

What Modern Day Men Can Learn from Nehemiah

“Guess what my favorite sky spirit is? There are three: wind, water and sun. Guess which one is my favorite?”

Oh boy. My 4-year-old, McRae said that in the back seat of our car the other day and I almost drove off the road into a gully and/or a holler.

It wasn't a difficult theological issue to address. My wife and I didn't flinch, we just weren't expecting the Nick show, “Penguins of Madagascar” to teach our daughter about sky spirits.

That was an easy issue, but there are harder issues to deal with when you are an adult, trickier faith plateaus to navigate. One of them is “being lazy for the Lord,” a phenomenon you can see expressed in statements like this:

“I'm not going to send out any resumes. I'm just going to pray and trust God to find me a job.”

“I want to be married, but I'm not going to try to meet a spouse or get involved in the singles group at church. I'm going to pray God will bring that person into my life.”

“Our finances are a mess, but I'm not going to take a class in financial responsibility or make amends. I'm going to pray God will rescue us from this pit.”

Rarely will we or our friends so succinctly express our desire to be lazy for the Lord, but it happens. We tend to beat around the bush; we confuse the issue with more words than that. We hide behind ideas and theological sounding arguments about faith and hope. But the truth is, sometimes we're lazy and we try to pretend we're being holy.

But what does the Bible say? What does God's word say about where trust in the Lord and human responsibility intersect? What does it say about the point where prayer and action come together? Where we are forgiven, but still have some consequences to work through?

My favorite example is in Nehemiah, a book I've been digging lately. The summary of the story is that Nehemiah is rebuilding the ruined walls of Jerusalem. Many of his enemies are angered by this and threaten to attack.

This is the crossroads moment for Nehemiah. From the get go, this has been an exercise in prayer and faith. Chapter 1 starts with a long prayer. In Chapter 2, Nehemiah actually stops to pray when the King asks him what he wants to do about the wall. This is the moment when you've lost your job. This is the moment where you feel like you're the type of person who wants to get married. This is the moment where you think you should write a book or become a missionary or a million other things.

What does Nehemiah do about the threats? Does he pray and move on? Not exactly. He starts that way, by telling everyone in chapter 4:

"Don't be afraid of them. Remember the Lord ..."

And for some of us, that's where it ends. We say the prayer and then wait. Waiting can be an important part of faith and sometimes action feels selfish and sinful and prideful. But Nehemiah isn't done. A few verses later, he deals with the threat of violence this way:

"From that day on, half of my men did the work, while the other half were equipped with spears, shields, bows and armor. The officers posted themselves behind all the people of Judah who were building the wall. Those who carried materials did their work with one hand and held a weapon in the other, and each of the builders wore his sword at his side as he worked."

I love that. His workers had a hammer in one hand and a sword in the other. The outcome is God's, we remain grass in a field that will fade away, but Nehemiah knew it was not disobedient to protect himself from getting stabbed by one of his enemies.

He didn't just pray the threat away; he prayed and also armed the people who were threatened. He didn't just pray he wouldn't struggle with porn; he installed a filter on his computer.

He didn't just pray his kids wouldn't fall down the stairs, he prayed and put up a gate. He didn't just pray he'd find a job, he prayed and got a part time job at Home Depot while he looked for something longer term.

He didn't just pray that a ridiculously hot and holy woman would deliver a pizza one night and fall in love with him, he prayed and went on dates and got plugged into his church.

He grabbed a hammer and a sword.

He wasn't lazy for the Lord.

He realized that it's OK to mix prayer with purpose, acceptance with action, surrender with sweat.

If you're being lazy for the Lord, my hope is that you'll remember it's OK to have your hands full. It's OK to clasp them in prayer even as you clasp them around a weapon.

Today, grab a hammer and a sword.

Today, quit being lazy for the Lord.

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