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Reaching Out to the Rebel

Revelation revealed demands response. **Revelation rejected** brings darkness. In a recent Focus on the Family article, Rolf Zettersten wrote about a friend in North Carolina who had purchased a new car with one of those voice warning systems. At first Edwin was amused to hear the soft female voice gently remind him that his seat belt wasn't fastened...Edwin affectionately called this voice the "little woman" One day he discovered his little woman was programmed to warn him about his gasoline. "Your fuel level is low" she said in her sweet voice. Edwin nodded his head, thanked her. But, like most of us guys he figured he still had enough to go another fifty miles, so he kept on driving. But, a few minutes later, her voice interrupted again with the same warning. And so it went like this over and over again. Although he knew it was the same recording, Edwin thought her voice sounded harsher each time. Finally, he stopped the car and crawled under the dashboard. After a quick search, he found the appropriate wires and gave them a good yank. So much for the little woman. He was still smiling smugly to himself a few miles later when his car began sputtering and coughing. He ran out of gas. Somewhere in the dashboard, Edwin was sure he could hear the little woman laughing.

Most of us will learn, just like Edwin did, that the little voice inside us, often tells us exactly what we need to know, even though it's ignored or even disconnected. **Revelation revealed** demands response. **Revelation rejected** brings darkness. When we ignore God's soft promptings to do right, to go His way and not our own. When we continue to swirl in the cycle of disobedience we are guaranteed a darkness will hover over our lives.

Are you familiar with the cycle of disobedience? Here's how it goes. I am obeying God enjoying his presence, loving Him. He blesses my life with peace and a satisfaction I haven't experienced before. This smoothness, stability and peace begins to invade other areas my life. Relationships at home are going better. I begin to relate better with my

employer, my attitudes and work improves. Life has become easy. But why is it that when life is smooth I so easily get my ball lost in the weeds? Why do I begin to take the good things for granted. Why do I decide I no longer need God. I stop coming to church. I stop reading the Bible. No prayer. Rebellion against God begin to take root. This is the low point in the cycle of disobedience. But, I don't really feel it until God allows a crisis in my life to show me that I can't make it on my own. To show me that I have been taking him for granted. This crisis is a tough time used by God to direct my pride back to dependence on Him. I turn back to God and begin to follow his ways, slowly things begin to get back on track in my life. The cycle of disobedience. I obey. life is stable. I am prideful. I take God for granted. I disobey. Crisis hits. I turn back to God. Have you ever experienced this cycle in your own life? Do you ever feel like God may choose not to pull you out of a crisis when you cry out to Him. You know you have continually disobeyed Him. Do you ever fear that God may not be compassionate when you want His help this time? Well, I want to assure you there is comfort in Nehemiah chapter 9. Do you want to break out of the disobedience cycle? There is hope for even us from the Word of God. How can we break out of the cycle?

First, we'll look at the problems we get ourselves into then we'll see what we can do to stay out of trouble. Well first look at the failure of man and then the faithfulness of God.

If you have your Bibles we will be grazing through the 9th chapter of Nehemiah. We won't read all 38 verses but will pick a verse verses to chew some cud on, so keep your Bible handy. Lets read verses 1-3 of chapter 9. The celebrative feast of tabernacles had finished two days earlier. Once again the people of Israel gather together. This time it's not in celebration but in humiliation. Does this surprise you? Didn't Ezra and the leaders encourage the people to stop their weeping in chapter 8? Why the move from joy to humiliation? They realize that there must be a time of sorrow and confession. They realize they must be separate from their old ways of doing life. They must separate themselves from sinful habits and lifestyles. Should not separation from sin and the joy of the Lord be close friends?

Look closely with me at verse 1. The people are fasting, they are in sackcloth, and they have covered themselves with dirt. These are

outward symbols of an inner attitude they want to display before God. I wonder if these actions symbolize the opposite of what they had been doing in sin. Take a look at fasting. The people were going without food. When you go without food your stomach starts to gurgle, it begins to hurt. You desire food. While one is fasting they are spending that extra time they would use to eat to seek God earnestly. As they felt their physical hunger they remembered they needed to eat to live. They remembered they needed to stay hungry for God to enjoy life. When your fasting you want to eat but are disciplining yourself in withholding that which you naturally desire. right? The opposite of fasting is what they were guilty of. Maybe some of us are guilty of. The opposite of fasting is gorging oneself on whatever our hearts desire. If we want it we are going to go get it right now no matter whether it hurts our bodies or our mate, or our children, or grieves God's heart. We will indulge without restraint. Self satisfying sin.

Next we see self gratifying sin. The people are wearing sackcloth. They are walking around in burlap sacks. What the opposite of that? Wearing nice clothes that make us look good. Is there anything wrong with wearing nice clothes? Absolutely not. For most of us clothes make it palatable for us to look at each other. Don't you feel better when you wear clothes that fit and know that they make you look your best. I think that's the danger area that they were sinning in. They wanted to make sure they always looked good. Not in clothing. They were self gratifying. Always pumping themselves, always boasting how great they were. Making sure they were the ones who looked best in a situation. They wallowed in self satisfying sin and self gratifying sin.

What about throwing dirt on themselves? I think this is a humble recognition of where we have come from. The dust, the dirt. The opposite of being dirty is keeping yourself clean? Yes? And often we think we can actually keep our self clean. We sometimes think we are self justifying like a self cleaning oven. If we get ourselves a little dirty we just turn it on to the self cleaning temperature. We crank up a little self discipline and burn off a little lust that's been dripping down on our burners, burn off some jealousy that was caked on after that...incident. maybe burn off some laziness, or anger. We come back in a couple hours, wipe the ashes away and feel that were clean as new. Are you ever guilty of

trying to justify your sins like a self cleaning oven? Do you ever wallow in self satisfying self gratifying, self justifying garbage? Yep me too.

These people in Jerusalem were feeling the weight of their sin before God. They also began to recognize the cycle of disobedience that they were in and their fathers before them had been in. Skip your eyes down through verses 5-38 this is the longest prayer recorded in the Bible. Is it any wonder that we find it here in the book of Nehemiah? It seems Nehemiah's passion for prayer was infectious. In verses 4 and 5 God is praised and worshipped. His name is exalted. In verses 5-6 the prayer gives praise to the God who created all things the heavens and the earth. It then goes into a history lesson about the people of Israel and their relationship with God. Verses 7, 8 tell how God chose Abraham, made a promise with him and his descendants, brought him out of Iraq to the promise land of Israel. How God had miraculously protected them in Egypt and led them out of slavery through the Red Sea and the desert providing for their physical needs bread and water during the trip. Then verse 16 hits. There the but. Here is what got in the way of God's blessing. Look at verse 16. Stubbornly refused to follow God's way. They wanted to choose their own way of doing things. They refused to listen to God's truth. Verse 17 they forgot what God had done for them. So they appointed leaders to go back to Egypt, back to slavery. Enslaved by their self satisfying, self gratifying, self justifying desires. They took the downward cycle of disobedience. Look at the middle of verse 17 we see another "But". But God is one who forgives, is gracious, compassionate, patient with a loyal love. You see even though man will fail. God will be faithful. You may think it is God who has deserted you but I must tell you it was not God who moved away from you...but you who moved from God. In verse 18 they are back at willful disobedience. Running to other Gods worshipping a golden calf. They insisted on attributing their successes to things other than God Himself. Do we ever do that? Do we attribute our success to our hard work, our intellect and business acumen? But once again God was forgiving and brought the people of Israel into the land. God allowed them to easily conquer their enemies and they never had so much material wealth in the promised land. But, then when things were easy again, when their life was smooth they decided they didn't need God any more. Verse 26 they became

disobedient and rebellious. They openly renounced by their words or actions the authority to which they owed their allegiance. Read there they chucked God's laws behind their backs and said "Who needs it!" and who needs you God, I can get by on my own thank you. I don't need any pie in the sky running my life!" Many time this cycle of disobedience repeated itself. Read verses 27 and 28 with me. I obey. life becomes stable. I am prideful. I take God for granted. I disobey. Crisis hits. I turn back to God. Have you ever experienced this cycle in your own life? Is this not the story of God's grace and God's goodness to all of us?

How can we break out of disobedience? First, Remember the goodness of God. All through this prayer in chapter 9 we see the faithfulness of God and the failure of man. Do you ever reflect on God's goodness? Isn't it a good things our covenant with God is not based on man's faithfulness but on God's? This passage is so encouraging because His faithfulness is clearly shown down through history to not be based on the merit of man, but God chose, he gave, he made, he saw He heard He spoke and He promised irregardless of the people. From our side their is no hope to break out of the cycle of discipline, but the great thing is our relationship with God is based on His faithfulness. In your prayers this week remember the goodness of God. Write down on a sheet of paper the times He has provided and come through for you. Remember the times when He has picked you up out of a disobedient fall. Meditate on the goodness of God.

Turn with me back to verses 2 and 3 for second clue to breaking out of the disobedience cycle. Not only should we remember God's goodness, We must confess our sin. See in verse 2 they confessed their sins, both personally and corporately. They confessed the sins of their fathers. Ezra the priest didn't say. Hey I wasn't a party to what was going on around here, I even preached against it. Ezra said, "God forgive us what we as a people have done in sinful rebellion against your ways." Confession involves separation. Evil confessed must be evil separated from. To confess sin while cleaving to it is a mockery of God. We must say "we are sinful" It's saying to God "You were right and I was wrong. I got what I deserved in this situation." God has promised to forgive sin that we confess. I john 1:9 "If we confess our sin He is faithful and just to forgive our sin and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." But, he will

not forgive a sin that we refuse to confess. Have you sinned against someone? Then ask their forgiveness. Have you sinned against God then confess that to God. All sin is against God isn't it. Alan Redpath uses this list of self exam questions to help guide his time of confession with God. I am going to close with this list. It may prompt some of you in a need to confess to each other or God. As we close we will have a time of confession. This may be silent or verbally, right where you are or down here in front if you want to pray with someone. I'll be here. Close your eyes in prayer before God. Ask him to reveal an area that may need dealt with.

What about my relationship with other people?

Am I consciously or unconsciously creating the impression that I am a better person than I really am? Is there the least suspicion of hypocrisy in my life? Am I honest in all my words and acts? Do I exaggerate? Am I reliable? Can I be trusted? Do I confidentially pass on what was told to me in confidence? Do I grumble and complain in the church? Am I jealous, impure, irritable, touchy, distrustful? Am I self satisfying, self gratifying self justifying? Am I proud? Do I thank God that I am not like other people? Is there anyone I fear, or dislike, or criticize, or resent? If so what am I doing about it?

What about my relationship with God?

Does the Bible live to me? Do I give it time to speak to me? Am I enjoying my prayer life today? Did I enjoy it today? When I am involved in a problem in life, do I use my tongue or my knees about it? Am I disobeying God in anything, or insisting on doing something that my conscience is uneasy about? When did I last talk to someone about Jesus? Am I a slave to books? fashion, work? friends? How am I spending my spare time? What about my relationship with God and others.