

Norman C. Schwab  
Yacolt EV Free  
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### **Ancient Promise Keepers**

Nehemiah 8:13-18

Those of you who have been around construction know that there is sort of an interesting relationship between the construction folks and the engineering types. This sometimes conflictual relationship is not always without reason. Because I'm an engineer, I can get away with telling one on my own. Raul Delgado was the Project Manager on the compressor replacement project near Bend Oregon. I was the project Engineer on site and Raul massaged the numbers back at the corporate offices in San Francisco. He did fine at the numbers side of things but out in the field it was a different story. One of my inspectors told me with great delight what happened when he had been a field project Engineer. On his project, the form work for the foundation had been finished and the rebar had been all bent and placed. The contractor was waiting for the Engineer OK to schedule the concrete pour. Raul must have been reading his engineering books that morning because when he went out to inspect the rebar he became very disturbed. The chalk marks used by the construction workers to mark the bends in the steel had not been wiped clean. He was quite concerned that the concrete would fail to completely adhere to the steel. He wanted the contractor to climb throughout the rebar and wipe off their chalk marks. I can just picture my inspector trying to enlighten him as to ridiculous nature of this request. Finally, my inspector gave up trying to school this college boy Engineer and told him there was on the market a special preparation that was excellent for removing chalk marks on rebar. This was exciting news for Mr. Engineer. Is this readily available? he asked. The inspector assured him it was. He wrote out the name of the substance and place to get it. Immediately, Mr. engineer went to the phone to requisition this chalk cleaner...two cases of preparation-H.

This Engineer was well schooled. I'm pretty sure he had taken a masters degree from an East Coast University. He had plenty of

knowledge up in his head. The problem was in transferring that knowledge packed up in his cranium to the dirt and rebar problems on the job. The failure to make knowledge practical can be quite laughable, it also can waste a lot of time and money. I'm afraid that some of us spiritually, are just as green as that tin horn Engineer. Filled with knowledge, devoid of the practical. Our failure to take the Biblical knowledge in our heads, and flesh it out practically in our lives, can be tragic. The problem is information without insight. Vast knowledge without any action. Are you with me?

Turn with me to Nehemiah chapter 8. We will be reading verses 13-18. If you go to watch the Mariners play baseball, everyone always looks forward to the seventh inning stretch. Everybody stands up and looks around...it's time for a break. We are in the 7th inning in our study here in Nehemiah. It's time for us to take a look at where we've been and where we were going. One of my goals is to make sure you are able to get a handle on the big picture of Nehemiah so that three years from now if someone asks you about Nehemiah you'll be able to think your way through the book. Nehemiah is in two sections. The first six chapters deal with reconstruction of the...(wall.) The last seven chapters deal with reconstruction of the ...(people.) In the first six chapters the dominant character is...Nehemiah. He was the building superintendent who became the governor. He knew how to motivate and encourage people. His character was marked by a dependence of God always looking to Him in...prayer. In the final seven chapters the main character is...Ezra. He was the priest and scribe. He firmly believed in the power of the scripture and led the people to revival. The overarching theme of this book..is leadership. In the first part of chapter 8 there is the revival of God's Word. Read with me as the men, the spiritual leaders and fathers, come back to the plaza for a second dose of God's Word. (READ) Can you picture the scene? Here on the plaza are thousands of men have come back for a second day, eager to hear the Word's of God. It's like an ancient Promise Keepers. The leaders of the families are there, the Spiritual leaders of the people are all there, waiting for insight that will help them lead their families, children and grandchildren onto God's way. They have been listening for several days. Packing their brains with knowledge. How can we move underneath the

facts and get them into our flesh our actions? My purpose this morning is to help move the leaders of our families to acquire not just knowledge, but insight.

Lets take a look at that word insight in verse 13. It says here the leaders gathered to gain insight. That word is used in ancient texts for a prick or a thorn to spur someone or something on. This word induces action by the prick. This insight refers to a practical wisdom, one who is shrewd in the daily affairs of life. This is an essential characteristics for those who are leaders. Leaders need insight, practical big picture views of what must be. Insight allows us to see the future results of present decisions. Insight puts flesh to facts.

Are you interested in acquiring more insight? First, We must *discover* insight. Brilliant deduction eh? Is it not true, you cannot give out what you do not possess? You may possess vast Bible knowledge, but that is no guarantee of insight. The project engineer possessed plenty of knowledge, but it's one thing to have a head full of knowledge and another to operate with practical wisdom and insight. Discovering insight takes **time**. In verse 13 we see that the leaders came back for a second day. We can't possibly expect to gain insight on the very first encounter with the Scripture. A brief reading of verses just won't cut it. The Bible unlocks it treasures only to those who are willing to invest the time. We tend to read a passage and say yep that's what it says, then move on. A professor friend of mine told me he reads through a passage thirty times before he begins to understand what it is saying. He told me that studying in the original languages and using the grammatical devices are helpful because they slow you down long enough to read carefully the Word. The treasures of the Bible are unlocked only to those who keep searching. Many people stop their study just short of a great insight. Acquiring insight takes time.

It also takes the right attitude. In verse 13 the leaders of the families of Israel are gathers to gain insight. They are saying "teach us" Tell us the things we need to know to be better leaders in our families and communities. They have a teachable attitude. They are like sponges that get bigger and bigger spiritually as more water of the Word is poured down them. I will take a rough uneducated man with a teachable spirit long before I enlist a talented know-it-all. As you approach the Word in

prayer ask God for a teachable spirit that desires to act on what God reveals to them in the Word. Acquiring insight takes time and a teachable attitude. But what good is insight if it's not acted upon. Insight without action becomes traction. If you continually fail to do what God has revealed for you to do..it will place you in a spiritual body cast, plastered with knowledge yet unable to move.

Look at verse 14. They were now reading out of Leviticus and they discover that God wanted them to celebrate a feast in the seventh month. From verse two in this chapter, we know that this was the seventh month. Here the leaders act on insight. They approached the scriptures asking, searching God? What are we supposed to be doing. They read in Leviticus 23 that he wanted them to celebrate the feast of booths. This was a feast to commemorate the crossing of the dessert with Moses. God wanted them to remember how the people of Israel had once lived in temporary shacks made of branches. God wanted them to celebrate how far He had brought them by reenacting the temporary living situation of their fathers. In verse 17 we see that this festival hadn't been celebrated in this way since the time of Joshua, over 1000 years. Yet here it was still in the Scriptures. God said "go make shacks!" That's what the word said so that's what they did. Here are intelligent, grown men - respected leaders of the community fetching sticks to make booths. Can you imagine the talk of the critics, the religious aristocracy Tobiah and Sanballet? That lousy wall was bad enough but now they can't even build a decent house. They look on their window and some guy is up on top of his roof putting up a lean to. What are you doing? Oh uh...were gathering up some stick to build a shack... come on kids lets get some more of those palm branches. This must have been more of a guy thing camping in the great outdoors...it certainly wasn't real convenient for mom. It was strange. But what is important is that the result of gaining insight was action. Insight resulted in unreserved obedience. They acted in obedience to the insight from the Word even when it was not convenient. God's wanted booths so they built booths. They took the time to discover God's truth approaching the Word with a teachable spirit. Then they acted in unreserved obedience.

Well, what are the results of action filled insight? What can we expect if we spend the time necessary to glean insights from scripture

and then act upon them in unreserved obedience? Read the end of verse 17. And there was great rejoicing. The results of insight that is followed through on. Happiness. Great rejoicing. I can't explain it but when you do right it makes you feel happy. Is it possible to be happy living in a shack? It is if you are obeying what God wants you to do. One cannot be in a more secure position than under the obedience of God. I can think of no happier place, no safer place to be. Are you feeling a little ridiculous by having plenty of Biblical knowledge but very little joy in your Christian life? Do you ever feel like that Engineer who possessed a cranium packed with information but when it came to practically use it in the field he embarrassing fell flat? Begin this week by praying this prayer. God, I know there are many things about the Christian life that you want me to work on. A head filled with knowledge can be overwhelming. Please show me just one area I can work on this week. As I spend time reading your Word this week give me an insight that I can act on. Give me the strength to act no matter how inconvenient this thing may be. Lord, bring joy to my life. Let me to experience the joy of unreserved obedience.