: cheating, stealing, saying mean things, etc... Make a list of these things as well.
- Compare the two lists with her and ask her which kind of person she wants to be.
- Discuss what 'character' is and how God wants us to be people of strong moral character.
- **Read Galatians 5:19-23** with your child.

DAY 4: THE GOD FACTOR

People are not supposed to be able to quantify the work of God by natural human means. People will explain the church away unless there is a God-dimension about us. People should look at your life and conclude, "This is a God thing," not, "This is a religious thing."

The God factor is at work in Nehemiah 6. An assassination plot, personal slander, and temptations -- Nehemiah faces it all -- and remains faithful to his call. I believe Nehemiah remains faithful because he is a poor math student. Nehemiah believes that one is greater than three. Like I said, bum math! Circle that answer in your third-grade math class and you get a big fat red check. While Nehemiah might not be a great math student, he is a remarkable God student.

DIVE IN:

Read Nehemiah 6:15-16

A ragtag bunch of exiles... A leader who is assaulted on all sides... Yet clearly, one is greater than the three powerful men opposing them! This group has finished the wall in just 52 days! Now, I am no civil engineer, but this is a true feat of construction! Not only is the job finished quickly, but the enemies are left stunned. They fell in their own esteem and they knew that God must have been behind this. That's right -- God. God is the factor that mystifies the math. The God-factor always will.

When the world looks at the people of God doing the work of God, the math should look a little wonky. If they can explain the work away, if it fits nicely in the modern business trends and growth models, if the church is just following the new steps to success, then there will be no power behind the work. It is the church seeking to do God's work in our way, not in God's way. The world doesn't need more examples of human strategies. They need to see God disrupt the equation.

GO DEEPER:

1 Kings 18:20-40 recounts the story of Elijah versus the prophets of Baal and it is another great example of the God factor at work. It plays out like a powerful TV drama. I can see it now as the opening credits roll. The theme music plays and then the camera opens on a wide shot of Mount Carmel where a contest between the god Baal and the unseen God, Yahweh, is unfolding. I can imagine the fanfare, the crowds of people, the 450 prophets of Baal dressed in their finery, corrupt King Ahab sitting on a makeshift throne before Baal's alter, the unfaithful people of Israel who have been worship Baal and other gods... and standing all alone is Elijah before the broken down alter to Yahweh. The camera pans past the fanfare to the intense face of Elijah who challenges:

"I am the only one of the Lord's prophets left, but Baal has four hundred and fifty prophets. Get two bulls for us. Let Baal's prophets choose one for themselves, and let them cut it into pieces and put it on the wood but not set fire to it. I will prepare the other bull and put it on the wood but not set fire to it. Then you call on the name of your god, and I will call on the name of the Lord. The god who answers by fire—he is God."

The crowd roars and Baal's prophets begin their show. They dance, and writhe, cut themselves and prostrate themselves, yell and rave... nothing.

So Elijah mocks, *"Shout louder!" Surely he is a god! Perhaps he is deep in thought, or busy, or traveling. Maybe he is asleep. You must wake him up.*" So they shout louder and slash themselves with swords and spears until their blood flows. But there is no response, no one answers, no one pays attention.

Then Elijah stands up calling to the people, "Come here to me." And surprisingly they came to him. He repairs the neglected altar of the Lord. He takes twelve stones, one for each of the tribes descended from Jacob. Even though the tribes have been divided for many years by war and hatred and the kingdom of Israel and Judah separated, the prophet unites the stones and with them he builds an altar in the name of the Lord, and he digs a trench around it large enough to hold 44 liters of water. Then he commands, "Fill four large jars with water and pour it on the offering and on the wood."

I can imagine the look exchanged by the people in the crowd. Water? Is he really asking for water in the middle of the worst drought we have ever known? Yes, Elijah asks them to sacrifice what has become the most valuable commodity in all the kingdom: water.

The people do what is asked, and four jugs of water are found and poured over the sacrifice. *"Do it again,"* Elijah says to them, and they do it again. *"Do it a third time,"* he orders, and they do it a third time. The water runs down around the altar and even fills the trench.

Finally, God's servant steps forward and prays:

"Lord, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Israel, let it be known today that you are God in Israel and that I am your servant and have done all these things at your command. Answer me, Lord, answer me, so these people will know that you, Lord, are God, and that you are turning their hearts back again."

Then the fire of the Lord falls intense and glorious.

It burns up the sacrifice, reminding them of their temple in Jerusalem and the fire that consumed countless sacrifices to atone their sin. It burns up the wood, reminding them of the fire used in God's covenant with Abraham, promising to send the Messiah to redeem their souls. It burns up the stones, reminding the

people of the fire of the Lord that saved them from Pharaoh's army before the Red Sea. It burns up the soil, reminding them of the fire of the Lord that guided them through the desert. Then it burns up the water, foreshadowing the tongs of flame that will fall on the disciples when they are baptized with the Holy Spirit.

The people fall prostrate and cry, "The Lord—He is God! The Lord—He is God!"

With the God-factor, 1 is greater than 450.

Next Steps:

- Consider areas in your life where you may be relying on your own abilities rather than on God.
- Pray and ask God to help you to rely on His power to accomplish the tasks He sets before you.
- Consider the distractions you face and ask God to help you to clear your life from their clutter and any resulting sinful behavior.
- Pray and ask God to give you clear focus for the mission He has given you.
- Pray and ask God to give you the strength of character needed to withstand slander from opponents.
- Continue to work on demonstrating dignity as described by Paul in Titus 2:7-8.

DAY 5: THE WORK IS NEVER FINISHED

“Rick was born in 1962 to Dick and Judy Hoyt. As a result of oxygen deprivation to Rick’s brain at the time of his birth, Rick was diagnosed as a spastic quadriplegic with cerebral palsy. Dick and Judy were advised to institutionalize Rick because there was no chance of him recovering, and little hope for Rick to live a “normal” life. This was just the beginning of Dick and Judy’s quest for Rick’s inclusion in community, sports, education and one day, the workplace.

“In the spring of 1977, Rick told his father that he wanted to participate in a 5-mile benefit run for a Lacrosse player who had been paralyzed in an accident. Far from being a long-distance runner, Dick agreed to push Rick in his wheelchair and they finished all 5 miles, coming in next to last.”

Dick had done it. The race was over, but his work wasn’t finished. “That night, Rick told his father, ‘Dad, when I’m running, it feels like I’m not handicapped.’

This realization was just the beginning of what would become over 1,000 races completed, including marathons, duathlons and triathlons (6 of them being Ironman competitions). Also adding to their list of achievements, Dick and Rick biked and ran across the U.S. in 1992, completing a full 3,735 miles in 45 days^{vi}.”

Just as Team Hoyt kept moving forward, you must never stop serving God. Even when you reach a milestone, there is more to be accomplished. The people of God should never be content with the state of things. We must continue to lead where we are until Jesus returns and sets everything right. Until that time, we must always seek to move ahead and not stay put.

DIVE IN:

Nehemiah demonstrates this in the end of chapter 6. As Nehemiah concluded his job as wall-builder he doesn’t pack up and leave, instead he stays to tackle an issue that is bigger than the wall. He leads where he is to unite his people to be a pure community for God.

Reread Nehemiah 6:17-19

Tobiah proves to be the most insidious enemy of all. He is related to the people by marriage. He can exert political pressure. This is a big reason why the Jewish people were not to engage in mix-marriages. It always came back to haunt them later. In this case, Tobiah has leverage on many.

Why does Nehemiah end the chapter on this note? Why not end on the huge milestone of finishing the wall instead? Because, he is making a big point here: the work is never finished. When you have reached one milestone, yes, you are finished, but in a real way you are also just beginning.

GO DEEPER:

It is easy as leaders to want to build our own little kingdoms. However, we must be unwilling to get lulled into a state of apathy. Instead, we declare, "I will stop leading only when the last person has come to know Jesus as Savior."

Next Steps:

- Pray and ask God to give you the strength needed to persevere in serving Him.
- Consider the distractions you face and ask God to help you to clear your life from their clutter and any resulting sinful behavior.
- Pray and ask God to give you clear focus for the mission He has given you.
- Pray and ask God to give you the strength of character needed to withstand slander from opponents.
- Continue to work on demonstrating dignity as described by Paul in Titus 2:7-8.
- Consider areas in your life where you may be relying on your own abilities rather than on the God.
- Pray and ask God to help you to rely on His power to accomplish the tasks He sets before you.

ⁱ Adapted by Stephen Cole from Donald Campbell, *Nehemiah: Man in Charge* [Victory Books], p. 55.

ⁱⁱ Stanley, Andy. *Visioneering: God's Blueprint for Developing and Maintaining Personal Vision* (p. 207). The Crown Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.

ⁱⁱⁱ Fensham, F. Charles. *NICOT: Ezra and Nehemiah*, p. 205

^{iv} Retelling of 1 Kings 18:20-40 authored by Kristin Baker

^v <http://www.teamhoyt.com/About-Team-Hoyt.html>

^{vi} <http://www.teamhoyt.com/About-Team-Hoyt.html>

DAY 1: WORSHIP FIRST

You can learn a lot of a leader's priorities by observing what they do first. As the first president of the United States of America, George Washington moved slowly. He wrote in 1790, "My station is new; and, if I may use the expression, I walk on untrodden ground. There is scarcely any part of my conduct which may not hereafter be drawn into precedent." President Washington knew that his priorities would say much to his successors and to his young nation. Nehemiah recognized the same thing.

DIVE IN:

Read Nehemiah 7

Consider how verse 1 reveals Nehemiah's big priority after building the wall. When he appointed the gatekeepers, the singers and the Levites, he was reestablishing the worship of Israel. Derek Kidner commented, "Worship was Jerusalem's *raison d'être*." (It was their reason to exist). During the captivity, the people were spiritually isolated.

Read Psalm 137:1-6:

By the rivers of Babylon we sit down and weep when we remember Zion. On the poplars in her midst we hang our harps, for there our captors ask us to compose songs; those who mock us demand that we be happy, saying: "Sing for us a song about Zion!" May my hand be crippled! May my tongue stick to the roof of my mouth, if I do not remember you, and do not give Jerusalem priority over whatever gives me the most joy."

Take a look at the Hebrew word for 'priority' in verse 6.

ראש (7218)

Occurrences (approximately 599)

1. head, top, summit, upper part, chief, total, sum, height, front, beginning
 - a. head (of man, animals)
 - b. top, tip (of mountain)
 - c. height (of stars)
 - d. chief, head (of man, city, nation, place, family, priest)
 - e. head, front, beginning
 - f. chief, choicest, best
 - g. head, division, company, band
 - h. sum

Is the psalmist really talking about giving Jerusalem priority? No. He is speaking of giving the God who dwelt in the temple of Jerusalem priority.

GO DEEPER:

There is a great illustration that uses a jar, rocks, and sand to address the issue of personal priorities. The idea is simple enough. The rocks represent what is most important. The sand represents everything else. Life will fill up your jar with sand without you doing anything. Whether it's other people asking things of you or sports schedules or a car breaking down or whatever else happens in life. A lot of people have no room for the rocks because their jar has already filled up with sand. How do you get the rocks in the jar? You must intentionally put them in first.

- Is worship a priority in your life?

Leaders must put worship at the top of their list. You will never regret it. You will regret it if your jar fills up with sand and you didn't make worship your priority.

Next Steps:

- Consider ways to help make worship a priority in your life and work on implementing them this week.
 - If you need help finding ways to prioritize worship, seek the advice of a church leader.

Parent Power:

Teaching our children to worship God with all they have is so important. Worship is much more than singing hymns and praise songs in church—worship is anything we do to show God how much He is worth to us. Worship is a show of worth.

- Have your child show you the item they value the most in the world. It doesn't need to be monetarily valuable but very meaningful to your child.
- Talk about different ways she could keep her item safe. Have fun with this. Maybe she could hire an armored truck to follow her around with her item safe inside.
- Talk about some of the most valuable items in the world, like the crown jewels and the different ways these items are treated.
- Transition your conversation by asking what she thinks God is worth.
- Explain that God is the most valuable thing in the universe: more valuable than the crown jewels or even her special item.
- Explain that worship is what we do to show God how much He is worth to us and discuss different forms of worship, such as: singing, dancing, clapping, jumping, shouting, bowing, playing musical instruments, serving others, and giving.

DAY 2: LEADERS INVEST IN FUTURE LEADERS

Mark Dever is the senior pastor of Capitol Hill Baptist Church in Washington, DC. Now, Mark Dever is a busy guy to say it mildly. He leads a church with over 900 members, writes books, speaks at conferences, and has a family. Do you know how much time he spends investing in future leaders? 10-12 hours per week! Listen to one of the reasons he does this, "For me, discipling is the only way I can evangelize non-Christians and equip Christians in the one place where I can never travel—the future beyond my life. Discipling others now is how I try to leave time-bombs of graceⁱ."

- Are you depositing time-bombs of grace into the future?
- Are you investing a portion of your time into raising up another Christian?

DIVE IN:

Nehemiah invested in future leaders.

Re-read Nehemiah 7:2

Here we can see what Nehemiah looked for when he sought for leaders.

I gave my brother Hanani and Hananiah the governor of the castle charge over Jerusalem, for he was a more faithful and God-fearing man than many.

The text doesn't read, "And Nehemiah chose the most competent men with the best education, most extensive work history, and most winsome personality he could find." Verse 2 says he looked for people who were 'more faithful' and more 'God-fearing'. Competence is important, but character is essential.

Read Jesus' helpful principle in Luke 16:10

Take a look at the Greek word for 'faithful' in this verse.

πιστός (4103)

Occurrences (approximately 70)

1. trusty, faithful
 - a. of persons who show themselves faithful in the transaction of business, the execution of commands, or the discharge of official duties
 - b. one who kept his plighted faith, worthy of trust
 - c. that can be relied on
2. easily persuaded
 - . believing, confiding, trusting
 - a. in the NT one who trusts in God's promises
 - i. one who is convinced that Jesus has been raised from the dead
 - ii. one who has become convinced that Jesus is the Messiah and author of salvation

Leaders know that if they are faithful in the little things that God will trust them with more.

GO DEEPER:

Nehemiah also looked for 'God-fearing' leaders.

Read Proverbs 9:10

Take a look at the Hebrew word for 'fear' in this verse.

יָרָא (3374)

Occurrences (approximately 41)

1. fear, terror, fearing
 - a. fear, terror
 - b. awesome or terrifying thing (object causing fear)
 - c. fear (of God), respect, reverence, piety
 - d. revered

- What happens when leaders do not 'fear the Lord'? - They endanger the people they lead.
- Do you have a healthy 'fear of the Lord'?

Take a look at the Hebrew word for 'knowledge' in this verse.

תַּעַר (1847)

Occurrences (approximately 95)

1. knowledge
 - a. knowledge, perception, skill
 - b. discernment, understanding, wisdom

- Do you want to KNOW God more?
- What will you do with the knowledge of God that you have now?

Read 2 Timothy 2:2

Notice that Paul lays out four generations of leadership succession here. Paul is generation one; Timothy is generation two; faithful men are three; and those men teaching others are four.

Next Steps:

- God wants us to train up wise leaders who lead where they are with godly conviction. But how do we do this? Well, the simple answer is you teach them to do what you've learned to do. You teach them to read the Bible the way you've learned to read the Bible, to share Christ the way you've learned to share Christ, to pray the way you've learned to pray.
 - Pray and ask God to help you find someone to start discipling.
 - You can also ask a church leader to help you connect with someone in the church who is looking for a spiritual mentor.
- You may be thinking, "What if no one has taught me how to do the things listed above?" Please know that God will meet you where you are at and that it is okay.
 - Your first stop is to find a mature Christian and ask them to disciple you.
 - Shortly thereafter, find someone else to disciple.
 - Every Christian is both a disciple and a discipler. God can use all of us!
- Consider ways to help make worship a priority in your life and work on implementing them this week.
 - If you need help finding ways to prioritize worship, seek the advice of a church leader.

DAY 3: LEADERS PROTECT PEOPLE

I was 18 when I met Dan. Even at 21, he was the most effective evangelist I have ever met. We would go into a grocery store for milk and come out an hour later, having shared the gospel with at least 3 people. At that time, he had a passion for serving God that was contagious. Later that same year he partnered with a local church to start "The Edge," an outreach ministry to the city's youth and young adults. The local church promised X amount of money towards the ministry. The Edge opened and within the first year of ministry had successfully reached hundreds of youth for Christ. However, when the time came for the partnering church to reimburse Dan for ministry costs, the church elders declared that they had changed their minds. Dan was left holding the bill for thousands of dollars.

I would love to say that one of the church leaders stepped up at this point and defended Dan - pointing out that the church had promised the funds, that Dan was a young leader depending on them for guidance, or even that Dan's ministry was being successful. Unfortunately, no one did. Dan's finances were left in ruins as he closed The Edge. He never served in ministry againⁱⁱⁱ.

As you lead where you are, consider this: effective leaders protect the people they lead.

DIVE IN:

Re-read Nehemiah 7:3-4

Notice how verse 4 highlights that something isn't quite right in Jerusalem. There is a big problem. Hardly anyone is living inside of the city. This is the capitol of God's land. This is the city where God dwells in the temple. It is the city that is meant to display God's glory and splendor. And it's a ghost town! Why? In part this is because Jerusalem is vulnerable to attack. A wall is great for protection, but if the guards are sleeping at open gates when the enemy comes, the wall will provide no protection at all. Nehemiah needs to establish measures to protect the people, so they can return to the city. This is exactly what he does in verse 3.

GO DEEPER:

Leaders protect the people they lead. People cannot freely live their lives, raise their families, and worship God if they are under threat. It just doesn't work.

Read 1 Peter 5:8

Satan is a thief. Satan is a wolf. His goal for your life: utter destruction. God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life. Satan hates you and wants to see your life ruined. He wants to see you distracted from God's mission. He wants to see your family in turmoil. He wants to see our church grow inward focused and divisive.

- Just like the people of Jerusalem needed each other to protect the city, God wants us to be a part of a church family and protect one another against this enemy!
- Are you protecting your brothers and sisters in Christ?

Next Steps:

- Take time to intercede for the people in your life through prayer. Ask God for His protection over their lives.
- Consider ways to help make worship a priority in your life and continue to work on implementing them this week.
 - If you need help finding ways to prioritize worship, seek the advice of a church leader.
- Continue to pray and ask God to help you find someone to start discipling.
 - You can also ask a church leader to help you connect with someone in the church who is looking for a spiritual mentor.

DAY 4: YOUR IDENTITY IS IN CHRIST

The TV screen lights up with rich cultural images as the announcer explains that his company's DNA testing will tell me exactly who I am. He promises that by identifying my ancestral heritage down to the last chromosome it will make me feel fulfilled. These are empty promises. Sure, the expensive test will tell me my lineage, but my identity can't be determined in some test tube^v. Still, members of our society are obsessed with answering the question, "who am I?"

The concept of one's identity is an important one. Nehemiah understood this.

DIVE IN:

Re-read Nehemiah 7:5-69

Notice how verse 5 recounts the second time that God has put something into Nehemiah's heart. The first time was in Nehemiah 2:12,

I had not told anyone what my God had put in my heart to do for Jerusalem.

Two times when Nehemiah faced a problem, a problem that stifled the glory of God, God provided him with a solution. What was the problem? The people of Israel didn't have a sense of who they are and what they were to do. Nehemiah would need to bring them together spiritually. He would need to remind them that they are the people meant to display God's glory to the nations.

Read Psalm 66:1-2 where we see this truth confirmed.

You may be wondering why another boring genealogy was so important. I am so glad you asked.

First, it's important from a salvation perspective. In Genesis 3, God told Satan that one of Eve's offspring would crush his head. As you move through the Bible, the identity of the Messiah becomes clearer. He would be a descendent of Abraham, of Isaac, of Jacob, and of Judah. In 2 Samuel 7, we then learn that he would be from the line of kings, a descendent of David. God wanted His people to know that only a very specific person could be the Messiah. This is why Matthew and Luke take such great pains to list Jesus' genealogy. It's a strong piece of evidence. They are saying, "He's got the credentials!"

Second, in Nehemiah's context, it gives the people a sense of who they are:

- In verse 7, he lists 12 leaders. The number 12 is likely important here. It's probable that these twelve leaders were representatives of the twelve tribes. Zerubbabel is the distant relative of Christ!
- We see mention of family groups (vv. 8-25); villages (vv. 27-38), priests (vv. 39-42), Levites (v. 43), temple singers, gatekeepers, temple servants and various other servants (vv. 44-60).

These records established who was a part of the people of Israel.

Read Deuteronomy 7:6-7

In these verses God explains their identity to His people.

GO DEEPER:

The people of God must always have a sense of who they are and what they are about. In the OT, this sense centered around national identity and faithfulness to God. Today, our identity is found in Christ. When a person trusts Jesus as Lord and Savior, they are brought into the family of God.

Read 1 Peter 2:9-10

Notice how Peter uses the same language used in Deuteronomy 7:6-7 to describe the church of Christ.

This shared identity is based solely on our relationship with Jesus. Paul also stresses this point in Romans.

Read Romans 10:11-13

Your first response to any type of identity question, such as “who are you” or “tell me about yourself,” should have something to do with your relationship with Christ and His people. You are not first African American or Korean American or Caucasian American. You are not first male or female. You are not first middle class. You are not first an American. These identifiers may always be true; however, they are not as deeply identifying as who you are in Christ. All other identities are subservient to that identity. **You are** first a blood-bought sinner saved by Jesus. **You are** a Christ-won Christian.

- Do you know who you are?
- Have you found your identity in Christ?

Next Steps:

- Pray and ask God to help you have a deeper sense of who you are in Him and how He has shaped your identity.
- Consider ways to help make worship a priority in your life and continue to work on implementing them this week.
 - If you need help finding ways to prioritize worship, seek the advice of a church leader.
- Continue to pray and ask God to help you find someone to start discipling.
 - You can also ask a church leader to help you connect with someone in the church who is looking for a spiritual mentor.
- Take time to intercede for the people in your life through prayer. Ask God for His protection over their lives.

Parent Power:

How will your child answer the question, “Who am I?” Will he be defined by his sexuality, his gender, his talents, what sports he plays, his grades, his habits- OR will he be defined by who he is in Christ?

Focus on The Family's Renee Gray-Wilburn provides this insight:

A healthy identity comes from understanding the truth about ourselves. Our deepest yearning is to understand where we came from and the purpose for which we were made. Sadly, many parents have no answers to these questions or neglect to give their children the confidence that comes from knowing that God made them for a reason. So it's vital that Dad and Mom teach their kids who they are and why they are here.

- Have your child close his eyes as you apply several dots of color to his face using washable markers or eyeliner pencils. Put away the markers and ask him to tell you what colors are on his face and where. Of course, he can't,

but it'll be fun watching him try. Now, place him in front of a mirror and ask him to tell you what colors he sees.

- Explain to your child that we cannot see our own face; we can only see a reflection of what we look like. This is called an image. When God made us, He made an image, or reflection of himself. We're different than any of God's other creations because we alone are made like Him.
- When we look in a mirror, we see a reflection of ourselves. The mirror shows us who we are on the outside, but God made us to be a reflection of His nature and image on the inside.
- Because of this, He wants us to imitate who He is to others. Although a mirror reflects our physical image, when we love others we reflect who God is. In this way, others see one part of His character through us. The more we love God and other people, the more we are a true reflection of Him.

DAY 5: LEADERS LEAVE A LEGACY

A Folopa elder in Papua New Guinea sat Bible translators Neil and Carol Anderson down and said, "I have to tell you why you're here." Intrigued, Neil and Carol said, "Oh? Tell us." The elder explained how an evangelist had once come to their area and shared the gospel with the people. They started a small church, but soon the evangelist had to go to another village. The people cried, "What will we do now? We don't know anything about God and Christianity!" He told them, "I want you to pray that God will send you a missionary." A few years later, the Andersons showed up to work on Bible translation! The elder told the missionaries, "You thought you came here all on your own, but you didn't. We'd been praying that you would come. God put His leash on your heart, and He pulled you here." God's leash reached further than the Folopa people knew as it stretched across the ocean to America where it enveloped the hearts of the many financial partners needed to make the Andersons' translation ministry possible.

When we invest our finances into God's kingdom, we are investing into a ministry of multiplication. Our finances are used by God to build up Pastors, teachers, prophets, and evangelists whose ministry in turn has immeasurable effects both now and in the future.

The returning Israelite exiles in Nehemiah 7 understood this.

DIVE IN:

Re-read Nehemiah 7:70-73

Some scholars estimate that these returning nobles gave upwards of 5 million dollars in today's currency to the work of the temple. We must marvel at the foresight of such giving! Just as leadership development is a time-bomb of grace, giving is also a time-bomb of grace.

You are a part of something that is bigger than you. You are a part of the church – Christ's community! You may never know what prayers your financial investment may answer.

- Will you lead where you are as a member of your community and leave a legacy?

GO DEEPER:

Pastor Steven J Cole writes:

In 1987, Chet Atkins and Margaret Archer wrote a song that was sung by country star, Ray Stevens, which went in part: "If he came back tomorrow, there's something I'd like to know. Would Jesus wear a Rolex on his television show?"

That same year, a well-known religious personality told his TV audience that if they didn't give \$8 million to his fund-raising campaign, God would call him home. Folk singer Arlo Guthrie commented wisely on this when he said, "I firmly believe we shouldn't negotiate with any terrorist on any level."

TV religious hucksters have given a bad name to Christian giving^{vi}.

Christian giving however, should be a beautiful thing. For when we allow God to leash our hearts we must also allow Him to leash our wallets.

Read Matthew 6:19-21

Take a look at the Greek word for 'treasure' in verse 21.

θησαυρός (2344)**Occurrences (approximately 16)**

1. the place in which good and precious things are collected and laid up
 - a. a casket, coffer, or other receptacle, in which valuables are kept
 - b. a treasury
 - c. storehouse, repository, magazine
2. the things laid up in a treasury, collected treasures

- Where have you stored your treasure? On Earth or in Heaven?

Consider also that all we have is a gift from God.

Read James 1:17**Read 1 Timothy 6:17**

- What are you going to leave to the next generation of Christians?
- Are you going to leave a legacy of total faithfulness or partial commitment?
- Are you going to financially invest so that future Christians can look back and marvel at the investments of the past?

Next Steps:

- Consider your history of giving. Pray and ask God to leash your heart and wallet.
- Pray for guidance in how and where He wants you to give. Then give.
- Consider ways to help make worship a priority in your life and continue to work on implementing them this week.
 - If you need help finding ways to prioritize worship, seek the advice of a church leader.
- Continue to pray and ask God to help you find someone to start discipling.
 - You can also ask a church leader to help you connect with someone in the church who is looking for a spiritual mentor.
- Take time to intercede for the people in your life through prayer. Ask God for His protection over their lives.
- Pray and ask God to help you have a deeper sense of who you are in Him and how He has shaped your identity.

ⁱ <http://mentalfloss.com/article/76248/5-first-things-presidents-did-office>

ⁱⁱ Dever, Mark. *Discipling*, p. 34.

ⁱⁱⁱ Illustration authored by Kristin Baker

^{iv} Illustration authored by Kristin Baker

^v <https://www.focusonthefamily.com/parenting/spiritual-growth-for-kids/who-am-i-your-childs-identity>

^{vi} <https://bible.org/seriespage/lesson-5-giving-god-s-way-selected-scriptures>

NEXT STEPS:

SUNDAY CONNECT TIME

We would love to have you again on a Sunday morning and join us for Connect Time at 10:00am to meet the people of OBC over a cup of coffee.

LUNCH WITH THE PASTORS

Interested in learning more about OBC? Join us for our next Lunch with the Pastors. Contact the church office to learn more about the next scheduled lunch.

THRIVE SMALL GROUPS

Want to get more plugged into fellowship? Thrive small groups are a great way to learn about God and to get to know others! The church office would love to help you find a group on a night of the week that works for you!

MORE DEVOTIONALS

For more devotionals in this and other sermon series, download the OBC App! Print copies are also available at the Welcome Center.



508.428.2787

824 Main Street

www.OstervilleBaptist.org

info@ostervillebaptist.org

Osterville, MA 02655

facebook.com/OstervilleBaptistChurch