

God's Rebuilding Process

Repent, Return and Rebuild

REVIVE US AGAIN

Steve Flatt



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Randolph Dunn

President

IBKI.English@gmail.com

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There was an ad in the "Business Farmer's News" in Scottsbluff, Nebraska under the "Sale and Trade" column. The ad said "Will trade one white wedding gown, size 16, never worn. Will trade for a 38-caliber revolver." Now I don't know the story, but somehow, I suspect things didn't work out quite like somebody had hoped.

The Bible is so honest about the way things are. Take the book of Nehemiah for example. Nehemiah had every opportunity to end his book on a high, positive, and happily ever after note. But life really isn't that way. God's people don't stay on the mountaintop.

Nehemiah served as governor a total of 12 years after getting the wall rebuilt and the people restored. As he had promised Artaxerxes, he then went back to Persia. Sometime later he returns to Jerusalem to check on things. Upon his arrival he is severely disappointed. Everything he had worked so hard to see accomplished was undone. (Nehemiah 13:6-7) Have you noticed how many times revival in any arena seems to fizzle? In politics you might have this great surge of conservatism, environmentalism or a great quest for campaign reform. It appears everybody gets worked up, but after a while, it all begins to fizzle and it's back to business as usual.

Churches sometimes have a great revival and everybody is on fire for weeks, maybe for several months. But in a year or two most everything has returned to the condition as it was before. Even in our lives we have those moments. We make New Year's resolutions or vow that things are going to be different and for awhile, we see that improvement. But all too often, we withdraw right back to where we were. It is the nature of revival to wear off.

"Before this, Eliashib, the priest, had been put in charge of the storerooms of the house of our God. He was closely associated with Tobiah and he had provided him with a large room formerly used to store the grain offerings and incense and temple articles and also the tithes of grain, new wine and oil prescribed for the Levites, singers and gatekeepers, as well as the contributions for the priests. But while all this was going on, I was not in Jerusalem. For in the thirty-second year of Artaxerxes, king of Babylon, I had returned to the king. Sometime later, I asked his permission and came back to Jerusalem. Here I learned about the evil thing Eliashib had done in providing Tobiah a room in the court of the house of our God." (Nehemiah 13:4-7) Reasons why revivals fizzle.

1. People cultivate wrong companions. Notice Eliashib. He was a worldly and ambitious high priest who laid low as long as Nehemiah was around. Apparently, he was not a big fan of Nehemiah and especially of Nehemiah's foreign policy.

You remember Nehemiah's two chief enemies all the way through were Sanballat, the Horonite, and Tobiah, the Amonite. When Nehemiah goes back to Artaxerxes, Eliashib establishes or re-establishes a relationship with Tobiah. Verse 4 states "He was closely associated with Tobiah." Verse 5 states "He even prepared him a room." In of all places, right there in the temple. You see, in those days, the house of God was joined by chambers, large rooms, that often held grain and utensils and vessels of worship. Eliashib, the High Priest, said, "Well, let's just clear out a room here in the temple and make a place for my good friend Tobiah." Now, can you imagine that? A man who was the bitterest foe of Nehemiah. A man who, on one occasion, even plotted to kill Nehemiah is now sleeping in the temple. Not because he has repented, but because evil is lurking back in as Nehemiah has left.

Nehemiah said upon learning about that situation "I was greatly displeased and threw all of Tobiah's household goods out of the room. I gave orders to purify the rooms and then I put back into them the equipment of the house of God with the grain offerings and incense." (v.8) Nehemiah immediately knew the influence that this was bringing upon all of Jerusalem. He could see that this was a root cause for the slippage in their revival. We've got to learn how to get mad at the right things, at the root causes. I am amazed how Christians will fuss over things that are so trivial and absolutely ignore the moral and the spiritual cancers that destroy our lives and our children's lives. Nehemiah saw the root cause and he attacked it. He wasn't going to live with wrong in a place that was built for right. So, he takes all the furniture, throws it out into the street and says, "I purified

the room." (v.9) The Hebrew word there means "he had it fumigated." He didn't want the stench of Tobiah around. So, he had it all removed. That sounds strong but keep reading and see all of the evil that spawned from a man like Tobiah rising to a place of influence.

2. The people quit contributing. "I also learned that the portions assigned to the Levites had not been given to them. And all the Levites and singers responsible for the services had gone back into their own fields. So, I rebuked the officials and asked them, 'Why is the house of God neglected?'" (v. 9-10) A sign that revival is fizzling is when people find something else to do with their money rather than keep their pledges and commitments to give to God. This is always a sign that revival is on the back-slide.

"In those days, I saw men in Judah treading wine presses on the Sabbath and bringing in grain and loading it on donkeys together with wine, grapes and figs and all other kinds of loads and they were bringing all this into Jerusalem on the Sabbath. Therefore, I warned them about selling food on that day. Men from Tyre who lived in Jerusalem were bringing in fish and all kinds of merchandise and selling them in Jerusalem on the Sabbath to the people of Judah. I rebuked the nobles of Judah and said to them, 'What is this wicked thing you are doing, desecrating the Sabbath day. Didn't your forefathers do the same things so that our God brought all of this calamity upon us and upon this city? Now you are stirring up more wrath against Israel by desecrating the Sabbath.'" (Neh. 13:15-18)

Now, someone may say, "Maybe the people quit giving because of poor leadership. Eliashib was the high priest and he had brought Tobiah into the temple. Maybe, they just say we're not going to give as long as that kind of evil relationship is going on." But, regardless of the reason, the Levites and temple servants had to leave the temple and go back to their farms. They had to find a way to survive. Regardless of the reason the temple was being neglected because the people were not giving.

God only knows how much work is not being done in mission fields and in communities all across the world because of what's not being given to the Lord's work by people who should be—Christians. One of the comments I've heard through the years and it's the age-old alibi, "I don't always agree with what the elders decide and I don't always agree with what the preacher preaches so I withhold my contribution." Nehemiah declared that their tithe was obligatory whether the leaders were fit to be leaders or not. Incidentally, they were not. Nehemiah said you've got an obligation before God to support the temple regardless of what you think.

I think one of the great misunderstandings among God's people is that giving is a function of financing the church. That the reason God incorporated giving was just that little practical necessity that if we don't give, the church would have to shut down. That is ridiculous! Giving is not about financing the church. God can finance the church. He owns the cattle on a thousand hills. God can do whatever He wants to whether you gave a dime or not. Giving is about blessing people's lives. The reason is it's an index of your priority. God knows it's a cleansing of your heart. "Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." In some ways, the Bible is the most spiritual document you own. But another of your books is also a spiritual book. It's your checkbook. Wherever you are putting your treasure, that is where your heart is also.

3. They were compromising the consecrated. They were secularizing the Sabbaths. It had just become another day. There is nothing wrong with doing business, and there's nothing wrong with making a dollar, making a profit. The problem is taking something God calls "holy" and treating it as if it were trivial as if there was nothing special about it at all. Under the Law of Moses, God said, "I want the Sabbath kept sacred." The people treated it as just another day.

God wants certain things consecrated in our lives and He becomes upset when we trivialize them. For example: Marriage. If there is anything holy and sacred to God it is marriage. He calls it a covenant and He

uses that word very sparingly. Jesus was asked, "what reason can somebody put their mate away?" He replied "What are you talking about? Haven't you read from the beginning God made them one flesh? How do you divide one flesh?" But people put away their mates by the scores of thousands every day, some for trivial reasons while others do so because a mate treated the marriage as something trivial.

Other examples could be given but the point is that which is consecrated or dedicated to God, is not to be compromised. In this case, the Sabbath Day abuse, Nehemiah made physical changes to see that it was consecrated and stayed that way. "When evening shadows fell on the gates of Jerusalem before the Sabbath, I ordered the doors to be shut and not opened until the Sabbath was over. I stationed some of my own at the gate so that no load could be brought in on the Sabbath Day. Once or twice, the merchants and sellers of all kinds of goods spent the night outside Jerusalem but I warned them and said, 'Why do you spend the night by the wall? If you do this again, I will lay hands on you.'" (v. 19) Nehemiah said that some of those merchants decided to spend Friday night right outside the wall and tempt the people to slip out and shop. Nehemiah said, "I see you camping out there, I just want to let you know that if you do that again, I'm going to come out there and I'm going to lay hands on you." ... "From that time, they no longer came on the Sabbath." (v. 21) I bet they didn't! People, God doesn't want us to fight about much, but He said I want you to fight over that which is consecrated before you let it become trivial, before it loses its sacredness.

4. They committed to wrong covenants. "Moreover, in those days, I saw men of Judah who had married women from Ashdod, Ammon and Moab. Half of their children spoke the language of Ashdod, or the language of one of the other peoples and did not know how to speak the language of Judah." (v. 26) Back in chapter 10, on the heels of their great revival where they read the word of God and the people confessed their sins, the people made a vow and had it written out in a document and they all signed it. They pledged three things in that written out vow. They said we pledge a) to be faithful to our tithes and offerings, b) to keep the Sabbath Day holy, and c) not going to marry pagan people anymore." Notice in Chapter 13 they had broken all three. Now they have little children running all through the streets who can't even speak the language of the Hebrew scripture because their mommas are worshipping idols.

Christian be careful who you marry. Therefore, be careful about whom you date. If your life is dedicated to God then you marry somebody who is on an entirely different wavelength, you are asking for trouble. The reason is so simple. You have conflicting covenants. You have a covenant with God that says, "My life and you are going to be one." But then if you enter into a covenant with someone else and say that we're going to be one flesh, we're headed in opposite way. Ninety-nine times out of a hundred, that will end in great pain and destruction. Nehemiah saw the fruit of conflicting covenants and he reacted violently. You thought he treated the merchants badly, look at verse 25. He said, "I rebuked them and called curses down on them. I beat some of the men and pulled out their hair." Aren't you glad our elders don't do that? "I made them take an oath in God's name and said, 'you are not to give your daughters in marriage to their sons, nor are you to take their daughters in marriage for your sons nor for yourselves. Was it not because of marriages like these that Solomon, king of Israel, sinned? Among the many nations, there was no king like him. He was loved by his God and God made him king over all Israel, but even he was led into sin by foreign women. Must we hear now that you too are doing all this terrible wickedness and are being unfaithful to our God by marrying foreign women?'" Applications

1. Revival is always in need of renewal. This sin-stained world has what I call a downward pull. For example, if you have a beautiful house and leave it totally vacant it will begin to slowly fall apart. If this world were on an even keel, then nothing would happen, but this world has a downward pull. That house will fall apart. Same thing will happen to a garden that's left un-kept. So, why have revival if it tends to wear off? The reason is if you do not have a revival is you don't stay the same, you go down, down, down and down. But understand that revival is not a one-time shot. We live in a world that is sin-stained and revival is going to always be in need.

2. Look for cracks in the wall. Nehemiah was finding cracks not in the physical wall, but in the spiritual wall of Jerusalem. The lesson is that by letting something in that didn't belong, destruction was the result. Remember this whole thing started when Eliashib let Tobiah come and live in the temple. Are there any rooms in your heart where Tobiah has set up residence? Do you have a chamber in your life where you are storing things that don't belong? The Bible teaches us that you give the devil a foothold, just a little place to put a foot, and he'll turn it into a stronghold. That's the way he works. Look for cracks in your wall.
3. Be willing to make repairs quickly. Nehemiah didn't form some committee, task force or a five months study. If it meant kick them out, fumigate the room, pull out their hair, or whatever, he did it! Don't misunderstand, I don't recommend beating people, or pulling out their hair. One of the greatest problems in the church today is not being willing to confront sin and allow the cracks to get bigger and bigger. Confronting sin either in your life or in someone's life that you love is not easy but neglecting it is far worse.

I heard a story about a little boy who was injured and severely hurt his legs. It could be a permanent disability or with therapy, he could totally improve and get back in shape. So, his father was working with him and working with him through hours of therapy and the improvement was so slow. The little boy holding on the rails making those legs work, slumped and he looked at his dad and said, "Aw, Dad, don't you just love me like I am?" With tears, the father said,

"Yes, Son, I sure do and I love you too much to let you stay that way." Would to God that we would love each other enough that when sin has crept into our lives, we would not let each other stay that way, but to do what's hard for their betterment.

Nehemiah closes with a warning that Judah hadn't gone into captivity originally because of inadequate defenses. She went into captivity because of inadequate obedience. Her problem when Babylon first came down and took her over was not that she didn't have a big enough wall. But she didn't have a big enough commitment to God. That's the message of Nehemiah. That's the essence of revival.

Don't misunderstand what we've studied. Our God doesn't want our isolation. He doesn't want us withdrawn from this world. You can't be salt and light if you are not out there amongst folks. But He wants our consecration so that when we move among the world, we change the world. Let's learn the lesson that they kept forgetting.

If you have never come to Christ and obeyed the gospel, I've got great news for you. That's not a re-do or a renovation. That's a whole new construction project. 2 Corinthians 5:17 says, "If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old is gone, the new has come!" Galatians 2:20 says, "You don't even live anymore as you have died to sin. Christ lives in you." The good news is you are a brand new life, a new heart, and the power of God's spirit will live in you. That is a freshness and a wholeness that has no comparison.

Steve Flatt Amazing Grace Lesson #1335 October 12, 1997

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