

Hanging out With Heros

NEHEMIAH

Working with walls and
other impossibilities



Lorraine
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Introduction

Do you ever feel that the task before you is impossible? Would you like to give up right now? Learning how to “stick with it” when the going gets tough, and to see a job through to the end, isn’t easy. If a tendency to give up is one of your problems, take lessons from Nehemiah.

Giving Up a Lucrative Job

Someone hard up for jokes has called Knee-high-miah the shortest man in the Bible. Actually, he was a man of gigantic spiritual stature. He lived during the fifth century B.C., and was a member of the Jewish minority whose ancestors had chosen to stay in Persia (modern-day Iran), he worked for the king, waiting on him and tasting his food and beverages to make certain there was no poison in the royal soup. This was a top job given only to one whom the king trusted completely.

God had another job for Nehemiah, however. His brother, Hanai, had made a trip back to Jerusalem. Horrified by the condition of the city, he described the sight to Nehemiah when he returned to Susa; The city walls were heaps of rubble and the gates had been burned down. Nehemiah was deeply concerned, but not wanting to make a rash decision, he prayed. After four months of prayerful consideration, he concluded that God wanted him to travel the thousand-plus miles to Jerusalem and supervise the rebuilding of the wall. Nehemiah then asked the king for a leave of absence, official letters guaranteeing safe passage, and permission to use logs from the king's forest to rebuild the gates – promising to return when he had completed the task. The king gave him all he asked for, and even threw in an armed escort.

Facing opposition

After arriving in Jerusalem, Nehemiah sneaked out one night and inspected the broken walls, then announced to the leaders why he had come. They agreed to help him rebuild the wall. Each family and each individual were given a specific job.

As the rebuilding progressed, the non-Jewish neighbors became angry, for they didn't want Jerusalem to become a strong city. Sanballat, governor of the nearby city of Samaria, and Tobiah, leader of the people called the Ammonites, rallied their people to stop the project, and tried every trick they could imagine; ridicule, rumors, threats of force, and attempts to kill Nehemiah. But opposition only made Nehemiah and his people work harder. They worked with weapons in their hands while others stood guard, all the

while trusting God and refusing to give in to the enemy's threats. After fifty-two days of diligent work, they had completed the wall.

To celebrate, Nehemiah gathered his people and had the Word of God read to them. Then they had a big feast. To dedicate the walls, the people formed two parades that marched around the walls in opposite directions, and met at the temple for a Thanksgiving service.

Nehemiah spent twelve years in Jerusalem doing everything possible to make sure the Jews followed God's law. Then, true to his promise, he returned to Jerusalem, trying to turn his disobedient countrymen back to the Lord. His primary concern was always the glory of God and the obedience of God's people.

Nehemiah was a man of action, organization, and responsibility, a natural leader who could have done many things well, and enjoyed material success and prestige. Instead, he spent his life helping others, and history is different because Nehemiah chose God's priorities and not his own.

The Time of Your Life

“They said to me, ‘Those who survived the exile and are back in the province are in great trouble and disgrace. The wall of Jerusalem is broken down, and its gates have been burned with fire.’ When I heard these things, I sat down and wept. For some days I mourned and fasted and prayed before the God of heaven” (Nehemiah 1: 3, 4).

Someone has said, “Time is the stuff of which life is made. Waste your time and you waste your life.” How you spend your time determines to a large extent, what your life will be. But how should you decide, among all the demands for your time, what things are worthwhile doing? Should you sign up for Spanish II because your buddy did? Should you apply for the first job you see in the ads? Should you attend the college that's closest to home? Aren't you tired of making spur-of-the-moment decisions that get you into trouble?

Nehemiah made choices – good choices. When he heard the wall of

Jerusalem was in shambles, he had to decide whether or not to go there to supervise its rebuilding – a job that would take much time and effort. How did he make such a big decision?

First, he was willing to do God's will, no matter what the cost. He was willing to risk an “off-with-your-head” edict from a king who might be furious with him for requesting a leave of absence. God's will was worth any sacrifice.

Do you consider God's will that important? Would you give up daily tennis games, the evenings with your girlfriend, or your favorite TV programs in order to spend your time going God's way?

Second, Nehemiah prayed – extensively. Although he was willing to make any necessary sacrifices, he didn't proceed until he was sure it was God's will. He recognized he could give up everything to serve God and still be completely out of God's will, so Nehemiah spent four months praying about it before he took action.

You, too, have to ask God to show His plans for you. What you do for Jesus is not your choice, it's His. In fact, He might have a better idea about what you can do to build His kingdom than you do!

One man, who, as a young person, was confused about choosing the right occupation, was told by a friend, “Spend five minutes each day praying about this decision.” He took the advice and got his answer.

Why don't you try it? Instead of complaining to everyone, “I just don't know if I should break up with Jeff” (got the refrain?), pray about it every day.

Nehemiah was willing to make the necessary sacrifices, and then he spent enough time praying to discover God's plan for his life. God, in turn, took care of the king's attitude and marvelously opened the way for Nehemiah to go and rebuild the wall. If you will dedicate your time to God and ask Him what walls He wants rebuilt, you, like Nehemiah, will receive His guidance and see His miracles. But don't try to build the wrong wall. If you will spend the time of your life for God, you will have the time of your life.

“Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life?”

You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes” (James 4: 14).

“Show me, O Lord, my life’s end and the number of my days; let me know how fleeting is my life” (Psalm 39: 4).

“Be very careful, then, how you live – not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil” (Ephesians 5: 15, 16).

1. What is the danger of thinking; I'm young and have my whole life ahead of me. I shouldn't have to think about responsibility just yet?
2. Life is amazingly short, but instead of letting the shortness of life scare you, how should you react?
3. Why is it important to set your priorities now, while you are young?
4. Pray and ask God to show you how to use your time.

“But I Always Travel Without Roadmaps”

“The king said to me, ‘What is it you want?’ Then I prayed to the God of heaven, and I answered the king, ‘If it pleases the king and if your servant has found favor in his sight, let him send me to the city in Judah where my fathers are buried so that I can rebuild it.’ Then the king, with the queen sitting beside him, asked me, ‘How long will your journey take, and when will you get back?’ It pleased the king to send me; so I set a time. I also said to him, ‘If it pleases the king, may I have letters to the governors of Trans-Euphrates, so that they will provide me safe-conduct until I arrive in Judah? And may I have a letter to Asaph, keeper of the king’s forest, so he will give me timber to make beams for the gates of the citadel by the temple and for the city wall and for the residence I will occupy?’” And because the gracious hand of my God was upon me, the king granted my requests” (Nehemiah 2: 4-8).

How would you respond if someone told you, “I know I should go to New York, so I'm just heading in that general direction. I really don't need a

roadmap”? It may *sound* super-spiritual to “live by faith,” never giving a thought for the next moment, but it isn’t. God doesn’t usually work that way. Consider some of His great acts – instructions for building the ark, for conquering Jericho, and for crossing the Red Sea; all were step-by-step directions. If Noah had designed the ark, it may have sunk. Joshua’s parade plans may have invited an enemy attack. Moses’ foray into the Red Sea may have turned into a session of free swimming lessons!

When God gives a goal, He also outlines each step necessary to reach it – a roadmap! Planning ahead with God is right. Making a certain plan into an idol, however, and being unwilling to change it, is wrong. And expecting a risk-free roadmap shows lack of faith in God.

Nehemiah had spent time planning with God. He knew he needed two things from the king – a letter guaranteeing safe passage through countries on the way, and big trees from the king’s forests for building the city’s gates. He may have desired horses and chariots to give the trip some style (after all, God’s servants need some luxuries). He may have wished for cattle and sheep to provide roast beef sandwiches for picnics and lamb chops for snacks (after all, he needed strength to do a good job). But Nehemiah did not make his own plans for wall-building. He got his plans from God.

If God has shown you a wall to build – taking college prep courses, developing your talent as a musician, or being president of the youth group, be a Nehemiah who plans with God. Find out what doing a good job will entail. Decide what sacrifices you must make to reach the goal. For instance, you can’t work nights, attend football practices, and still keep your grades up – you’ll have to sacrifice something. Ask God to set your priorities, then you can forget about doing other seemingly important things. Ask Him what you should omit from your schedule so you can practice your guitar every day – if He has told you to become a topnotch guitarist. Don’t start on a God-assigned project, and then do a poor job because you failed to follow instructions.

God can use you if, by faith, you receive step-by-step instructions from Him. Don’t be the guy or gal who says, “Oh, I know what God wants me to do. Now I’ll just figure out how to do it.” That’s like trying to draw your own roadmap. A few miles down the road you’ll be hopelessly lost. So don’t draw

your own roadmap, and don't travel without one. Get your directions from God. Spend as much time praying about how to accomplish the goal God gave you to pursue as you did finding out what your goal is.

"Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Will he not first sit down and estimate the cost to see if he has enough money to complete it? In the same way, any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple" (Luke 14: 28, 33).

"... and if you call out for insight and cry aloud for understanding, and if you look for it as for silver and search for it as for hidden treasure, then you will understand the fear of the Lord and find the knowledge of God. For the Lord gives wisdom, and from his mouth come knowledge and understanding" (Proverbs 2: 3-6).

"The Lord delights in the way of the man whose steps he has made firm; though he stumble, he will not fall, for the Lord upholds him with his hand" (Psalm 37: 23, 24).

1. Are you willing to make the sacrifices necessary to reach your goal?
2. How do you get step-by-step instructions from God?
3. What promises can you claim if you consistently seek God's guidance for each step?
4. Are you willing to put enough prayer into planning your life step-by-step with God? What things in your life need special prayer right now?

Act Like a Branch

"Adjoining this, Jedaiah son of Harumaph made repairs opposite his house, and Hattush son of Hashabneiah made repairs next to him. Malkijah son of Harim and Hasshub son of Pahath-Moab repaired another section and the Tower of the Ovens. Shallum son of Hallohesh, ruler of a half-district of

Jerusalem, repaired the next section with the help of his daughters. The Valley Gate was repaired by Hanun and the residents of Zanoah. They rebuilt it and put its doors and bolts and bars in place. They also repaired five hundred yards of the wall as far as the Dung Gate” (Nehemiah 3: 10-13).

Boredom is probably the most common teenagers’ disease in the world. When the English teacher picks up her grammar book, the kids at school groan in unison, “Oh, not that again!” “There’s nothing to do around here” is repeated in every town in this country. Most teenagers say classes are boring and work is a drag.

The usual prescription for boredom is: “Do something exciting,” or, “Change your lifestyle,” or “Move somewhere else.” But those who try such solutions find that the new school also has boring classes; that the city isn’t much more exciting than the small town, and that the new job remains interesting for only the first month. So what *is* the cure for boredom? Ask Nehemiah.

When Nehemiah organized the rebuilding of Jerusalem’s wall, he assigned each individual or family a section to build, or a responsibility to fulfill. No doubt, some workers wished they could be traveling to the king’s forest to bring back logs, rather than laboring hour after hour, day after day on the same section of wall. But because each person stuck with his assignment, the wall was completed. Everyone worked wholeheartedly, in spite of boredom.

God has some high priority work for you – if you intend to help build His kingdom. He may be asking you to study extra hard in order to develop your Bible-teaching ability. He may want you to become the best worker at MacDonald’s so your testimony to your boss will change his life. God may desire you to work hard on voice lessons so you can sing for His glory – not your own – and thus be used in His kingdom. He’d no doubt like to revamp your personality so people can see a reflection of Jesus in you. He wants to teach you right attitudes toward money and possessions so they won’t sidetrack you from doing His will.

Do such projects seem boring and uninteresting? Compared to what the devil is baiting you with, they maybe do. Satan will always try to lure you away from God’s priorities with promises of excitement. But if you ditch God’s priorities and pursue some new thrill, you will eventually learn a painful

lesson; Satisfaction and fulfillment come, not from what you do, but from how you do it. Doing something for your own satisfaction leads to a miserable dead end. Zilch. Performing a task for God's glory, however, brings supernatural blessing. If you cooperate wholeheartedly with God, He will miraculously turn you into a worker who glorifies Him. Nothing could be greater than teaching a Bible study in the power of the Holy Spirit – or more boring than lying on the beach thinking only of yourself.

How do you get in on this power of the Holy Spirit? Jesus said, “I am the vine; you are the branches ... apart from me you can do nothing (worthwhile, deeply satisfying, or pleasing to God)” (John 15: 5). A branch receives everything from the vine. So ask Jesus, the True Vine, how to listen in church, how to clean up the kitchen, how to do math problems, or how to really enjoy a picnic. Just act like a branch and receive from Jesus a life that is not boring.

“I am the vine, you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. If anyone does not remain in me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you. This is to my Father’s glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples. As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father’s commands and remain in his love” (John 15: 5-10).

1. In what areas of your life are you frequently tempted to search for more excitement, rather than doing the best you can where you are?
2. Are you trying to find satisfaction in the wrong way? What is the right way?
3. What can you do this week to depend on God completely, as a branch would depend on the vine?

Sign Up for “Improving Your Work Habits, 101”

“The next section was repaired by the men of Tekoa, but their nobles would not put their shoulders into the work under their supervisors” (Nehemiah 3: 5).

“Meanwhile, the people in Judah said, ‘The strength of the laborers is giving out, and there is so much rubble that we cannot rebuild the wall’” (Nehemiah 4: 10).

It's easy to begin a task with gusto, but the follow through is often difficult. You determine to write the best term paper possible in order to glorify God, but then you find out how much time and work a good term paper requires. Discouragement sets in. You promise to help your father with the spring yard work, but then you realize what the job really involves. You consider trying to get out of it. You agree to phone twenty people to remind them about the youth group retreat. But as you discover that teenagers don't always answer their phones, you're wondering if you really want to keep your word. You get completely bummed out.

Discouragement seems to strike everywhere – so easily. Just looking at the long chapter you're supposed to read makes you decide the assignment is impossible. And as you view the mound of debris in your room, you know how the tribe of Judah felt when they said the quantity of trash made wall-building impossible! Often, the amount of physical work involved keeps you from sticking with the priorities God has given you.

The feeling of being overwhelmed, however, is not really what keeps you from reaching the goals God has set for you. The underlying reason is laziness and pride. Laziness keeps you from doing the daily assignments and taking notes during each class period. Therefore, studying for the test is nearly impossible. Laziness makes you decide you're too tired to complete a hard or uninteresting job.

Pride made the nobles of Jerusalem consider wall-building beneath their dignity, and you may be guilty of the same attitude. After all, why should a straight “A” student who was just voted “Best-All-Around” by the senior class have to carry out his family's garbage every night? And why should the runner-up for homecoming queen have to suffer dishpan hands?

The solution to laziness and pride is not covering up by saying, “I’m easily discouraged,” or, “Laziness runs in my family,” or, “There are some jobs I just don’t like.” You must face the problem that keeps you from accomplishing what God wants you to do.

You first must deal with laziness and pride as sin. If you are not willing to work hard, God can do nothing with you. If you refuse to tackle tough, thankless jobs, He’ll find someone else to build His kingdom. Forget your excuses and confront the issue. Repent of your wrong attitudes.

You then must receive God’s grace and power to overcome laziness and pride – and instill diligence in your life. Pray for God’s step-by-step guidance in writing your term paper. Then obey at every point. Ask God where to begin on the long assignment, the messy room, or the overgrown yard. Ask Him for courage to tackle the next task He has for you.

In case you’re discouraged, take courage. God wants to work a miracle in you – giving you organization, diligence, and a will to work. He knows if you find it harder than most people to be neat. He understands if you have a tendency to lose things. He will give you whatever you need to overcome the discouragement you feel in facing a big job, because He’s got a course especially designed to improve your work habits. Why not sign up for it today?

“‘Be strong, all you people of the land,’ declares the Lord, ‘and work. For I am with you,’ declares the Lord Almighty” (Haggai 2: 4).

“If you are willing and obedient, you will eat the best from the land” (Isaiah 1: 19).

“Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another’s feet” (John 13: 14).

“Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain” (1 Corinthians 15: 58).

1. What attitudes toward work does God want you to adopt?

2. What promises does God have for the diligent worker?
3. Which attitude do you need God to place in you? Ask Him to do it.
4. Ask God to show you how to apply something from these verses to a job you need to get done. Ask Him for His grace and instructions.

Orders from the General Himself

“When Sanballat heard that we were rebuilding the wall, he became angry and was greatly incensed. He ridiculed the Jews, and in the presence of his associates and the army of Samaria, he said, ‘What are those feeble Jews doing? Will they restore their wall? Will they offer scarifies? Will they finish in a day? Can they bring the stones back to life from those heaps of rubble – burned as they are?’ Tobiah the Ammonite, who was at his side, said, ‘What they are building – if even a fox climbed up on it, he would break down their wall of stones!’ Hear us, O our God, for we are despised. Turn their insults back on their own heads. Give them over as plunder in a land of captivity. So we rebuilt the wall till all of it reached half its height, for the people worked with all their hearts” (Nehemiah 4: 1-4, 6).

Do you take opinion polls among your friends before you drop basketball or to decide which outfit to buy? Or do you ask God? Do you fall apart if someone says you are “straight-laced, sober, and sad,” and therefore a poor advertisement for Christianity? Or do you ask God what He thinks of you and what changes He would like you to make? Do you accept it as fact if one of your Christian friends says you're wasting your time by teaching the third grade Sunday school class? Or do you request an evaluation from the Lord? The devil loves using the opinions of others to mix up your priorities and keep you from accomplishing the jobs God assigns you. When the devil tried this tactic on Nehemiah, however, it failed. Nehemiah simply ignored the insults and continued building.

The devil uses two kinds of “public opinion” to make you ineffective. The first kind is ridicule from unbelievers. If you drop basketball so you can lead a Bible study, many people will suggest you're crazy. If you decide to get by

on last year's wardrobe so you can give more money to missions, you're more apt to get a Bronx cheer than a standing ovation. Such mockery and disrespect can easily paralyze you.

Besides the teasing you may receive for a specific decision, Satan uses general ridicule to wear you down and deter you from following God's priorities. Such ridicule shows up in every school via the Don't-Need-No-Education Club. Its "members" threaten kids who won't join the sit-down strike in gym class, and constantly taunt Brian Bookworm and Heidi Homework.

God wants you to ignore them, to relax, and to keep God's priorities: obedience to authority and working to the best of your ability. When a member of the Ego Demolition Squad quips, "Did you get your haircut at the poodle boutique?" don't let Satan convince you to hide for a month because you look too terrible to witness to anybody. When some self-crowned princess remarks that your skirt must have come from your grandmother's attic, don't decide that all the kids hate you because your wardrobe isn't up to date, and therefore you don't dare ask Sherri to attend church with you. Learn, as Nehemiah, to ignore the abuse and keep building the wall that God has given you to build.

The other kind of destructive public opinion is wrong advice and discouraging comments from Christian friends. How should you handle such opinions? Again, ignore them. Although God often will use the council of other Christians to confirm what He has already told you, you must be careful to always get your orders from God – first. When God has clearly given you His plan, ignore the doubts of other Christians and walk ahead in faith. If He wants you to be brave and to suffer for Jesus, you must not listen to the words of those who would rescue you from doing God's will.

In the army, the commander-in-chief's orders cancel all other suggestions and orders. A fellow private's advice can never outweigh the words of the general Himself.

"Then Pilate took Jesus and had him flogged. The soldiers twisted together a crown of thorns and put it on his head. They clothed him in a purple robe and

went up to him again and again, saying, ‘Hail, O king of the Jews!’ And they struck him in the face” (John 19: 1-3).

“Who is going to harm you if you are eager to do good? But even if you should suffer for what is right, you are blessed. ‘Do not fear what they fear; do not be frightened.’ But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander” (1 Peter 3: 13-16).

1. What comfort can you have when you are persecuted?
2. What are specific things to remember when you are ridiculed?
3. Why is it wrong to let ridicule stop you from completing the work God has given you?

Easy Street is Boring

“When our enemies heard that we were aware of their plot and that God had frustrated it, we all returned to the wall, each to his own work, while the other half were equipped with spears, shields, bows and armor. The officers posted themselves behind all the people of Judah who were building the wall. Those who carried materials did their work with one hand and held a weapon in the other, and each of the builders wore his sword at his side as he worked. But the man who sounded the trumpet stayed with me” (Nehemiah 4: 15-18).

Have you ever wished for push-button consecration, or a Complete-Surrender-to-Jesus-in-Ten-Easy-Lessons course – with a lifetime guarantee, or a vaccination against temptation? Could you use a vacation from Satan’s attacks? Would you like to live on Easy Street, at least for a while? Don’t count on it.

Once you have completely given yourself to Jesus and received His Holy Spirit, the devil will test your surrender mercilessly. Someone has compared your initial commitment to entering the right gate – and finding there a long

road to your destination. Life is designed this way so you can walk hand in hand with Jesus, trusting Him for every step. If there were no obstacles or temptations, you'd try to walk that road by yourself.

Such a life, however, isn't unending misery. Overcoming constant opposition gives life a certain excitement, a cutting edge. Nehemiah and his people, for instance, weren't basket cases because an enemy was harassing them. They decided that they could guard against danger and continue to build the wall. The opposition inspired cooperation, a renewed dedication to the job, and a greater trust in God. God allowed their priorities to be tested so they could strengthen their faith.

Life without a challenge is boring. Playing football against third graders would be easy – but not fun. Canoeing the kiddie canal at the amusement park or skiing the bunny hill would be effortless – but dull. That's why God allows constant challenges in your Christian life – so you'll grow, and no longer be a whining baby Christian.

The sooner you quit seeking a safe, boring, easy Christian life, the better. You must always be on guard against Satan's attacks; today's victory will not help you tomorrow. You will have to stay close to Jesus and let Him protect you, because wandering out on your own will get you into deep trouble.

In a way, the Christian life is like a science fiction cartoon, with you as the main character. God has given you secret power against the devil. But whenever you venture off on your own, any attack of Satan crash-lands you on a hostile, lonely planet. But if you stay close to Jesus, He'll always win the battle for you – and everybody likes to be on the winning side.

“Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the body is weak” (Matthew 26: 41).

“So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall!” (1 Corinthians 10:12).

“Be on your guard; stand firm in the faith; be men of courage; be strong” (1 Corinthians 16: 13).

“Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour” (1 Peter 5: 8).

1. At what times do you find it easy to let down your guard?
2. Which areas in your life are you not guarding with prayer and faith?
3. Do you watch with courage or with fear?
4. How can you start being more alert for Satan’s attacks?

First on Your Agenda

“So on the first day of the seventh month Ezra the priest brought the Law before the assembly, which was made up of men and women and all who were able to understand. On the second day of the month, the heads of all the families, along with the priests and the Levites, gathered around Ezra the scribe to give attention to the words of the Law” (Nehemiah 8: 2, 13).

What would you have done after spending fifty-two days on backbreaking work and tense guard duty to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem? If a Mediterranean cruise or some other vacation weren’t possible, you could do a lot of important work; building much needed houses, and attending to overgrown farms.

All sorts of lesser jobs had been postponed so the wall could be built. But instead of caring for any of these pressing needs, Nehemiah and his people took two days off to hear the Word of God. Impractical? In addition, they set aside other days that month to observe the celebration God had prescribed in the Law of Moses. Returning to God and obeying His Word was more important to them than work that “just has to get done.”

Maybe you're already aware that life can grind on like a relentless machine – classes, homework, part-time job, choir rehearsal, Sunday afternoon, and then you start another carbon-copy week. Maybe you’ve noticed that making time payments, keeping up with the Joneses – or the kid at school, and trying to accomplish too many things at once can imprison you. It can seem like a merry-go-round that never stops – and you're on the wrong horse! Life makes so many demands on a person.

A man once remarked to another, “Your greatest danger is letting the urgent things crowd out the important.” You may be groaning in response, “If only I could discover what things are important. Straightening out priorities isn’t possible.”

However, Jesus knew what His priority should be; glorifying God. When Jesus’ ministry was nearing its end, He could honestly say to His Father, “I have brought you glory on earth by completing the work you gave me to do” (John 17: 4). Jesus did not heal every leper or preach to every person in Palestine. He did not get to do everything He might have enjoyed. But He had confidence and peace despite big crowds and a busy schedule, because He did exactly what God wanted Him to do. His life made sense and was full of accomplishment. Yours can be too.

Start discovering God's priorities by reading and studying God's Word. If you are obeying God's general biblical teachings about money, or work habits, or heart attitudes, you can expect specific guidance about what is your next important step. So take time to study the Bible every day.

You will also discover God's priorities by praying. Rather than bolting out of bed at the last moment and dashing off to school or a day of skiing, get up earlier and spend time talking to God about your activities. In his wonderful booklet, *Tyranny of the Urgent*, Charles Hummel suggests you take some time each week to pray and plan with God, choosing your priorities for that week. (You could start by spending ten minutes each Sunday morning.)

Be willing to obey God and stick so close to Him so that you won't wander down a wrong path. Let Him decide what will be first on your agenda. Your life will be much better if you spend it doing only the things God has planned for you.

“Paul and his companions traveled throughout the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been kept by the Holy Spirit from preaching the word in the province of Asia. When they came to the border of Mysia, they tried to enter Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus would not allow them to. So they passed by Mysia and went down to Troas. During the night Paul had a vision of a man

of Macedonia standing and begging him, 'Come over to Macedonia and help us.' After Paul had seen the vision, we got ready at once to leave for Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them” (Acts 16: 6-10).

1. What priority did Paul and his friends establish?
2. (Read Mark 16: 15, Acts 1: 8.) What general plan of God were they already following?
3. Are you disobeying any of God's general biblical principles? Which ones?
4. Ask God to help you set top priorities for this week. Write them down.