

The Stratagem of Scriptural Success

The Stratagem of Scriptural Success...

focuses on the strategic concepts that are necessary to succeed in all of life's endeavors—vocational, people relationships, and our spiritual ministry as we serve Christ in the local church. Each concept is expounded by using the background of the life of a Bible Character. Truly, God's Master's give us practical teaching and many illustrations of scriptural principles needed for a successful Christian endeavor.

The stimulating Bible study outlines include:

Joshua: *Getting off the Fence*

Timothy: *Grabbing the Horns*

David: *Feathering Your Oars*

Peter: *Strengthening Your Net*

Jacob: *Twisting Your Hip*

Daniel: *Going on a Diet*

Nehemiah: *Laying the Brick*

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To: Dr. Edward Watke, Jr.

My father, who has been an example of one who has endeavored to inculcate Biblical success concepts into every area of life.

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Introduction

In every bookstore many shelves are lined with success books—how to be a millionaire, how to succeed in real estate, how to wake up your financial genius, how to think your way to riches. But what are the principles of success that are scriptural? What guidelines for success can a Christian follow?

It has been my privilege to study many of God's Masters during the last year. Bible characters that God has used for His honor and glory can give us practical instruction in guiding principles for scriptural success.

It is my desire that the lives of great men will challenge your heart. May the *Stratagems Of Scriptural Success* burn into your mind causing your life to reflect a successful Christian lifestyle. -- Dr. Curtis E. Watke
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Contents

1.	Joshua:	Getting Off The Fence	3.
		<i>The Art of Making Right Decisions</i>	
2.	Timothy:	Grabbing The Horns	7.
		<i>The Art of Accepting Responsibility</i>	
3.	David:	Feathering Your Oars	10.
		<i>The Art of Using Your Abilities</i>	
4.	Peter:	Strengthening Your Net	14.
		<i>The Art of Maintaining Consistency</i>	
5.	Jacob:	Twisting Your Hip	18.
		<i>The Art of Overcoming Self-Centeredness</i>	
6.	Daniel:	Going On A Diet	21.
		<i>The Art of Abiding by Convictions</i>	
7.	Nehemiah:	Laying The Brick	24.
		<i>The Art of Accomplishing the Task</i>	

Joshua -- Getting Off The Fence *The Art of Making Right Decisions*

A successful Christian learns to get off the fence because he learns it is impossible to succeed while straddling it. Although we recognize this, the problem that we face every day is: on which side do I get off? Every decision we make has eternal consequences. A wrong decision can lead to misery and destruction, while making no decision at all can yield disastrous results by default. We all sit on different fences in several important areas. What we do with these fences will to a large degree shape our entire lives.

Joshua was faced with similar circumstances. He was constantly challenged to make decisions that would have far-reaching implications for not only his own life, but the lives of many others as well. Let's analyze four fences and see on which side we should get off.

The Fence of Human Popularity

Joshua had been sent by God (Numbers 13:8) and the people of Israel to bring an honest report (Numbers 13:18-20). When the spies returned, ten were afraid to do as God commanded (Numbers 13:2). Joshua had to make a decision!

Joshua was Faced with Two Choices.

1. He could stand with the Ten Spies. Joshua's first choice was to stand with the evil report of the ten spies. After all, weren't they in the majority? Wasn't their reasoning rational? Of course we can't win in battle against all those giants!
2. He could stand with Caleb. Joshua's second choice was to trust God to honor His promise (Numbers 13:2). Although it was the minority opinion (Numbers 14:6-9) as far as man was concerned, just one plus God is a majority! Should I risk the hatred of the people if I stand against them? (Numbers 14:10).
3. He made a decision, he got off the fence! Joshua decided to stand with Caleb, and with the Lord, and trust Him (Numbers 14:6,7).

We are Faced with Two Choices Every Day.

1. We can stand with the world's system. Jesus said, "*Wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat*" (Matthew 7:13). The majority of the people around us are following a system that leads to destruction. The danger Christians face is the enticement of this same worldly system. We are told not to love the things of the world (I John 2:15-17). Shall we stand with the world's ungodly philosophy?
2. We can stand with the Lord. Paul admonishes us to "*stand steadfast*" in the work of the Lord (I Corinthians 15:58). In order to do that we must "*put on the whole armour of God*" (Ephesians 6:10,11). Jesus said: "*Narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it*" (Matthew 7:14). To stand for the Lord is the task that is accomplished by the minority. If we take such a stand, we will risk the hatred of those around us (Matthew 5:11,12). Shall we stand with the Lord?

3. We must make a decision, we must get off the fence! It is time to get off the fence of human popularity. A successful Christian realizes that to be popular with God is to be unpopular with those of the world; but in the long run popularity with God will bring blessings while popularity with man will bring ruin.

The Fence of Spiritual Victory

God commissioned Joshua to lead the Israelites across the Jordan River into the Promised Land. In order to accomplish this task, Joshua faced four decisions that he had to make in order to be successful in crossing the River Jordan. These same four decisions we must make if we are to have spiritual victory.

Shall I Face the Obstacles?

1. Joshua faced a challenge (Joshua 1:2-5). How would he manage to see 2 to 3 million people cross the river Jordan? It was physically impossible. Jordan was at flood stage—how could all of these people, plus their belongings and livestock, do it? There were no ferries, no boats, no bridges, and wading was out of the question. But it was also extremely dangerous. For them to enter into the land would be a declaration of war. How could this obstacle be overcome? Joshua made the decision to trust God for the victory. Upon this decision, he began to make the necessary preparations.
2. Successful Christians make the decision to trust God to help them overcome the obstacles of life. They apply the principle of partnership. What is this principle? It is saying: God is my partner in this matter. In the partnership which faith establishes, you tap the resources of God. The resources of the infinite partner become available for the needs of the finite partner. As partners, God gives the orders, and you execute them by relying on Him for strength. The finite partner goes forward confident that the strength of the infinite partner will help his weakness. Have you made the decision to approach life by faith? Get off the fence!

Shall I Appropriate the Gift?

1. The promised land was a gift—but Joshua knew they must receive it. He knew that God had given the people the right to the land: but they must secure it. Joshua made the decision to take the gift (Joshua 1:3).
2. The Christian has already discovered that salvation is a free gift and has made the decision to accept that gift by faith. But the ability to walk a victorious Christian life is a free gift as well. We must make the decision to receive it. To obtain this gift we must ask for God's power, Christ's strength, and the Holy Spirit's illumination to teach us what God would have us to do. All we must do is get off the fence and receive it!

Shall I Possess the Boundaries?

1. Joshua faced another decision (Joshua 1:4). God described the boundaries of the possession He had given to the Israelites. It was a description that showed the immensity of the land. God had abundantly prepared the land for them. It was a spacious region that overflowed with "milk and honey." But before God's abundance could be displayed, the Israelites had to go through a training time. It took being in slavery, and wandering for forty years in the wilderness to bring them to the position where God could really bless them. Now Joshua faced the challenge. He got off the fence of indecision and decided to possess the boundaries of their inheritance.

2. We face a similar decision today. God has abundantly prepared an inheritance for us. He has shown His generosity toward us by giving Christ to shed His blood so that even the vilest sinner who receives Him can be cleansed of all his sin. He has given us the power of the Holy Spirit to indwell our lives; He has given us His wisdom if we ask Him; He has given us His love for He has made us the very Sons of God. He has given us an opportunity to live a victorious Christian life that walks and communes with Him. But to possess this inheritance, we too must go through an intensive training period. On this earth we must go through trials and tribulations. As a patient in a hospital, we must endure bitter medicines, painful operations, close restraint, and meager diet, so that we can live a God-honoring, Christ-exalting, Spirit-filled, victorious Christian life. Oh that we would possess that kind of life! As Joshua did, get off the fence of indecision and decide to possess your spiritual inheritance!

Shall I Believe the Provision?

1. Joshua had to decide whether to believe God or not. God promised Joshua that *"...no one shall stand before you"* (Joshua 1:5). Can you imagine a general going into battle knowing that he would never taste defeat? God had promised a uniform success. But God also promised a uniform assurance. *"As I was with Moses, so I will be with thee."* Look at Moses' life: he confronted the grandest monarch; he dealt with an apostate people who worshipped idols and were ready to stone him; he called water from the rock; he sweetened the bitter fountain; healed the fiery bite; brought bread down from heaven; brought God's law to the people and obtained a hearty compliance. Truly Moses served God and had God's power. And Joshua was assured that he could have the same power! Joshua decided to believe the provision of God and thus he knew that they would be victorious. He got off the fence!
2. A successful Christian believes the provisions that God has made for him. Just as Joshua was promised uniform success; so we too can have success in our Christian life. I Corinthians 10:13 states: *"...who will not suffer you to be tempted above that which ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape..."* We are promised victory over temptation! We are also promised a uniform assurance. *"...He hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee"* (Hebrews 13:5). The same God that empowered Moses has promised to be with us as well! God has a constant, unvarying feeling of love toward us, and readiness to help us. Decide to believe the provision of God, and know that you will be victorious! Get down off the fence!

The Fence of Living by Faith

Over and over again during his lifetime, Joshua faced decisions that would test the strength of his faith. One of the most significant tests was the decision he had to make regarding the conquest of Jericho. He had to answer the following questions:

Shall I Trust God Even When the Means Seem Inadequate?

1. Have you ever thought about the military strategy Joshua was asked to use in his battle against the city of Jericho? Instead of attacking the city, he and his people were to march around the walls of the city (Joshua 6:1-21). Can you imagine the thoughts that ran through his mind as he contemplated the instructions he was going to give to his soldiers? March around the city? Seven times? What a *"military strategy!"* The world has never heard of a stranger plan for war. This was a strain on the faith of Joshua. He had to decide to trust God completely, and step around that city—by faith! What a fence to get

off!

2. The successful Christian learns that whenever we have a clear indication of God's will regarding a matter, we are to take action promptly and without fear, even though the method or action we are to take seems entirely inadequate to accomplish the task before us. *"When Carey on his shoemaker's stool contemplated the evangelization of India, there was as great a gulf between the end and the apparent means, as when the priests blew with their rams' horns round the walls of Jericho. But Carey felt it to be a Divine command, and Joshua-like set himself to obey it, leaving to God from whom it came to furnish the power by which the work was to be done."* We must trust God even when the means seem inadequate, get off the fence, and accomplish the task.

Shall I Trust God Even When Victory Isn't in Sight?

1. For six days the priests marched around the city of Jericho, with no apparent result. For six times on the seventh day, the priests marched around the walls seemingly to no avail. It wasn't until the end of the seventh time around on the seventh day, after the trumpets blew, after the shout of the people—then there were results! Joshua made the decision to trust God—even when he couldn't see if his faith would "work." There was no room for human reasoning, schemes, or conventional military tactics. Joshua obeyed by faith. Hebrews 11:30 tells us: *"By faith the walls of Jericho fell down."* He got off the fence even when victory was no where in sight!
2. We must learn to walk by faith and not by sight. *"Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen"* (Hebrews 11:1). We are to have faith that reckons (Romans 4:20,21), responds (Romans 6:13), receives (Galatians 3:14; Hebrews 11:6), and rests (John 15:4). Even when we are trusting God, and no answer is in sight, the successful Christian gets off the fence and believes God for the victory!

The Fence of Future Service

At the end of his life, Joshua challenged the people of Israel to serve God. These final words of Joshua give us a clear enunciation of a major decision he had made. It is the same decision that we need to make today.

Shall I Serve the Lord?

1. Joshua tells the people: *"As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord"* (Joshua 24:15). He had already come to a conclusion: he would dedicate his life to serving the Lord. Now he desires this same commitment from the people of Israel. He charges them to serve God with a whole heart; that is with a wholesome godly fear accompanied by sincerity and truth (Joshua 24:14). Their service was to be a clean service, untainted by idolatrous worship (Joshua 24:14). **Then Joshua tells them to get off the fence!** *"Choose you this day whom ye shall serve!"* (Joshua 24:15). Make a decision!
2. We are faced with the same decision. Can you say *"As for me I will serve the Lord?"* Is your service to God whole-hearted and clean? Choose you this day whom you will serve!
Get off the fence and make a commitment to the Lord.

Timothy -- Grabbing The Horns

The Art of Accepting Responsibility

Have you ever been in a situation where you had to "*grab the bull by the horns*" and wrestle with responsibility in order to get the job done? To varying degrees all of us have faced such circumstances. For the Christian to be successful he must learn stratagems regarding "*grabbing the horns*." Any one who is successful for the Lord has developed important characteristics that enable him to be trusted with responsibility, has learned how to handle the responsibility he accepts, and is growing in the amount and significance of the responsibilities he handles. A successful Christian then, is one who has learned the art of accepting responsibility.

Timothy was a young man whom God prepared to assume great leadership responsibilities. At a young age, he became responsible for the spiritual direction of the Church at Corinth, and later pastored the Church at Ephesus. Paul, who was his spiritual father, counseled Timothy in the art of grabbing the horns. By analyzing Timothy's life and Paul's counsel, we can receive instruction in what is necessary before we grab the horns, what to do while grabbing the horns, and how to grab bigger horns.

Before You Grab the Horns

Timothy is mentioned twenty-four times in the New Testament. Of these, several refer to his background experiences, the home in which he was reared, those things he was taught, his character, and his conduct. Before Timothy was able to grab any horns he incorporated two very important qualities into the fabric of his lifestyle.

Timothy Was Dedicated to the One who Delegates Responsibility

1. Early in life Timothy learned an important principle: God is the source of all my responsibility. Since God is in control of our lives (Romans 8:28), and has a will for our lives (Ephesians 6:6), it is understood that it is through His power and grace that we are given responsibilities in this life (Psalm 37:23). This understanding brought Timothy to a place of submission and dedication to the will and desires of God.
2. Timothy lived and conducted himself in a godly manner. He had a testimony of a godly life among the people who were close to him. Acts 16:2 tells us: "*(Timothy) which was well reported of by the brothers at Lystra and Iconium.*" Later, on a missionary journey, Paul wrote the believers at Philippi, "*For I have no man likeminded, who will naturally care for your state.*" He didn't know of anyone other than Timothy, who had a genuine interest in their welfare (Philippians 2:20). Then Paul continues in verse 22, "*But you know the proof of him, that, as a son with the father, he hath served with me in the gospel.*" Timothy's life showed that he was dedicated to the Lord and he had proven this to others around him many times.
2. Our lives should be conducted in a godly manner. Before God will put it in the hearts of others to trust us and give us horns to grab, we must show ourselves trustworthy by exhibiting a consistent dedication to the things of the Lord. The fellow Christians who know us best will speak well of us if we are dedicated to the Lord and show a genuine

interest in the welfare of others. Before we can grab the horns, we must "prove" ourselves to others by being dedicated to the one who delegates responsibility.

Timothy was Loyal to the Precepts Taught Him.

1. He grew up with a Christian mother and grandmother who taught him to live for the Lord (II Timothy 1:5). *"When I call to remembrance the unfeigned (sincere) faith that is in thee, which dwelt first in thy grandmother Lois, and thy mother Eunice, and I am persuaded that in thee also."* Timothy was faithful to the sincere faith that he was taught.
2. In order for us to be entrusted with horns to grab, we must be found loyal and faithful to the things we have been taught.

While You Are Grabbing the Horns

After traveling with Paul for approximately five years, Timothy was given a very difficult responsibility. The Church of Corinth was experiencing some moral, doctrinal, and administrative problems. Since Paul was unable to be with them, he sent Timothy in his place. Through this situation, Timothy began to learn an important lesson regarding grabbing the horns.

Grabbing the Horns Successfully Requires Working With Others.

1. Timothy assumed the responsibility to lead the Corinthians believers. But the people he was to lead wanted Paul to lead them. They didn't want his help (I Corinthians 4:17; 16:10,11). Paul wrote the Corinthians and admonished them to accept Timothy as the leader God had chosen for them. He told them Timothy was trustworthy and proven and they were to follow him. Yet some of the Corinthians were arrogant about the whole situation (I Corinthians 4: 18,19). In order for Timothy to succeed in leading the Church at Corinth, and solve their problems, he had to learn to overcome the attitudes and actions of others. He had to learn how to work with others in a loving way.
2. Sometimes God asks us to do something that will make us unpopular with others. Yet the successful Christian understands that with every horn he grabs he has a corresponding series of difficulties to overcome. Like Timothy, he overcomes the problems caused by other people.

Later Timothy became the pastor of the Church at Ephesus. God used this experience to teach him some other important lessons regarding grabbing the horns. While grabbing the horns at Ephesus, Paul wrote to him exhorting him to overcome himself so that he could grab the horns successfully.

Grabbing the Horns Successfully Requires Overcoming Self.

1. Paul wrote to Timothy (I Timothy 4:11-13) exposing many personal problems that Timothy was to deal with if he continued grabbing the horns in Ephesus. First, he was to teach with authority and conviction. This required overcoming his timid and fearful personality (verse 11). Secondly, Timothy needed to learn to avoid the mistakes which were natural to young adults. Such mistakes could cause him to forfeit respect (verse 12). And finally, Timothy's life was to be the life of a pattern Christian. Verse thirteen states that his life was to be a pattern in the outward expressions of life (speech and conduct), ruling principles of life (love and faith), and consecrating grace of life (purity).
2. In order for us to be successful in fulfilling our responsibilities, we must overcome these same personal problems. In confidence, we fulfill our responsibilities, avoid

common mistakes, and become pattern Christians in our speech, conduct, love, faith, and purity.

How You Can Grab Bigger Horns

Paul gave Timothy some very wise counsel (I Timothy 4:13-16). The instructions Timothy received gave him four requirements to fulfill which would enable him to grow in his responsibilities. These four requirements also help us to understand what is needed in order for us to see our ministry and realm of influence grow today.

Grabbing Bigger Horns Requires Devotion

1. Timothy was to devote himself to his ministry. His ministry as a pastor (I Timothy 4:13) consisted of reading (the public reading of Scripture), exhortation (preaching), and doctrine (teaching Bible truths). He was to *"give attendance."* to these things
2. We must devote ourselves to our ministry. Like Timothy, we too have a ministry of service. In order for us to grab bigger horns we must *"give attendance"* to reading and studying the scripture, developing a personal relationship with Christ, and Fellowshiping with other Christians.

Grabbing Bigger Horns Requires Development

1. Timothy was to develop his gift. I Timothy 4:14 says, *"Neglect not the gift that is in thee."* A gift left undeveloped will be lost. He was to develop his gift by practicing or meditating on it until using it became second nature.
2. We must develop our gifts. At salvation we were given at least one gift by the Spirit of God (Romans 12:6). These gifts plus our talents and abilities are skills that need to be developed before God can allow us to grab bigger horns.

Grabbing Bigger Horns Requires Diligence

1. Timothy was to be diligent. He was to give himself wholly to the ministry and his gifts so that others would see his spiritual progress (I Timothy 4:15). His life was to be as submerged in his ministry as a goldfish in a bowl —totally immersed! Because his life was under close scrutiny by those who followed his leadership, he was to ensure that they were impressed and guided by his Christian life, not his personality, charm, or charisma.
2. We must be diligent. Our lives are under close observation by those around us every day. Rather than seeing our talents or personality, they should be able to see the spiritual development that is being made within us. This development is exhibited by a godly character and lifestyle. To be capable of grabbing bigger horns, we must be diligent in our Christian growth.

Grabbing Bigger Horns Requires Devotion

1. Timothy was to watch his beliefs and how he applied them. Timothy was to *"take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine."* Paul was concerned that Timothy was monitoring his beliefs closely and that he was applying those beliefs to his practical daily life.
2. We must watch our beliefs and how we apply them. Our Christian testimony hinges on what we believe and how we apply what we believe. It is critical that we stand true to the Word of God and that we apply it. Without that we cannot have a growing influence as we grab bigger horns.

3.

David -- Feathering Your Oars *The Art of Using Your Abilities*

Skilled oarsmen use a valuable technique to reduce air resistance as they row. This technique is to turn the oar blade almost horizontal when lifting from the water at the end of a stroke. Feathering the oars, as this is called, increases the speed of each stroke. As a result, the expression "*feathering your oars*" has come to mean "*to be skillful*." The successful Christian has learned how to feather his oars; that is, use his abilities skillfully to their maximum potential.

David was a man who was endowed with great abilities. With that endowment came a corresponding responsibility to feather his oars; that is, to use his abilities to the fullest extent possible. From his life we have an example of how to feather our oars successfully, wrongfully, and purposefully. Before we can evaluate each concept, we must understand some fundamental truths regarding gifts and abilities.

Understanding Your Oars

For the Christian there is a difference between talent and gifts. A talent is a person's natural endowment or characteristic feature, aptitude, or disposition. Talents are influenced by one's genetic make-up and environment. These talents may be developed through continuous use. Every human being has natural talent—no one is talent less.

But the Christian also has spiritual gifts. A spiritual gift has been defined as a "*skill, talent, or ability...natural, learned, or imparted that the Holy Spirit chooses to permeate with divine power for the building up of the Church*." Spiritual gifts can best be understood by knowing six basic Biblical principles.

God Gives Spiritual Gifts

The gifts that we receive at salvation are given, not on the basis of our merit, but on the basis of God's goodness and grace.

God Gives Spiritual Gifts as He Chooses

I Corinthians 12: 11, "*as He wills*." Each gift we receive was chosen by God. He gives according to His plan and purpose.

God Gives Spiritual Gifts to Every Believer

I Corinthians 12:7,11, "*given to every man to profit withal, ...dividing to every man severally as he will*."

God Gives Spiritual Gifts for Service

I Corinthians 12:7, "*the common good*." The gifts are given to benefit others, not to draw attention to the Christian or to bloat his ego.

God Gives Spiritual Gifts to the Local Church Ministry

It is God's purpose that the local church ministry be accomplished through the believers exercising their gifts. If all of us used the abilities God has given to us, the local church would accomplish its mission of evangelism and edification more effectively.

Spiritual Gifts are Different from Fruits of the Spirit.

Spiritual gifts are given to be used for doing the work of the ministry; the fruits of the Spirit are manifestations of what the Christian is as a person.

Feathering Your Oars Successfully

Much of success in the Christian life hinges on learning how to feather the oars successfully. This art is something that takes practice and patient perseverance. David learned how to use his oars effectively in the Lord's service. Through this life six strategic concepts related to feathering oars are revealed. These same concepts must be inculcated into the Christian's lifestyle before the Christian can expect to become successful at feathering his oars.

Oars are Given by God

1. David received his oars from God. I Samuel 13:14 states, "*The Lord sought Him a man.*" God needed a man that He could endow with gifts and empower for service. God found David (Psalm 89:20) a servant after His own heart. David was equipped and appointed to assume a position of leadership (I Samuel 13:14); because God had provided for Himself a King (I Samuel 16:1).
2. In the same way Christians today are sought by God, found by Him through salvation, commissioned to a task, and given provisions by God.

Oars are Developed by God

1. David's formative years were spent in Bethlehem on the ancestral property of Boaz and Ruth. The family was poor as the parents tried to rear eight sons and two daughters. From his mother he gained his poetic gift, his sensitive nature, and his religious character. From the rugged terrain around him he learned much about natural scenery, pastoral pursuits, and the ways of both animals and man.
2. God uses our background to aid in the development of the oars that He gives us. He may provide opportunities to use our gifts, or he may use other people to influence us to adopt the proper perspective about our gifts, or we may learn how to use our gifts by watching others.

Oars are Empowered by the Spirit

1. God anointed David (I Samuel 16). It was just like any other day when Samuel came to anoint David. David was summoned from the field where he had been watching sheep. This empowering by the Spirit was the consummation of all his former training. He had a regenerated heart filled with humility, fidelity, cleanliness, and a close walk with God. Upon this consecrated life the power of God fell.
2. It is only with the power of God upon our life that we can effectively use the oars God has given us. The Holy Spirit was given to us at salvation to empower us for service.

Oars are Used by Faith (I Samuel 17)

1. By faith, oars are exercised in lonely conflict (I Samuel 17 :34-36). David used his abilities by faith many times in the past. These conflicts sharpened

his skills and gave him the strength and faith to stand in the battle against Goliath. It was during the lonely hours that God taught him the principle of faith. So it is with us. The lonely hours of battle and conflict prepare us, equip us, and strengthen our faith sufficiently for the great struggles that lie ahead.

2. By faith, oars can stand the test of daily life (I Samuel 17:17).

David faced the daily toil and friction of the home. When Jesse asked him to go to his brothers, he quickly obeyed and was careful to entrust the care of his sheep to another keeper.

Each of us must use our oars in the daily hassles of life, ever mindful not to neglect one duty for another.

3. By faith, oars withstand rebuke and provocation (I Samuel 17:28,29). *"To bear with meekness the spiteful attacks of malice and envy; not to be overcome by evil, but to overcome evil with good; to suffer wrong; to possess one's soul with patience; to keep the mouth with a bridle; to pass unruffled through a very cyclone of unkindliness and misrepresentation—this is possible only to those in whose breasts the dove-like Spirit has found an abiding place. These are they who bear themselves as heroes in the fight. Those who are the most gentle under provocation are strongest. Meekness is an attribute of might."* (F. B. Meyer)

Oars are Used with Wisdom (I Samuel 18:5)

1. David served Saul faithfully. As he went about his duties, he was careful to behave wisely. This meant that everything he said and did in using the abilities God had given him, he said and did wisely as one who had learned how to feather his oars.

2. We must use our abilities wisely as we serve Christ. The oars that we have should be feathered with great wisdom. This wisdom comes as we project what the effect of each stroke of the oar will be on the lives of others.

Oars are Used to do God's Will (I Samuel 26:9-11)

1. David continually sought the will of God for his life. Even during the time while he was fleeing from Saul, David sought God's will. During this time of hiding, he had opportunities to end the struggle by killing Saul. Yet he did not because he knew it was God's will for him to wait on the Lord's timing.

2. We must be burdened to know and do the will of God. We are commanded to now be unwise, but understanding the will of God. (Ephesians 5:17) Epaphras is a wonderful illustration for us as he prayed fervently that the saints would stand perfect and complete in all the will of God. (Colossians 4:12)

Feathering Your Oars Wrongfully

Just as David learned that oars can be used successfully for the Lord, so he also learned that once those oars are no longer dedicated to Christ, they can be used for wrong. This wrong will bring God's wrath and chastening hand upon the individual. God had used his ability to lead. But one evening David used that same ability to lead Bathsheba into sin (II Samuel 11). As a result of this great sin, David was isolated from God; Uriah, Bathsheba's husband died; and the child that was born died. Sin is always punitive. No one gets by without paying for the consequences of sin.

We can learn that using God-given abilities to make personal gain or satisfy sinful pleasure will always yield God's judgment upon the Christian.

Feathering Your Oars Purposefully

David became a man after God's own heart. At every stage of his life David used his God-given abilities to serve God for the purpose God intended. Even the sin that he committed with the abilities God had given him was forgiven by God. God used David to accomplish much. God has given us our abilities for a purpose. Each one of us are unique; specially designed to fulfill a specific function in the local church. In conclusion, let's consider seven purposes of feathering your oars.

1. The equipping of the believers (Ephesians 4:11-12).
2. The edification of the believers (Ephesians 4:12, 16).
3. The establishment of the believers (Romans 1:11).
4. The mutual faith of the believers (Romans 1:12).
5. The profiting of the believers (I Corinthians 12:7).
6. The increase of the believers (Ephesians 4:16).
7. The glorification of Christ (I Peter 4: 11).

Peter -- Strengthening Your Nets

The Art of Maintaining Consistency

There is no more difficult task for the Christian than maintaining consistency in his relationship to the Lord. At the moment of conversion, the new Christian becomes a new creature in Christ. Old things are passing away; new things bring excitement and enthusiasm to the Christian's life. Throughout this life we must leave the old things behind and strengthen our new relationship as a son of God. However, this leaving the world and clinging to the Lord is very difficult to maintain on a consistent, daily basis. Although many Christians face a problem of inconsistency in their relationship to the Lord, yet there are others who are successful in their relationship to the Lord because they have learned the art of maintaining consistency.

We see much of ourselves in the life of Peter. He faced that same problem that strikes such a familiar chord in all of us. If we analyze his problem of inconsistency and its solution three stages are readily apparent. These stages can be seen in his relationship to the nets in his life: the old, physical net he used in his occupation as a fisherman; the new, spiritual net he used as a fisher of men. First there was the problem of inconsistency (changing nets), then Peter's solution to his problem (returning to the old nets), and finally God's solution to his problem of inconsistency (strengthening the new nets).

Changing Your Nets

Peter was totally dedicated to the Lord. He had made a decision to leave his occupation, fishing with physical nets, to follow Christ, where he would use new spiritual nets. But he had a problem with being consistent. Although he had chosen the new nets, yet he yielded to pressure and denied that he had made that choice. He began to change nets.

The Plight of Changing Nets

1. Peter's dedication to Christ. While at Caesarea Philippi, Christ asked Peter who he thought He was (Matthew 16:15,16). He declared, "*Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.*" This was a great thing for a Jew to believe concerning one whose outward actions were so contrary to the general idea the Jews had of the Messiah. In the upper room at Jerusalem (Matthew 26:32-35), Peter impetuously repudiated the prediction that he would deny the Lord.
2. Peter's denial of Christ (Matthew 26:69-75). Peter denied that he had been with Jesus; he denied that he knew Jesus; and he cursed and swore. At this point in his life Peter was a "*used to be.*" He "*used to be a follower of Christ.*" Now he had turned his back on the Lord.
3. Our plight of changing nets. Today we have many "*used to be's*" in our churches. There are many who at one time followed Christ one hundred percent, but now are no longer serving Him. This includes former Sunday School teachers, bus, children's church, and youth workers, choir members, visitation workers, soul-winners, tithers, and givers who used to use their talents for the Lord, but are now sitting on the side-lines.

The Causes of Changing Nets

1. A direct onslaught of the Devil (Luke 22:31). The Devil set a trap for Peter and tried to lead him into sin. For us today, Satan "*seeks whom he may devour*" (I Peter 5:18,19). In order for us to stand we must put on the whole armour of God (Ephesians 6:11, 12).
2. A permitted attack by the Devil (Luke 22:32). God only allows the amount and kind of temptation and testing which He knows will be good for us. So it was with Job. The trials he faced, God allowed because he knew Job would be given the strength and grace to bear them. Yet, these attacks can cause the believer, if he doesn't receive strength from the Lord, to stumble and change his nets.
3. A sinful nature. The Christian faces a daily battle within himself. The sinful nature seeks domination over the godly nature. This conflict between flesh and Spirit (Galatians 5:17) causes us to change our nets as our will becomes yielded to the one or to the other.
4. Oppressive situations of life.
 - Peter didn't understand why Christ was to die. His heart was broken as he witnessed one of the twelve betray Christ. Luke 22:45 says that in the garden he was "*sleeping for sorrow*." He was overwhelmed with grief and discouragement.
 - We also can be overwhelmed by the situations we face each day. All of the pressures and trials can cause us to be oppressed with grief and discouragement. Many times this causes us to change our nets, leaving the new net to return to the old net.
5. Sin of prayerlessness.
 - Instead of using the resources at his disposal through prayer, Peter slept. He could have obtained the strength to resist temptation, but did not.
 - Prayerlessness in the life of the Christian will produce an anemic spiritual life which will in turn cause an inability to maintain consistency.
6. Fellowship with the wrong crowd.
 - Peter began to stay on the "fringe" and follow Christ afar off. Ultimately we find him sitting with those who mocked Christ.
 - Influences from the wrong quarters will produce actions contrary to established beliefs. Changing your nets will become easier and easier to accomplish.

The Effect of Changing Nets

1. Peter's sorrow was both secret and serious. He went out of the High Priest's Hall alone. He wept bitterly as he sorrowed for his sin.
2. Our sorrow will be both secret and serious. As we reflect on the sin of inconsistency, a deep sense of loneliness fills our heart. It is in this state that we find our fellowship with God severed and our spiritual well-being at a low ebb. This sorrowing makes an indelible impression on the mind, ever being recalled in the future as we remember the sin of changing our nets.

Returning to the Old Nets

Do you remember when Peter had said that he would never "*leave the Lord?*" Now, after denying the Lord, Peter returns to his old nets (John 21:3-4). There are four things that went with the old nets.

Back to His Old Nets and Fishing

1. He turned back to his old way of life. His former occupation lured him back to live the way he lived before he met Christ.
2. II Corinthians 5:17 states that for the Christian "*old things are passing away*." Yet there

are many Christians who, although they once served the Lord, have now returned to their past way of living before they met Christ.

Back to His Old Nets and Friends

1. Peter took his friends with him. They joined him in leaving their spiritual nets behind and returning to their past way of life.
2. We must always remember that when Christians backslide they become stumbling blocks for others.

Back to His Old Nets and Emptiness

1. Without Christ, Peter's life was meaningless. He lost his joy just like David did when he sinned (Psalm 51:12).
2. Our lives are never more empty than when we are out of fellowship with Christ (I John 1:3-4).

Back to His Old Nets and Obscurity

Peter thought he could go back to his old nets, live in obscurity, and forget he had ever met Christ. But that was impossible. Instead, when Christ came to him, his vision was obscured and he didn't even recognize Christ.

Strengthening Your New Nets

Love Strengthens New Nets (John 21:15-17)

In this passage, Christ asks Peter the same question three times: "***Lovest thou me?***" These verses give part of God's solution to changing nets—an understanding that love is the basis of Christian service.

The First Interchange.

1. Christ asks, "*Peter, do you love me more than these other disciples, as you boasted previously? Peter, do you love me with a God-like love, a sacrificial, perfect, supreme love?*"
2. Peter's answer: "*Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.*" He uses a different word for love, which means "*to be fond of*" or "*to have natural affection for.*" Peter knows that he has fallen far short of the noble love which Jesus expected from him. He dared not use the higher word for love.
3. The Lord's recommissioning: "*Feed my lambs.*" Christ told Peter that He wanted to use him. Peter was to actively shepherd His lambs.

The Second Interchange.

1. Christ asks the same question but leaves off "more than these." *Peter, do you love me with a God-like, sacrificial love?*
2. Peter's answer: "*Yes, Lord, you know that I am fond of you.*"
3. The Lord's recommissioning: Peter is now given a ministry to full-grown sheep.

The Third Interchange.

1. Christ asks: Peter, do you really have affection for me?
2. Peter answers with sincerity, "Yes."
3. The Lord's recommissioning: "*Feed my sheep.*"

Love in us will mean that our lives will be strengthened, ready to use our spiritual nets in Christian service. Without love for others, our service is empty and vain.

Power Strengthens New Nets

This same Peter who had once denied the Lord and returned to his old nets, now has the power of God upon his life. His new nets have been strengthened and God's power has become the basis of his Christian action. Let's investigate the sequence of events that led up to this great event.

1. Power was promised (Acts 1:8).
2. Power was delivered (Acts 2:1-4). With a mighty rushing sound from heaven and cloven tongues as of fire, the Holy Spirit empowered and indwelt the believers giving them strength to use their new nets effectively for the Lord.
3. Power was manifested (Acts 2:5-11). It was a miracle! Illiterate, unlearned fishermen spoke and words were understood in many languages. These fearful men now spoke with boldness. And Peter, who had gone back fishing, now preaches a sermon that was used of God to see thousands saved!

-- This power upon them meant that they began to speak for Jesus. Their testimony was immediate, impressive and divine (Acts 2:11). They acknowledged the Lordship of Christ (Acts 2:36) and were filled with the Holy Spirit (Acts 4:31).

-- This power upon us will mean that our lives will give evidence of the fruit of the Spirit (Ephesians 5:16, 17), be filled and controlled by the Spirit (Ephesians 5:18), possess an inner-overflowing life (Ephesians 5:19), and manifest a submissiveness to God and others (Ephesians 5:20,21).

Jacob -- Twisting Your Hip

The Art of Overcoming Self-Centeredness

One of the greatest sources of danger to the Christian life is self. The natural self does not seek the things of God, but rather seeks to bind the Christian life, subjecting it to the control of sinful, lustful desires. This problem of self-centeredness can so grip the soul that it snuffs out any vestige of spiritual life, vitality, or desire. It is a menace that must be mastered in order to be successful in the Christian life.

Scripture records the life of Jacob, a man who wrestled with self. His struggle is our struggle; his failures, our failure. And God's solution to his problem of self-centeredness is the same solution we need today. Jacob was a man destined to be a mighty man of God. However, before God could use this man, he had to first learn the art of overcoming self-centeredness. As his story unfolds, we see a man "*hipped on self*," then brought down "*on the hip*," and finally God got a hold of him and *twisted his hip!*

Hipped on Self

The Plight of Being Hipped on Self

1. Jacob stole the birthright (Genesis 25:27-34). Because of the privileges identified with the birthright, it was important to him. It was a spiritual heritage which carried the right of being the priest of the family. It included the privilege of being the receiver and communicator of divine secrets. The birthright constituted a link in the line of descent by which the Messiah was to be born. Through Jacob's craftiness he received the birthright—Esau sold it to him in exchange for a bowl of lentil beans.
2. Jacob stole the blessing (Genesis 27:1-33).

He went through seven steps to steal the blessing.

- He hesitated to do wrong. v. 12
- He sought ungodly counsel. v. 13
- He deceived in appearance. v. 14-18
- He lied in speech. v. 19
- He accumulated falsehoods and pretended to be spiritual. v. 20
- He deceived his father Isaac. v. 22
- He got his selfish desires. v. 23

The Effect of Being Hipped on Self

Jacob gained a reputation for craftiness (Genesis 27:34) and reaped the results of hatred (Genesis 27:41).

Problems We Invite by Being Hipped on Self

1. Like Esau, we choose carnal gratification over spiritual blessings. Many times our lives revolve around things that satisfy our fleshly desires, and we spend so much time in attaining those things that we don't have time to get the spiritual blessings we need.
2. Like Jacob, we use wrong methodology to get what God has already promised us.

3. Like Isaac, we must learn that we shouldn't let our natural affections override the will of God.
4. Like Rebekah, we must learn that what we sow we shall also reap. The chain reaction of sin is evident. If we grasp for something selfishly and willfully, no matter how well we succeed, we will never be fully satisfied.

On the Hip

Running on the Hip from His Problem

Jacob was so scared of what Esau would do, that he ran forty-three miles that first day! He wanted to get away from Esau as quickly as possible. On his journey to his Uncle Laban's house, Jacob ran into God.

1. God meets him at Bethel (Genesis 28:10-22). Here God establishes the covenant with Jacob. The Lord made a three-fold promise: fellowship ("*I am with thee*"), protection ("*I will keep thee*"), and guidance ("*I will bring thee*").
2. Jacob bargains with God. True to character, Jacob begins to bargain with God. All the benefits that Jacob sought were already promised by God. But, he tells God that if He will bless him, he will confer upon him the favor of acknowledging Him as his God. What a monstrous self-exaltation. Instead Jacob should have said, "*Because God has done so much for me, I will strive to do something for Him.*"

Running on the Hip to a Place of Safety

1. Jacob learns submission (Genesis 29:15). After enjoying Laban's hospitality for a month, he found out that he had fallen into the hands of a crafty schemer like himself. Jacob, who would be served, now was made the servant.
2. Jacob learns to respect the rights of the firstborn (Genesis 29:17-30). Although he had worked for seven years for Rachel, he received Leah instead because she was the firstborn.
3. Jacob learns patience (Genesis 29:20,27-28). Remember how he impatiently worked to get the blessing and birthright that was already to be his? Now he had to wait and work fourteen years to get Rachel.

Reaping What You Sow

Throughout Jacob's life he needed to learn that what he sowed he would reap. He deceived his father, and then was deceived by his father-in-law. He deceived his father by covering his hands with the skins of goats; later his sons deceived him by dipping Joseph's coat in the blood of goats. His father-in-law tricked his wife Rachel; then later she tricked her father. Always what he sowed he also reaped.

Twisting Your Hip

Jacob flees the wrath of his father-in-law Laban. As he heads home, Esau approaches with four hundred men. So Jacob divides his family and possessions and sends them in opposite directions. Then he sends gifts to Esau to try to appease his wrath. After doing all this, Jacob prays to God for deliverance out of the hand of Esau. And it is here that Jacob wrestles with God.

Twisting the Hip (Genesis 32:24-32)

1. For the first time in his life, Jacob sees himself as he really is. He was alone with God. He was away from the world, his thoughts, his reasoning, and his emotions. It is only when we get alone with God that we can get a correct judgment about ourselves.
2. He is brought to the end of his resources as he wrestles with God all night. The wrestling stopped as God renders him powerless. God brought him to a state of total helplessness.
3. Finally the purpose of the heavenly wrestler was accomplished. No longer could Jacob wrestle; all he could do was to cling. Up to now he had always schemed and plotted and connived to solve his problems. Now he was relying on God to bless him. His name was changed to "*Israel*" meaning "*God commanded.*"

Twisting Your Hip

We can find the solution to a self-centered life as we realize what the flesh really is. We must realize that the character and activities of the natural man plots and connives, devises and schemes, to get its own way. We need to realize that our true self can only be understood as we "*get alone with God.*"

God will bring us to a vivid realization of our utter helplessness, and when He does, we will then be willing and ready for God to command our lives. But this subduing of the flesh is a gradual process that takes time. During the process we need to cast ourselves on the Lord and cling to Him, remembering that when God commands, blessings follow.

As we face the problem of self in our lives, let's remember the life of Jacob and get alone with God, reach the end of our resources, and see God's purpose for our lives accomplished through God working in our lives, doing it in and through us.

Daniel -- Going On A Diet *The Art of Abiding by Convictions*

Another stratagem of scriptural success is to learn the art of abiding by convictions. If there ever was a time in the history of mankind, now is the time when the Lord needs Christian people who are willing to take a stand for what they believe. To abide by convictions, one must so walk with the Lord that his life is different, his character is consecrated, his spirituality brings consequences, and his triumphs reveal victory in Christ.

Daniel was a man who purposed in his heart not to defile himself. From his initial trial which centered around the dietary laws, to his victory in the midst of trials later, Daniel lived the convictions of his conscience. To serve God properly Daniel had a different diet, a consecrated diet, a consequential diet, and a triumphant diet. By analyzing how Daniel went on a diet we are exposed to practical illustrations in the art of abiding by convictions.

A Different Diet

Daniel was selected for special training and grooming for leadership in the Babylonian government. He was forced to leave his homeland and to remain a prisoner in a foreign land. This could have caused Daniel to react in one of several ways.

1. He could have rebelled against his captors and refused to cooperate with them.
2. He could have followed his captors; forsaking all the teachings of Judaism.
3. He could have pretended to cooperate with the government while simultaneously plotting ways of getting even or of staging a revolt.

But instead, it caused Daniel to have a greater understanding of the fact that God can make good come out of seeming evil.

When he was asked to partake of meat and wine which was forbidden by Jewish law, he trusted God and refused to obey the order. In this situation Daniel learned three very important principles regarding separation. Truly this was separation revealed by trial. For the Christian today, now is the time to go on a different diet!

Separation is the Result of a Different Diet (Daniel 1:8)

1. Daniel refused to eat the king's meat, not because he was a fanatic vegetarian, but because he was obedient to God. God wanted His people to be different from the world. To make this easier He had given them an isolated land, a peculiar worship and ceremony, a place of worship, special regulations concerning dress, and a diet that would eliminate the need for fellowship with the unregenerate nations around them. The restrictions of diet were God's own provision to keep Israel in a place of blessing.
2. Today Christians are God's "*peculiar people*." (Titus 2:11-14) This word "*peculiar*" means "*a private possession*." We are not our own but rather we are bought with a price—the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ. We are not following dietary laws, but rather we follow Christ and love not the things of the world (1 John 2:15-17). God's message to Christians today cries out: "*Come out from among them and be ye*

separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing" (II Corinthians 6:17). To the Ephesians Paul said, "Have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them" (Ephesians 5:11). To be successful in the Christian life, one must be separate from sin and separated unto God.

Self-Purification is the Result of a Different Diet (Daniel 1:8)

1. Daniel purposed in his heart not to defile himself. "What grimy dirt is to the fair countenance, what rust is to virgin gold, what soot is to crystal snow, such is sin on the human soul." (J.D. Davies) If self-preservation is a primary instinct of man, so self-purification should be the primary instinct of the soul.
2. The Christian is to purpose in his heart to keep himself unspotted from the world (James 1:27). We are to live so as to keep ourselves blameless in the eyes of others. For the Christian to live in sin is a reproach to God, a trampling of the finished work of Calvary, and a quenching of the Holy Spirit within.

Overcoming Opposition Can Be a Result of a Different Diet (Daniel 1:8)

1. Daniel "requested of the prince of the eunuchs that he might not defile himself." Rather than being rebellious or indignant, Daniel sought a solution that would give the prince what needed to be done and yet not violate any of his convictions.
2. How many times when we face this same situation would a treatment of love be like honey to the mind and attitude of our human opposition! In meekness we should approach the oppressor and seek a reasonable solution—yet without compromising convictions. There is no need to kick any one in the shin verbally to get God's way. A kind word will heap coals of fire on his head (Proverbs 25:22).

A Consecrated Diet

In chapter two of Daniel, character was revealed by trial. As a result of his spiritual, consecrated diet, Daniel exhibited the excellency of devout wisdom under severe trial. The king had dreamed and then forgotten it. Now if Daniel didn't discover what the dream was, and what it meant, he would be put to death. He needed wisdom, and he knew how to find it. He didn't pretend to have wisdom, instead he sought the help and direction of God. Like Daniel, Christians today need to go on a consecrated diet.

Wisdom is Given as a Result of Prayer.

1. Daniel prayed a united prayer (Daniel 2:17,18). Daniel gathered some other Hebrews together to pray. For the Christian, see Acts 2:1; 12:5; and James 5:14.
2. Daniel prayed a specific prayer (Daniel 2:18). He asked for the secret to the King's dream.
3. Daniel prayed a reasonable prayer (2:18). He didn't seek escape from the King's condition.

Wisdom Finds Its Greatest Strength in the Greatest Trial.

1. If it hadn't been for the savage threat, Daniel might not have seen such a miracle from God on his behalf. The trial challenged his character, compelling him to exercise his faith.
2. If we live with a proper attitude toward adversity, we will often find that the extremities and emergencies of life are used by God to develop His best gifts and graces of character.

A Consequential Diet

When Daniel was advanced in years, his spirituality was revealed by trial (Daniel 6:10). His enemies had plotted his death by forcing him to either violate his convictions or be thrown in the lion's den. It was at this time that all the years of spiritual growth manifested themselves as he remained true to his spiritual diet and faced the consequences. Following his example, Christians need to go on a consequential diet.

Let's analyze two consequences of a spiritual diet.

A Spiritual Diet Expresses Itself in Prayer

1. Daniel continued to pray just as he always had before the King's decree (Daniel 6:10). Why? Because prayer is the distinctive mark and badge of spirituality. His spiritual diet produced a life of prayer.
2. It is essential that the spiritual diet of every Christian include a deep prayer life which, when faced with dangerous circumstances as a result of their faith, is able to get a hold of the throne of God.

A Spiritual Diet Expresses Itself in Consistency

1. Daniel prayed three times a day at his window with his face toward Jerusalem. It was this consistency spiritual life that gave him power with men and favor with God. When challenged by the King's decree, he continued his ritual as if nothing had happened. The habit of life had become so precious that he was willing to risk death rather than discontinue such a sacred duty.
2. For the Christian to be successful a consistent prayer life must be established and maintained. Today's victory over circumstances, and influence with men, requires a diligent spiritual diet that yields the power of God on our lives.

A Triumphant Diet

Victory is revealed by trial (Daniel 12:1). Throughout the latter part of the book of Daniel we are taught prophetic truths concerning the Jews and the church. The key to all of this discussion is to remember that those who have their name written down in God's book will be saved. God assures us that right will triumph over wrong.

If every Christian would go on a diet—

- a different diet (separation from evil),
- a consecrated diet (character dedicated to the Lord),
- a consequential diet (spirituality bringing forth blessing),
- and a triumphant diet (victory over wrong), the world would see scores of Christians who have learned the art of abiding by convictions.

Nehemiah -- Laying The Bricks

The Art of Accomplishing the Task

Have you ever known a Christian who seemed to accomplish one great task after another? Part of the reason for his great accomplishments rests on a solid understanding of laying the bricks. Each brick (task) is only laid (accomplished) successfully when the Christian understands the steps in the brick laying process. A successful Christian learns the art of accomplishing the task and therefore develops a "**can do**" attitude.

Nehemiah was a man who was given a task of monstrous proportions: rebuilding the wall around Jerusalem. Yet he managed to see it rebuilt in just fifty-two days! How did he do it? Let's analyze the eight steps in the brick laying process that enabled Nehemiah to accomplish his task and that will enable any Christian to be successful in laying his bricks.

Know the Purpose for Laying the Bricks

The book of Nehemiah opens with a sad description of the situation facing the city of Jerusalem. The walls had crumbled and were in need of rebuilding. This caused the Jews to be afflicted by their enemies around them. Because they were open to attack, Jerusalem became a reproach to the name of Jehovah. Nehemiah was so upset when he heard this that he fasted, mourned, and wept for days.

A goal began to formulate in his mind. The walls must be rebuilt! The purpose of laying the bricks was clear. He approached the task with a clear understanding of its necessity and importance. He weighed the energy that would be expended against the importance of the task and decided that the task was worthy of the effort.

God gives us all tasks that need to be accomplished. The successful Christian visualizes the completion of the task and therefore sees the necessity of it. In order for us to balance the effort that will be made, with the importance of laying the bricks, we must evaluate each brick in the light of God's will for our lives and subsequently set appropriate priorities.

Obtain Guidance for Laying the Bricks

Since the burden was so great, Nehemiah sought guidance for laying the bricks. His intercessory prayer for the needs of Jerusalem is recorded in Nehemiah 1:5-11. His prayer sheds light on some principles that he recognized.

1. First, the prayer shows that his dependence was on God to accomplish the task. Instead of seeking to use his civil power or influence, he sought God's power.
2. Secondly, through prayer, Nehemiah realized that he should do something about the need for which he was praying.
3. Finally, his prayer recalled both the sins of the people and the promises of God. These are guiding principles that each of us need to follow today. Let's dissect his prayer and

point out what he prayed for and how he prayed.

Nehemiah Prayed for Guidance (Nehemiah 1:4-11)

1. He prayed fervently. v. 4
2. He prayed meekly and reverently. v. 5
3. He prayed confessing the sins of the nation and the sin he had committed. v. 6,7
4. He prayed for forbearance. v. 8,9
5. He prayed reminding God of Israel's relationship to Him. v. 10

We Must Pray for Guidance

In order to see bricks laid, we must be totally dependent upon the Lord to accomplish the task through us. It is only after confession of our sins that we are in a position where God can use us. As we pray for the guidance we need, it is imperative that we trust God enough to take the entire situation and its ramification to God and leave it there.

Have a Commitment to Laying the Bricks

Nehemiah was totally committed to the cause. His commitment meant that he would leave the affluence and prestige of the King's chambers where he lived and worked in luxury to go to an oppressed people in a dangerous setting to do manual work and see accomplished a task that many opposed.

You and I must be totally committed to each task God gives us. Without this commitment, we will soon grow weary in well doing. Someone once said that the great things of life are accomplished by lopsided people. This is to say that people who commit body and soul to a narrow field of endeavor will accomplish more in a shorter time than people who try to do everything for everyone. We need to be lopsided as we lay bricks!

Count the Cost of Laying the Bricks

Before any work can be done, a cost analysis must be completed. Nehemiah did just that. He evaluated the situation that was before him, calculating the cost of materials, human energy, and emotional strain.

Five Things that Nehemiah Wanted to Know Before Laying the Bricks

1. He wanted to know if he would be sent (Nehemiah 2:5,6).
2. He wanted to know if he would be protected (Nehemiah 2:7,9).
3. He wanted to know if he could have provisions (Nehemiah 2:8).
4. He wanted to know who his enemies were (Nehemiah 2:10,11).
5. He wanted to know the extent of the need (Nehemiah 2:12-16).

Five Things that We Need to Know Before Laying the Bricks

1. We must know that it is God's will (Psalm 37:23).
2. We must know that we are protected (Hebrews 13:5,6; I Peter 1:5).
3. We must know that we have provisions (Philippians 4:19).
4. We must know that we have enemies (I Peter 5:8).
5. We must know the extent of the need (Philippians 2:20-21).

Involve People in Laying the Bricks

Nehemiah called the people together (Nehemiah 2:1,19) and in meekness challenged them with the need. He begged them to cooperate and rise up and build. Today we too must call on others to mix some mortar and help us by laying the bricks that need to be laid.

Work Hard at Laying the Bricks

Laying bricks is hard manual labor. Many tasks are not easily accomplished. But through hard work the bricks are laid and the job is finished. Even during times of attack, the builders continued working, laying brick with one hand and fighting with the other. Christians today, in order to be successful, must be willing to work hard at laying the bricks, even during times of adversity.

Anticipate Opposition to Laying the Bricks

Every worthwhile project becomes the brunt of opposition. So it was in Nehemiah's day.

1. He faced scorn (Nehemiah 4:1-4),
2. physical threats (Nehemiah 4:4-8),
3. workers who talked rather than working (Nehemiah 6:1,2),
4. rumors (6:6), and false friends (6:12).

A successful Christian soon learns that success includes coping with the attacks of others. During all of this, we must never lose sight of laying the bricks.

Lay the Last Brick

Nehemiah 6:15 reads, *"So the wall was completed...in fifty-two days."* For about two months Nehemiah had toiled night and day to see the last brick laid. That day finally came. One of the most important qualities we can have is endurance—seeing the job through to completion. The Christian life is a marathon race—not a fifty-yard dash. A successful Christian learns the art of accomplishing the tasks and lays that last brick!