

What We Need is an Extreme Makeover #3
(The third of 3 Messages from Nehemiah)

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I grew up in ministry, all but 2 stubborn years. My father was my pastor; his father was his. I have 4 brothers, 3 of whom have been in full time ministry. The 4th is our intercessor. I usually say little about my life because it's not really about *me*! It's about *Him*. But I know what it is to be curious about a speaker.

During that time of being away from the Church, I met and married a handsome 6-foot 4-inch man with black wavy hair. Early in our marriage I came back to the Lord. It was a very rocky and painful 10 years that followed. The only reason it lasted that long was that he was in the service and gone for long periods of time. So, when he came home on leave I had become Mrs. "Super-Christian."

I had about as much wisdom at that time as would fit on the head of a pin, and I laid down the law: "From now on... in *my* home..." I think you can hear it. Finally he found someone that he preferred, and I didn't know how to "win" him to Jesus. All I knew was how to set the rules. Are you there? So, for whomever this is – if it's just to know about me – okay. But it's also a wonderful tool for you to use with young people who have walked away from the Lord. If they won't immediately turn (repent) and come back to Him, tell them this: "Please don't make any major decisions about your life while you're away from Jesus." A Christian is not capable of making "good decisions" without the counsel of God. I have two wonderful children from that marriage and now 3 grandkids, but that doesn't justify my rigid, religious ways.

Someone usually says to me, "Well, why didn't you re-marry?" I simply respond with a question: "Can you think of anyone that could put up with this?" ☺ Their answer is always – silence. So, I rest my case. ☺

But **God** has been faithful to me through every moment. I raised my children alone – yet not really alone because He said, "When you are let down by others, I will lift you up." He's taught me much through the years and I've been able to help many, many marriages stay together. Some of you could testify through several decades of marriage that there have been times when you wondered, "What on earth did I do? Draw the short straw?" ☺ And yet you realize there exists a covenant bond between the two of you, and you choose to hang in there through the hard times until the expression of love once again becomes a reality from within. I'm saying this because recently someone made the statement: "Let's win." I have to add: "Let's not just win a battle – let's win the war!" I'd just like to see marriages and homes stay together. I'd like to be able to display an example to the world that it can work. It can happen. God can unite a husband and a wife together in holy matrimony and see them through thick and through thin!

Just as surely, I long to see leaders in the Church who have a call of God on their lives know that it's *for eternity*. There's so much talk about "retire." Let's just forget that spelling. I think we need to *re-fire*. I dare to say that because I'm still going. I agree with occasionally taking time off and pacing yourself and all those nuggets of wisdom, but I believe we must also realize that *the longer we live, the more we know that needs to be shared* with the next generation. "Passing the baton" is not "passing the buck." ☺ One of the most needed things we can do is raise up others to come behind us. It's also called "mentoring" these days and we need to be involved actively in training up new leaders in the Body of Christ.

Before we pick up our study of Nehemiah again, I want to mention something – perhaps by way of instruction for leaders. When I am speaking at any given location, I rarely, personally, give an altar call or remain there through them. The Lord has literally mandated, in these latter years, that I preserve my energies for the preaching of the Word. I rely on the local leadership to oversee that part of the ministry and to have trained personnel to do the altar work. Moreover, I trust the Holy Spirit to direct those leaders as *He* desires and trust *them* to be mature enough to hear His direction and follow it.

Here's the instruction for you: when I return to my room after preaching, I never simply forget the service in which we have just ministered. I head to the Throne Room of God and intercede, often at length. First, I take *myself* to the altar and begin to take inventory in light of what God just delivered through my own mouth. I never want to say anything that doesn't apply to me first and then to the audience. This is a time I come as honestly as I can to the Lord in confession of sin with repentance, or in releasing whatever He may direct. After that, I earnestly pray for each person who heard the message. I pray for them to be open to the voice of the Holy Spirit within, and for enough honesty and humility to respond to His conviction.

Learn this too: there are well over 75 intercessors, *my own trained intercessors*, who travel with me in the spirit to every service, interceding all the way through. They even set their clocks for the different time zones so they can be praying actively during the meetings. You see, none of us is alone. I would be frightened to be out there alone. I'm not alone. Along with God, these people *intercede*, not just blindly asking for His blessings on me and the meetings! Pastors, I strongly encourage you personally to train a good number of intercessors who are committed to you and to the strong ministry of God's Word. Moreover, you who travel especially need this kind of constant, prayerful covering. The attacks on us out in the field are horrendous – both spiritually and physically – and we need people that are *powerfully interceding* as we travel. I'm a firm believer in the power of prayer, and I thank God for every intercessor I have.

With that bit of counsel said, let us pick up where we left Nehemiah in our previous message – Extreme Makeover #2. We have seen how such a *transformation* is truly needed in the Church today. At the end of chapter 4, Nehemiah is speaking. What this says is that he has followed a few logical steps: first, he received his vision, then checked it out, made a plan, shared it with a few, and at the right time, shared with many more who agreed to work, and now there must be an *impartation of the vision* to all the people.

You can spend your whole life just trying to get hold of God's will, or vision. I can only say: "Get it and get on with it!" Hello? It's time for us *to know the will of the Lord* (Eph.5:17). It's not hard to know! I am sorry we spend so much time trying to teach people *how* to know the will of God. It's not hard at all. READ THE BOOK! He wrote it! He put it altogether and said, "***This is My will.***"

Once we receive that, once we understand what it is God is saying to us, then these other steps I have just recounted for you have to follow (see above: receive the vision, check it out, make a plan, share with only a few, etc.). Now the ***time for implementation*** has come and Nehemiah says, "Okay, the people were willing to work and they voiced agreement." And so "*neither I nor my brothers, nor my servants, nor the men of the guard which followed me...*"(vs.23) – this is what we have spoken of lightly as "Body ministry." This man is not doing the work alone. He's not a burnt-out pastor. He has *trained* some people. He's taught some people. There's been a period of time during which he obtained the help of others and now he's saying, "Here's what we have to do, Team. We want to rebuild these walls. We're going to use *burnt stones*. There's a lot for us to do and it'll be work." Then he adds, "*Not one of us put off our clothes...*" And I'm so glad he told us that. ☺ Every lady who reads it is glad for the rest of that verse – "*except that everyone put them off for washing.*" ☺ I just know that was written for us women! ☺

What Nehemiah is saying here is that it takes a lot of hard work in order to build the vision. And when we say to people, "This is where we're going. This is what God wants," we need to make it clear to them, from the beginning when they're making their big commitments: "This is going to take some work." I know this is an Old Testament story but it's quite a New Testament teaching, if you will. "*No man builds a tower but that he first sits down and calculates the cost*" (Lk.14:28f).

No wonder we have so many drop-outs! We forget to tell them the cost! We've made life so easy in the church by our soft and *encouraging* words, and then when the people come up against hardships, they don't know how to handle them. We need to be honest with people and say, "You know this is a long

walk. This is a life-long walk. We're not offering an altar call here where I lay hands on you and instantly you have everything you want. There is no *instant maturity*. This is not a simple 'add water and stir.'" ☺ This is LIFE, Church. And Christians are not immune to problems. There's nothing in the Bible that teaches "Christian immunity from problems." We *are* susceptible. The further truth is: God gives us His strength and grace and mercy to do our task and to survive the taunts of the enemy. Hello? If you say, "Well, I don't want to hear that – if I have enough faith, I don't have to go through anything." Uh, meet me later and we'll have a little chat. ☺ If you have enough faith, you can go *through* it.

Have you ever had a tunnel experience? A time when you started on a path and thought you knew where you were going, but got halfway there and could no longer see light – at *either* end? That's a *tunnel experience*. At that point, in the middle of the tunnel, in the darkest time, we have to make a decision. Many times, I've said, "I'd go back if I knew how!" ☺ "If I just knew how to get back where I started – if I could undo what I did to get this far..." Tell the truth – haven't there been times when you would have retreated if you could? There are those times in our lives when we honestly would retreat. But – I'm more leery of going back than I am of pressing forward! I don't know how far it is ahead but I do know I've already come a long way!

That reminds me of a story on the Internet a few years ago. A mountaineer was climbing the face of a cliff and suddenly night falls too soon with a misty fog. He misses a step and falls to the full extent of his lifeline. Dangling at the end of his rope, literally, he begins to pray in earnest and with great fervor. God hears his cries and asks, "Do you trust Me?" In the dark, the once courageous mountaineer isn't quite so certain – of anything. The voice of God encourages: "Cut the rope. Trust Me, it'll be okay." Can you imagine? At day break, the rescuers discover the dangling mountaineer suspended all night long by his lifeline – only a few feet from the ground. He just didn't know how far he had to go. Can we trust God and move forward, even though we cannot see all the details?

I've had several of these in my life – *tunnel experiences*. When I finally arrived at the far end, I saw the light, emerged from the darkness, and rejoiced for a time – a period of time – a season, if you will. "Oh, thank You Lord for getting me through that!" *All of a sudden* (have you noticed that everything God does is "all of a sudden" – even if it takes a hundred years? ☺). *All of a sudden*, I forgot the pain of the tunnel. Ladies, it's like having a baby. You know – you're in labor and you're thinking curses against *him* ☺ and what *he* did to you, ☺ and a myriad of other thoughts ☺ especially, "I'll never do this again!" And then, *suddenly*, there's the baby! All we hear then is: "Oh, is he gorgeous! He's so wonderful! We need to have another one!" ☺

Well, that's the way these tunnel experiences are as we come through them, because when the load is lifted, so is the memory of the pain. Now we're out there on the other side thanking the Lord for victory. "You brought me through!" We can even sing it: "Oh, He brought me a mighty long way!" We're so excited! And the next voice I often hear is His saying, "Now, go back!" "I'm not going through that again." "Yeah," He says, "you are." "Why?" I demand! "I came all the way through. **You** held my hand. **You** brought me through. I'm here giving You praise for it. I'm thanking You." He says, "I know – but there are a whole lot of people back there on the other side that don't know the way through, and you do now." That's why we have to say to people, "It'll cost you, but I know the way." A real leader can say, "I've been there – I'll go with you."

We need to fully understand this: the taunts of the enemy are not "personal," they're universal. "You'll never make it." "You're too old." "You're too young." "You're too uneducated." "You're too over-educated." "You're too skinny" (Oh, would to God that was true! ☺) "You're too fat." "You're too tall." "You're too short." I know we've all heard those things! They *sound* so personal, but I promise you, they are not! You're not that big a deal! ☺ These are universal efforts to stop the building of the wall of the City of God! Don't take them personally because the minute you do, the *moment* you do, you open a pathway for the enemy to halt your progress. We should just ignore those accusations!

There *are* times when we do have to take authority in Jesus' name. People sometimes say, "Iverna, you act like you never cast out the devil." The devil is real and demons are real, but the Blood of Jesus Christ applied to a Believer causes the enemy to have very limited access to us! His only access is to stand *outside* of our lives and shout in. If we're foolish enough to listen and tune an ear to him and spend our ministry talking about him, it is inverted praise and he loves it! Most of the time, we simply need to ignore his taunts, because we know the Truth!

"I will lift up mine eyes to the hills from whence cometh my help." Why? "My help cometh from the Lord who made heaven and earth!" (Ps.121:1,2). I don't want to spend time looking at the devil. I don't care what color he is or what he says is his name. He's an accuser (Rev.12:10). He's a liar and the father of lies (Jn.8:44). I should think he's going to tell me the truth? ☺ The only one he couldn't lie to was Jesus! He can lie to me. I could call out the wrong thing and he'd stand there laughing. I just don't want to deal with all that unnecessarily. But! – if he interrupts a service? Yes, "In the Name of Jesus – out!!" Just don't mess with it – you don't have to tie him to a pole and have five people deal with it. We need to know who we are and Whose we are! "Greater is He that is in you than he that is in the world!" (1Jn.4:4).

Now leaders, having the vision, implementing the vision, ignoring the enemy, and teaching people of their power in God and that they need not fear the enemy is a "piece of cake" compared to Chapter 5 of Nehemiah. Chapter 5 is about *internal* conflict – not *external*. It's about the people. It's about people in *your* church taking advantage of other people in your church – taking *undo* advantage – wrong advantage. Cheating. Lusting. It's like the man with many sheep longing to take the only sheep of another man (see 2Sam.12).

Read the whole story in the rest of Nehemiah. The people that had some advantage when the whole system fell apart – they had the right stocks and enough money to wait it out – are now taking *undo* advantage of those who couldn't afford to buy even a single stock share. "Well, if you had wisdom – if you had done what I did with my money, you'd have money too." That's what chapter 5 is all about.

These people get together – the "have-nots" – and say to Nehemiah, their leader, "You know, we don't even have food because we were so destitute but *they* had a big field. We were desperate and had to feed our children but they over-charged us for everything!" Read the chapter. It is the horrendous conflict all leaders face – the specifics just work out differently in each different place. "So-and-So's talking about So-and-So" and "Such-and-Such had a problem with Such-and-Such."

How ridiculous that we have to go to the civil courts to settle our disputes! The reason we do that is we don't have strong leaders! No one wants to take a firm stand for righteousness because we might offend the biggest tither! "If any man lacks wisdom, let him ask of God who upbraideth not but giveth to all men liberally" (Jas.1:5). We need more **wisdom** today than we have ever needed in our lives.

We also need the **boldness** to take some definitive stands, and to listen to conflicts and say, "Is this how you see it? I'm listening." And, "This is how *you* see that? I'm listening." "Now, here's the way I see it as the 3rd party." Not trying to be the all-wise one – not the Commander-in-Chief. But – "here's how *I* see it – as your leader and as the 3rd party. We need to pray for this..." or however God shows you to handle it. But it needs to be handled internally because it exists internally and if you try to handle it externally, it becomes a mar, a real blemish on the Church, and consequently on the Kingdom of God!

Being a leader. Listening. Being willing to take a stand. Listening. *Leading*. Walk through *your* tunnel so you know the way. Walk *through* some hard things so you can come back and help others find their way – to God's Way. Look at your people – be realistic about their lives. See the truth in conflicts. Understand what they're going through. See a marriage that's rocky. These things exist – in your church.

The people come to Nehemiah. They trust their leader. They said, "This is not right." No, this is not the Book of Acts where everyone sold everything and gave to one another. When the Holy Spirit came in

those days, no one felt personal ownership of anything. Well, we've certainly come a long way from that! Today we see: "It's mine! I earned it. I invested it. I... I..." Ai-yi-yi-yi-yi! ☺

Now please keep the balance to this message – you *know* I'm not saying that we give up everything God has allowed for us to enjoy. I'm saying – we *share* things. (I can just see it – 17 of you are agreeing: "Right – right – right." And the rest are thinking, "I'm not sharing! I worked hard for what I have!") ☺

I'm not talking – as Nehemia, Chapter 5 does – only about finances and things – or tangible assets. I'm not talking about that. Well, I *could*. To me, that is obvious. If you see people around you in your own fellowship that have needs, and you're not meeting them but are capable of doing so, God is going to get you. ☺ Oh, absolutely! Yes, He is! Not because He's mad at you, but *because you can't be trusted with what you have*. The whole principle of God's blessing is F-L-O-W. It is not K-E-E-P. We need to release the death-grip we hold on our "possessions." You have nothing that came to you without God's signature on it! (1Cor.4:6,7)

I'm talking now, however, about the giftings of God – the abilities He gives us – every good thing we have is from Him (see Jas.1:7; Jn.3:27; 1Cor.4:7). I'm talking about the gifts of the Spirit – all those wonderful things. Every divine attribute I have been given, I am obligated to share. What do you think the prophets meant when they said, "*Woe is me if I preach not the Gospel*" (1Cor.9:16). Paul is not saying, "I've got preacher-itis, I have to preach!" There are a lot of people that do these days! But it isn't a matter of "preacher's itch" – or "I have to speak" or "I have to be heard" or "I have to be in the spotlight." If you knew me better, you'd know I'm the one that would sit in the back row until it's an absolute necessity and I have to move forward. It isn't a natural thing for me to want to be in the spotlight even though it may appear like that, because when I arrive on the platform I'm as "bold as a lion" (Pr.28:1). It's a matter of "Woe is me" if I don't give you what He gave me for you! If I don't share His revelation, He's going to get me. ☺

That's what mother used to say all the time. I know you heard it too. "Did you share that with your brothers?" "Did you share that with your sister?" "Oh, they didn't want any." ☺ (That is so much like what preachers defensively say – "The people rejected me.") Mother always taught us, "Keep your conflicts inside the house." There are battle zones in every house. No one outside needs to know what's going on inside. Handle inside issues inside the house. That's good advice in the Church as well – for, like it or not, we are family, and family members have conflicts.

I believe we are going back through the tunnel because **the impartation of the message has to be lived out**. It can't be a simple enjoyment of the message or of the blessings. "God, can't we just be content *here*?" No, the price paid for you has been greater than that! You have a responsibility to be different because you've been in touch with God.

This has to be a genuine makeover – a makeover that affects your home, your church, your whole life. There has to be a dramatic change. It's a passion – not of Iverna – but a passion of the Holy Spirit who birthed this thought I deliver to you, who declared to me, "*Bring the child forth and lay it in their arms!* I have to show My Glory to the world. Their churches – their areas – their spheres of influence have to be filled with the glory of God! – 'like the waters cover the sea' (Is.11:9; Hab.2:14). And to do that, there have to be some major changes made. My people can no longer be satisfied with 'status quo!'"

When Nehemiah hears of the abuse, he calls the people together and says, "This is not right. You need to give back what you've actually stolen from these others." And here's what they say, verse 12 – oh, listen Church, because this is so beautiful! "*We will restore them...*" Restore what? Go back up to verse 11 where he directs, "*Give them back their lands, vineyards, olives, houses, also a hundred part of the money of the taxes you've taken, the corn, the wine, the oil that you've exacted from them. Give it back!*" Verse 12 – "*And they said, 'We will restore them and require nothing of them.'*" Now, that's giving!

You see, it's one thing to give from a higher socio-economic level than the recipient with an attitude that says, "You owe me" and then hold it over them forever. There's no blessing in that! "*Verily, you have your reward*" (see Mt.6:5c). What they're saying is, "We will require nothing of them. We will give to them and treat them on an equal level." That's a makeover!

Paul wrote the church at Corinth and said, "You have all kinds of problems." Then he inquired, "*What do you have that hasn't been given you? You're so proud of all the gifts operating in you. What do you have that hasn't been given to you? And if it's been given, how can you be proud of it?*" (1Cor.4:6,7).

Do you realize you even can be proud of being a "little church?" That's a subtle snare. "Bless God, we're not very many but, you know... Well, I'll tell you! We're the little faithful." Uhhh – maybe yes, maybe no.

You also can be proud of being a big church – that simply means you have more problems than the little guys. Problems always exist in the mixed multitudes and the mixed multitudes always meet in the *outer court*. If that is your story, if your people are content with outer court ministry, it tells me you're not making any demands on them. [Do you understand "outer court ministry?" We enter His gates with thanksgiving and into His courts with praise (Ps.100) – period. No intimacy with the King – not into His chambers – His Presence – offerings maybe, but no real worship. In the Temple, there was the Court of the Gentiles where the mixed multitudes were allowed to be, but no further. It costs nothing to be in the outer court. Only the circumcised, the separated, were allowed to bring their sacrificial offerings to the Priests as an act of worship.]

"*We will give back to them and require nothing of them.*" So, we have a two-fold task. First, we have to solve the situation of the enemy and all the temptations – and, yes, they're *out there* – habits of sin and all those things – and we have to take authority over that. Secondly, we also have to learn to handle the conflicts *within*. Let me illustrate from a fictitious yet realistic scenario. "Sometimes people that aren't in the choir are sitting in the pews resenting the fact that they're not in the choir but some other people are. Sometimes people doing altar work are being resented by people that want to do altar work but have not been chosen. And the biggest problem is, Mr. Pastor, you don't see it. You're thinking, "This is good. We're just running like clockwork, moving right along. We've got all our altar workers in place. We've a great choir. Great music team...." Sir. Lady. Get your heads out of the clouds – or the sand! Open your eyes and see what's really going on! There may be some *internal conflicts* that need to be addressed. Maybe you need to give some other people a chance.

Here's an actual, true illustration. Many years ago, I was invited by the Pastor to come to a church as a "trouble shooter" to try to determine why this church just stagnated – it seemed to have everything going for it. So, I went to the service and the first thing I noticed was that the organ was on one side of the platform, the piano on the other side, and both were draped. I considered it: "Well, they must be dead." ☺ (and unfortunately, I was right! ☺) When it was time for the service to begin, a little old lady, 2 years older than God ☺, walked down the aisle, undraped the piano, and sat down on the bench. I thought, "At least they have a pianist." Then I looked down on the front row and discovered two friends of mine – a husband and wife whom I had known for some years – psalmists, great musicians, highly gifted and anointed by the Lord. I supposed one of them would play the organ. But nothing like that happened.

When the song service started – that's what we used to call it because that's what it was – we gave service to the songs ☺ – when the song service started, the little old lady at the piano, I'll call her Sister Jones, using only two fingers, mechanically hit the keys (two at a time) for each song. I am not exaggerating when I tell this: she played with only two fingers for every song – all the way through each one. ☺ It was very syncopated and always the same beat – "A-ma – zing-grace – how-sweet – the-sound." And this was a congregation of 300-350 people. Every song. They'd say, "Let's turn now to hymn # such-and-such." And Sister Jones would play "da-da, da-da, da-da" for the introduction.

After the service, the pastor who had invited me to help him, asked if I could give him a checklist of things I thought should be improved ☺. I ventured forth: “Well, we could start with the music. I think you need to know you have two excellent pianists and organists sitting right in your service.” “Oh,” the pastor said dejectedly. “I know. But Sister Jones has been with us from the beginning.” I said, in my most tactful style ☺ “So?” “Oh, well, it would break her heart if we took her off the piano.” I carefully replied, “It’s going to break your church if you don’t.”

Now, leaders, there’s a wonderful word called *loyalty*, but there’s another word that also ends in -ty and it’s called *stupidity*. ☺ Never sacrifice the multitude for one individual. Yes, there probably will be hurt feelings. There will be. So? Deal with it – *inside the house*. God deserves the best and if He sends someone that is better equipped or qualified for a certain function than someone who has been there forever – take a close and careful look at why He sent the new ones. Don’t make them “earn the right” to give away their talents and gifts in service.

We made the exchange and Sister Jones was furious. She thundered out of the church slamming the door. “I’ll never come back to that!” Now, my work had just begun. Hello? I don’t dare take that kind of stand and leave it for the pastor to deal with alone! She was now a *burnt stone* and I had to go after her. At first, she wouldn’t even let me in her house when I tried to visit. She’d open the door and say, “I’m not interested in talking to you!” It happened repeatedly.

So, I went back to the Boss and I prayed and prayed and I wish I could tell you that – :: *whish!!* :: – just like that it was over and repaired. But not so. Truth is it took months of prayer and practical personal initiatives before we got her back. In the meantime, we undraped both the organ and the piano and music began to flow. A choir was formed. The people in the pews were actually singing instead of staring off into space. ☺ *Life* came to the church. And all the while, I’m saying, “But what about Sister Jones?” Finally, one fine Sunday morning, she showed up. When she came through the door, someone whispered, “Look who’s here.” I hurried back there and hugged her and we cried together. She apologized saying, “I’m so sorry I took the stand I did.” And I said, “I’m sorry I *had* to take the stand I did.” Come on, leaders, that’s what leaders do.

If you read the rest of this Book of Nehemiah, you’ll see that everything didn’t stay *pure* after the big commitment services (9:1-3, 38; 10:29,30). Inter-marriages took place once again (13:23). Nehemiah had left (13:6), and his brother was in charge. His brother was... (“Don’t go there, Iverna – don’t say he was a *wimp!*” ☺ “Okay, I won’t say that.”). Nehemiah’s brother was – not as strong in his faith as Nehemiah. ☺

In time, Nehemiah returns and cries out, “What’s going on here?” His brother’s response was something like this: “Well, you know. What could I do? They choose whom they want to marry.”

Let me tell you the result of their inter-marriages: *the children could no longer speak the language of the Jews* (13:24) because the inter-marriages had taught them another language as well, one from each parent. Are you there? I pray you are hearing this! We’re not talking about a racist kind of thing. We’re talking about *unbelief* – **unbelievers and believers** in a mixed relationship. It truly is like trying to yoke an ox and mule in the same harness and expect the same or equal results (see 2Cor.6:14).

When the inter-marriage takes place, the children are the affected ones. They don’t know which language is right. They don’t know how to talk the things of God because everything is *mixture*! Why do you think the Levitical Law says, “Don’t sow this seed and that other in the same field” (Lev.19:19)? Is there something wrong with oats and corn? Or wheat and barley? Why can’t you sow them in the same field? Have you *never* read the Mosaic Law? Why would God say, “Don’t do that!” Because what He is saying is, “Don’t you understand that even two things that look good alone in and of themselves, when they’re mixed the *mixture* messes things up.”

How's *your* church? How mixed up is it? Is there one language? Do we all know the vision? Do we all know the goal? Is there love prevailing in the Body? Do we see the needs of one another? Have you released your people to bless one another? Are we appointing people to be in charge of people? What's happening?

When I go into a church, or to a meeting, and I'm just sitting in the pew, not the speaker – I often take charge of my pew. ☺ I do – at least in my mind. I feel responsible. I look up and down the row to see if people are singing. If they aren't, I may sing *at* them! ☺ “How sweet the sound.” Or, if the words are up on a screen, I may point that out to them ☺ just making sure they know what's going on. I don't see how anyone can just go week after week and stare straight ahead, not interacting with the *brothers and sisters* all around.

We're the people of God and we've been *given* salvation! And we've been *given* baptism; we've been *given* healing; we've been *given* miracles, the signs we prayed for... And we sit in the pew – just staring straight ahead! We don't know who's sitting to our right or our left. People ought to be being led to the Lord! During the service! “Do you know Jesus? You'll like this song a lot better if you do.” ☺ It doesn't really take a sermon, you know, to get people saved. Oh, that God would teach us *Body ministry* again! Maybe you ought to go back and re-read the Book of Acts – you'll see the Church all working together!

Nehemiah returns and sees this incredible mixture. He declares, “*We're going to have to do something about this. Don't you understand – we're the holy people of God?*” Now, I know that we don't have control over who marries whom, but I do think the Church has a *position* to represent. What if there is a woman in our church that has an unsaved husband? I think the attitude of every man in the congregation should be – “Go get 'im! Sic 'im, boys!” But love him into the Kingdom. What does he like to do? If he fishes, take him fishing – if he golfs, take him golfing. Be there for him! Let him see for himself – “WOW! These people are accepting me, and they don't even know me!” He doesn't need to know we've got a secret agenda! ☺

When a Christian man has an unsaved wife, every woman in the church ought to go after her. Find out what she likes. What kind of a person is she? How can we implement His love to her? What does she need? Not simply fellowship – how can we get there and bring her to the Lord? You see, that's what has to happen. Do you know why? Because Nehemiah said, “*We're a holy people! This is God's people!*”

I know a church that operates this way – pretty much this way – in New Zealand. It is a very large church and that's because their attitude is, “We are (and not just by title) a *city-church*. So we're going to affect this city.” Then they taught the *people* from the church how to “Go get them!” Young people, “Go get 'em!” Men, “Go get 'em!” Ladies, “Go get 'em!” It's the most fun church on earth in which to preach! They have hundreds of young people and the minute you start, they're with you: “Amen!” But they also have hundreds in other age groups – they have thousands in the church. Why? The pastor and his wife just started out in their living room but they reached out to people with God's love and taught them to reach out to others.

Why don't you stop being proud of what “little bit” you have and *give it away*?! Get into the schools! “Well, I don't know what we'd take in there...” Do you have anyone that does puppets? Any talents at all? Find them – give them away. Have any singers? “Well, yes, but we use them on Sunday mornings.” Baloney! The church doesn't need any more singers on Sunday morning! Come on! We are filled up with all these goodies. It's time to get it outside the doors of our churches and *give away what He has provided!*

The Church reaching out to people in the community, expressing the love of God in creative ways. One of the greatest gifts God has given to us as a tool to reach the *outsiders* – is prophecy. If you walk up to an unbeliever and share: “I serve God and He just told me something about you,” I believe you'll hear: “Really? What'd He say?” I've had that experience more times than you would believe. We should be

functioning in the marketplace with every gift God has given to us. “Well, I never thought about it.” Right. That’s the problem.

I know a church in northern California that taught their people about *marketplace prophecy*. The people go into the local grocery stores (and others) and walk around, just quietly praying in the Spirit, looking and listening for His direction and leading. They are unobtrusive – just real quiet – not trying to make a scene. “Lord, show me something.” Then, when they are prompted by the Lord, they walk up to people and say, “I’ve been praying for you as I’ve walked through the store...” Over a number of years they’ve had – I’m not exaggerating – hundreds and hundreds of people saved and healed. Invalids have walked out of wheel chairs, others have been delivered from demons, and the whole testimony of ministry. *These are laymen*. They don’t have clergy cards. They merely have been taught that “Now that you have received – freely you have received – give it away!” (Mt.10:8). That church is in Redding CA.

What I’m really hoping to do by relating these stories is to stimulate thought in you. I know you can’t do *everything* I’m saying, but you could begin – simply. I know another church in California that started *publicly* displaying Christmas pageantry. They did it outside, across the street from their church building – with permission – in the parking lot of a Bank. They developed a living nativity with lots of portrayers from their church and in time have added more scenes and the appropriate animals. People in the community were curious – “Who’s doing this? What is it?” – and they came out in masses to see for themselves. Subsequently, the church re-designed the whole thing so the public could simply drive through the display, not having to get out of their cars or be *threatened* by the whole “Christian” thing. A few years ago, 10,000 people drove through and saw the whole Gospel story in pageantry form. They *witnessed* the Gospel! The story hit the newspapers and guess what? More and more people want to know who’s doing it and what it’s all about, etc. ☺ **Marketplace ministry.**

I’m trying to get you to *think outside the box*. I started there – and I’m trying to end there. ☺ Let’s be – *dangerous* to the enemy! Let’s get outside of our tiny little churchy world and let the glory of God shine brightly – His creativity and His nature and His love – because we’re the people of God.

Let’s review. What has happened in Jerusalem? The *wall* was re-built, the doors (or *gates*) were restored, and then Nehemiah began making appointments. Chapter 7 – “*I appointed singers, priests, Levites* (Board members? Deacons?), *demanding cleanliness from all. I got everything in place* (vvs.1,73). *When I came back and found some impurities* (13:7ff) – *I demanded that be changed...*” because, my Friends, we have to get ready to pass the baton and we can’t pass the baton to unprepared Christians. We have to get things in order. (see 9:2; 10:28-30).

When I get letters or phone calls from pastors, asking my opinion as to whether or not they should leave their present positions, I ask this simple question of each one: “Is your church at it’s *highest peak* – at it’s utopia – in every way? Out of debt, good attendance, spiritually moving forward? And if that’s true and you still feel you should go I’ll agree with you in prayer.” “Well, hey, if it was like that...” ☺ We can’t leave the places where God put us just for a better opportunity.

Nehemiah went back to the palace just because he promised he would (1:6;13:6), but he had been made governor in Israel (5:14). When he returned there, he discovered the leader he put in place hadn’t kept it “clean.” Nehemiah (the Governor) had to clean it up again. He actually came back to Jerusalem because he had been called of God to there in the first place.

What gave him a right to “*cut hair and pluck beard?*” (13:25). Read it for yourself. He could do that because he could weep over them first (1:14). If you don’t care enough about your people to fall on your own face and ask God for wisdom – of how to deal with the failures – and cry over the situation of broken homes and kids running to and fro – if your heart isn’t broken – leave them alone instead of standing as great judges, saying they aren’t doing this and they aren’t doing that. Without that personal involvement, you aren’t going to *lead* them anywhere. You can beat them with harsh words. You can preach them into

guilt, but not to conviction. Guilt is a negative – conviction turns things and situations around. Guilt lingers on – conviction produces repentance and is relieved, satisfied, upon confession.

Chapter 8. The Word is read to the people in Jerusalem. The whole group is there – priests and leaders, husbands, wives, and children (vs.1). Upon hearing the Word of God, the people begin to weep (8:9b), “*Oh, God, we’ve violated everything You’ve ever given us!*” The leader lets them weep for awhile. It’s good for people to weep over sin – we’d rather call it “shortfall.” That doesn’t sound so heinous. It’s good for people to be sorry for sin. But the time came when the leader also said, “That’s enough, now. That’s enough weeping. This day belongs to the Lord” (8:9a).

Ecclesiastes makes it clear, doesn’t it? In Chapter 3, Solomon says there’s a time for everything. “*There’s a time to weep and a time to rejoice*” (vs.4a). There’s “*a time to mourn and a time to be joyful*” (vs.4b). Do the people know that? People don’t always know the times. When people confess to something and ask forgiveness, they have a tendency to stay there and wallow in it! I’m telling the truth! ☺ You know people whose testimony is still the same old one, year after year – “I don’t know why the Lord saw fit to save me – such a wretch; such a failure.” It takes a leader to say, “Alright, enough. It’s time for the joy of the Lord to strengthen you (Neh.8:10) – strengthen you to get up and move on.

In my opinion (making it right, of course ☺), the church has three main functions. The first function a church has is as **a hospital**. If our doors are not open to the broken, bruised, bleeding, hurting, needy – and if we don’t have proper placement of service personnel – doctors and nurses (or, counselors, altar workers, etc.) – who have been *trained and equipped* by us to serve and minister (take that literally – trained by you, Pastors and Leaders) – if we don’t have them in place, we better not open our doors! But as soon as we have the doctors and nurses in place, and we know we’re just the administrator of this hospital (actually, Pastor, you’re not much more than that) ☺ – we now may open the doors and let them come. And come they will – oh yes – *because it’s free*.

Oh, excuse me. I did say, “because it’s free.” We *freely* give back from what we have *freely* received and *require nothing from them*. Oh, may God put “give” into your hearts! You just *give it*. And so they come and we minister to them and we counsel them and we bless them and we help them. But there will come a day, Sir, Lady, when you as a leader – when your responsibility will be to see that the people who are now well must stop pushing their call-buttons and get out of their beds. You’ve been responding to every signal-light, but there comes a time when you have to say, “Hey you! Get out of that bed and get dressed! We need nurses and you are well-equipped! Put on the whole armor of God (see Eph.6) and begin serving someone else!”

It is sad to me to see a church that stops right there merely getting people healed. I see many of these situations because I travel and am exposed to a lot of variety. That’s all they ever become – just a hospital. The administrator teaches the doctors and nurses and they nurse all the sick people and that’s what they have – “sick” people – coming and going, coming and going. They have a staff of well-educated, trained and experienced personnel (I pray you are following this) and the rest of the people just keep getting sick and going back to bed – the same people answering the same altar calls every week.

The second phase of the local church is that of **a school**. We are to be *trainers*. It’s much easier to be a “teller” than a “trainer.” You can receive a good message, a great sermon, and impress people with the delivery of it – and then whatever they do with it is between them and God. Or – you can be a trainer! Trainers go over the “lesson” and over it and over it. They say it from Genesis and then from Revelation and then from Exodus. And they say it again from Jude and just go back and forth from passage to passage. You say the same thing over and over again with different words and different illustrations, but it’s the same message. Why? Repetition is an effective teaching method in a school setting.

Have you ever noticed throughout a given conference that there’s only one message? Tell the truth! It doesn’t matter who’s preaching at which session. God brings the same message through many speakers – a single main stream of thought all the way through. “What’s new?” There’s nothing new – under the

sun (Eccl.1:9). We need to hear what God is saying and He says it in every way possible, serving it from every platter available.

It's a new day – *you need a makeover!* You need to reach out! This is the 21st Century and you're on duty – **now!** And we can no longer sing "I'll Fly Away." ☺ So we have to *teach and train*. **Training** means: "***creating a standard of excellence and repeating it until the recipient is functioning in it.***" Why change your subject? If they haven't taken hold of the first things... (see Heb.6:1f) The writer in Hebrews says, "at what time you ought to be eating meat, I have to give you milk" (see Heb.5:12-14). You know why? Because our people aren't mature enough to be discerning, and spoiled meat would kill them. Spoiled *milk* is good – on potatoes. ☺

God can't bring *meat* out to give to *babies!* They'll try to eat anything, but choke on the chunks of meat. If you bring in a guest speaker who violates the true doctrine of the Word – and you haven't trained your people *in school* (the School of the Bible), they won't know the difference! They can't discern or test what speakers say against what *He* says. They'll just swallow anything and everything. They don't know enough Bible to test the spirits behind the teaching brought forth in error (1Jn.4:1). Now, it isn't only a matter of "knowing those who labor among you" (1Th.5:12) and being smart enough not to bring them into your flock just because they have a big name. But today, all people have to do is turn on the TV... and how will they weigh what they're hearing there? Are you hearing this? And we say, "Oh, my God!" But have we trained them sufficiently?

They're in school – your people – and you're the Head Master. You need to know your teachers and what they're offering to the people. And – we need to *train* the people so that when they see or smell spoiled meat, they will automatically reject it! Otherwise, just keep giving them milk – it won't do any damage – sour cream – doesn't matter. ☺

But I know churches that have recognized their responsibility as a hospital and recognized their responsibility as a school – who have *teachers* – or people capable of teaching – still sitting in the classroom – still learning – eating tapes – reading books – going to conferences – becoming ultra-knowledgeable in the things of God. I hope you understand my sarcasm and balance it. We need to "employ" the trained teachers – give them a classroom and responsibility to give out from the storehouse within them. We need to make a place for them to minister what they have already learned and encourage them to keep on learning more. The knowledge of God is humanly inexhaustible – there will always be more for us to learn, no matter how advanced we think we are already.

You must know how strongly I believe we need to teach the "deeper things of God," but if there isn't an application being made of truth learned, what good is it to know the rules? We need to shake some of our people loose from their student positions. We need to get them out from behind the desk – out of their libraries. They're just learning – writing notes – filling notebooks with facts (2Tim.3:7). Their mindset is: "I just have to hang on." Put them to work! "Well, I don't know – once you get all your teachers in place, and all your ushers, and altar workers, and all your staff – what're you going to do with the extras?" Be creative! Make up something! But put them in a place where they can give back from what they have learned.

Back when I gave oversight to the Sunday School organization, I would split a class putting only two people in one if I had to, just to have a place for a new teacher. I'd hear: "Oh, no! I just built my class up to nine people!" "Good. We're going to split it. Three here and three here and three there, then I will have a place for two more teachers. Yea!" That's the honest truth. I have done that – many times – and then just watched it grow – and grow – and grow – because *everyone* in the Church has something to give. But, it's easier to keep the same group of people in place with the same volunteer staff than it is to train and release new ones. Delegate – train – delegate – release – follow-up – *pluck beard*. ☺

Ah, but that's only two aspects of the church. The third is – the church is the **Temple** of the *living* God. It should be a place so holy we can *expect His Presence* – a place where He is worshipped without

reserve. **There would be no dead churches if we functioned as a Hospital, School, and Temple.** There would be no boring churches because you never know how God's going to direct things. It's a great adventure, that is – if God is really in charge!

If God is truly in charge, it will not be boring, I can assure you of that! He knows how to keep things exciting. When you come to a service and your heart is heavy because the church bills aren't paid and you're thinking, "Ohhhhh..." (By the way – here's a quickie side-sermon: if you don't preach on tithing and giving and the blessing of it all – your people won't do it!) When you come laden-down and think, "Oh God, I'm going to have to do something to get money out of these people. I'm..."

I'm thinking of a real live illustration again that occurred while my brother Judson and I pastored together many years ago, and we were at an extremely difficult place in a building program. We were desperate – desperate for money. But we did not exactly share that blunt fact with the people! You don't stand up and tell all the morbid details: "Blah-blah-blah. We're out of money." That just puts a heavy load on the people. The babies can't handle that kind of burden! Handle it yourself! Be a big boy! (or girl!)

So, there we were – kind of heavy-hearted – and we simply said to the congregation, "We have a need." Very soon a little widow-woman in the church came forward. No one in the church liked her much because she always brought her Chihuahua with her. ☺ It was a good dog, never gave us any trouble, but there was just something about... She sat in the congregation, week after week, cuddling her little dog. That particular service, she came right up to the steps of the platform – with the dog. I thought, "Oh, dear God! She wants us to anoint that Chihuahua!" ☺

Now we knew this lady's life circumstances. I had counseled with her often, so I knew her whole story. She was living on welfare and the whole thing. She came that Sunday and said, "I think the Lord wants me to say something." That's when pastors cringe and think, "Oh, dear, ☺ this had better be God!"

Judson – a man of grace and mercy and everything his sister wasn't ☺ – turned and helped her up the steps with the dog in hand! ☺ I couldn't believe it! She came over to the microphone and quietly and so humbly shared in her little thin voice, "I feel the Lord wants me to give *over-and-above my tithe*, another \$20 a month." Then she turned around and left the platform – with the dog. ☺ Jud looked at me – I looked at him. I calculated it quickly and thought, "That probably means at least one meal a week for her!" We didn't know what to say!

Now, in our congregation there were wealthy people – business people – that we knew hadn't given much, certainly not a full tithe. And now she's going to give \$20 a month extra! Jud wisely said nothing – he just stood there! It seemed like two and a half years! ☺ But soon the people started coming and began laying money down at the altar. We just sat on the platform. I looked at him – he looked at me. I thought, "We should stand and sing – or something." ☺ But *God* was at work in the hearts of His people and He used a most unlikely stimulus.

I'm telling you – when your church is a *Temple*, *God* is in charge. Our debt was paid. We built without a loan. Miracle after miracle after miracle. Why? Because all of it was *His*. We became known in our denomination as "the weird ones." Because we would *worship* – sometimes for an hour. Remember, this was in the '60's before that kind of worship was acceptable. And often when I marched the choir down the center aisle singing, "It's a highway to heaven..." 50 people followed behind them. I promise this is the truth! Not once, not twice, or even a dozen times, but throughout those years – almost nine years many times – members and guests would get up and follow the choir as far as the altar. It was because *from those individual singers – burnt stones* whom we had "trained" – *emanated the power of the Spirit of God!* It became infectious. I could tell you stories about their lives – a literal shambles when they came. They had been healed – taught – trained – many became teachers – and they learned to worship God. From them beamed *a divine presence* that pricked the congregation, even the unbelievers! (see Ex. 34:29ff).

Sometimes when Jud and I would stand in the back, saying goodbye to the people as we ministers often do after a service, people would say, “You know that language you all were using? Was it Latin? We started doing it too!” ☺ And we’d have to pull them aside and explain, “You just got baptized in the Holy Ghost!”

Aw, Church! I want to close by saying this – you’re working too hard! Let go! And let God have His wonderful, wonderful way!