

WHERE AM I? RETREAT OUTLINE

1. TALK 1 – WHERE IS MAN AND WHERE ARE YOU?

A. The Garden

- i. Humanity turned from God
 - 1. *Turning from the source of life is turning towards death*
- ii. Humanity was designed for union with God
- iii. Humanity must choose to turn again towards God if we are to live
- iv. Time on earth is the opportunity to turn towards God
 - 1. *Humanity could have died immediately after turning from God*
 - 2. *Time on earth is our opportunity to respond*
 - 3. *Without responding and turning towards God we remain lost*

B. God seeks for us

- i. God afforded us time to respond
- ii. God must respect our free will
- iii. God will always present opportunities to respond
- iv. Choosing to respond is less situational and more of a mindset
 - 1. *God can use any and all situations if we are willing?*

C. Nehemiah's predicament

- i. Set the stage and context of Nehemiah
- ii. Wrong place at the wrong time or just perfect?
 - 1. *Nehemiah wants to help Jerusalem, but he is the cup bearer to the king far away*
 - a. *Opportunity to turn towards God presents when 'what is' is different than what 'should be'*
 - 2. *Key: turning towards God is a mindset*
- iii. Nehemiah turned towards prayer
 - 1. *Consistent prayer allows for growth of our vision*
 - 2. *In prayer our vision moves from 'what is' to 'what could be' to 'what it should be'*
 - 3. *Prayer affords us the time to see why we got into the situation we are in*
 - a. *We must go back in order to go forward*

D. Preparing for opportunity

- i. Planning and expecting God to present the opportunity
 - 1. *Prayer over time begins to mature plans*
 - a. *Plans can and will never be perfect*
 - b. *Planning is our turning towards God*
 - c. *It's our engagement in His plans*
 - 2. *We think of what we would do if the opportunity presents itself*
 - a. *Ex. New Years and the old lady who asked how much we needed...blown opportunity*

3. *Even though we don't have the means, planning is essential*
 4. *Planning well, allows the vision for what we want to do sink into every part of our being*
- ii. A well thought out plan will take any opportunity to execute the plan
 1. *Nehemiah thought out his plan and waited for God to present the opportunity*
 2. *Nehemiah's sadness before the king, was opportunity knocking*
 3. *Before every step remember to pray...Turning to God*

E. Take home points

- i. God is asking where are you?
- ii. Stop making excuses based on circumstances
- iii. Start looking and planning for ways and opportunities to turn towards God

2. TALK 2 – DEALING WITH LIFE GOD'S WAY

A. All plans face challenges

- i. We need to plan because it won't come on a silver platter
 1. *Whenever we turn towards God, the devil will try and turn us back*
- ii. Nehemiah had a plan...but Nehemiah had unknowns
 1. *Condition of the wall*
 2. *Reception of the people*
 3. *Surrounding conditions*
- iii. Always more questions than answers
 1. *Plans allows us to answer the questions we can*
 2. *Prayer provides the courage to stay the course*

B. Heed the warnings and adjust the plan as needed

- i. Surrounding governor's plan to attack
- ii. Repeated warnings from travelers help gauge the seriousness of the threat
- iii. Nehemiah adjusted the plan
 1. *Workers carried weapons*
 2. *People on guard*
 3. *Plan put in place if attacked*

C. Beware of distractions

- i. Whenever we are working, distractions will try to siphon our focus away
 1. *Invitation to a meeting seems harmless*
 2. *When we say yes to something we are saying no to something else*
 - a. *Every moment presents an opportunity to turn towards God or away from God*
 3. *I am doing a good work and cannot come down*

D. Criticism/rumors is a distraction

- i. Criticism and rumors are a twisting of the truth
- ii. They easily get into our heads and make us spin

- 1. *They stir our emotions*
 - iii. Its important to remember what is true and what is false
 - 1. *God in time will bring all things true to the light*
 - a. *Even if it takes years*
 - iv. Prayer, is our again turning towards God
 - 1. *Prayer is how we ask for God to strength us to stay the course*
- E. The deadliest attack is the one on our character
 - i. When threats, invitations, criticism and rumors all fail the devil strikes at the core...our character
 - ii. They could not stop the wall despite many attempts
 - iii. They aimed at defiling Nehemiah...if they could discredit him and make him violate the commands of God then the construction would stop
 - iv. Threaten his life...hid in the temple.
 - v. Nehemiah would abandon the project of the wall before abandoning his value of honoring God
- F. Summary points
 - i. In our desire to turn to God we will have many opportunities to turn away
 - 1. *Threats, invitations, criticism/rumors are all opportunities to turn towards God or away*
 - 2. *Mindset matters*
 - a. *Determination to turn towards God in every opportunity begins to create a pattern and eventually a direction in life*
 - ii. Our character matters most