

"Face the Facts"

By Allan Pole

Theme: God wants you to live above life's harsh realities.

Text: Nehemiah 2:17



God had led the Israelites miraculously out of a life of slavery in Egypt as he parted the Red Sea in front of them and had drowned the Pharaoh and his army behind them. They had travelled through the desert on their way to a land promised to them by the Lord. Moses appointed 12 men to go ahead and spy out the land. All 12 of them agreed that the land was beautiful and lush, a place where anyone would want to live. All 12 of them agreed that the people who lived there were gigantic, making the Israelites appear as grasshoppers in comparison. *Not* all 12 of them agreed that the Israelites could take over the land, however. In fact, ten of them concluded that Moses and their colleagues should forget about the whole idea. They started the Israelites on a cry to appoint themselves a leader other than Moses and to return to Egypt. Two of them, however, Joshua and Caleb, were nodding their heads in agreement over the spies' report on the Promised Land then added, "Yes, we see the problems, but let's go for it! We can do it!"

The ten spies, along with the rest of the Israelites who saw only their problems died in the wilderness without settling in the land that God had promised to them. On the other hand, Joshua and Caleb outlived them all and settled in the land.

Some people have found the secret to overcoming adversity and challenges in life. I admire people like Joshua and Caleb, who had their feet on the ground but who lived above the harsh realities of life.

I have found in the Bible another person who lived this way. 445 years before Christ the city of Jerusalem was in a shambles. Nation after nation had plundered the area and it was now under the thumb of the Persian Empire. In this low point in Israel's history God raised up a man to be the trusted and honoured cupbearer to the Persian ruler, King Artaxerxes. In conversation with his countrymen Nehemiah learned of the condition of Jerusalem. Through prayer and gritty determination Nehemiah decided to return to the

city of his ancestors to rebuild its walls. With the helpers given to him by the king, Nehemiah travelled to Jerusalem and carefully inspected the walls. By this time he knew what God wanted him to do but he had not yet revealed the plan to his associates.

After looking over the walls of the city, this man of vision and faith concluded in Nehemiah 2:17:

Then I [Nehemiah] said to them, "You see the trouble we are in: Jerusalem lies in ruins, and its gates have been burned with fire. Come, let us rebuild the wall of Jerusalem, and we will no longer be in disgrace."

World-changers can see:

Problems



I am sure that Nehemiah's heart sank as he looked over the city that he had heard so much about. This was where his ancestors had lived and died. His heart was stirred as he pictured his great grandparents walking the streets of Jerusalem and as he imagined the splendour that the city had once enjoyed. All of these dreams for the future had come to an abrupt halt when the Babylonians had stormed the city gates 142 years earlier. Now the city laid in disgrace.

Nehemiah could have easily concluded that the devastation was too widespread and that the walls of Jerusalem could not be rebuilt. "Forget it," he could have said. "Let's go back to Susa and to King Artaxerxes' palace there." Nehemiah was well aware of all the challenges and struggles that lay ahead and of all the comforts and luxuries he had left behind in the king's palace.

Nehemiah did not have his head in the sand. This is a common trait of people who make significant contributions with their lives.

Jesus certainly did not have His head in the sand when He lived amongst people. Luke 5:17-22 is but one example:

One day as he was teaching, Pharisees and teachers of the law, who had come from every village of Galilee and from Judea and Jerusalem, were sitting there. And the power of the Lord was present for him to heal the sick. {18} Some men came carrying a paralytic on a mat and tried to take him into the house to lay him before Jesus. {19} When they could not find a way to do this because of the crowd, they went up on the roof and lowered him on his mat through the tiles into the middle of the crowd, right in front of Jesus. {20} When Jesus saw their faith, he said, "Friend, your sins are forgiven." {21} The Pharisees and the teachers of the law began thinking to themselves, "Who is this fellow who speaks blasphemy? Who can forgive sins but God alone?" {22} Jesus knew what they were thinking and asked, "Why are you thinking these things in your hearts?"

Jesus was very much in touch with reality as He warned His disciples of opposition in Matthew 10:16-18:

I am sending you out like sheep among wolves. Therefore be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves. {17} "Be on your guard against men; they will hand you over to the local councils and flog you in their synagogues. {18} On my account you will be brought before governors and kings as witnesses to them and to the Gentiles.

Some of the spookiest people I have met happen to be Christians. They are out of touch with reality! They deal with problems either by running from them or by sticking their heads in the sand. If they spook me, what do you suppose they do to people who are *not* Christians?

There is a notion amongst some Christians that emphasizes one of two extremes:

1. The world is falling apart and there is nothing we can do about it except hang in here until Jesus returns.
2. People of faith are not people who admit their struggles. Admitting such struggles gives glory to the devil so we better think and speak only positively.

What makes these two extremes so difficult to deal with is that each has a measure of truth (which can be said of almost any extreme teaching). Yes, our world is broken and its restoration will only be made complete when Jesus Christ comes again. Yes, it is very important what we dwell on in our thoughts and speech. Continually dwelling on the negative does no one any good.

Ed noticed the furrowed brow of his friend and commented, "You sure look worried."

Ned replied, "Man, I've got so many troubles that if anything bad happens to me today, it'll be at least two weeks before I can worry about it."

Having warned you to avoid two extremes common to North American Christianity, let me say now that if you want to make a difference with your life you need to face your problems head-on. The first step in dealing with your problems is to acknowledge they are there.

Are there problems in you or around you that you have been trying to avoid? Have you considered how this has affected your growth and progress?

World-changers can see:

Problems

Solutions



Nehemiah fully recognized the magnitude of the problems that lay ahead of him and his helpers. Instead of denying the problems or running from them, however, he chose to face them with solutions. Nehemiah was determined to obey the Lord in following through with the wisdom and strategy given to him. "Let's rebuild!" he thundered. God-given ideas can overcome any problems that are ahead!

Remember Jesus' awareness of all the scepticism around Him? He faced those problems in Luke 5:23-26:

Which is easier: to say, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Get up and walk'? {24} But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins...." He said to the paralyzed man, "I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home." {25} Immediately he stood up in front of them, took what he had been lying on and went home praising God. {26} Everyone was amazed and gave praise to God. They were filled with awe and said, "We have seen remarkable things today."

Remember Jesus' warnings to His followers of persecution? He urges us to rely upon the Holy Spirit to face such problems in Matthew 10:19-20:

But when they arrest you, do not worry about what to say or how to say it. At that time you will be given what to say, {20} for it will not be you speaking, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you.

Yes, there will be challenges and problems. Yes, you can do all things through Christ who gives you strength!

Let me explain the relationship between fact and faith. That you are sitting before me in this church meeting is fact. That I am standing, speaking to you, is fact. It is faith that makes me believe anyone is listening.

You might have a nagging habit, a person or a circumstance that you smash your nose on again and again. There is a solution! Finding a solution could involve these steps:

1. Acknowledge your problem – quit hiding it or blaming someone else for it. Change comes when you are sick and tired of the status quo.
2. Bring it to the Lord in prayer – so many of our prayers are filled with nothing but nice religious phrases that do not truly reveal the struggles and pain that goes on in our guts.
3. Confess it to people who can help.
4. Begin to take action toward a specific solution and goal – people often avoid goals because it makes them accountable for their choices.
5. Make yourself accountable to someone who will ask you how you are doing with your goal.

In June of 1999, my mom lay dying with cancer on a hospital bed in High River. Our family knew the end of her earthly life was near and the medical personnel were very gracious in allowing us to stay with her day and night. That week was very emotional as I asked God again and again to heal my mom. We could see her life slipping away because by Tuesday she had quit eating and by Wednesday evening all Mom could do was blink her eyelids in response to yes or no questions. All through the week we urged a member of our family to join us in the vigil. She lived out of town and seemed to ignore our pleas to come. It angered me when I learned why: she had been praying for Mom and was convinced that God was going to heal her. She was claiming Mom's healing and by coming to join us in the High River Hospital she was, in her mind, admitting that Mom was dying. This to her was a lack of faith.

Mom deteriorated through the week until by Friday night she was fighting for every breath. My family member still had not arrived but, fortunately, we received word that she was on her way. By 2:00 a.m. on Saturday I had begun reading aloud the awesome passage on the Christian's hope of the resurrection in 1 Corinthians 15. Halfway through the chapter our family member burst in

to the room and urged us all to lay hands on Mom and to claim her healing. We had already prayed over Mom many times and had come to grips with the reality that God was about to take her home to heaven. A couple hours later Mom slipped into eternity, we said our goodbyes and left our family member alone with her body, continuing to claim her healing and now expecting Mom to be raised from the dead.

Fortunately, this family member that I love has since come to grips with Mom's death. This whole experience, however, has left an indelible fingerprint on me. The teaching on healing that my relative had been exposed to is all too common today. Such teaching has left God's people ill-prepared to deal with the adversity that we face in life.

Yes, there was the problem of cancer. God could have easily healed my mom. His solution was higher than my plans, however. His solution was to usher her directly into His presence. I do not regret praying for Mom's healing. The Bible exhorts us to face such problems with a healthy mixture of faith, hope and reality.

Nehemiah had a practical, balanced grip on reality. He was no airhead: "You see the bad situation we are in," he said in his opening speech to the people. He had the workers stay at the job with diligence, but he also stationed others, in shifts, to guard the wall from attack. He acted without overreacting; he was gracious but unbendingly firm. World-changers maintain that needed balance between being positive and being aware of the negative. Their heads may soar in the heavenlies, but their feet stay firmly fixed on earth's dirt.

There are some problems that I *cannot* solve in this world. The ones that I *can* solve I have determined, with God's help, to face.

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Problems
Solutions

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