

Rescue— Tough Love

Read Nehemiah 9:26-27.

1. Summarize today's scripture.
2. Summarize 2 Chronicles 36:15-16.
3. Jesus told a story of a young man who rebelled. Possibly his father had repeatedly tried to bring his son back to right behavior and to God, but the son refused to listen. Finally the father made a tough decision. What was this, and what happened in the story after the father's decision? See Luke 15:11-32.
4. Were there times when God quit taking care of His people temporarily to bring them back to himself? If you can, give an example.
5. Summarize Deuteronomy 4:29-31, specifically recording verse 29.

Nehemiah 9 is a recounting of how the people rebelled repeatedly, but God rescued them again and again when they turned to Him. Yet sometimes we overlook the fact that God rarely rescued His people immediately. Usually years of sinning and disobedience would go by until the circumstances of the people became so adverse that they could tolerate it no longer. When they were lying in the bed they had made, they found out how miserable it was and cried to be rescued.

God allowed His people to suffer the consequences of their own behavior. When they chose evil, God would not intervene to protect them from that evil. He allowed them to feel the devastation of their own choices. He loved them so much that He looked not to the moment or the temporary, but to the long run or

the permanent. If God immediately rescued His people from the consequences of wrong choices, they would never learn the valuable, necessary lesson of obedience. Therefore, He allowed them to suffer so that they would learn to turn to Him for rescue and begin to choose Him first.

As Christians today, we may sometimes think it is our responsibility to rescue those in rebellion before they suffer the consequences. We sometimes think it's our job to protect people from evil. But according to the pattern shown us in the Word, God always allows His people to have free choice. If we choose evil, we must suffer in order to be brought back to Him. We actually might interfere with God's plan by rescuing too soon.

When the prodigal son left home, we know his father's heart must have been heavy. He probably did not know if he would ever see his son again. Obviously the son chose a very rebellious lifestyle. The father knew the risks and had no guarantees that his son would ever return to him.

But because of the father's wisdom and courage, he was able to allow his prodigal son to hit rock bottom. Things couldn't get much worse than longing to have the pig's slop for dinner. That was the moment the son realized that the path he had chosen was one of destruction. That was the moment the son made a new choice—a choice for good and for God.

What if the father had protected the son from the consequences of his own behavior? What if he continued to send him money in that foreign country or got a friend there to take him in and let him live in his home? Would the prodigal son have hit rock bottom? No, he would have been protected from the evil of his own choice. He might have been able to go on living like that forever.

When we protect and care for someone God wants to rescue, we thwart His plan. There is often a fine line between when we should care and protect and when we should let go and let one suffer the consequences of his or her own behavior. But when we never draw the line and always care and protect, we limit God. Love is sometimes tough. We have to have enough courage and faith to let our loved ones go to the "pigpen" in order that God can make a miraculous rescue and they can come back home.

Days 1, 3, and 4 written by Linda Shaw

MEMORY CHALLENGE

Try to recite the verse correctly aloud.

Returning Again to Evil

Read Nehemiah 9:28-31.

Often the blessings of God cause us to forget Him. Verse 28 tells of the repeated disobedience of the Israelites as they continue their prayer of confession.

1. Summarize verse 28 as briefly as possible.
2. Record Psalm 106:43.
3. Record Isaiah 30:18.
4. From Nehemiah 9:29 list the phrases that describe the actions of the Israelites.
5. Summarize Zechariah 7:11-12.
6. How does Nehemiah 9:30-31 describe God's faithfulness?
7. Summarize the following verses:

2 Kings 17:13

Psalm 78:38

Isaiah 48:9
8. Record James 1:25.

As God's people continue in their lengthy prayer of confession, they explain that God's blessing continued in spite of their rebellion; also rebellion continued in spite of His blessing. They heard the Word of God but placed no importance on being obedient to its commandments. They saw miracles performed on their behalf but didn't respond in faith, reverence, or gratitude. They became self-indulgent, fell under the power of luxury, became totally corrupt, and sinned against all the mercies of God. He then had to destroy them by His judgments.

Some of our modern-day fallen television evangelists may have been very sincere in their commitment to God when they began, but as the last two sentences in the preceding paragraph describe the Israelites, they also describe these failed ministers. Worship of power, money, and ego, plus sexual promiscuity, finally destroyed them and many of those who followed blindly. We can see sinful nature hasn't changed them. We need to be living a devoted life for God, or we can be led astray as they were.

Nehemiah is a wonderful role model for the person described in James 1:25. Long before President Andrew Jackson said, “One man with courage is a majority,” Nehemiah had already proved it. Consider a few of Nehemiah’s well-known phrases:

The people worked with all their heart (4:6).

Our God will fight for us! (4:20).

I am carrying on a great project and cannot come down (6:3).

Do not grieve, for the joy of the LORD is your strength (8:10).

Remember me with favor, O my God (5:19).

The gracious hand of my God [was] upon me (2:18).

Because of his devotion and obedience to God, the hand of God was upon him—protecting, upholding, strengthening, and guiding. God wants to bless His obedient children. How different the Jewish history could have been!

Examine your obedience to scriptural principles. Ask God to reveal any blind spots that need to be made known. Obey God as never before. Be willing to make corrections in attitude and behavior. The resulting joy and peace will enrich your life and encourage a growing devotion to God and obedience to His Word.

MEMORY CHALLENGE

Do you feel you truly meditate and delight in the law of the Lord?