

Beyond Addictions

Free to live a new life in Christ Jesus



Completing the Work

Lesson 13

For you were once darkness,
but now you are light in the Lord.
Walk as children of light
Ephesians 5:8

In chapter 12 we looked at three of Satan's most frequently used devices to frustrate the work of God in your life: discouragement, confusion and fear. You are probably on code red alert to be sure that you don't fall into addiction so your enemy will try to sneak in the back door to discourage or confuse you. He may also attempt to spook you into fear, and tempt you to take his way out of trouble. Then he can cause you to fall. You can defend against these two tactics the same way that Nehemiah did, by praying and setting a watch against the enemy day and night. This worked well for the people of Israel and it will work in your situation too.

What other attack do you need to prepare for?

The distraction of selfishness

The enemy could not defeat the Israelites by discouraging them, confusing them or making them run away but the Israelites almost defeated themselves by their own lust and selfishness. In the fifth chapter of Nehemiah there is an account of the workers taking advantage of each other rather than looking out for each other's benefit (Nehemiah 5:1-12). Tests often reveal what is in the heart of a man and in this time of weakness, the men of Israel tried to exploit each other rather than caring for each other. The trouble started with a food shortage in the city and countryside. Some had it and some did not and the "haves" began to take advantage of the "have nots". It got so

Beyond Addictions

bad that those who lacked food had to mortgage their homes and land in order to buy any. When they had no more land, they actually sold their children into slavery in order to put food on the table, and that among brothers who were supposed to be united against a common enemy! Instead of pulling together to make it through this trial, they began pulling apart and almost succeeded in pulling down the work that God was doing through them.

The unholy trinity of me, myself and I brought the blessing of God to a halt among the servants in Jerusalem. If we are not careful, it will happen to us too. By human nature we want to serve self first but the Bible encourages us to look out for one another in the body of Christ. Philippians 2:4 says, “Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.”

Giving and serving takes your eyes off of you and it is a great blessing.

So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound toward you, that you, always having all sufficiency in all things, may have an abundance for every good work. II Corinthians 9:7-8

You can see from this passage that giving is more an issue of the heart than of the wallet, and this is where the people of Israel were having a problem. It isn't that they were not capable of giving; it was that they were looking at their own desires without considering the needs of others. Then they began to devour each other and the enemy almost won the battle. Be on guard. When you are more concerned about your own needs or how you are being served than you are about how you can serve, then you are in trouble. You are harboring lust in your heart and it will eventually bare bad fruit in your treatment of others.

I John 3:17 even raises the question of whether you have the love of God in you if you see a brother in need and your heart is not open to help him.

But whoever has this world's goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him? I John 3:17

Now the Bible also says that if a man won't work, neither should he eat (II Thessalonians 3:10) so laziness is no excuse for charity. However, when brothers are sisters are in difficult situations and need our help, we are called upon to provide. In the process, God is glorified. Pray for God's heart for those in need and remember he who sows bountifully will reap bountifully (II Corinthians 9:6). Someone else's need may be a time for you to sow rather than to reap.

Completing the Work

How did Nehemiah respond? In Nehemiah 5:14-19 you will see that he set the example for giving, and he refused to accept the governor's portion even when it was due him. He did not want to be accused of taking from the poor of Israel that which they needed and he wanted to be free to give as the Lord directed.

Deceptive or False Friendships

In chapter 6, the wall is nearing completion! The work is almost done now, right??? Not exactly.

Now it happened when Sanballat, Tobiah, Geshem the Arab, and the rest of our enemies heard that I had rebuilt the wall, and that there were no breaks left in it (though at that time I had not hung the doors in the gates), that Sanballat and Geshem sent to me, saying, "Come, let us meet together among the villages in the plain of Ono." But they thought to do me harm. So I sent messengers to them, saying, "I am doing a great work, so that I cannot come down. Why should the work cease while I leave it and go down to you?" Nehemiah 6:1-3

The enemies of Nehemiah encouraged him to drop the work for a few days and take a break.

How will the enemy try to draw you out? A free weekend vacation with the guys? A date with some foxy mama from your past? Remember, Satan will dangle all kinds of good-looking things before your eyes but in reality, he seeks nothing but to steal, kill and destroy (John 10:10).

You may hear someone tell you, "Hey, you've been doing well at this Christian thing, the guys really admire you. Come on and go with us to Myrtle Beach for the weekend. We're going to catch some fish, drink a few beers and relax. You need the rest." What should you do? Don't go.

Nehemiah saw through their scheme. He knew that they weren't interested in blessing him but in taking him away from the will of God. You can see through the schemes of the enemy too. People will come to you seeming to have your best interest at heart. But do they? The simple test to determine their motive is to check it out with scripture and ask the Holy Spirit to give you discernment. Would Jesus want you to be involved? Why should you leave the great work that the Lord is doing in your life and go back to the world's ways that got you into trouble?

Nehemiah's enemies were persistent; verse four says that they tried four times to draw him outside of his protection. You have to be just as persistent in your devotion to the Lord. If it was wrong to take them up on the offer the first time they asked then it is still wrong the fourth time they ask.

False Accusations

When this didn't work, they brought a false accusation that could have ruined the reputation of the work.

Then Sanballat sent his servant to me as before, the fifth time, with an open letter in his hand. In it was written: It is reported among the nations, and Geshem says, that you and the Jews plan to rebel; therefore, according to these rumors, you are rebuilding the wall, that you may be their king. And you have also appointed prophets to proclaim concerning you at Jerusalem, saying, 'There is a king in Judah!' Now these matters will be reported to the king. So come, therefore, and let us consult together.

Nehemiah 6:5-7

This could have ruined the work. Nehemiah depended upon the good favor of the king and this kind of report could have stopped progress. But Nehemiah knew that he was right and that their accusation was a lie. What did he do? He answered with a simple, "Not so", and prayed for God to strengthen his hands in the face of this attempt to draw him away.

How should you respond to false accusations? One of the great blessings of your new relationship with Christ is that you do not have to defend your reputation in the face of lies. You will hear false accusations from time to time. Don't worry about them. As long as you are serving Jesus, He provides the defense. God will be your rear guard (Isaiah 52:12 & 58:8). He's got your back. So don't react; respond to God in prayer.

If you are at fault, confess your sins to Christ and admit your mistake to the ones affected by it. If you are not at fault, let Christ be your defender and just continue doing what He has called you to do.

False Counsel

This time the enemy sent a subtle messenger who appeared Godly but was really a wolf in sheep's clothing.

Afterward I came to the house of Shemaiah the son of Delaiah, the son of Mehetabel, who was a secret informer; and he said, "Let us meet together in the house of God, within the temple, and let us close the doors of the temple, for they are coming to kill you; indeed, at night they will come to kill you." And I said, "Should such a man as I flee? And who is there such as I who would go into the temple to save his life? I will

Completing the Work

not go in!" Then I perceived that God had not sent him at all, but that he pronounced this prophecy against me because Tobiah and Sanballat had hired him. For this reason he was hired, that I should be afraid and act that way and sin, so that they might have cause for an evil report, that they might reproach me. My God, remember Tobiah and Sanballat, according to these their works, and the prophetess Noadiah and the rest of the prophets who would have made me afraid. Nehemiah 6:10-14

The enemy had hired the priest! How did Nehemiah know that the counsel of the priest was not from the Lord? First of all, his counsel was against God's law. He was encouraging Nehemiah to hide in the Holy Place of the Temple. Nehemiah was not a priest and he wasn't supposed to go into the Holy Place. If Nehemiah had listened, he would have brought a reproach on the work by clearly disobeying the commandments of God. Because Nehemiah knew the Word, he also knew when counsel was ungodly even when it came from someone who was supposed to represent God.

Like Nehemiah, you need to be careful who you receive counsel from. Be sure to find Godly counselors that you can trust. Be like the Bereans in Acts 17:11; receive counsel with all readiness of mind but search the scriptures to be sure that the advice you receive is consistent with God's Word.

Secondly, Shemaiah the priest also tried to use fear to motivate Nehemiah. We have already addressed this issue but remember Romans 8:15 says that you have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but you have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father. If fear is the driving force, then the motive for taking an action is probably not from God. When we act out of fear, we are not responding in faith. Instead of fearing, cry out to your Heavenly Father.

Lastly, when receiving counsel, remember Colossians 3:15 and let the peace of God rule (umpire) in your heart. Remember, false counsel will dispute God's Word, and beware if fear is used.

It is finished!

So the wall was finished on the twenty-fifth day of Elul, in fifty-two days. And it happened, when all our enemies heard of it, and all the nations around us saw these things, that they were very disheartened in their own eyes; for they perceived that this work was done by our God. Nehemiah 6:15-16

The wall of protection is finished. The people of Israel were recognized as a strong people with a strong wall. They no longer had to worry about bands of marauders coming in and stealing

their goods or harming their children. The enemies of Israel “were very disheartened in their own eyes, for they perceived that this work was done by our God.” Amen and amen!

We come to point where we began two lessons ago when we said that the work would speak for itself. Once people begin to see that God is doing the work in your life, their response to you will change too. Some will be encouraged; others will be discouraged and for a while they will give up trying to draw you away. You are safe as you abide in Christ.

You have committed to building a good foundation in your life. Praise the Lord for your good beginning! However, you still need to beware of something ...

Compromise

Also in those days the nobles of Judah sent many letters to Tobiah, and the letters of Tobiah came to them. For many in Judah were pledged to him, because he was the son-in-law of Shechaniah the son of Arah, and his son Jehohanan had married the daughter of Meshullam the son of Berechiah. Also they reported his good deeds before me, and reported my words to him. Tobiah sent letters to frighten me.
Nehemiah 6:17-19

In Nehemiah’s case, there were men within the walls who were allies of Tobiah. They maintained communication with this enemy and sought to convince Nehemiah that good old Tobiah wasn’t such a bad guy after all. They also repeated to Tobiah conversations they had with Nehemiah.

The people of Israel were compromising with the same enemy who had tried to kill them! How could they do such a thing? They probably drifted slowly into compromise. This trick of the devil kills inch by inch and there is no place for it when you are confronted with temptation.

Satan, your enemy will attempt to draw you away little by little. He knows that it isn’t likely for you to fall into drug use or drunkenness overnight. And he is aware that your defense system is on alert for a frontal attack. So how will he try to get you back into his net? He may tempt you with an alluring woman or man who leads you away from God. He or she looks good and righteous on your first or second meeting but the longer you know them the more you realize that they aren’t the good Christian that they appeared to be. Your affection for them may tempt you away from your love for Christ and before you realize it, you are living in sin and dealing with the consequences.

Completing the Work

Satan may also tempt you into compromise at work or in social situations where you are overly concerned with the opinions of unbelievers around you. “One drink won’t hurt. I’ve got to fit in or I may lose my job.” And it may not ... yet. You will be led further into the trap until you drink two or three beers or split a bag of marijuana with your old buddies and then you will be back in trouble.

Some years after the events of chapter six, Nehemiah left the city to return to the king’s palace at Shushan. During his absence, the enemy moved in slowly until he had taken up residence in the Temple. When Nehemiah returned to Jerusalem, he was grieved by what he saw but he also knew how to handle the problem.

But during all this I was not in Jerusalem, for in the thirty-second year of Artaxerxes king of Babylon I had returned to the king. Then after certain days I obtained leave from the king, and I came to Jerusalem and discovered the evil that Eliashib had done for Tobiah, in preparing a room for him in the courts of the house of God. And it grieved me bitterly; therefore I threw all the household goods of Tobiah out of the room. Then I commanded them to cleanse the rooms; and I brought back into them the articles of the house of God, with the grain offering and the frankincense.
Nehemiah 13:6-9

During Nehemiah’s absence, a great deal of corruption had taken place. They actually removed the articles of worship from a storage room in the Temple and set up a little efficiency apartment for Tobiah, one of the enemies who had tried years before to destroy them.

This is unbelievable! How could they forget? How could they compromise their worship of God in order to appease their enemy? We would never do anything like that, would we?

Have you ever seen a Christian brother who was sold out for Jesus one year and by the next, he was inviting you to his house for a keg party? Or maybe he begins emailing you dirty jokes and you wonder what happened to him. He may still claim to have a relationship with Jesus but Jesus no longer rules in his heart. Instead, he has converted the place in his heart that Jesus once occupied into a room for his own pleasure. Over time, compromise has eroded his devotion to Jesus and he is at risk of falling back into a sinful lifestyle.

How can you avoid this problem? It’s really pretty simple. You can be free from the problems of compromise the same way that Nehemiah set the people of Jerusalem free. He cleaned house. He threw Tobiah’s stuff out and put the articles of worship back where they belonged. Do a

little heart cleaning and find out what you may be harboring there too. Remember King David's prayer in Psalm 139. It's a great heart cleanser.

Search me, O God, and know my heart; Try me, and know my anxieties; and see if there is any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting. Psalm 139:23-24

So be it.

Nehemiah addressed other issues of compromise that had seeped into Jerusalem. Chapter 13 details the steps that he took to root out all of the corruption that occurred during his absence.

- The Israelites had been breaking the Sabbath law set down by God for the Jews. They were working, buying and selling on the Sabbath in direct violation of God's commandment. They must have forgotten that their failure to observe the Jewish Sabbath was one of the reasons that God sent them into captivity but alas, people's memories are short. It is important to remember where your own sins have led. You don't want to live in the past but it is healthy to recall that satisfying that little desire of the flesh led to deeper and deeper addictions and it cost more than you ever wanted to pay. Don't go back.
- In verses 23-28, Nehemiah discovered that the Israelites had been intermarrying with those of other beliefs, one of the priest's sons had married the daughter of Sanballet! God warns us not to be unequally yoked with unbelievers, for what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness? (II Corinthians 6:14) Being "unequally yoked" covers a lot of territory i.e. possible marriage partners, business partners, close friends, etc. The bottom line is not to be brought into partnership with unbelievers. If you do then you will be open to compromising your faith. "Do not be deceived: "Evil company corrupts good habits" (I Corinthians 15:33).

Beware of compromise in your new life.

Virtually all of the trouble experienced by the Israelites once the wall was built can be attributed to compromise in their relationship with God. The same is true for us. You are in good shape right now. The Lord has cleansed you from the inside out. You are closer to Him than you have been in a long time. Your thoughts are clearer, your mind is sharper.

All you need to do is to continue walking in the Spirit.

Completing the Work

As you have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith, as you have been taught, abounding in it with thanksgiving. Colossians 2:6-7

Think about the lessons in this discipleship study and continue walking this path of life as the Holy Spirit directs you.

- You are being transformed as you renew your mind in the Word of God.
- You have a fresh view of who God is and of your sufficiency and identity in His Son Jesus Christ.
- You now understand that addictions are a form of idolatry that interfere with your relationship with the Lord.
- You have found Biblical counsel for problems related to pride, anger, self-discipline and friendship.
- You have allowed the Lord to cleanse your body (the temple of the Holy Spirit) and begun to build a wall around your thought-life and behavior as a new creation in Christ.

Protect it! Diligently keep the wall and do not permit the enemy to creep in through compromise. Be careful what you permit in your life (TV, music, negative relationships, places you go). They may appear innocent on the front end but sin practiced over and over will cause you to compromise your relationship with Jesus and rob you of the blessings that He gives. Remember, Jesus is the one who came in order that you might have abundant life; Satan is the one who wants to kill you, steal from you and destroy you. Don't compromise with him.

The best way to avoid compromise is to be separated unto Jesus Christ. It can be difficult to figure out how to be separated from all of the sin that swirls around you. The best way that I have found is to be separated unto Jesus Christ. If you are with Him everyday, seeking Him through prayer, meditation and reading His Word, then you will be free from the issues that the enemy would use to hold you in bondage to your past.

And do this, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep; for now our salvation is nearer than when we first believed. The night is far spent, the day is at hand. Therefore let us cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light. Let us walk properly, as in the day, not in revelry and drunkenness, not in lewdness and lust, not in strife and envy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts. Romans 13:11-14

Beyond Addictions

The best way to cast off the works of darkness is to put on the armor of light, to put on the Lord Jesus Christ. This is how Nehemiah taught the Israelites to win the battle; it wasn't by constantly fearing their enemies or even by understanding all of their tactics, it was by remaining secure inside the walls of the city. We are victorious as we put on the Lord Jesus Christ, our armor of light. We remain secure as long as we abide in Him.

Beyond Addictions

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Completing the Work

Assignment 13

Name: _____

1. After facing opposition from Sanballat and the other enemies of Israel, the people of Jerusalem almost destroyed the work that God was doing in their city. What happened? _____

Have you ever experienced a time when selfishness almost destroyed the work that the Lord was doing in your life? _____ If so, how? _____

2. There are blessings in serving, in looking out for the needs of others rather than being concerned about ourselves first. Can you think of some scripture passages that encourage you to think of others rather than yourself or to seek to serve rather than seeking to be served? _____

3. Sanballat and his followers tried an interesting approach to draw Nehemiah away from the work that he was doing in Jerusalem (page 4). What did he do? _____

How can you apply this to your own life? _____

4. How should you respond to accusations regarding your past? _____

Beyond Addictions

5. How was Nehemiah protected from the false counsel of the priest? _____

How can you be sure that the counsel you are given is godly? _____

6. What is necessary for you to continue building on the foundation that God is establishing in your life? _____

7. Compromise is a killer. Can you identify any areas of your life in which you need to be especially on guard against compromise? _____

8. We need to have a regular heart cleansing to be sure that we are not compromising our faith in Jesus Christ, to be sure that we are not allowing thoughts and activities back into our life that can lead us back into sin. How can you search your heart in order to be sure that you are not already compromising your faith in Jesus? _____

Once you complete this worksheet, mail it to:

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