

“Finishing Well”
Nehemiah 6 * February 28, 2010

I. “Groundhog Day” – one of the most ‘spiritual movies of all time’

A. What lesson does Bill Murray have to learn before he is set free?

B. How is this a parable for Christianity?

“For those God foreknew he also *predestined* to be conformed to the likeness of his Son.” ~ Romans 8:29
“As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.” ~ John 13:34-35

2 LESSONS FOR SPIRITUAL GROWTH FROM
NEHEMIAH 6

LESSON 1: TO GROW SPIRITUALLY, I MUST KEEP _____.

I. What does it mean to do this?

II. Why is it hard to do this?

A. Life is just so _____ in today’s world.

B. Our culture and our technology has conditioned us to be _____ in our thinking.

1. How so?

2. Is technology just passive tool in our hands?

C. When it comes to our _____, younger believers don’t know what to focus on.

1. How is Christianity like Disneyland?

2. What cool, new thing is Grace going to begin soon?

LESSON 2: TO GROW SPIRITUALLY, I MUST MANAGE MY _____.

I. In the parable of the sower, what was the ‘rocky’ soil?

II. Where may trouble or persecution come from?

A. It may come from my _____.

1. Jesus said to follow him we must ‘hate our family’.
What did he mean by this?

B. It may come from my _____.

III. So what must we do to learn how to manage this?

A. Take God’s hand and _____.

B. Take stock often in what you _____ with _____
compared to what you once had without Him.

IV. And what finally happened for Nehemiah and his friends?

And what about me?

“[Be] confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it to _____ until the day of Christ Jesus.”

Philippians 1:6

“Finishing Well”

Nehemiah 6 * February 28, 2010

I. “Groundhog Day” – one of the most ‘spiritual movies of all time’

A. What lesson does Bill Murray have to learn before he is set free?

He has to learn how to love another human being selflessly. Only with that, is the spell broken, and time resumes its normal course. “Groundhog Day” has been called by one theologian “the most spiritual movie ever made.”

B. How is this a parable for Christianity?

In a way, what Bill Murray experiences in “Groundhog Day” is exactly what every follower of Jesus Christ is meant to experience as they journey through life on this earth. We are meant to grow spiritually. We are meant to grow in our relationship with God. Meaning, we are meant to learn how to overcome our sin and selfishness till we reach a place where we love others in the way modeled for us by Jesus.

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2 LESSONS FOR SPIRITUAL GROWTH FROM NEHEMIAH 6

LESSON 1: TO GROW SPIRITUALLY, I MUST KEEP **FOCUSED**.

I. What does it mean to do this?

We’ve been looking at living examples of it now for the past two weeks. I love looking in the faces of Olympic athletes moments before they are ready to compete. What do you see in their faces? You see intensity, concentration, and an ability to rivet their focus on the task at hand. To grow spiritually, you need to bring some equivalent intensity to your commitment to Jesus.

II. Why is it hard to do this?

A. Life is just so **crazy** in today’s world.

You have mouths to feed and bills to pay and homes to maintain and families to manage. To be honest, most elite Olympic athletes have it easy, because they can afford to focus. We can’t.

B. Our culture and our technology has conditioned us to be **scattered** in our thinking.

1. How so?

An article from last Monday’s Washington Post discussed this. Here’s a quote from: “On an Iphone, Oblivious To The Here and Now”. “You see these tethered souls everywhere: The father joining in an intense Twitter debate at his daughter’s dance recital. The woman cracking wise on Facebook while strolling through the mall. The guy on a date reviewing his fish tacos on Yelp. Not to mention drivers staring down instead of through their windshields. Physically, they are present. Mentally, they are elsewhere existing as bits of data pinging between cellphone towers. ‘My wife has physically pulled the thing out of my hands a couple times,’ said Jay Ferrari, who has been nabbed checking his Twitter feed at, among other places, his in-laws dining room table. ‘She says it’s like I’m picking my nose in public.’

2. Is technology just passive tool in our hands?

In using it, we literally are rewiring the way our brain functions. We may not yet be at the point depicted by movies like “The Terminator” and “The Matrix”, but technology is changing us and it is overpowering us, stripping away from us essential parts of our humanity which God says we need. We need to touch the earth, to play outdoors, to walk barefoot on the grass. We also need to have silence, oceans of it around us. A true Sabbath requires disconnecting and unplugging and shutting off. “Be still and know that I am God,” the Bible says.

C. When it comes to our **faith**, younger believers don't know what to focus on.

1. How is Christianity like Disneyland?

It's so vast, it's so dazzling, you don't know where to begin. You have Bibleland to explore, but which book do you read first, and how exactly are you supposed to read it? You have Churchland to explore. But there are so many people, so many ministries and volunteer opportunities, where do you begin? And there is Faithland, filled with teachings to learn and doctrines to master, and skills to acquire. It's all so overwhelming. You know that you love Jesus, and you know that you want to get closer to him, but where do you begin? What do you focus on?

2. What cool, new thing is Grace going to begin soon?

It doesn't even have a name yet, 'Discipleship Ministry' is our working name for now – and the purpose of this ministry is to provide a roadmap, a structure, a plan to help new believers lay a solid and strong foundation for their faith. In a nutshell, what we want to do is link stronger believers with newer believers in groups of 4-6 people, who are going to meet once a month for one year to study specific topics that are vital for a new Christian to learn, and to jump start your Bible reading by teaching you how to read it, and suggesting specific books to start with. If like having Mickey Mouse be your own personal tour guide through Disneyland. Wouldn't that be great? Though some of you may end up with Goofy, but that's OK too.

LESSON 2: TO GROW SPIRITUALLY, I MUST MANAGE MY **FEARS**.

1. In the parable of the sower, what was the 'rocky' soil?

With people like this, the seed of God's Word springs up right away, but its roots can't penetrate the soil, and the sun scorches it and it dies. Who are these people? Well, Jesus tells us. These are the people who hear about Jesus, and at once they receive it with joy, but because their faith has no roots, when *trouble or persecution comes because of the Word* (and those are Jesus' words) that person quickly falls away.

II. Where may trouble or persecution come from?

A. It may come from my **family**.

1. Jesus said to follow him we must 'hate our family'.

What did he mean by this?

He meant that if you're family pressures you into giving up your faith in Jesus or watering down your faith in Jesus, you will choose Jesus' approval over theirs. The rejecting doesn't come from you the believer. You want the relationship. The rejecting comes from the one who doesn't believe. And if they force you to make a choice, then nothing can come between you and Jesus.

B. It may come from my **friends**.

When you simply make a stand for the Word of God and its values, that alone will arouse slander, opposition and misunderstanding. As far as it depends on you, you love your friends, you treat them with kindness, you reach out to them. You just aren't going to go along with them any longer in doing the sinful, stupid things you used to do. And as Jesus begins to clean you up, you knock off your cussing, the church becomes more of your hangout than the bar, your idea of a fun time begins to change, trouble is going to appear.

III. So what must we do to learn how to manage this?

A. Take God's hand and **hang on tight**.

Nehemiah prayed to God. He cried out, "Lord, strengthen my hands." *Take my hand, Lord*. Paul said to his young friend Timothy, "For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline." (2 Tim.1:7).

B. Take stock often in what you **have** with Jesus compared to what you once had without Him.

I would never, ever trade in this life for anything else. I could never go back to what it was like before. I can't speak for those weird, counterfeit versions of Christianity that are out there. I feel badly for those who are trapped within them. And those who are hurt because of them, including innocent family members. And I feel badly for the way the name of my Savior is defamed and defaced by such people and such so-called churches. Because the Jesus I've met, and the Jesus I know is not life-stealing, but life-

giving, and has done everything and more that he promised to give me: he has brought peace into my life, and a joy that is real, and a love that I have experienced, and am growing in still to this day.

IV. And what finally happened for Nehemiah and his friends?

They completed the rebuilding of the wall in 52 days.

And what about me?

“[Be] confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it to **completion** until the day of Christ Jesus.” Philippians 1:6