



OPEN



BEGINNING

I hate to start on a negative note, but can we talk about diets for a moment. Nobody seems to like to talk about diets.

Illustration: Am I the only one in here whose weight goes up and down like a roller coaster? I've gone from 243 to 193 to 232 to 210, and then this Mexico trip which EVERYBODY says you'll lose weight on, made me gain 10 pounds!

And when I try to diet, and Darlene is not needing to diet at the same time I am, and I have to do it alone – and I don't do very well by myself. I really need a diet partner. Here at work I have plenty of lunch partners but not so many that are dieting partners.

There is a whole industry and companies and products that are devoted to helping people lose weight. There's Jenny Craig and Weight Watchers just to mention a couple. And these companies' entire service is shaped around the concept of *accountability*.

Here's the Thought:

Staying on any kind of a plan requires somebody holding us accountable.

Transition: *There are all sorts of things that hold us accountable these days. There are time cards, parking meters, email monitoring programs.*

CONNECTING

Even in Christianity there are accountability programs and ministries to help Christians “stay on the plan.”

There’s Promise Keepers and Man in the Mirror and others again, all exist to help people stay on track by checking up or inspecting and correcting issues their lives.

All of us can probably think of a time when you were held accountable in an area of your life and you experienced success in that area. And then maybe the opposite was also true. When no one was checking on you, you grabbed an extra jelly filled donut during Bible Study hour. It’s not necessarily dishonest; it’s just not helpful if you’re trying to lose weight!

With regard to our spiritual growth, if we want to “stay on the plan” for long term maturing, we need some help.

So here’s the Question We Need to Answer Today:

How can Christians ensure long term growth in their relationship with Jesus Christ?

Transition: *As we close out our study of Nehemiah, there are some valuable experiences that the Jews went through that we will be able to relate to and learn from today.*

Turn to Nehemiah chapter 13.

Story Background

The Jews who had returned to Jerusalem had had quite a decade. They had returned to their homeland from exile and had returned to their God, Yahweh. Their relationship with God had been in ruins much like the City of Jerusalem. But as they sought to restore the relationship they had with God, He enabled the wall around Jerusalem and the city itself to be restored.

In chapter 11, a plan for resettling Jerusalem and the surrounding areas is put in place. **In chapter 12**, the Jews celebrate the completion of the Jerusalem wall by dedicating it to God. **In chapter 13**, we learn that with his original task completed, Nehemiah returned to King Artaxerxes and was back in the service of the king for two or more years. During Nehemiah's absence, the Jews fall off the plan a little, and are not attentive to the things that are needed to maintain closeness with God.

Today we will study the areas that these believers tended to stray away from God, how they had their course adjusted, and what we can do about similarities in our own lives today as modern day believers.

Text: Nehemiah 13 (selected verses)

Start in 13:6 But in all this time was not I at Jerusalem: for in the two and thirtieth (32nd) year of Artaxerxes king of Babylon came I unto the king, and after certain days obtained I leave of the king: **7** And I came to Jerusalem, and understood of the evil that Eliashib did for Tobiah, in preparing him a chamber (*room*) in the courts of the house of God. **8** And it

grieved me sore: therefore I cast forth all the household stuff of Tobiah out of the chamber. **9** Then I commanded, and they cleansed the chambers: and thither (I love this word, *thither*, it sounds like an instrument used in a country western band) brought I again the vessels of the house of God, with the meat offering and the frankincense. **Incomplete Separation from Unbelievers.** Although the Jews had been separating themselves from the unbelievers, they had begun to go off track by permitting an unbeliever (Tobiah) to have his own room right in the temple area. Nehemiah swiftly through all of his stuff out and cleaned the place up.

Continue with 13:10 And I perceived that the portions of the Levites had not been given them: for the Levites and the singers, that did the work, were fled every one to his field. **11** Then contended I with the rulers, and said, Why is the house of God forsaken? And I gathered them together, and set them in their place. **12** Then brought all Judah the tithe of the corn and the new wine and the oil unto the treasuries.

Not Financially Supporting The Ministry They Were A Part Of. The ministry workers had to go back to secular fields of work – literally – they returned to the fields in order to survive because the local believers weren't contributing to support the work of the ministry. Nehemiah addressed this issue as well and set them back on track.

Drop down to 13:15 In those days saw I in Judah some treading wine presses on the sabbath, and bringing in sheaves, and lading asses; as also wine, grapes, and figs, and all manner of burdens, which they brought into Jerusalem on the sabbath day:

and I testified against them in the day wherein they sold victuals. **16** There dwelt men of Tyre also therein, which brought fish, and all manner of ware, and sold on the sabbath unto the children of Judah, and in Jerusalem. **17** Then I contended with the nobles of Judah, and said unto them, What evil thing is this that ye do, and profane the sabbath day? **18** Did not your fathers thus, and did not our God bring all this evil upon us, and upon this city? yet ye bring more wrath upon Israel by profaning the sabbath.

Not Protecting a Weekly Time of Corporate Worship. A third area the Jews were having a tendency to stray in was that of not honoring the Sabbath. The Sabbath was “business as usual” until Nehemiah stepped in.

Passage Recap Questions

1. What were 3 areas the Jews were going off track in?

- a. They weren't maintaining **separation** from the world.
- b. They weren't **financially supporting** the ministry they were a part of.
- c. They weren't **protecting** their weekly worship time.

2. What put them back on track?

A mature believer correcting them.

3. How did they respond?

They acted according to the correction they were given.

4. Do the areas the Jews were struggling in remind you of believers' struggles today? Yes or No? Why or Why not?

Summary of the Bible Passage

In order for the Jews to get back on track with their spiritual growth, they had to be **open** to the **corrections** Nehemiah offered them.

Transition: God spoke to the Jews who were straying through Nehemiah. God used Nehemiah as the Jews' personal spiritual trainer. Believers today could use a personal spiritual trainer like Nehemiah.

APPLYING

Here's the Main Idea for the Lesson

In order to sustain **long term** spiritual growth, Christians must be open to God correcting them through other maturing believers.

So WHAT do Christians need to do?

Christians need to be **open** to other maturing believers **speaking** into their lives in order to maintain their spiritual growth.

WHY do believers need to be open to other believers speaking into their lives?

Because the use of growing believers in the lives of other believers is one of God's main ways of **correcting** His children.

HOW can believers be open to other believers speaking into their lives?

1. Be **Open**. First, believers must ask God for an open attitude to receive what another growing Christian might offer.
2. **Connect** with Other **Growing** Believers. Second, Christians must ask God to bring other maturing believers into their lives.
3. Act When **Convicted**. Christians must act on the advice of the believers God brings into their lives when the Holy Spirit's conviction matches the perception of fellow believers.

INSPIRING

Imagine how much better your life could be than it is right now today if God could just correct you a little bit – just a little tweak – just a little adjustment to help you be that much closer to Him. What would your family be like? What would our church be like? Why wonder, why not let God speak to you through another believer. Maybe He's already been trying. Are you open to what He has to say?

Remember:

In order to sustain long term spiritual growth, Christians must be open to God correcting them through other maturing believers.
