

Study Guide to the Christian Service

February 2016

1st Week.

Dates: January 31 to February 6th, 2016

Reading Assignment: Pages 171.2- 173.2

A Worthy Example

The poor widow who cast her two mites into the Lord's treasury, little knew what she was doing. Her example of self-sacrifice has acted and reacted upon thousands of hearts in every land and in every age. It has brought to the treasury of God gifts from the high and the low, the rich and the poor. It has helped to sustain missions, to establish hospitals, to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, heal the sick, and preach the gospel to the poor. Multitudes have been blessed through her unselfish deed.—[Testimonies for the Church 6:310](#). {ChS 171.2}

Lessons from the Life of Nehemiah

In years past, I have spoken in favor of the plan of presenting our mission work and its progress before our friends and neighbors, and have referred to the example of Nehemiah. And now I desire to urge our brethren and sisters to study anew the experience of this man of prayer and faith and sound judgment, who made bold to ask his friend, King Artaxerxes, for help with which to advance the interests of God's cause.—MS., "Consecrated Efforts to Reach Unbelievers," June 5, 1914. {ChS 171.3}

Solicited Means From Those Able to Bestow—Men of prayer should be men of action. Those who are ready and willing, will find ways and means of working. Nehemiah did not depend upon uncertainties. The means which he lacked he solicited from those who were able to bestow.—The Southern Watchman, March 15, 1904. {ChS 171.4}

Courage for the Task Came Through Power—Nehemiah and Artaxerxes stood face to face,—the one a servant of a downtrodden race, the other the monarch of the world's great empire. But infinitely greater than the disparity of rank was the moral distance which separated them. Nehemiah had complied with the invitation of the King of kings, "Let him take hold of My strength, that he may make peace with Me, and he shall make peace with Me." The silent petition that he sent up to heaven was the same that he had offered for many weeks, that God would prosper his request. And now, taking courage at the thought that he had a Friend, omniscient and omnipotent, to work in his behalf, the man of God made known to the king his desire for release for a time from his office at the court, and for authority to build up the waste places of Jerusalem, and make it once more a strong and defended city. Momentous results to the Jewish city and nation hung upon this request. "And," says Nehemiah, "the king granted me according to the good hand of my God upon me."—The Southern Watchman, March 8, 1904. {ChS 172.1}

Secured Official Indorsement—As his [Nehemiah's] request to the king had been so favorably received, he was encouraged to ask for such assistance as was needed for the carrying out of his plans. To give dignity and authority to his mission, as well as to provide for protection on the journey, he secured a military escort. He obtained royal letters to the governors of the provinces beyond the Euphrates, the territory through which he must pass on his way to Judea; and he obtained, also, a letter to the keeper of the king's forest in the

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mountains of Lebanon, directing him to furnish such timber as would be needed for the wall of Jerusalem and the buildings that Nehemiah proposed to erect. In order that there might be no occasion for complaint that he had exceeded his commission, Nehemiah was careful to have the authority and privileges accorded him, clearly defined.—The Southern Watchman, March 15, 1904. {ChS 172.2}

The royal letters to the governors of the provinces along his route, secured to Nehemiah an honorable reception and prompt assistance. And no enemy dared molest the official who was guarded by the power of the Persian king and treated with marked consideration by the provincial rulers. Nehemiah's journey was safe and prosperous.—The Southern Watchman, March 22, 1904. {ChS 172.3}

Encountering Obstacles—His arrival at Jerusalem, however, with the attendance of a military guard, showing that he had come on some important mission, excited the jealousy and hatred of the enemies of Israel. The heathen tribes settled near Jerusalem had previously indulged their enmity against the Jews by heaping upon them every insult and injury which they dared inflict. Foremost in this evil work were certain chiefs of these tribes, Sanballat the Horonite, Tobiah the Ammonite, and Geshem the Arabian; and from this time these leaders watched with jealous eye the movements of Nehemiah, and endeavored by every means in their power to thwart his plans and hinder his work.—The Southern Watchman, March 22, 1904. {ChS 173.1}

They attempted to cause division among the workmen by suggesting doubts and arousing unbelief as to their success. They also ridiculed the efforts of the builders, declared the enterprise an impossibility, and predicted a disgraceful failure.... The builders on the wall were soon beset by more active opposition. They were compelled to guard continually against the plots of their sleepless adversaries. The emissaries of the enemy endeavored to destroy their courage by the circulation of false reports; conspiracies were formed on various pretexts to draw Nehemiah into their toils; and false-hearted Jews were found ready to aid the treacherous undertaking.... Emissaries of the enemy, professing friendliness, mingled with the builders, suggesting changes in the plan, seeking in various ways to divert the attention of the workers, to cause confusion and perplexity, and to arouse distrust and suspicion.—The Southern Watchman, April 12, 1904. {ChS 173.2}

Question to Ponder- February 6th, 2016

1. What practical lessons can we draw from Nehemiah's experience in planning for God's work?

2nd Week.

Dates: February 7th to 13th, 2016

Reading Assignment: Pages 173.3- 175.4

Same Obstacles Confront Leaders Today—The experience of Nehemiah is repeated in the history of God's people in this time. Those who labor in the cause of truth will find that they cannot do this without exciting the anger of its enemies. Though they have been called of God to the work in which they are engaged, and their course is approved of Him, they cannot escape reproach and derision. They will be denounced as visionary, unreliable, scheming, hypocritical,—anything, in short, that will suit the purpose of their enemies. The most sacred things will be represented in a ridiculous light to amuse the ungodly. A very small amount of sarcasm and low wit, united with envy, jealousy, impiety, and hatred, is sufficient to excite the mirth of the profane scoffer. And these presumptuous jesters sharpen one another's ingenuity, and embolden each other in their blasphemous work. Contempt and derision are indeed painful to human nature; but they must be endured by all who are true to God. It is the policy of Satan thus to turn souls from doing the work which the Lord has laid upon them.—The Southern Watchman, April 12, 1904. {ChS 173.3}

Rallying the Dispirited Forces—In secrecy and silence, Nehemiah completed his circuit of the walls. He declares, "The rulers knew not whither I went, or what I did; neither had I as yet told it to the Jews, nor to the priests, nor to the nobles, nor to the rulers, nor to the rest that did the work." In this painful survey he did not wish to attract the attention of either friends or foes, lest an excitement should be created, and reports be put in circulation that might defeat, or at least hinder, his work. Nehemiah devoted the remainder of the night to prayer; in the morning there must be earnest effort to arouse and unite his dispirited and divided countrymen.—The Southern Watchman, March 22, 1904. {ChS 174.1}

Although Nehemiah bore a royal commission requiring the inhabitants to co-operate with him in rebuilding the walls of the city, he chose not to depend upon the mere exercise of authority. He sought rather to gain the confidence and sympathy of the people, well knowing that a union of hearts as well as hands was essential to success in the great work which he had undertaken. {ChS 174.2}

When he called the people together on the morrow, he presented such arguments as were calculated to arouse their dormant energies and to unite their scattered numbers.... And having laid the matter fully before them, showing that he was sustained by the combined authority of the Persian king and the God of Israel, Nehemiah put to the people directly the question whether they would take advantage of this favorable occasion, and arise with him and build the wall. This appeal went straight to their hearts; the manifestation of the favor of Heaven toward them put their fears to shame. With new courage they cried out with one voice, "Let us rise up and build."—The Southern Watchman, March 29, 1904. {ChS 174.3}

The holy energy and high hope of Nehemiah were communicated to the people. As they caught the spirit, they rose for a time to the moral level of their leader. Each, in his own sphere, was a sort of Nehemiah; and each strengthened and upheld his brother in the work.—The Southern Watchman, March 29, 1904. {ChS 175.1}

The Priests of Israel Among the First to Respond—Among the first to catch Nehemiah's spirit of zeal and earnestness were the priests of Israel. From the position of influence which they occupied, these men could do much to hinder or advance the work. Their ready co-operation at the very outset contributed not a little to its success. Thus should it be in every holy enterprise. Those who occupy positions of influence and responsibility in the church,

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should be foremost in the work of God. If they move reluctantly, others will not move at all. But “their zeal will provoke very many.” When their light burns brightly, a thousand torches will be kindled at the flame.—The Southern Watchman, April 5, 1904. {ChS 175.2}

Nehemiah as an Organizer—The people in general were animated with one heart and one soul of patriotism and cheerful activity. Men of ability and influence organized the various classes of citizens into companies, each leader making himself responsible for the erection of a certain portion of the wall. It was a sight well pleasing to God and angels to see the busy companies working harmoniously upon the broken-down walls of Jerusalem, and it was a joyous sound to hear the noise of instruments of labor from the earliest dawn “till the stars appeared.”—The Southern Watchman, April 5, 1904. {ChS 175.3}

The Demonstration of True Leadership—Nehemiah’s zeal and energy did not abate, now that the work was actually begun. He did not fold his hands, feeling that he might let fall the burden. With tireless vigilance he constantly superintended the work, directing the workmen, noting every hindrance, and providing for every emergency. His influence was constantly felt along the whole extent of those three miles of wall. With timely words he encouraged the fearful, approved the diligent, or aroused the laggard. And again he watched with eagle eye the movements of their enemies, who at times collected at a distance and engaged in earnest conversation, as if plotting mischief, and then drawing near the workmen, attempted to divert their attention and hinder the work. {ChS 175.4}

Questions to Ponder February 13th, 2016

1. How should we deal when opposition? How did Nehemiah deal with opposition in his time?
2. How did Nehemiah engage the people to support the work?

3rd Week.

Dates: February 14th to 20th, 2016

Reading Assignment: Pages 176.1- 179.1

While the eye of every worker is often directed to Nehemiah, ready to heed the slightest signal, his eye and heart are uplifted to God, the great Overseer of the whole work, the one who put it into the heart of His servant to build. And as faith and courage strengthen in his own heart, Nehemiah exclaims, and his words, repeated and re-echoed, thrill the hearts of the workers all along the line, "The God of heaven, He will prosper us!"—The Southern Watchman, April 5, 1904. {ChS 176.1}

Nehemiah and his companions did not shrink from hardships, or excuse themselves from trying service. Neither by night nor by day, not even during the brief time given to slumber, did they put off their clothing, or even lay aside their armor. "So neither I, nor my brethren, nor my servants, nor the men of the guard which followed me, none of us put off our clothes, saving that every one put them off for washing."—The Southern Watchman, April 26, 1904. ChS 176.2

Counteracting Influence in Every Religious Movement—A majority of the nobles and rulers of Israel also came nobly up to their duty; but there were a few, the Tekoite nobles, who "put not their necks to the work of their Lord." While the faithful builders have honorable mention in the book of God, the memory of these slothful servants is branded with shame, and handed down as a warning to all future generations. {ChS 176.3}

In every religious movement there are some who, while they cannot deny that it is the work of God, will keep themselves aloof, refusing to make any effort to advance it. But in enterprises to promote their selfish interests, these men are often the most active and energetic workers. It were well to remember that record kept on high, the book of God, in which all our motives and our works are written,—that book in which there are no omissions, no mistakes, and out of which we are to be judged. There every neglected opportunity to do service for God will be faithfully reported, and every deed of faith and love, however humble, will be held in everlasting remembrance.—The Southern Watchman, April 5, 1904. {ChS 177.4}

The Call for Modern Nehemiahs

There is need of Nehemiahs in the church today,—not men who can pray and preach only, but men whose prayers and sermons are braced with firm and eager purpose. The course pursued by this Hebrew patriot in the accomplishment of his plans is one that should still be adopted by ministers and leading men. When they have laid their plans, they should present them to the church in such a manner as to win their interest and co-operation. Let the people understand the plans and share in the work, and they will have a personal interest in its prosperity. The success attending Nehemiah's efforts shows what prayer, faith, and wise, energetic action will accomplish. Living faith will prompt to energetic action. The spirit manifested by the leader will be, to a great extent, reflected by the people. If the leaders professing to believe the solemn, important truths that are to test the world at this time, manifest no ardent zeal to prepare a people to stand in the day of God, we must expect the church to be careless, indolent, and pleasure-loving.—The Southern Watchman, March 29, 1904. {ChS 177.1}

Chapter 16—The Church Expansion Movement
The Divine Plan

It is not the purpose of God that His people should colonize, or settle together in large communities. The disciples of Christ are His representatives upon the earth, and God designs that they shall be scattered all over the country, in the towns, cities, and villages, as lights amidst the darkness of the world.—Testimonies for the Church 8:244. {ChS 178.1}

The plan of colonizing, or moving from different localities where there is but little strength or influence, and concentrating the influence of many in one locality, is removing the light from places where God would have it shine.—Testimonies for the Church 2:633. {ChS 178.2}

If the church of Christ were fulfilling the purpose of our Lord, light would be shed upon all that sit in darkness and in the region and shadow of death. Instead of congregating together and shunning responsibility and cross-bearing, the members of the church would scatter into all lands, letting the light of Christ shine out from them, working as He did for the salvation of souls, and this “gospel of the kingdom” would speedily be carried to all the world.—Thoughts from the Mount of Blessing, 42, 43. {ChS 178.3}

Brethren and sisters, why hover about the churches? Study the parable of the lost sheep, and go forth as true shepherds, seeking the lost one who is in the wilderness of sin. Rescue the perishing.—The Review and Herald, December 12, 1893. {ChS 178.4}

The lay members of our churches can accomplish a work which, as yet, they have scarcely begun. None should move into new places merely for the sake of worldly advantage; but where there is an opening to obtain a livelihood, let families that are well grounded in the truth enter, one or two families in a place, to work as missionaries. They should feel a love for souls, a burden of labor for them, and should make it a study how to bring them into the truth. They can distribute our publications, hold meetings in their homes, become acquainted with their neighbors, and invite them to come to these meetings. Thus they can let their light shine in good works.—Testimonies for the Church 8:245. {ChS 178.5}

Brethren who wish to change their location, who have the glory of God in view, and feel that individual responsibility rests upon them to do others good, to benefit and save souls for whom Christ withheld not His precious life, should move into towns and villages where there is but little or no light, and where they can be of real service, and bless others with their labor and experience. Missionaries are wanted to go into towns and villages and raise the standard of truth, that God may have His witnesses scattered all over the land, that the light of truth may penetrate where it has not yet reached, and the standard of truth be raised where it is not yet known.—Testimonies for the Church 2:115. {ChS 179.1}

Question to Ponder February 20th, 2016

1. What is the “divine plan” in regards to the Church expansion?
2. Have you ever considered moving to a new area to expand the work of God?

4th Week.

Dates: January 21st to 27th, 2016

Reading Assignment: Pages 179.2- 181.4

Nothing will so arouse a self-sacrificing zeal and broaden and strengthen the character as to engage in work for others. Many professed Christians, in seeking church relationship, think only of themselves. They wish to enjoy church fellowship and pastoral care. They become members of large and prosperous churches, and are content to do little for others. In this way they are robbing themselves of the most precious blessings. Many would be greatly benefited by sacrificing their pleasant, ease-conducing associations. They need to go where their energies will be called out in Christian work, and they can learn to bear responsibilities.—[The Ministry of Healing, 151. {ChS 179.2}](#)

There are thousands of places to be entered where the standard of truth has never been raised, where the proclamation of the truth has never been heard in America. And there are thousands who might enter the harvest field who are now religiously idle, and as a result, go crippling their way to heaven, expressing their doubt whether they are Christians. Their need is a vital union with Jesus Christ. Then it can be said of them, “Ye are laborers together with God.” I want to say to many, You are waiting for some one to carry you to the vineyard and set you to work, or to bring the vineyard to you, that you may experience no inconvenience in labor. You will wait in vain. If you will lift up your eyes, you will see the harvest ripe, ready for the sickle, whichever way you may look; you will find work close by and far off. But of how many will Christ say in the judgment, “Good and faithful servants”? I think how the angels must feel seeing the end approaching, and those who claim to have a knowledge of God and Jesus Christ whom He hath sent, huddle together, colonize, and attend the meetings, and feel dissatisfied if there is not much preaching to benefit their souls and strengthen the church, while they are doing literally nothing.... If their temporal, financial prospects are not as prosperous by moving to localities where the truth has not been proclaimed, or where there has been but a glimmering of light, will they not be doing just the work that Jesus has done to save them?—The General Conference Bulletin, 1893, 131. [{ChS 179.3}](#)

We see the great need of missionary work to carry the truth not only to foreign countries, but to those who are near us. Close around us are cities and towns in which no efforts are made to save souls. Why should not families who know the present truth settle in these cities and villages, to set up there the standard of Christ, working in humility, not in their own way, but in God’s way, to bring the light before those who have no knowledge of it? [{ChS 180.1}](#)

When the church shall truly have the spirit of the message, they will throw all their energies into the work of saving the souls for whom Christ has died. They will enter new fields. Some who are not ordained ministers will be laborers together with God in visiting the churches, and trying to strengthen the things that remain, that are ready to die. There will be laymen who will move into towns and cities, and into apparently out-of-the-way places, that they may let the light which God has given them, shine forth to others. Some whom they meet will not appear to be the most promising subjects, but the only question should be, Will they come into harmony with Christ? Will they become partakers of His spirit, so that their influence, in precept and example, will present the attractions of the Author of truth and righteousness? [{ChS 180.2}](#)

In places where the truth is not known, brethren who are adapted to the work, might hire a hall, or some other suitable place to assemble, and gather together all who will come. Then let them instruct the people in the truth. They need not sermonize, but take the Bible, and let

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God speak directly out of His Word. If there is only a small number present, they can read a “Thus saith the Lord,” without a great parade or excitement; just read and explain the simple gospel truth, and sing and pray with them.—[The Review and Herald, September 29, 1891.](#) {ChS 181.1}

Abraham a Worthy Example

It was no light test that was thus brought upon Abraham, no small sacrifice that was required of him. There were strong ties to bind him to his country, his kindred, and his home. But he did not hesitate to obey the call. He had no question to ask concerning the Land of Promise,—whether the soil was fertile, and the climate healthful; whether the country offered agreeable surroundings, and would afford opportunities for amassing wealth. God had spoken, and His servant must obey; the happiest place on earth for him was the place where God would have him to be. {ChS 181.2}

Many are still tested as was Abraham. They do not hear the voice of God speaking directly from the heavens, but He calls them by the teachings of His Word and the events of this providence. They may be required to abandon a career that promises wealth and honor, to leave congenial and profitable associations, and separate from kindred, to enter upon what appears to be only a path of self-denial, hardship, and sacrifice. God has a work for them to do; but a life of ease and the influence of friends and kindred would hinder the development of the very traits essential for its accomplishment. He calls them away from human influences and aid, and leads them to feel the need of His help, and to depend upon Him alone, that He may reveal Himself to them. {ChS 181.3}

Who is ready at the call of Providence to renounce cherished plans and familiar associations? Who will accept new duties and enter untried fields, doing God’s work with firm and willing hearts, for Christ’s sake counting His losses again? He who will do this has the faith of Abraham, and will share with him that “far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory,” with which “the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared.”—[Patriarchs and Prophets, 126, 127.](#) {ChS 181.4}

Questions to Ponder February 27th, 2015

1. Are you ready at the call of Providence to renounce cherished plans and family associations?