

All right. Let's open our Bibles this morning to Nehemiah 10.

The book of Nehemiah covers a historic time in Israel's history- especially if you've read through the Old Testament, you realize there're not a lot of revivals; there's a lot of failure, a lot of coming up short. But here's a revival that you get to take a front-row seat in and even get to take a good long look behind the scenes - what caused revival, what sustained it. In many ways, it's a difficult book - not to understand, that's fairly easy; but it's a hard book to read if you've living at all in compromise because you get to see that, on the one side you don't do very well, and on the other side you can do well but it's that commitment to the Lord. What side are you standing with? There's this constant call in this book to see faith translated into tangible behavior. It's kind of like "talk is cheap," and there's no room for it in this book.

Up through chapter 6:14, the concern of the book is to talk to us about this wall that needed to be built again. It's a long journey there - Nehemiah's calling, his awesome plans that he made as he waited upon the LORD, the leadership that he showed to the people (especially in light of constant enemy threats to derail the work). It's a great story about how God moves through one man, and then through many, to get His work accomplished.

By the time you get to chapter 6:15, you read that the wall was finished in record time. It was a miracle, indeed. It had been down 160 years, and it was built in fifty-two days. But beginning, then, in verse 15, there is this immediate turn as God begins to speak about the reinstruction or the regathering of the people back to a spiritual life. They had a wall now, but they still didn't have much of a relationship with God, and they'd lived there for generations without Him.

So, chapters 7 and 8, we talked about how the city was secured but most importantly that they established the priesthood again, according to the genealogy as the Old Testament demanded. And then we are given, in chapter 8, these six steps that the people took that brought revival to the nation as a whole. And we spent a long time, a whole morning I think, there (if you weren't with us) at the end of chapter 8.

Last week, in chapter 9, we studied the prayer of the people. They gathered, they made these steps, they found their hearts open to the LORD, they admitted that God had always been faithful. In fact, maybe the key verse is in verse 33 of last week's study where it said, "However You are just in all that has befallen us; for You have dealt faithfully, but we have done wickedly." And that certainly is the story of much of the Old Testament. They had brought it upon themselves, the captivity, now coming back to this upheaval and difficulty, and they found themselves humbled. They had broken the covenant with God. Back in chapter 30 of Deuteronomy, the LORD had said to them, "Go into the land, and don't forget about Me. But if you do, and God brings that to mind, you're going to remember in all the nations where I've driven you. And when you return to Me with your heart and soul, I'll return you to the land." And that was the promise that they were being driven by. Right? God had scattered them because they had not done what He had said. But now they were back in the land, seeking to do what He wanted from them. And, as a result, they were praying that God would then give to them all that they had lost in the process. So, they wanted to re-establish it. In fact, verse 38 of last week, "And because of all this, we make a sure covenant and write it; our leaders, our Levites, and our priests seal it." "We're going to make this covenant between us and God." They wanted a fresh start. They wanted to serve the LORD. They had been, for years, away from Him. And one of the things that we realize, as we read through this book especially, is that maybe the greatest contributing factor of them losing that relationship with the LORD was their priorities had gotten really out of line. What they had done well early on, as they walked with God, they had stopped doing. They had not kept the main things, the main things. And so here, they determine as a nation - both as individuals and then collectively - that they were going to put God first and not divert from following Him again.

So that's what chapter 10 is really all about. It is the daily lives that take urgency, but they replace in our lives the things that are vital. We are so busy doing things that they just have to be done. I've got a checklist. But we let go of the priorities of keeping close to Him. And so you could write on this chapter, "Setting Biblical Goals." You have to prioritize practices and pursuits in such a way that you don't get pulled away from God but you get drawn closer to Him.

There're a couple things that happen here to the people because we get this view into what happens when there's a revival. Repentance and confession of the sin of the people had released them from guilt and, in many ways, had released them from

the punishment of that sinfulness. But now they wanted to get rid of the consequences of sin, and that takes a lot longer. Forgiveness is immediate, but yet the consequences that come with sin can sometimes just kind of drag on. Right? They're those seeds that you've planted that need to be uprooted. So they were going to have to commit themselves to doing things God's way. And true revival always starts with repentance but results in action.

Let me ask you this. What are the top priorities in your life, as seen by what you dedicate yourself to? I don't mean what you say; just what you do. I mean, if someone were to follow you around with a pad of paper, and they would write down everything you did in terms of time and effort and friends and expenditures, what would they come away with saying, "This is the most important thing to this person's life, and I'm not just guessing at it, I've seen it with my own eyes"? The natural tendency, in just about everything in life, is to lose vitality, not gain it, as time passes. You just kind of get worn out. You don't kind of ratchet up most of the time; you just kind of head downhill. And so it is easy for us in our spiritual lives to begin, after a while, to give attendance to what we were rather than what we could be. We're, "Oh, I remember the day," or, "This is what we used to be." But there isn't much pushing forward. It's easier to smile at yesterday's accomplishments than to look forward in faith to what God might want to do with us tomorrow. And that had been the case for these folks for a long time, but now they were wanting to go forward. Someone once said, "Life's like a coin. You can spend it any way you like, but you can only spend it once."

So, the most difficult thing, at least for these folks (and spiritually for us, I think) is to think in terms of thinking and acting in terms of priority. So with this long prayer that we looked at last week, the people now want to write down, "Here're some changes we're going to make, and we're going to follow them. We're going to commit ourselves. We're going to sign on the dotted line. We're going to do this. We're not just going to talk about this." They'd prayed. They wanted a covenant with God. They'd had enough of the wages of sin. They were ready to alter their ways, and they wanted to write them down. Because, let's face it, making promises is far easier than keeping them; or even the old New Year's resolution thing, "Oh, starting next year" or my diet - I start every Monday. Every Monday. "Are you on a diet?" "Monday." It's always gonna happen. It hasn't.

So, here's a list that you can make because it'll help you spiritually. God wants to bring us to a place where we make spiritual decisions that we can carry out not just

talk about. And, certainly, goal setting is one of Nehemiah's greatest lessons. It's a biblical thing to write down what you plan to do, what you hope to do, how you plan to get there, what the LORD is showing you. Few people practice it. Folks would rather do this, "Oh, the LORD'll just work it all out" which means, "I don't have to do anything. I just have to hang around 'cause God is good, and I'm just gonna sit." Now, look, what would happen if I showed up every Sunday morning and I never had studied at all? I just got up here and went, "Dude, I'm feelin' it. I'm not feelin' it. Oh, I'm feelin' it." Or maybe you don't show up at church so I'm just talkin' to the pews. Or none of us pray. Or none of us go out and share our faith. Or none of us are willing to forgive one another. We talk about it, and we all agree it's the right thing to do, but none of us are doing it. All talk no action produces no progress and no fruit. It's just deceptive. So here comes this nation who are (since the middle of chapter 6) determined to walk with God. They'll not let what has happened in the years that have gone by happen again, and it has led to this real revival. And so they come together, they write down some biblical goals. It would mean changing the status quo. They can't stay as they were. Things are going to have to change. Change is hard. But they're determined, by God's grace, to get it all done.

So, the end of chapter 9, these are the signators - the priests, the leaders, the Levites. Verse 1 of chapter 10 says, "Now those who placed their seal on the document were:" beginning with Nehemiah and then going forward from there. In fact, in the first twenty-eight verses, there are eighty-four names: Nehemiah, twenty-one priests, seventeen Levites, forty-five chiefs. And then you get to verse 28, and you read this, "Now the rest of the people - the priests, the Levites, the gatekeepers, the singers, the Nethinim, and all those who had separated themselves from the peoples of the lands to the Law of God, their wives, their sons, and their daughters, everyone who had knowledge and understanding - these joined with their brethren, their nobles, and entered into a curse and an oath to walk in God's Law, which was given by Moses the servant of God, and to observe and do all the commandments of the LORD our Lord, and His ordinances and His statutes." So, eighty-four names and then verses 28 and 29 - and everyone else who understood what they were doing. In other words, it was a volitional choice. "This is what we're going to do." Not everyone signed on. Not everyone ever does, even if they're sitting in your pew. But this was an important day because it's kind of like raising your hands when you get saved, or going to get prayer, or making a step in the right direction. They start verbally (chapter 9), they are open and deliberate about it. But since chapter 7, there has been this whirlwind, if you will,

of reform and of repentance, of dedication, and this personal revival. And so now they want to write it down and make it sure.

So, notice in verse 29, they make this covenant, and they mention (as we go through) three areas that seem to be the most important to them in terms of things they could do immediately. It touches their home life, their social life, their business life, and their religious practices. "This is who we are, this is what we need to start doing, and we assume this is what we haven't done."

Notice that, in verse 29, they "joined with their brethren." "We're going to make this happen together." There's something about being in church. I know that we live in a part of the country that you can shop for churches. In fact, you can go to a new church every day for the rest of your life. But is that really beneficial to you? It isn't. I mean, when you get down to it, it is the joining together with others walking with God that makes you the strongest. Hebrews 10:25 says, "Don't forsake the assembling of yourselves together; that's the manner of some. And be encouraged, especially when you see this Day approaching." There is benefit to being in the body. In fact, the body of Christ, I think, is God's gift to you and me to help us to do the right thing. Together, pressure helps; people look over your shoulder, they're interested in how you're doing. It is something that they had sorely neglected for a long time. And yet, if you're going to do well, you've got to be in church. And I would say to you - you've got to be in a local church. You don't have to be in this church. You go where God leads you. But you go somewhere and stick it through and work it out and see it through. Be a part. I have sometimes people go, "Yeah, I'm not comin' anymore. I'm watchin' on the live feed." That's a dumb move. It's great. It's a dumb move. (Pastor Jack points to the camera). Wait, I'm talking to the camera. (Laughing) It's great if you're sick, if you're stuck, if you're not able. But there's nothing about your involvement with others that can be done from the comfort of your couch. We need to be involved. People need to know who you are, and you need to know who they are. So, together they were going to accomplish this work.

Beginning in verse 30, "We would not give our daughters as wives to the peoples of the land, nor take their daughters for our sons." They were going to distinguish themselves from the world. They were going to be a separate group, if you will. And back in Deuteronomy chapter 7, the LORD had said to them through Moses, "When the LORD delivers you, don't make marriages with them; your daughters to their sons, their daughters to your sons. They're going to turn your hearts from

walking with Me and serving Me. They're going to lead you to worship other gods, and God's anger is going to be raised up, and He's going to be aroused against you." And they'd been doing that, and it had been destructive for them. They needed to maintain their distinction. If you want revival, you're going to have to be distinct. You aren't of the world. You're in it, you don't belong to it. I guarantee you the day that the Lord separates the sheep from the goats, you want to be in the sheep group. You may want to fit in now, but you're not going to want to fit in then. "I'm a sheep. Look at my I'm a sheep." (Pastor Jack puts his hands on his hips). You won't want to be anything else. And that's what God calls us to - to be sheep. The LORD, in Exodus 33:12, said, "Come out from them and be separate upon the face of the earth, and the world will know that you have found grace in My sight." Paul said the same thing when you get to 2 Corinthians 6:17, "Come out from among them and be separate." And one of the things that the people made a commitment of themselves to was that they were going to live a different life than the world. I mean, Israel here was surrounded by idolaters. It was easy to lose their identity. It was easy for them to conform to the world. And they'd been doing that, and they'd seen themselves falling in this area. But they now vow to put a stop to it. "We're going to do things God's way." The LORD said to them, in Exodus 34:15, "Be careful that you don't make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land where you're going. It'll become a snare to you. It won't help you, it'll trap you." Just a couple books later, in the book of Numbers 33:55, the LORD says, "If you don't drive out the inhabitants of the land before you, they're going to be irritants in your eyes, they're going to be thorns in your side. And they're going to harass you in the place that you dwell." This isn't helpful - to be stuck in the world, with the world. You have to be distinct.

The body of Christ is a place of fellowship and serving. You want to have friends? Find them in church. You want to minister to people? Find that in the world. Go reach out. The world is a great place for outreach and witness. The church is a great place for service and friendship, support. It's the way God set it up. Which is why, when you get to the New Testament, the Lord says, "When you get married, you get married only in the Lord. Don't you be unequally yoked" (2 Corinthians 6:14). "In love, prefer one another" (Romans 12:10). Because the body is so necessary for us to grow. If we, as saints, surround ourselves mostly with unsaved folks and look to have kind of an intimate relationship with them - those are our best friends - you're goin' down. It's not going to help you. Because our tendency is to just kind of flow in that direction. Solomon found that out. You read in 1 Kings 11:4 that when he became old his wives turned his heart away from the LORD

to other gods; he wasn't loyal to the LORD as the heart of his father, David, had been. There wasn't that commitment anymore. It's because he had separated himself from God's people. Not good. Not helpful. So, Solomon learned the hard way. Peter went to stand by the soldiers' fire (that were denying Jesus), and from there, he could deny Him as well. Paul writes to the Ephesians in chapter 5:11, "Have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose them." In Peter's first sermon, book of Acts 2:40, he said to the people when they said, "What shall we do?" he said, "You should save yourself from this perverse generation," and he called them to Jesus. But get away from the world around you, and surround yourself with God's people. And, like I said, the Lord (in Matthew 13) told that parable about the wheat and the tares; and He said, "Just let them grow together until the harvest. Then we'll separate them, and the wheat can be brought into the barn, and the tares can go into the fire." You want to be a wheat. You don't want any mistakes, do you? You want to be sure you're standing on the right spot. So here's their commitment, "We're going to separate ourselves to the LORD."

Secondly, verse 31, "If the peoples of the land brought wares or any grain to sell on the Sabbath day, we would not buy it from them on the Sabbath, or on a holy day; and we would forego the seventh year's produce and the exacting of every debt." Secondly, we're not going to do business anymore on the Sabbath. You know, one of the things that distinguished Israel (back in Exodus 31) was that the Sabbath was a day that God established so that His people would learn that there was a way to be provided for that starts with a commitment to the LORD, not a commitment to commerce; that, as much as they were to work, they were to recognize that God provided all that they were given. And that's true. It wasn't them, it was Him. And this unique practice of setting a day aside where no work was to be done, and, if you go to Exodus 31:14, it has attached to it the death penalty if you violate it. Now you might say, "Well, that's kind of severe. I went to work on Sunday" (or the Sabbath for them), "and now I'm dying?" Well, look, from a spiritual standpoint, if you try to work your way into heaven, work your way into God's grace, work your way into His favor, you're going to die anyway - trying - because you're a sinner. That's the picture. So Jesus becomes our Sabbath rest. We rest from our labors. We trust in Him. And that's ultimately, I think, the view that God would have us to have. And praise the Lord that, in His mercy, He doesn't carry out that death sentence. But that's the way it is. Right? He's our way in. What had happened to the people? Sin and, more importantly, self-interest had caused them to set the Sabbath laws aside. These are spiritual rules that

unspiritual people practiced. "We're just going to set this aside because we have different ways of life." And their business profit and gain far outdistanced their devotion and faith, and God's ways were descending down the priority scale. And you see it happen to folks a lot. They just get involved in the ways and the things of the world - they don't have time for the Lord or His people, for church, for service, for ministry. And that law applied to their lives, and they hadn't been keeping it.

Furthermore, we read here that they were willing to apply that Sabbath law to the land. Back in Leviticus (back in the Law) chapter 25, the LORD had said to the people like you're supposed to one day a week cease from your labors and just trust the LORD, let it be a day of worship, so the land needed a rest every seventh year. And so the LORD said, "On the sixth year, I'll give you enough food and crops to get you through to the next year. You don't have to plant that year. Let the land rest. And on these big holidays, on seven sets of years, on the fiftieth year, the Year of Jubilee, I'll give you enough to last two years." And they were obligated to just trust God. It meant, maybe, less income for a year; but it meant greater dividends in terms of their spiritual life. And they didn't do it. In fact, they didn't ever do it. For 490 years, they never let the land rest, and the LORD, in determining how long they would go into captivity, said, "Well, you owe Me seventy years of rest. I'll just take it back. Now you won't even get to live in the land for the next seventy years," and He moved them on. So, God wanted it to be rested, and God wanted them to trust in Him. And so the people hadn't been able to do that. They loved gain more than they loved God. They placed temporal gain over God's blessing, and now they'd had enough of that, and they made a vow together, and they said, "Look, we can't afford to live like this. We're going to put You before our business and before our commerce. We're going to restore debts." Because that Year of Jubilee, you're supposed to be forgiving people's debts and restoring their land to them. Nobody's done that because that means me losing financially, and I only would do it if God was involved. And I don't care. And so they hadn't done it. But now they were called to do it. And for half of a millennium, they ignored His counsel, and they suffered accordingly. It was going to cost them to put God first, by the way; these were poor folks. We read it a couple chapters ago. They were struggling. But that didn't matter. They wanted to do it right. They saw it as something they could not afford not to do. So these were difficult reforms. Putting God first would bring a reward, but it was going to take a real commitment; and yet God honors the person who honors Him. That's just always the way it was. "If you love your life, you're going to lose it. If you

hate your life in this world, you will keep it for everlasting life." That's what Jesus said in John 12:25. So do that.

In light of that, verse 32 says this, "Also we made ordinances for ourselves, to exact from ourselves yearly one-third of a shekel for the service of the house of our God: for the showbread, for the regular grain offering, for the regular burnt offering of the Sabbaths, the New Moons, and the set feasts; for the holy things, for the sin offerings to make atonement for Israel, and all the work of the house of our God. We cast lots among the priests, the Levites, and the people, for bringing the wood offering into the house of our God, according to our fathers' houses, at the appointed times year by year, to burn on the altar of the LORD our God as it is written in the Law. And we made ordinances to bring the firstfruits of our ground and the firstfruits of all the fruit of all trees, year by year, to the house of the LORD; to bring the firstborn of our sons and our cattle, as it is written in the Law, and the firstborn of our herds and our flocks, to the house of our God, to the priests who minister in the house of our God; to bring the firstfruits of our dough, our offerings, the fruit from all kinds of trees, the new wine and oil, to the priests, to the storerooms of the house of our God; and to bring the tithes of our land to the Levites, for the Levites should receive the tithes in all our farming communities. And the priest, the descendant of Aaron, shall be with the Levites when the Levites receive tithes; and the Levites shall bring up a tenth of the tithes to the house of our God; to the rooms of the storehouse. For the children of Israel and the children of Levi shall bring the offering of the grain, of the new wine and the oil, to the storerooms where the articles of the sanctuary are, where the priests who minister and the gatekeepers and the singers are; and we will not neglect the house of our God."

You read the words (in these eight verses) "the house of our God" nine times. According to the law of God, the people were obliged or required to come to the LORD to redeem anything that they received as firstfruits so that whatever you got in the year - produce, crops - 10% of those crops were to be given back to the LORD in terms of the support of the house of God, the place of worship, the place of sacrifice. It was designed not to make God rich because, let's face it, God doesn't need anything. He says we're stewards of His stuff, and when we die, He can take it all back. But that it was given to us to involve ourselves with the thought that everything we have comes from His hand. It's an easy thing to forget. You know? We take pride in our successes, we laud our accomplishments, we quickly forget if God wants it back, He can take it all back right now. What you

have, you are holding as a steward. That's really as far as it can go. So, in the law, there was this requirement of the firstfruits. And, in spite of these heavy taxation issues and poverty, they said to each other, and to the LORD, "We're going to put first things first, and what little we have, we are going to be sure that we will acknowledge You." They're putting their money where their heart is; not where their mouth is but where their hearts are. Right? Where their faith rested. Usually, our wallets are the last things to be redeemed. But it's a pretty good test of how much we really acknowledge that God is the One who has provided.

So verse 32 and verse 33, they have these self-imposed taxes which they levied against themselves only so that they might bring whatever the cost of the daily service at the temple was, so that God could be kept in their national life. What was an expenditure for generations, that seemed to be a waste - and so they ignored it - now becomes totally worth it to them. They didn't want to go without it. There's that verse in Leviticus 6:13 that said that the fire at the place of worship should always be kept going. That required constant wood. Can you imagine? 24/7. All the time, this fire before the LORD had to be burning so that they could bring the offerings upon it, and they had let that thing go out constantly. There was an expense to it.

So the people made a commitment here, verse 34, that they would bring wood for the altar, the requirements of God. And by the way, notice that, in order for it to work, it required a group effort. Again, it's the body working together, not one individual. Nehemiah, in fact, at the end of chapter 13, talked about having a time when he also took the responsibility of making sure that the wood showed up. It was quite a cost, but they did it. Why did they do it? Because their biblical priority was, "If we do things God's way, things are going to change in our lives."

Verse 35, they were to bring the firstfruits of the ground and of the trees and of the harvest. They had to bring those up every year to the LORD. Verses 36-39, the first things from the children. Now obviously you can't give the LORD your first child as a sacrifice, but you were to purchase him or her with an offering to the LORD redeemed in-kind in terms of cattle or whatever. The wheat would be brought. The firstfruits would be brought. It didn't matter how much it was. Percentage-wise you could have a very little crop and very little income and have very little to give. But God wasn't interested in the amount. He was interested in

the heart's willingness to put Him first so that God's house wasn't forsaken. "We're going to keep Him first."

Giving is certainly a very difficult area to change your life if you have been stuck in a practice of being a hoarder or self-serving for a long time. And even this whole law of a tenth, and then there were lots of taxes that went with it as well, was a hard thing to change for people, a difficulty. But notice that there is this willingness in the hearts of the people to give to the things of God and to keep the work of God going in their midst, if you will. And God began to stir hearts, and together, they were able to accomplish God's will.

It is certainly that way today in the church, I think. Everything - from our tracts to lightbulbs here - is paid for by tithing. We don't have business investments because we don't tithe and put them in risky kinds of places. We try to be good stewards of them. It requires a group effort. It requires everyone to be a part. Jesus said, "Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out demons. Freely you've received, now freely give" (Matthew 10:8). But that really can only happen when your heart is moved by the Lord because the flesh doesn't really like any of this. This is a spiritual work that is only accomplished when God's desires are first in the heart of the people.

So here's a reflection, if you will, of the spiritual condition of this generation and the work of God's Spirit, who said, "We're going to make sure that the priests and the place of offering and worship and sacrifice, that the LORD in our midst is honored and obeyed first." But that is a work of God in the heart.

If you've been with us for any length of time, as a church, we teach on giving only as we run into it in the Bible. We are convinced completely that fundraising isn't necessary because, if God is moving on your heart, God will provide. And if He isn't, then there's no sense us trying to spend what we don't have or try to beat it out of you. I remember hearing a pastor one time say, "God has given us all that we need. Unfortunately it's still in your pockets." (Laughing) What a crook! We don't need that. I mean, we have lots of opportunities here. We're going to be feeding lots of folks who God has given us opportunity to work with. We're sending tons of gifts to little children who are in orphanages in Mexico that we've been working with and ministering to. There're lots of opportunities to be involved. But we're not going to beg. You just as the Lord leads. God has to build the church! It's ridiculous to think otherwise.

And notice that, for the people here, it had been going on for years - until God began to move in their hearts. And now they were making changes. But you can't strive with money to make that happen. I mean, Scripture will bear that out. Go back and read Exodus 25 or 36 when the LORD said to Moses, "Go tell the people we're going to need a lot of stuff to build the Ark (of the Testimony). But just receive it from people who are willing to give it. And if they don't, don't take it from them." So Moses just goes, "Here's a list of stuff we need. God bless you guys." And he walked away. And eleven chapters later, the priests came to Moses and said, "You tell the people to quit bringing stuff because we've got more than we need. We don't know what to do with all this stuff now." There was an abundance because their hearts were right with God. You find the same thing in Ezra chapters 1 and 2, when the people were going to go to this place before Nehemiah got here and said to the folks, "We'd like to rebuild and support," and the giving from those who were walking with God was so much that they had more than they knew what to do with. It happened the same way, in 1 Chronicles 29, when David said to the people, "We're going to build. And we're going to build a temple." And yet God brought more than they could have ever expected.

When God moves, God provides. If God's not providing, then you can't really struggle with that. Then you're left to your own devices. And how foolish is that! Haggai was a prophet who showed up in this town years before Nehemiah would, and he confronted the people that were supposed to be there building the temple. And he said to them, "Why are you just serving yourselves?" (Haggai 1:5-9) "There's a severe evil that I saw under the sun," Solomon would write in Ecclesiastes 5:13, "that riches are kept by their owners to their own hurt." Self-interest will keep you from giving to God. The law of firstfruits is a real offense to your flesh. You read it and go, "Why?!" Well, think about it. If the Lord is in it, your priorities will move you to give and support that which God is doing.

By the way, just jumping ahead, in Nehemiah 13, Nehemiah goes back to the king for a while, and when he comes back, he finds the temple closed, the priests out farming, and no one showing up for worship because they had moved away from this heart for the LORD, and everything just shut down. And then Nehemiah got mad, and he started to scream at the people, and I guess the screaming worked. I don't know.

So, terrible when you have to bring missionaries home or close temple doors. On the same manner, when God moves in the heart, then you always have what you

need. And that's our confidence. You know that Scripture, there in 2 Corinthians 9:7, where Paul writes about the church and giving, he said it has to be of a willing mind, it should be determined beforehand what you give so you're never coerced into having to give, you should be able to give "hilariously." Try that. Give "hilariously." You should give only as you are able. Deuteronomy 16:10 & 16:17 as well. Stewardship is an important issue. We have to account for the way that we handle what God has given to us. So, we take offerings on Sunday mornings. We don't say anything about them, and we never will. And we don't rely upon that, we rely upon the Lord. God has a way of making sure that things get taken care of. And, in terms of our outreaches, we take care of our church needs first. Right? Local fellowship needs first, then local outreach, and finally, missions in a foreign country because Jerusalem first. That's how God has given it to us. Does God need you to give? Let me just tell this to you - He doesn't. He doesn't need your help. Can you imagine, you thinkin' you're helping God out? Or helping His work out. That's pretty arrogant. That's not what it is. It's not that He needs it. It's that we need to be able to rely upon Him, and they made a commitment, "We're not going to open for business on the Sabbath, and we're going to put that before the LORD. We're going to let the land rest, and we're going to support the spiritual things in our lives that need to be taken care of." It's a reflection of your spiritual well-being. You look at the widow, there in Mark 12 (and Luke 21), where Jesus applauded not the amount in her hand, which was negligible, but the openness of her heart, which was, in the Lord's assessment of it, there was no one like her that was so willing to sacrifice her entire life. So, you can read Malachi 3 where the LORD gives us this challenge, "Trust Me, and I'll bless you."

In our church, there are over 50% of the people that attend that never give at all. And that's fine because 100% of our needs get paid for and taken care of. God has a way. And our trust is that, as you get to know Him better, you'll support what He's doing - with joy. So, let me say this to you - since, at Christmas, you're going to hear a lot of begging - we don't need any help. All of our bills are paid. God is faithful. We have more than we need to take care of what we've been given, and I trust that God will always do that because it's His church, not ours. So that gets us off the hook for fundraising, doesn't it?

But notice the commitment of the people, and I love to see there's a revival in the pocketbook. That's pretty good, especially amongst people that have so little, and yet their hearts are so open. So here're the vows of the people. "We're going to do things God's way. We're going to separate from the world. We're going to keep

the Sabbath. We're going to forgive debts in the Jubilee time. We're going to put God first." That's everything, right? "Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness; everything after that will be added to you" (Matthew 6:33). So, let me ask you again. What's your priority? And how is it reflected in the way you work, spend your time, spend your days? I know that God would like to break the priorities that get in the way of what He wants to do in your life. Revival comes when He gets at the top of every list, and then all the other things will follow. Seek first the kingdom of God. It's the old Abbott and Costello, "Who's On First?" It better be the Lord.

Submitted by Maureen Dickson
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