



Scott Turansky, Senior Pastor
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NEHEMIAH 10:28-29

Series: Life Lessons from Nehemiah

[PRAYER] Father, you're so great and powerful and all-knowing and everywhere. It's just hard to imagine your infinity in so many different ways. We can see it through things like creation and the stars and even looking in a microscope and seeing all intricacies of your creation. We are amazed. We worship you for how great you are. In addition to that, Lord, we are thankful for your personal dimension with us, that you personally interact with us. You're not just a force out there, but you're a person. We thank you that we can have a personal relationship with you and we can walk with you during the week. So thank you for that. Lord, today as we open your word now, we ask that you would speak to us through your word. Teach us through it. Inspire us from the stories that we read, even in the Old Testament as we're studying it now. In Jesus' name, amen.

How many of you are familiar with the term "adulting"? Raise your hand if you know what adulting means. It's a generational thing. Oh some of you older folks also know what adulting is. That's kind of cool.

Let me define it for you so that those of you who don't know what adulting is can enjoy the word as we talk about it today. Adulting is a term used about being an adult and you can use it at any age. Young people, teenagers, are adulting. They're learning how to become adults. A lot of adults are adulting, learning how to become adults too. The practice of acting responsibly and making adult choices, especially when you don't want to. It's usually referred to when we're talking about the management of time or money or chores like washing the dishes or cleaning your clothes. Someone might say, "Yes, I'm adulting. I'm growing in those areas."

Now I think the word is an interesting one in our culture, but I want to talk about spiritual adulting today because I think we're going to see that in our Bible passage. Of course in Ephesians 4 in the Bible it gives us a statement about how we are doing that. As Christians we're growing. It says – *Then we will no longer be infants, tossed about by the waves and carried around by every wind of teaching and by the clever cunning of men in their deceitful scheming. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up (you can put we're adulting) in Christ Himself, who is the head.* So as we are growing in Christ, we're adulting. That means we're developing spiritually adult responses to life.

Now the reason I thought about this is because in our passage today we come to a place where adulting is taking place on a spiritual level. I'm inspired by it. As I look at it I see in the passage some really interesting things that apply to us. My goal each week is to take the Bible, read a passage of scripture, and then ask the question – So what? How does this apply to me? How can I take this and implement this in my own personal life? So the applications then come from God's word. So that's what we're going to do today as we look at Nehemiah 10.

Let me bring you up to date if you aren't familiar with the story that we find in the book of Nehemiah. See, the people in Israel had drifted away from God and as a result their enemies came in and captured

them and took them away to captivity. So they were in a very sad state away from their country for many years. Maybe seventy plus years before the restorers started bringing them back. One of those restorers was Nehemiah and that's the book we're reading. When he came back his goal was to help the people rebuild the walls of Jerusalem. So in a short period of time, actually fifty-two days, they rebuilt these walls. That's what we've already studied in the book of Nehemiah as we're going through the book. They rebuilt some of the houses in the city as well, but it became clear that these people, many of whom were born in captivity, many of them didn't even know a lot about the Bible or the law that they had. And so they have (starting in Nehemiah) this reading of the word, this revival experience for them.

It's interesting to me to see the passion that the people have. As the Bible is read from this big stage and all the people are around (we read in the story), then the people hear the Bible read and they start crying. They are just so touched because they realize they've lost something. Their government had failed them. Their government hadn't kept up the traditions of the gospel, so their government was corrupt and created some problems. So they were taken away and they went to live with another government that was also ungodly. Inside of them they lost something. So now as they listen to the Bible being read, it rings true in their hearts because now they realize this is so amazing. We've lost some things. Wow, I can see why we're in the condition that we're in while we have the challenges that we have.

So Nehemiah makes that famous statement. He says – *Do not mourn, for the joy of the Lord is your strength*. That's a turning point for them and they start to realize that God wants to do something really powerful in their lives in the same way that He wants to do something powerful in our own hearts and lives today. You may look at your life and grieve over some of the history in your own life, but God wants to do something in our lives and bring us to this place of restoration. That's what's happening in this story of Nehemiah.

So they have this magnificent prayer that we looked at last week where they see the faithfulness of God. We go back and forth about how big God is and how faithful He is versus the mistakes we made. Big God, mistakes, big God, mistakes. Back and forth. It reminds any of us that there's no sins that are too big that would prevent us from knowing and understanding and coming close to God. Because God's love is faithful. It's not based on our actions. It's based on His faithfulness, His righteousness. So God is continually having His hands open, ready for that reuniting kind of relationship. That's what they realized. That's their prayer that we studied last week in chapter 9. It says at the end of the prayer they committed themselves and wanted to sign their names to a document. That's commitment. We're going to serve the Lord, they said, and we're going to write our names down here.

So chapter 10, I'm going to spare you from reading the first twenty-eight verses of chapter 10 because those are the signatories, all of the names. Twenty-eight verses of names of people that signed on the dotted line. These were their leaders and nobles and so on, many of them who had signed on the line that says we are committing to do this. That's where we enter the story I'm about to read to you. In fact at the end of the list of signatories, we come to some verse that we're going to look at.

At first I thought I'm going to share all of these verses in one week because they make four commitments. I started going into this and I'm going, man, these commitments are so important that we're just going to park here over the next few weeks. We're going to look at these four commitments. Because these are the same four commitments that we need in our lives. These will help us to understand the commitments they're making and so we're going to look at them over a period of time.

Now the first one is the one we come to and that's where I want you to stand with me. Would you stand please? In honor of God's word we're going to stand as we read the Bible. These are verses right out of

God's word and we're going to take these verses and look at these particular verses today and apply them to our lives. Remember signatories.

Now we come to verse 28. *The rest of the people—priests, Levites, gatekeepers, musicians, temple servants and all who separated themselves from the neighboring peoples...* That means they stepped away from worldliness. That's what they're doing and these are the people. We're identifying the noun here, who the people are... *for the sake of the Law of God, together with their wives and all their sons and daughters who are able to understand.* So, young people, this is important. You're here because you are able to understand. You can put yourself in this story because you're like the people who were able to understand and responding with dads and moms, husbands, wives are all there. *All these now join their fellow Israelites the nobles, and bind themselves with a curse and an oath to follow the Law of God given through Moses the servant of God and to obey carefully all the commands, regulations and decrees of the Lord our God.* So their commitment is to follow the law of God given through Moses and to obey carefully all the commands, regulations, and decrees of the Lord our God.

You may be seated.

In my mind, as I'm reading this passage, I'm imagining myself being there. I'm seeing these people. They're crying one moment and then the whole month we read that they're in these celebrations and they're having festivals every day reading the Bible. Because what the Bible does for a person is it gives them new information, it gives them understanding, it gives them more beliefs, it gives them important data that they need. So the Bible provides them with this information. But it's more than that. The Bible provides them with insight and understanding into their own lives and their own needs. They come to this place where they say okay, we got it. We've been reading the Bible for a month now and as we do that, we realize that we need to commit ourselves to something.

Four commitments. The first one here is we're just going to commit ourselves to obey God. So I'm thinking, I'm asking myself this question this week: What is the motivation for you and me to obey God? What is our motivation to take the commands of God and apply them to our lives and obey Him? What is our motivation? So I want you to think about that for just a moment because I think the Bible has a lot to say about the motivation about why we do what we do. But I want to ask a specific question: Why do you obey God? Why would you obey God? Or why should you obey God? Let's explore motivation for just a moment and ask the question from God's word.

Let's go now to God's word and ask the Lord to speak to us from other passages of scripture and pull them together and kind of look at this subject of motivation. Why do we do this? I would suggest there's going to be five different levels. The further you go up, the further you are adulting in your spiritual life. That's my suggestion. All five of these are good. They can be misused, but all five of these types of motivation are good types of motivation. They're all found in God's word. God uses them with us. But I think there's levels that accelerate our spiritual growth and I want to show you what those are as we go through.

The first one has to do with reward and punishment. God uses reward and punishment. He did with the Israelites. He told them – *If you listen carefully to the Lord your God and do what is right in his eyes, if you pay attention to his commands and keep all his decrees, I will not bring on you any of the diseases I brought on the Egyptians, for I am the Lord, who heals you.* And we know there are other passages in Deuteronomy which gives the blessings for obedience and the curses for disobedience. We read even the subject of heaven and hell are motivations for us to obey God.

The challenge, I think, with reward and punishment is that if that is all we rely on in our lives for obeying God, then we become rather self-focused. What am I going to get out of this? So there are some people who obey God because for them it's almost a karma. I don't believe in karma. I believe in a personal God who's interacting in our world. But there's some people who obey God as if it was karma because they're saying, "Well I better do the right thing so that God can come back around to me somehow." Or there are some people who obey God out of fear. "Oh no. If I don't do the right thing, He's going to zap me." And so the reward-punishment model can become rather self-focused and can become rather selfish in our lives. So we have to be careful about that.

I'm not saying it's bad. I do think that reward-punishment, that whole motivation is what draws some people to accept Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior. But there's more to it than that when we come to understanding motivation. So when you're experiencing selfishness, maybe your relationship with God is you're seeing that selfishness is growing, then you're going to want to move to I would suggest the next level, which is wisdom. Now I use this one a lot, I confess, as I was looking at my own life. Why do I obey God? Because it's the wise thing to do.

When you look at the Bible and all the wisdom that's there, then there's some applications to our lives that are a success principle. I like using those words. Success principle. I say God designed the world (which He did), He wrote the instructional manual, and if you follow it you'll be more successful. There's wisdom there.

So if, for example, you arrange your finances, your financial life so that you're going to have money come out, then you're going to spend, save, and give. Okay. That's your basic outline of finance. The Bible has a lot to say about how we're going to earn our money. We're going to do it fairly. We're going to work hard. There's this whole justice idea, the idea of being just with employers and employees. So the way we gain money is important. Then the way we spend money is important. How we save money is important. How we're generous with that money. That provides us then with some wisdom about God's word and finances. So if you will take the principles from God's word and apply them to your finances, you will be exercising wisdom. And that wisdom will provide you with financial freedom.

Now I look at the Bible a lot like that. I obey God that way. I think about wisdom. I go yep. I identify with wisdom as a motivation to obey God. It makes sense. It's in the Bible. In fact in this verse, Jesus Himself is talking about obedience and He ties it to wisdom. He says – *Whoever hears these sayings of mine and does them* (that is they obey them), *I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock.*

There's a challenge when we only emphasize the wisdom, though, and we don't go higher. If we only emphasize the wisdom then I think we tend to...we can experience some emotional challenges, emotional turmoil. About "is this the wise thing to do?" Or "what do I do here?" We can also find ourselves. I think we can find ourselves tense in the midst of this. So I would suggest when that takes place we want to move to the next level. There's another level of motivation that God teaches in His word. As I'm thinking about these people in Nehemiah's time and I'm just imagining the passion they had, they've got to be moving up the scale here.

I would suggest the next motivation is a motivation of trust. Some would say trust should be at the top. Because it's all about trust. Right? I do think that trust does something for us when we find ourselves emotionally driven. Even because there's a lot of wisdom in God's word, we're trying to figure out how to apply that, then trust what that does. It allows us to let go of some things. We can trust. We can allow someone else (God in this case) to be in charge and we don't have to be so controlling. It does something

to us when we experience trust in our lives. I think it's a very important part of motivation that we obey God because we trust Him.

So in Proverbs 3:5-6 it says – *Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to Him or obey Him and He will make your paths straight.* So there's this trust that becomes this foundation for obedience. It's a great tool. It's a great idea. We need that and God uses that in our makeup to help us to move up in the motivational plan. In fact there's even a song that some of you have learned when you were younger called *Trust and Obey*. Right? It's a great hymn and it ties trust and obedience together.

But there's more. Because here's what can happen. You're trusting the Lord. You've given it all up to Him, but you can sometimes feel as if you can feel negative. Even in the midst of the trusting we can feel like, "Wow, you know I just don't have what I wish I had," and so on. So I think there's another higher form of motivation that we see in God's word. And that higher form of motivation is gratitude. Some would say this is the highest form of motivation. Because God loved us and He sent His Son for us and we're so grateful for that that we want to obey Him. True. That's great. It's a high form of motivation. I think it's very applicable in our lives and we need to be grateful people. Gratitude is a great motivator. It motivates us to say thank you, but it also motivates us to change our behavior and our actions. So I think it's a great motivator. But there are some challenges I think we experience sometimes, even in our gratitude and it has to do with commitment. The commitment to obeying. What is it that would move us?

Now I know that some of you are tracking right with me and you already know what's at the top. How many of you know what's at the top? Put your hand up. Okay yeah. What is it? Love. Right. You know that because that's what the Bible says. Right?

I would suggest that love is the highest motivation for obeying God. Not obligation, but love. Jesus, when He came, taught us about love. In fact one of the disciples is called the disciple of love. His name is John. So let's look at what John has to say about this idea of love. This is love for God. Notice it's for God. Now there's two kinds of love we've been talking about. Last week we talked about God's love for us. We described it in terms of this Hebrew word *chesed*, which is God's faithfulness, His love for us that there is nothing we can do that's too big for God to forgive. Because God is faithful, He's loving, He initiates. That famous verse that we see in the Bible: *For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him will have life.* So there's this idea of God's love that's powerful. But now we're talking about our love for God. Because it's our love for God that promotes this motivation inside of our hearts to obey Him.

Young people, are you listening to that? You want to get this because in our passage it's young people in addition to parents that are around and they are making a commitment to God early in their lives. If you commit your heart to the Lord early in your life and you start obeying Him, you will develop this love relationship with God that is powerful. You want that in your heart, this love for God to keep His commands. Do you see how the love is tied to obedience? Both of us those are tied together and His commands are not burdensome.

In other words when you think about the Ten Commandments coming down to the people, do you picture God as the rule maker and they're saying, "Oh no, now we got all the list of rules. The playground rules are now being laid out here for us." No. I would suggest that the people felt special. That God has chosen. They're God's chosen people, the Bible said, and He's picked them out. Just like He's chosen us, He's picked us out, and so there's this special separateness. They are separate from the other countries, the other people. So we too as Christians are separate from what others are doing, what others think, or the way the world operates. We live differently because we're chosen, we're picked out, we're separate.

Because of that, we are so excited. “Tell me what it is, God. I want to obey you.” And so this love relationship is developed where it’s not burdensome, it’s “yes, I want to do this.” As you obey the Lord a little bit then it makes it easier for you to make the next step of obedience and obey a little bit more. So obedience grows inside of us and just enlarges this whole love relationship that we have with God.

In John 15 He’s talking about the vine that’s abiding in the branches. Well I use the word ‘abide’ because that’s what’s used in one translation, but it’s the word remain. So he takes the word ‘remain’ and he applies it here as he continues in chapter 15 and he says – *Now remain in my love. If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love.* Again, there’s this tie together between this love relationship with God and obedience. When we understand God, who He is, that He’s a personal God, not just a force out there, but He’s a personal God that we talk to, who communicates to us, that guides us and leads us, and speaks to us on a regular basis. This experiential side of understanding the Christian life is really powerful.

So when you’re growing and you’re being trained as a Christian, you want to have the knowledge part, which is learning the Bible stories (about 200 Bible stories). Having those is good and understanding theology is great. But then there’s the experiential side of our relationship with God, which is the love portion where we’re walking with Him every day. It provides this strength inside of us and allows us to meet the challenges that we face in life. Of course in John 14:15 he says – *If you love me, keep my commands.* Why? Because obedience and love are tied together. Love becomes the highest form of motivation.

But we have a problem and the problem is this: I don’t think we understand love that much in our society. We don’t understand what it is. So I’m going to tell you what the Bible says about love and I’m going to put it into this diagram that I created this week. This is a diagram that I think the Bible describes love. I want to take it and apply it to the Lord as we love God. But you can also take this and apply it to a marriage. I think it is helpful if you see it in a marriage to understand more about how to apply it to God. But these three words then (commitment, delight, and sacrifice) become part of what I believe love is all about as I study God’s word.

In fact let’s talk about that first one, commitment. Jesus in Mark 12 thinks back into the passages that were being read to the Nehemiah believers. See they were reading the law and the words this quote comes from the law, so likely these are verses that were read to the people that prompted them to make their commitment that they made. Because Jesus says here’s the words that were written when asked the greatest command. *Love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.* That’s a lot of *all*’s. The idea here is there’s commitment. When we love God then we have this commitment to Him that involves faithfulness, reliable.

Those words we can apply to marriage. When you get married to someone, you make a commitment to that person. The commitment is important and valuable. It’s especially challenging when we live in a world today where commitments are not usually made or they are easily gotten out of. People don’t commit to jobs long-term nowadays. You stay in a job as long as it’s beneficial to you and then you move on to the next job. We live in a throw-away society. So we have stuff, we eat our food, and then we just junk the stuff. We throw away the plates and so on. Our life is like that in a lot of different ways. So when we come to God and we think about commitment, we’re talking about bedrock stuff here. That love is about commitment. Even in a marriage love is about commitment. It’s just something that takes you through thick and thin. You go through things together and you’re developing some depth in this relationship. It’s not based on whether you please me anymore or whether we’re compatible. It’s based on something deeper because we have this faithfulness or that commitment together. That’s what marriage is.

So when we come to God and we understand what love is, it's this internal commitment that "God, I want to live for you. I love you. I'm committing myself to you." That's one part of what love is.

A second part of what love is delight. Now some would say that the supreme kind of love doesn't involve emotion. I just can't buy that. I just think that emotions are part of this. You're saying look, I've been married for a long time. Well if you've been married for a long time then one of the things we do in marriage when we've been married for a long time is we learn to cherish our spouse. We value them. We delight in them all the more. The delight actually deepens in a marriage relationship over a significant period of time. Delight is an important part in a marriage relationship.

So the verse in Psalms says – *Delight in the Lord, and he will give you the desires of your heart.* So I think that the depth of delight that we have with God is significant. When you first come to know Jesus and you say, "Yes, I'm going to serve Him," there's a delight that's bubbly, it's exciting. You go, "Oh this going to change my life." And it does. It radically changes. You find new things every day that you didn't see before and you go, "Whoa, this is really exciting to watch God work in my life." But as you grow in your relationship with the Lord, although that continues, there's a depth that you experience in your delight as you go through challenges, as you go through difficult experiences. You come to a place where you recognize that my delight in the Lord can happen even in challenging moments, in difficult experiences. Delight. A key component of love.

A third component of love is this sacrifice. It's very clear. John's defining love here in 1 John. He says – *By this we know what love is.* So this is a definition of love, according to John. *Jesus laid down His life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers.* Sacrifice is a very key part of what Jesus taught us about what love is all about. *If anyone with earthly possessions sees his brother in need, but withholds his compassion from him, how can the love of God abide in him?* So love must include this idea of sacrifice.

Certainly it takes place in a marriage relationship that we sacrifice. We become servants. Right? We sacrifice our agenda. We sacrifice our desires. We sacrifice in a lot of ways because we love that person. We want to strengthen that relationship, and so sacrifice becomes a part of what we do. When we love the Lord, sacrifice becomes part of what we do. We choose to make Him a priority in our lives. Which means we love Him, we want Him. Some things we have to say no to. Some things we're not going to get involved in. Even some good things. Why? Because we love God.

This is different than saying I love spaghetti. Okay? There's a deeper commitment here in our lives that involves delight. Yes, you might delight yourself in spaghetti, but there's this bigger element of love that's very important because it involves sacrifice and commitment and delight all at the same time.

So when you think about loving God and your motivation for loving God, I want you to think about... Well let's just go back and look at all these things. So if you put all this together, just where are you in your adulthood? Where are you in your spiritual growth? I would suggest that we want to be moving more and more toward this ultimate reason to obey God and that is because we love Him. What does that love mean? It means that we delight in Him. We're committed. We have the sacrifice.

I was thinking this week about trying to find another analogy about this. I was thinking about running. Let's say that you're a runner and you go out and run. There's some people who would say if you ask them, "Why do you run?" someone might say, "I run because I'm in my fifties and if I don't run I'm going to die." That's a fair punishment. That's running based on fear. Right? Not punishment. Just fear. That's why you run. That's not a bad reason to run. It's good for you to run, even if you're afraid you're

going to die. But another guy says, “Well a reason I run is because when I run I can eat anything.” Well what’s that? That’s a sense of reward. When I run I can enjoy eating whatever I want. There’s another person who says, “You know when I run I run because it’s a good idea and it helps my body be healthy.” That’s wisdom. Get some exercise. So they’re just applying that idea of running. But there’s some people who when they run it’s like this top one. They go, “When I run I feel alive. When I run I just feel like I’m who I need to be.” There’s that experience that they have that is I think the kind of thing we’re talking about.

Which got me thinking about the story of Eric Liddell who was in the Olympics in 1924. He loved God. They were trying to talk him out of really going into the Olympics because he wanted to be a missionary to China. That was his desire, to be a missionary to China. So in one of the scenes of the movie (you can watch the movie, *Chariots of Fire*; it’s a great movie) he says, “You’re right. I want to go be a missionary to China and share God’s love with the people in China.” This was in the 1920s. “I want to do that. But God has made me fast. And when I run, I experience the pleasure of God.” Ah. I love that. When I obey, I experience being alive. That’s this idea of love.

So as I look back on these Nehemiah believers, we go back to our passage today, I look at them and I see what is it that they’re doing and I see the passion that they have, that they’re making a commitment, a commitment to obey God. That’s their first of four commitments. But their first one is we’re going to obey. We’re going to *follow the law of God given through Moses the servant of God and to obey carefully*. Carefully. We want to take note. We want to know exactly what He wants so that we can demonstrate our love to Him. *Obey carefully all the commands, the regulations and the decrees of the Lord our God*.

I hope that God will use this in your life, this idea of motivation. Because it gets to the core of who we are, where our heart is, what God has for us. That you would use this in your own life to prompt you in your relationship with God.

If you’ve never trusted God in your life, then this can be a motivation for you to seek Him with all of your heart and to understand what that passion is all about. This isn’t just about having another element of your life. This about putting God in the center of your life and following Him whole-heartedly. It’s big. It’s a love commitment that you make.

And then of course the rest of us who have already accepted Christ into our life, we need to be reminded. Where are we going here in our obedience? Why are we obeying? Is it a list of obligations or is it a demonstration of our love relationship with God? That’s what He has for us. He wants more. It’s all about enhancing this love relationship with the Lord. I trust that God will do something special in your life in regards to this.

Would you stand with me and let’s pray together.

[PRAYER] Heavenly Father, we do thank you that you desire a personal relationship with us. Your hands are open, willing to receive us. Lord, we recognize our own weakness and sin (as we saw last week in the passage) and failure. Lord, I just thank you that you provided Jesus as our Savior that we could have this personal love relationship with you, we can have fellowship with you. So thank you. We’re grateful for that. Lord, teach us how to walk in that love, what it means to live our lives every day in the midst of this world so that we can increase that love relationship. Do a work deep inside of our hearts, each one we ask. In Jesus’ name, amen.