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**DAILY
BIBLE
STUDY**



CEDARCREEKCHURCH

When Everything Crumbles

Monday, February 6, 2017

Have you ever found yourself at a place in life where you felt like you had wasted a massive amount of time? Maybe you spent days working on a paper for school, and then an hour before the deadline you realized you wanted to start all over. Maybe you rearranged your entire living room, and once you finished, you wished you hadn't moved anything. Or maybe you found yourself entering your senior year of college and realized that your degree program had nothing to do with what you now wanted for your life.

While our stories may differ, we've all been in a position where we felt as though we've wasted a lot of time. This can also be the case for our life design. So often, we bank on one plan. We have the "perfect" plan for our life, with the ideal future career, spouse, and kids we want. We design our lives around this plan only to realize further down the road that this plan is not, in fact, the real deal.

What do we do?

This past weekend, Ben closed out our "Design Your Life" series by talking about our final mindset, which is, "Know it's a process." Often, we spend so much energy focused on the result, that when the actual result doesn't match up with our intended result, we despair and feel like giving up. This, however, isn't helpful, and since our plans for our lives rarely match up perfectly with reality, it's important for us to embrace the "know it's a process" mindset.

A look at the conclusion of Nehemiah's story can be helpful.

For five weeks, we've talked about the book of Nehemiah. Over the course of Nehemiah's story, we've witnessed him get curious, have a bias for action, reframe his obstacles, and radically collaborate. He had a job he didn't want in a place he didn't want to be. He stepped out and boldly asked King Artaxerxes for permission to go and rebuild Jerusalem. He then spent 12 years in Jerusalem rebuilding and responding to both internal and external obstacles. It seemed as if everything was going well and so he went back to King Artaxerxes.

It took one year.

He and his team spent 12 years rebuilding Jerusalem and strengthening its people.

It took **one year** for the proverbial cracks to begin to surface.

Tobiah was, by Jewish law, prohibited from the temple. However, he had taken over the room specifically dedicated to storing tithes and food for the priests, the singers, the gatekeepers, and the Levites. As a result, the priests and singers had to go work for their food, abandoning their posts in Jerusalem. Also, many people were found working, buying, and selling on the Sabbath which, as Nehemiah points out, is one of the primary reasons God punished Israel in the first place (Neh. 13:18).

Over the course of this week, we are going to look at how Nehemiah responded and how we can apply this approach to our life design. Today, however, let's look at how the story ends and learn how we can respond when our plans don't end up the way we'd hoped.

After seeing everything that had gone wrong, and taking appropriate action, Nehemiah writes this:

Nehemiah 13:30-31

³⁰So I purged out everything foreign and assigned tasks to the priests and Levites, making certain that each knew his work. ³¹I also made sure that the supply of wood for the altar and the first portions of the harvest were brought at the proper times.

Remember this in my favor, O my God.

Nehemiah asks God to remember all that he'd done, to remember the process. Things did not end up the way Nehemiah hoped they would. It might be safe to assume that Nehemiah didn't anticipate spending 12 years in Jerusalem only to have his progress fall apart in one. His plan didn't turn out the way he hoped. How did he react? He came and readjusted the things that had gone wrong. He had to let go of the results he expected and move on to making adjustments based on the reality at hand.

Our response to our life design falling short of our expectations should be similar, and this all starts with the idea that there may be many ways our lives could go. This is why Ben challenged us to **gather and create options**. When we recognize that there are many different paths we can take, we can adjust certain aspects of our design without despair.

Have you taken Ben up on his challenge? Have you tried to craft three different life designs? How did it go?

What is one of your life designs?

Prayer

Gracious and heavenly Father, thank you so much for your love and mercy toward me. I know that you alone know what my life's course will be. I pray that when my life design doesn't turn out the way I'd hoped, I would remember that you are ultimately in control. Help me to love you and serve you always. I ask this in the name of your Son, Jesus. Amen.

When Things Go Wrong, the Joy of the Lord is Our Strength

Tuesday, February 7, 2017

We have all made mistakes that are hard to forget. And we all continue to make mistakes – and will continue to do so until our time on earth is complete. Given this reality, it's important to consider how we choose to react to our mistakes; how we handle the situations that have not gone our way. How much time have we wasted thinking of how we could have handled a circumstance differently (and better)?

In Nehemiah 8:9-10, we learn that Nehemiah, Ezra, and the Levites are interpreting the Law of the Lord to the people. The people are weeping and mourning as they hear and learn of the Law, not because they are being disciplined, but because they are remembering their past and all the things they have done that were not pleasing to the Lord. But Nehemiah lifts their heads up and says, "Don't mourn or weep on such a day as this! For today is a sacred day before the Lord your God" (v. 9). The word 'sacred' means connected with God, holy, blessed, and devoted. Nehemiah continues, "Go and celebrate with a feast of rich foods and sweet drinks, and share gifts with people who have nothing prepared. This is a sacred day before our Lord. Don't be dejected and sad, for the joy of the Lord is our strength!" (v. 10). Nehemiah understands that even through our sins and mistakes, God still loves us, still wants to be in communion with us, still wants us to seek him, worship him, and give our best to him.

"The joy of the Lord is our strength!" is a powerful piece of Scripture. We shouldn't interpret "joy" and "happiness" as the same thing. "Joy" comes from the Holy Spirit who gives us the power to choose joy in any circumstance because we know who God is, what he has done for us, and that he has the best plans for us. "Happiness" comes and goes. It is based on our emotions which can be inconsistent and change within moments. Ben Snyder says, "Don't waste your future by hoping for a better past." Rather than allowing your past to determine your future, believe that God has forgiven you, that he loves you and has greater things in mind for your future. Jeremiah 29:11 says, "For I know the plans I have for you, plans to prosper you and not to harm you. Plans to give you a hope and a future."

Nehemiah 8:9-10

"Then Nehemiah the governor, Ezra the priest and scribe, and the Levites who were interpreting for the people said to them, "Don't mourn or weep on such

a day as this! For today is a sacred day before the Lord your God." For the people had all been weeping as they listened to the words of the Law. And Nehemiah continued, "Go and celebrate with a feast of rich foods and sweet drinks, and share gifts of food with people who have nothing prepared. This is a sacred day before our Lord. Don't be dejected and sad, for the joy of the Lord is our strength!"

How can you relate to the Israelite people after they received the Law? What part of this Scripture sticks out to you the most?

How can you choose joy amid a broken and messy world?

What are some difficult choices you have made that are hindering your relationship with God?

Can you reflect on some difficult circumstances you experienced and how you handled them? What could you have done differently?

Prayer: *Thank God for his unconditional love, guidance, and mercy. Thank him that we can draw strength from his joy even through the difficult times and that we can learn from the choices we have made that we wish we hadn't.*

This post was written by Rachel Marroquin, a regular contributor to the LivingItOut Bible Study.

When It's Time to Clean House

Wednesday, February 8, 2017

“SPLAT!” I hit the bottom of the watery ditch with all the grace and finesse of a one-year-old attempting his or her first steps. As I surveyed my surroundings in the glow of the ambient moonlight, I realized I was at the bottom of a five-foot-deep ditch. By the time I clambered out of the muddy trench, I realized I had lost my bearings. In the moonlight, all the trees looked the same. I pulled out my compass, figured my general direction, and stepped into the darkness, hoping I'd still be able to find my objective.

As I reminisce about the adventures and mishaps of my military training, I find it amusing how much Army Land Navigation, or “wayfinding,” reminds me of life. In Land Navigation you are trying to find a point on a map by following a specific path. As we've discussed in the “Design Your Life” series, you should have a sense of the direction you need, or want, to be heading. The thing about life is that, if we're not careful, we either begin to drift off course over time, or we'll run smack dab into an obstacle, like a ditch that pops up out of nowhere!

When you drift over time, or come upon a sudden obstacle, the result is the same; you wind up off course. Maybe you felt like you had things figured out, you were heading in the right direction, you took the right steps and were making progress, but all of a sudden you realize things are not going as planned. Perhaps you drifted over time, you got distracted, misused time, or followed someone or something you shouldn't have. Maybe you hit a sudden obstacle as your plans blew up in your face: relationships have been severed, the promotion didn't go through, you lost the job completely, or you didn't get accepted to the program.

No matter where you find yourself you can find hope and gain wisdom from the story of Nehemiah. As the book of Nehemiah goes on in chapter 13, we find the people of Jerusalem and Nehemiah in a very similar situation. We know that Nehemiah was in Jerusalem for 12 years. Then, he returns to serve the king for a year before making his way back to Jerusalem. When he returns, he finds that nearly all the spiritual reforms and progress that were made have been forgotten and abandoned in the course of just one year. So, in true Nehemiah fashion, he takes immediate action.

We see this play out in Nehemiah 13:6-9:

⁶I was not in Jerusalem at that time, for I had returned to King Artaxerxes of Babylon in the thirty-second year of his reign, though I later asked his

permission to return. ⁷When I arrived back in Jerusalem, I learned about Eliashib's evil deed in providing Tobiah with a room in the courtyards of the Temple of God. ⁸I became very upset and threw all of Tobiah's belongings out of the room. ⁹Then I demanded that the rooms be purified, and I brought back the articles for God's Temple, the grain offerings, and the frankincense.

The primary obstacle that Nehemiah encounters in this passage is that of Tobiah living in the Temple. Tobiah was an enemy of God's people who was abusing and using the people for his personal gain.

Nehemiah's reaction is significant. He jumps to action and clears out Tobiah's stuff. He cleanses and purifies the Temple. Finally, he puts things back the way they should be. How can we tie this to our life design? When things don't go as planned, we may not act as rash as Nehemiah did, but we can take similar steps.

When drifting occurs or obstacles are encountered, look inward. Evaluate and set your heart straight. If drifting occurs, ask questions like:

Is there anything you need to remove or stop doing?

Is there anything you need to start doing?

Then, follow through. When drifting occurs and changes need to be made to get back on track, have the grit to make the right, albeit hard, decision. When you encounter an obstacle out of the blue, remind yourself that what God is working in you is worth the struggle. Find your bearings, take action, and keep moving forward.

As we put our life design into practice this week and for the years to come, let us be less like the people of Jerusalem and more like Nehemiah: focused, diligent, and resilient.

Are there any areas of your life where you are prone to wander off track? If so, what are some safeguards you can put in place to prevent that?

If you were making progress in a specific area of your life but then got derailed, what are some ways you could start to get back on track today?

Prayer:

Lord, help me to stay in tune to the direction I need to be heading. Help me evaluate my life and stay away from things that will cause me to drift from you. When the obstacles of life come, let me trust in you. I know that your plan working is better than anything I can imagine. Let my life glorify you and make a positive impact on all those I encounter along the way. Amen.

This post was written by Alex Woody, a regular contributor the LivingItOut Bible Study.

Don't Waste Your Future Building a Better Past

Thursday, February 9, 2017

While some people are natural dreamers who look toward the future, others are stuck in the past, trapped in a time and place they can't get beyond. Last weekend Ben talked about building a better future. He said that we shouldn't waste our future by hoping for a better past. Learn from your past, but then build your way forward.

Another way to learn from the past is to learn from other people's mistakes. The Bible is full of imperfect people. The Old Testament follows the history of the Israelites, God's chosen people, as they fall into the same traps again and again. It's easy to read the account of the Israelites in captivity, then in the desert, then longer in the desert and wonder how they couldn't seem to get it right. But the truth is we all get stuck in the same pattern. Even though we know the right thing to do, we can be prone to making the same mistakes time and again.

At the end of Nehemiah's story, we see him return to Jerusalem after a year's absence. The wall had been rebuilt and the people were safe from their enemies, yet Nehemiah finds the people breaking the Sabbath. They were caught working and selling their produce and other merchandise on the Sabbath. Such work was expressly forbidden as the Sabbath was a day set aside to worship God. Nehemiah reminds the people that this sin is what brought God's wrath upon them in the first place. How can you make sure to not repeat the same mistakes in your life?

While we cannot change our past, knowing where we've been is critical to building a better future and a deeper faith. Rick Warren said in his famous book *The Purpose Driven Life: What on Earth Am I Here For*, "We are products of our past, but we don't have to be prisoners of it." But so many people are. Warren goes on to say, "God's purpose is not limited by your past. He turned a murderer named Moses into a leader and a coward named Gideon into a courageous hero, and he can do amazing things with the rest of your life, too. God specializes in giving people a fresh start."

If there is something in your life that is holding you back, confess it to God, and he will take the guilt away. Your past is the past and you don't have to live with the guilt. That is an amazing thing to realize today.

Nehemiah 13:15-18

¹⁵In those days I saw men of Judah treading out their winepresses on the Sabbath. They were also bringing in grain, loading it on donkeys, and bringing their wine, grapes, figs, and all sorts of produce to Jerusalem to sell on the Sabbath. So I rebuked them for selling their produce on that day. ¹⁶Some men from Tyre, who lived in Jerusalem, were bringing in fish and all kinds of merchandise. They were selling it on the Sabbath to the people of Judah—and in Jerusalem at that!

¹⁷So I confronted the nobles of Judah. “Why are you profaning the Sabbath in this evil way?” I asked. ¹⁸“Wasn’t it just this sort of thing that your ancestors did that caused our God to bring all this trouble upon us and our city? Now you are bringing even more wrath upon Israel by permitting the Sabbath to be desecrated in this way!”

Why did Nehemiah have a problem with the people selling their produce and merchandise on the Sabbath?

The danger of not learning from the past is repeating the same mistakes. What is something in your life that you keep repeating instead of learning from?

Think back through 2016. What lessons can you learn from the events in your life? How can those lessons guide you forward in your journey?

Is there something in your past holding you back, or something you are dwelling on? Last week, Ben talked about building a brain trust, or core team, to provide counsel in your life design. If you are stuck in the past, bring up that event to your brain trust, and ask their advice on how you can move forward in your life journey.

Prayer

God, thank you for your written words and the lessons we can learn from Nehemiah. Help us to not dwell on our past but instead find ways to build a better future. Thank you for the hope we have in you, Lord, a second chance through the forgiveness you offer. Please guide our journey forward. Amen.

This post was written by Kaye Althaus, a regular contributor to the LivingItOut Bible Study.

The Armchair Quarterback

Friday, February 10, 2017

Millions of people watched the Patriots and the Falcons compete in Super Bowl LI last weekend. But not everyone watching was a faithful and loyal fan watching the game from start to finish. Some may have only viewed the half-time show, while others just tuned in for the commercials. Still others were only interested in the wings, chip dip, and beverages!

Many of those watching were also playing arm-chair quarterback. Although not actually involved in the game, they adamantly complained that they could have caught that pass, made that first down, sacked the quarterback, or refereed the play better than those who actually were on the field. It is easy to analyze, scrutinize, and criticize the problems of the world. But we really need people who will not just discuss a situation but actually do something about it.

Nehemiah saw a problem and was distressed. Instead of complaining or wallowing in self-pity and grief, he took action. Nehemiah knew that God wanted him to motivate the Jews to rebuild Jerusalem's walls, so he left a position in the Persian government to do what God wanted. Nehemiah knew God could use his talents to get the job done. He organized, managed, supervised, encouraged, met opposition, confronted injustice, and kept going until the walls were built. Nehemiah was a man of action. To accomplish more for the sake of God's kingdom, we must pray, persevere, and sacrifice, as did Nehemiah. Nehemiah was a faithful leader. His life story provides many principles of leadership that are still valid today. Leaders need to have a clear purpose and keep evaluating it in light of God's will be straightforward and honest, live above reproach, and be a person of constant prayer.

Leadership appears glamorous at times, but it is often lonely, thankless, and filled with pressures to compromise values and standards. Nehemiah learned that there is no success without risk, no reward without hard work, no opportunity without criticism, and no true leadership without trust and faith in God. In the Old Testament book of Nehemiah, Nehemiah's last words were "Remember me with favor, O my God." Today we know that over 400 years later, God sent his son Jesus Christ to die for our sins. Jesus told his followers to "get in the game" by making disciples in all nations and stop "armchair quarterbacking." The message in today's language might look like this:



Nehemiah 13:31

³¹"I also made provision for contributions of wood at designated times, and for the first fruits. Remember this in my favor, O my God."

What gifts has God blessed you with?

Are you armchair quarterbacking, or are you in the game?

How are you faithfully using those gifts to advance God's kingdom?

Prayer:

O Heavenly Father, thank you for the gifts you have blessed me with. Help me use my talents to expand your kingdom and to do your will. Show me my path and use me to be a light for others on the journey. Help me be faithful in doing your will with joy and thanksgiving! Amen.

This post was written by Pam Haynam, a regular contributor to the LivingItOut Bible Study.