



As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another. Proverbs 27:17

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Words to Grow By

LINDA LEWIS, GMI DIRECTOR OF COMMUNICATIONS

REJOICE!

Rejoice in the Lord Always!
 In the good times...Rejoice!
 In the bad times...Rejoice!
 When you have a reason to...Rejoice!
 And even when you don't...Rejoice!
 Rejoice in the Lord always, again I will say
 Rejoice! *Philippians 4:4*

My Brothers and Sisters, when you look around and see/hear the troubles of this world,

It can become easy to ask why?
Why should I rejoice?

Well, I've come to tell you it's because
HE IS THE WAYMAKER!

HE is here, moving in our midst.
And HE is here mending every heart.
Even when we don't see it...HE'S working.
Even when we don't feel it...HE'S working.

HE NEVER stops working!

So never stop trusting, never stop believing...our God Reigns...REJOICE!

1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

Fear can paralyze us and keep us from believing God and stepping out in faith. The devil loves a fearful Christian!
 ~ Billy Graham



Nehemiah BY PASTOR MIKE HERNANDEZ, CHURCH OF THE HARVEST

This month we are going to learn from a man who was willing to give up everything he had because of a burden he felt for a place he never visited. Nehemiah was the cupbearer to the king of Persia (Nehemiah 1:11). The cupbearer was a very prestigious and trusted position.

Nehemiah was responsible for all the wine in the king's court and would even have to taste the wine prior to the king drinking (to ensure that it wasn't poisoned). Due to the corruption of the environment, this was a very trusted position as any enemy of the king could try to bribe or threaten the cupbearer for easy access to cause harm to the king. This was also a position that paid well as Nehemiah was a man of means.

And they said to me, "The remnant there in the province who had survived the exile is in great trouble and shame. The wall of Jerusalem is broken down, and its gates are destroyed by fire." As soon as I heard these words I sat down and wept and mourned for days, and I continued fasting and praying before the God of heaven. – Nehemiah 1:3-4

Nehemiah had grown up in Persia and had worked up the ranks to become the cup bearer. However, when he heard the news that the walls of Jerusalem were broken down, he wept. What is interesting is that the walls of Jerusalem were burned down some 140 years prior to this. Nehemiah would probably have known this fact, but when he heard a firsthand report of the state of the city, it broke his heart. Remember, back in those days, the walls of a city provided protection for the city. Without walls, the city was vulnerable to any attack from an enemy. Without walls, the people were never safe. Without walls, the city was never going to be rebuilt to any level of significance.

As Nehemiah prayed about the walls being broken down (Nehemiah 1:5-11), God gave him a burden to be an agent of change. As he was serving the king, the king noticed that he was sad. This was a dangerous moment for Nehemiah for you never wanted to be sad in the king's presence. When the king asked why he was sad, Nehemiah told him that the city of his fathers' tombs lies in waste and its gates are burned with fire. The king then asks Nehemiah what he requests so Nehemiah prayed (Nehemiah 2:1-4).

And I said to the king, "If it pleases the king, and if your servant has found favor in your sight, that you send me to Judah, to the city of my fathers' graves, that I may rebuild it." – Nehemiah 2:5

What a bold request! Nehemiah was risking everything he had - his position, his wealth and even his life when he made this request. The king agreed to send Nehemiah and then Nehemiah made another bold request - he asked the king to donate resources to rebuild the city. Nehemiah had favor with the king and the king granted his request.

Nehemiah Con't

Nehemiah went to Jerusalem and led the people in rebuilding the wall. He faced opposition and inspired the people to work hard. The wall was completed in 52 days (Nehemiah 6:15). Let's look at three keys to Nehemiah's success.

The first key to Nehemiah's success was that he continually prayed for wisdom and favor. From the moment he heard about the destruction of the gate, he went to the Lord in prayer. Then, when they faced opposition, Nehemiah prayed (Nehemiah 4:4-5). When social injustice arose, Nehemiah prayed (Nehemiah 5:19). When the enemy was pressuring Nehemiah to stop working on the wall, he prayed (Nehemiah 6:9). When the city celebrated the completion of the walls, Ezra and Nehemiah led the people in praise and repentance (Nehemiah 8 & 9). And finally, after he returned to Persia and then heard about how the people stopped following God's commands, he prayed (Nehemiah 13:22). Nehemiah prayed throughout the whole project. He prayed for strength. He prayed for wisdom. He prayed against those that opposed him. Nehemiah was a man of prayer!

The second key to Nehemiah's success was how he dealt with opposition. Three men, Sanballat, Tobiah and Geshem were not happy that the walls of Jerusalem were being built. At first, they laughed and despised Nehemiah (Nehemiah 2:19). Then they were furious, indignant and mocked Nehemiah (Nehemiah 4:1). Then these men were going to attack Jerusalem and stop the rebuilding so Nehemiah had to protect the city (Nehemiah 4:7-23). Then these men plotted a conspiracy about Nehemiah and even plotted to kill Nehemiah (Nehemiah 6:1-14). Nehemiah was aware of the opposition, prayed for wisdom and never gave in to the threats. He kept building the wall. Nehemiah never got sucked into the accusations and never gave in to the bullying and mocking. Nehemiah stood his ground.

The final key to Nehemiah's success was his leadership. When he arrived to Jerusalem, he had to communicate his desire to build the wall to a group of people who have always lived in a city without walls. He had to motivate them and lead them in rebuilding the wall. Nehemiah had to come up with a plan to defend the city when they were under the threat of attack. He had the people hold a tool in one hand and a weapon in the other. He positioned the people in the best defensive position so that they could help one another in case of attack (Nehemiah 4:13-23). When facing social injustice, Nehemiah rebuked the nobles and rulers (Nehemiah 5:1-13). Nehemiah was generous to the people (Nehemiah 5:14-19). Nehemiah was a great leader!

God gave Nehemiah a burden for what appeared an impossible task – rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem. God will give us burdens for impossible tasks as well. If we will pray, stand our ground against opposition, and lead well, we can accomplish amazing things for God. Nehemiah also received favor and blessing from those around him. We can expect that God will put people in our lives that will provide resource and protection as we work toward completing the impossible. However, with God, nothing is impossible!

Finishing Strong BY BEVERLY BROWN, GMI VOLUNTEER WRITER

Anyone who has ever participated in a race knows it's how you finish the race that's most important. Starting out strong can give you a certain advantage, but in order to win, you must be the first one across the finish line.

Second Chronicles lists the kings of Israel and Judah. It states whether the kings started out following the Lord. Some did but many did not. Israel and Judah were surrounded by nations who worshipped various false gods and idols. Those worshipping these gods and idols greatly influenced many of the kings.

Israel and Judah knew they were supposed to worship the one true God—the God of Abraham, Jacob and Isaac. God's prophets repeatedly warned against serving and worshipping false gods.

Some of the kings started out following the Lord. Their intentions were good, but somewhere along the way they were tempted to stray from Him. And did. Some of their decisions might not have seemed like that big of a deal, but they led the kings away from totally serving and depending on God.

King Rehoboam started off serving God but later abandoned the Lord—and all Israel followed him into sin.

Fortunately for King Rehoboam, he repented, so the Lord did not completely destroy him.

King Asa started off doing what was right in God's sight. However, as time went on, King Asa made a military alliance with the evil king, Aram. In doing so he put his faith in Aram rather than in the Lord. Thus pulling Asa away from his close relationship with God.

King Jehosaphat started out pleasing the Lord. He later made an alliance with a godless king, Ahab. The alliance was for Jehosaphat's son to marry Ahab's daughter. This alliance displeased the Lord.

King Uzziah started out serving God. The Lord blessed him abundantly. Instead of being thankful to the Lord, Uzziah became proud. In doing so, he depended on himself instead of inquiring of the Lord.

Although it does not seem these kings committed an awful sin, their walk away from the Lord began with the small step of compromise. Compromise can be a slippery slope away from the Lord.

On the other hand, King Manassah was very wicked as he began his reign. However, later he repented and cried out to the Lord.

Any time one of the king's repented and cried out to the Lord, the Lord forgave him and took him back. The same is true for us—anytime we repent and cry out to the Lord, He will forgive us. That is how loving our God is.

I have known young people who started out on fire for the Lord. They embraced their faith with great enthusiasm. They wanted to win the lost for Jesus.

As they grew and more of the world came to influence them, their faith waned and the fire they once had for the Lord became a cold ember.

Compromise sneaked in. Once these young people stood firm in their beliefs. Now little temptations edged their way in and after giving in to these temptations, the line between right and wrong blurred. Some even lost their faith altogether.

I've seen this in adults as well—even preachers. All it takes is giving in to one little temptation, then the next one doesn't seem so bad. It leads to that slippery slope away from the Lord.

As you can see by the kings I mentioned, it did not take a lot for them to lose their faith and reliance on God--influences from ungodly people, hanging out with the wrong crowd, or becoming prideful.

A strong start definitely has merit whether it is in an actual race, or in the Christian life. In the Christian life, it is important to start with accepting Jesus as your savior. Sound, Biblical teaching and time with the Lord give roots to our faith. It is important for your spiritual roots to go deep, thus helping you stay with the Lord and not being tossed to and fro by the teachings and influences of the world.

If you started out strong in your faith but have lost your fervor, I urge you to repent and ask the Lord to forgive you. He will welcome you back.

If you are strong in your faith, fight to stay strong in your faith. Don't let those temptations and compromise pull you from your relationship with Jesus.



Michael Franzese (Born 1951) –

Former New York Mobster and Head of the Colombo Crime Family Turned Christian

Michael Franzese was born into a life of crime, born in Brooklyn, New York; his father was the notorious Colombo Underboss John “Sonny” Franzese. In October 1975 Franzese attended Hofstra University but soon after decided to quit his college to join the Colombo family.

Franzese grew in the ranks of his mafia peers through creating lucrative money making schemes from the mafia, including extortion, money laundering, intimidation to his most famous scheme the infamous gasoline-bootlegging racket in the mid-1980’s.

In 1984 he met Camile Garcia, an evangelical Christian on a film set who would soon become his wife. Franzese credits his wife for introducing him to the Christian faith.

In 1985 he was indicted on 14 counts of racketeering, extortion, counterfeiting from the gasoline-bootlegging racket and was sentenced to ten years in federal prison but was released from prison after serving 43 months. In December 27, 1991 he was sent back to federal prison for his involvement in tax fraud. During his time in jail, he claimed he found Jesus where he summoned up the strength to walk away from the Colombo family which is a cardinal sin in the mafia.

In 1992 was the year of transformation; he wrote his autobiography title, “Quitting the Mob” book which he wrote as a tool to sway teenagers to stay out of a life of crime by revealing the myth of the glamorous life.

He founded the Breaking Out Foundation, where he routinely tours across America sharing his life experience and new life in Christ to college campuses, churches, and empowerment seminars.

Women Empowering Women

Who You Are

A woman in harmony with her spirit is like a river flowing,
 She goes where she will without pretense...
 And arrives at her destination,
 prepared to be herself and only herself. *Maya Angelou*

You are a child of God!
 You are chosen, not forsaken,
 You are who He says you are.
 Who the Son sets free, is free indeed,
 You are a child of God!

So my Sisters, always remember that God's Word says, "Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." *Romans 8:37-39*

Word Search

N	H	R	B	Y	A	M	E	Y	L	O	H
M	A	L	M	R	R	J	M	A	K	E	V
Y	L	X	O	I	D	A	F	X	T	C	H
O	O	A	T	T	J	U	M	R	D	N	C
S	H	N	A	R	S	P	I	R	I	T	A
E	N	G	Y	E	B	Z	S	U	S	E	J
L	T	E	T	G	A	S	B	L	O	O	D
T	Z	L	I	N	A	D	B	M	A	L	U
S	G	Y	N	A	N	E	V	A	E	H	K
O	C	I	I	M	C	R	C	E	J	U	N
P	D	V	R	H	P	E	S	O	J	M	Y
A	G	M	T	S	S	O	R	C	C	G	M

JESUS
MARY
HALO
MANGER
LAMB
JOSEPH
HOLY
ANGEL
TOMB
SPIRIT
HEAVEN
CROSS
BLOOD
APOSTLES
TRINITY

Closing Words BY LONNIE JOHNSON, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, GROWTH MINISTRIES INC



The Immovable Love of God

Have you ever had someone to be jealous of a relationship you were in with someone? It may have been with a significant other or a very good friend. Sometimes people are so miserable that they try to place a wedge between you and that other person. They may try and throw shade on your relationship by saying things about your person that are not true. Or they may try to lead you into situations that are not healthy for your relationship in hopes that your connection to the other person may fade away. I watch a lot of true crime shows on the ID channel and The First 48. I have seen cases where people have gone so far as to kill someone if they could not have them or get them to leave the other person.

Satan is highly irritated because you are in a relationship with God. You have something that he will NEVER have. He is jealous because God loves you unconditionally. Satan hates you because God created you in His image and is grooming you to be in a relationship with Him for eternity. Satan is so jealous that he tries everything he can to destroy that relationship. He will try and lead you into situations he hopes will end your spiritual and physical life. He is here to kill, steal and destroy all that you have and all that you are.

Satan will come after you with a number of schemes such as sending demons to tempt and torment you. He will try and take you to extreme lows in your life such as job loss, family crisis, or an attack on your health. He will tell you things like you don't have a future or that you are not worth anything. He will bring depressing news and obstacles that seem almost impossible to overcome to get you to behave destructively.

All of this is to sway, distract, destroy, kill, or break you away from your relationship with God. Satan wants you to feel hopeless as much as possible so you will give up and give in to *his* stupid ways and not stay connected to God.

But God's love is stronger than anything Satan can throw your way. It covers a multitude of sins. That's right, God will still love you even when you slip and make a mistake. Nothing in life can stop God from loving you, providing for you and keeping you safe. No matter what comes your way remember this, "We are more than conquerors!"

Paul summed it up like this is Romans 8:38-39

³⁸ For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons,^[k] neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, ³⁹ neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

What must I do to be saved?



If you've never accepted Christ as your Lord and Savior, or if you've turned away from Him for a life of unrighteousness, then take a moment and say this prayer:

“Lord, I confess that I am a sinner and ask your forgiveness. I believe that your son Jesus died on the cross for my sins and was resurrected with all power. I invite Jesus to be the Lord of my life and your Holy Spirit to come into my heart to guide me for the rest of my days. Amen.”

Romans 10:9 says that if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved.

If this is you, please write Growth Ministries and we will gladly help you start your new life in Christ.

Growth Ministries, Inc., Attn: Executive Secretary, P.O. Box 4375, Olathe, KS 66063

Write Us



We would love to hear from you. If you have a testimony, a prayer request or a question about your walk with the Lord, send us a letter. We would love to pray or rejoice with you. Maybe you are a writer and you have a spiritual word of encouragement for the readers of our newsletter. We would love to review your article to see if we can use it in our newsletter. We also like to share poems from you more artistic sisters and brothers.

We also ask that you be mindful of what you send to us as there are some things that are prohibited for print:

- Inappropriate Verbiage/Profanity
- Sexually Explicit Verbiage/Images
- Political opinions
- Opinions regarding social/systemic injustices
- Demeaning or Offensive Views
- Legal Information/Advice
- Photographs

Thank you so much for adhering to these guidelines and we look forward to hearing from you.