Nehemiah 13 **11-18-26**

4 Reliable Ways To Backslide

I. Announce:

A. Welcome to those watching online.

B. Slide1 TGE: Come and join us next Wed at 6:30 PM for our Thanksgiving Eve all church service. Worship and a Message. After, there will be a Thanksgiving craft for the kids, and we'll enjoy *breaking **pie** together* (coffee/cocoa).

C. Slide2 Women's: Ladies, join us on **Sat, Dec. 5th** from 9-11:00 AM as we celebrate "His Wonderlous Love." [combo of *marvelous ... wonderful*] Our speaker will be **Joy Metzger** from CC San Diego, & our own Calvary band will lead us in worship. A craft boutique in the gym will follow, & coffee vendors *for purchase*. This is a **free event**, so invite **family** and **friends**.

D. Prayer:

II. Slide4 **Intro:** *4 Reliable Ways To Backslide*

A. Theme: Spiritual decline occurs when we **stop tending** our relationship with God.

B. Big idea: Backsliding is rarely ***a sudden blowout***; it is usually **a slow leak**.

1. **We drift** by neglecting God's Word; allowing the wrong influences into our lives; rearranging our priorities; and failing to disciple the next generation.

C. William Booth, founder of the Salvation Army, is often quoted as telling a group of young officers: *"Always bear in mind that **it is the nature of a fire to go out**. You must keep it **stirred up** and **fed** and **the ashes removed**."*

1. This message is for anyone whose *fire of devotion* is beginning to **go out**.

D. In the same way, **spiritual health** does not maintain itself. If *prayer, Scripture, worship, repentance, and Christian fellowship* are continually neglected, *spiritual disorder* begins to take over.

1. Peter writes that we are to ***add to our faith** virtue, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, brotherly affection, and love* (not to earn salvation) but because ***a living faith is meant to grow***.

E. Scripture calls spiritual decline: *backsliding, falling away, wandering from the truth, or leaving our first love.*

F. Backsliding is *almost never* a **blowout**; it is usually a **slow leak**.

1. The fire does not disappear in a moment, but if it goes unattended for too long, the flame gradually becomes an ember.

G. That makes Nehemiah 13 a surprising conclusion.

1. The wall has been completed, Scripture has been taught, worship has been restored, and the people have promised to obey God.
2. Yet when Nehemiah returns to Jerusalem, he discovers that many of those commitments *have been abandoned*.

H. **Don Carson** calls Nehemiah 13 ***the anticlimax of revival*** and describes the book's story as ***The Triumphant Failure of Reformation and Revival.*** The reforms achieved real good, but they could not permanently transform the human heart.

I. The chapter gives us *4 Reliable Ways To Backslide* and shows us why we need a Greater Nehemiah.

III. SlideX **1. LET GOD'S WORD GROW SILENT (1-3)**

A. 1 On that day they read from the Book of Moses in the hearing of the people. And in
it was found written that no Ammonite or Moabite should ever enter the assembly
of God, 2 for they did not meet the people of Israel with bread and water, but hired
Balaam against them to curse them—yet our God turned the curse into a blessing.
3 As soon as the people heard the law, they separated from Israel all those of foreign
descent.

B. The chapter begins with Scripture being read publicly. As the people hear God's Word, they discover areas in which their lives have **moved outside** His will.

1. The reading of Scripture exposes **compromises** they had learned to **tolerate**. The problem was *not simply* that the Bible had disappeared. **The deeper problem was that God's Word had *ceased to govern* the life of the community.**

2. **Neglecting** Scripture produces **Permissiveness**. When God's Word becomes distant, **compromise** becomes easier to **justify**.
3. *Neglect can lead to confusion, apathy, spiritual dryness, joylessness, vulnerability to temptation, and indifference* toward God.
4. If **neglecting Scripture** is one of the first steps toward backsliding, **returning to Scripture** is one of our first lines of defense. As we consistently read it, God begins reshaping our ***appetites, desires, values, and activities***.

C. Think about 3 words:

1. Discipline: Sometimes we read Scripture because we know it is **necessary**, much like brushing our teeth or taking vitamins. We do it faithfully even when we do not feel emotionally motivated.
2. Desire: As we encounter God through His Word, discipline begins producing spiritual appetite. We increasingly want to hear from Him.
3. Delight: Eventually, Scripture becomes ***more than a duty***. We begin to love the God who *speaks through it* and *treasure* His truth.

D. Carson interprets (vs.3) as a warning that ***zeal for holiness*** can become **legalism**.

1. He argues that they were attempting to be *"more holy than God"* by extending the restriction beyond what God's Word required. (i.e. Ruth was a Moabite who trusted Israel's God and was welcomed into His people). Biblical holiness does not *ignore* God's commands, but *neither does it* add man-made rules to prove our spiritual credentials!

E. Q: Has God's Word been **shaping** my life, or have I merely been hearing it without **obeying** it? - Is my relationship with Scripture presently characterized by **neglect, discipline, desire, or delight**?

IV. SlideX **2. LET COMPROMISE MOVE IN (4-9)**

A. 4 Now before this, **Eliashib** the priest, who was appointed over the chambers of the house of our God, and who was related to **Tobiah**, 5 prepared for Tobiah a large chamber where they had previously put the grain offering, the frankincense, the vessels, and the tithes of grain, wine, and oil, which were given by commandment

to the Levites, singers, and gatekeepers, and the contributions for the priests. 6 (key) While this was taking place, **I was not in Jerusalem**, for in the thirty-second year of Artaxerxes king of Babylon I went to the king. And after some time I asked leave of the king (1-2 yrs). 7 and came to Jerusalem, and I then discovered the evil that Eliashib had done for Tobiah, preparing for him a chamber in the courts of the house of God. 8 And I was very angry, and I threw all the household furniture of Tobiah out of the chamber. 9 Then I gave orders, and they cleansed the chambers, and I brought back there the vessels of the house of God, with the grain offering and the frankincense.

B. While Nehemiah is away, Eliashib the priest gives Tobiah a large room in the temple courts. This is the same *Tobiah* who mocked the rebuilding effort and repeatedly opposed God's people. A room intended to store offerings for worship is turned into living space for an enemy of the work???

1. Carson describes this as nepotism. Personal relationships and family connections became more important than *covenant faithfulness*. Someone who once opposed the work was now given influence at its center. ;(

   a) Vance Havner famously warned, ***Satan isn't fighting churches; he's joining them.*** The greatest danger does not always remain outside the walls. **Compromise** often gains influence through *familiarity, friendship, family connections, and misplaced loyalty*.

C. Christians should have meaningful relationships with unbelievers and seek to point them toward Jesus. **But** there is a difference between loving people we hope to influence and allowing their *beliefs, values, and lifestyles* to **form us**.
We can love everyone without giving everyone equal influence over our souls.

D. As Nehemiah threw Tobiah's belongings out and restored the room to its proper purpose. (There may be influences **WE** need to remove so that God can once again occupy the space that belongs to Him).

E. Q: **Who** is presently shaping my *values, thinking, and desires*? Have I allowed a relationship or influence to occupy space in my heart that rightfully belongs to God?

V. SlideX 3. LET GOD BECOME SECONDARY (10-22)

A. 10 I also found out that the portions of the Levites had not been given to them, so that the Levites and the singers, who did the work, had fled each to his field.
11a So I confronted the officials and said, "Why is the house of God forsaken?"

1. Side note: read 4 "remember me/them" quotes.

B. Another way to **backslide** is to make sure that **what is Urgent** continually replaces **what is Important**.

1. Nehemiah discovers that the Levites are not receiving the support promised to them. They have left their ministry responsibilities and returned to their fields so they can provide for their families. The **temple** is still standing, but its **worship** is slowly collapsing through neglect.

C. This is where **Passion** turns into **Passivity**.

1. The people do not announce that they have rejected God, they simply *stop supporting* His **worship**. Their attention shifts from the **spiritual** to the **secular**, & God receives whatever *time, energy, & resources* are left over.

a) Many remember the **spiritual sensitivity** immediately following Sept.11.

b) Sept.12 People prayed publicly (news casters), churches filled, and conversations about God became common. **Yet** much of that urgency ***faded quickly***.

(1) **A crisis** may temporarily awaken **spiritual** interest, but **lasting devotion** requires something deeper than *an emotional moment*.

D. The next change is from **Purpose** to **Profit**.

1. The people begin working and selling goods **on the Sabbath**. Merchants wait outside Jerusalem for another opportunity to trade. **Obedience** had become inconvenient *because* it interfered with **income**.

a) Carson describes this as choosing **profit** over **purity**. Whenever faithfulness costs us *money, advancement, comfort, or opportunity*, we discover what we truly value.

2. The answer is to **Reprioritize**. We must stop placing ***Ourselves*** at the center of the universe, and expecting *our spouse, children, work, hobbies, and even God* to revolve around **us**.

   a) God belongs at the center, with everything else arranged around Him.

E. Q: What does the use of *my time, money, and energy* reveal about **my real priorities**? - Where am I allowing what is ***urgent, profitable, or convenient*** to push aside what is **spiritually important**?

VI. SlideX **4. LET FAITH STOP WITH YOU (23-31)**

A. 23 In those days also I saw **the Jews who had married women** of Ashdod, Ammon, and Moab. 24 And half of **their children** spoke the language of Ashdod, and they could not speak the language of Judah, but only the language of each people. 25 And I confronted them and cursed them and beat some of them and pulled out their hair. And I made them take an oath in the name of God …

1. Cursed - not cussed, *to invoke divine harm upon them*.

B. Nehemiah then discovers that some Israelites have **married** people committed to the worship of foreign gods.

1. The issue is not ***ethnicity*** as much as it is **spiritual allegiance**. *These relationships are moving **families** away from the Lord*.

C. The **effects** are already appearing **in their children**.

1. Many can no longer speak the language of Judah. This involves more than **vocabulary**. Ask: what's the prob? - If the children cannot understand the **language** of **Scripture** and **worship**, how will they participate meaningfully in temple services or learn the truth of God?

D. Nehemiah's **physical response** reflects the seriousness of the situation within Israel's covenant, but it should not be treated as **a model** for Christian leadership.

1. His central concern remains valid: *the **compromise** of one generation becomes the spiritual **confusion** of the next*.

2. An old proverb says, *"One generation **plants** the trees; the next generation enjoys the **shade**."* So …
3. What kind of **shade** are we creating for our children and grandchildren?
4. What are we **planting now** that will protect them from the disintegrating influence of a culture that increasingly rejects God?

E. Parents have a limited period in which to **shape a child's character** and **prepare** that child to **enter the world**. Parents are **partners with God** in making disciples of their children. We cannot **cause** our children to believe, but we can teach Scripture, model repentance, prioritize worship, pray faithfully, and speak often about the grace of Christ.

1. Our children need more than ***Christian behavior***. They need a gospel vocabulary. They need to understand *sin, grace, forgiveness, repentance, faith, the cross, and resurrection*.

a) Most importantly, they need to know that Christianity is not merely something **their family does**; it is **a relationship** with the living Christ.

F. Q: What spiritual inheritance are we presently planting for the next generation? Are our children learning merely to **behave** like Christians, or are we helping them ***understand the gospel*** and know Jesus?

VII.SlideX **JESUS CONNECTION**

A. Nehemiah can **throw** Tobiah out of the temple, but he cannot **throw** sin out of the human heart. He can **close** the gates to dishonest merchants, but he cannot permanently **close** the door to temptation. He can **require** outward obedience, but he cannot **produce** inward transformation.

B. This is **why we need Jesus**, the ***Greater*** Nehemiah.

1. Nehemiah returned to find that the people had broken their promises to God. Jesus came knowing that every one of us had *broken covenant* with God. Nehemiah cleansed a room in the temple; Jesus cleansed the temple and then gave His own body as the final sacrifice for sin.

Nehemiah could reform behavior; Jesus died and rose again to forgive us, give us His Spirit, and create new hearts within us.

C. You never **backslide** merely from **a place**; you backslide from **a Person**.
You do not ultimately backslide from **church** - you backslide from God.
You do not merely backslide from the **Bible** - you drift from the God who speaks through it. You do not simply lose **a religious routine** - you *leave your first love*.

1. The answer is not merely, *Try harder and restore your habits.*
The gospel invitation is, *Return to Christ*.

D. **Conclusion**.

E. Nehemiah 13 teaches us that **yesterday's revival** does not guarantee **today's faithfulness**. We cannot live forever on ***a past encounter*** with God, the fire must be tended.

1. **Return** to God's Word. **Examine** the voices shaping you. Put God back at the **center** of your priorities. **Plant** gospel truth for the next generation. But do not place your confidence in the strength of your reforms.

F. ***Our*** **hope** is built on nothing less, Than Jesus' blood and righteousness.
I dare not trust the sweetest frame, But wholly lean on Jesus' name.

G. Keywords: backslide, neglect, priorities.