

Do
You
Hear
Him?

DECKY
BLACKMON

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DEDICATION

This book is dedicated to my Precious Heavenly Father.
What would I do without You and Your marvelous
Word?

*If the LORD had not been my help,
My soul would soon have dwelt
in the abode of silence.*

—**Psalm 94:17**



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INTRODUCTION

STOP, LOOK, AND READ AGAIN!

Have you ever been reading God's marvelous Word and suddenly you stumble upon an unusual character or an extraordinary event that seems to be hidden away among the verses? Perhaps it is only one verse that describes an event or person, but there it lies, and you may have read through the Bible for years and years and never noticed it.

So what do you do? You screech to a grinding halt and back up. Then you read that verse again. And again. And again. And there it is, a moment in God's time that He has been sharing with the world for several thousand years, but you have never seen it before. I call this a zinger. Sometimes the zinger is connected by the word *and* to a very familiar verse that is rarely quoted fully. Sometimes the zinger is a complete sentence, a word, or a phrase. But there it is, and you have never noticed it. Or perhaps you have noticed it but have never stopped and examined it.

Personally I love it when this happens to me. Every time I discover a zinger, my heart soars! Zingers have the power to completely turn me around and stop my world. But probably the most important thing a zinger does is cause me to ask questions and dig more deeply into God's Word. It becomes a glorious quest for me, a thrilling search for the answers that result in my spiritual growth. Whatever the zinger is, I find it frequently popping up in my brain to the extent that I want to talk about it wherever I go. And that is exactly what is happening right now. On a side note: My zingers may not be zingers to you. You may already know some of these verses completely. That's all right. Please indulge me.

In the lessons ahead, please stop and read all the "Wading in the Water" inserts. Read the Bible verses out loud. Get out your maps and timelines. Study the locations presented. Read the commentary notes at the end of each lesson. You will even find some answers there. Above all things, ask the questions that spring up. Do you know what will happen after that? You will grow. Your faith will grow. You may not have all the answers in a particular event, and that's just fine. You

will stand amazed at what God has done, not only in your own life but also in the life of the character or the event you have just read. Your realization of who God is and His power will astound you in every possible way. Oh, the lessons our Father is trying to teach you and me, if only we will open His Book.

I hope and pray that you are a daily Bible reader. If you are, you know how some books in the Bible are challenging, especially those from the Old Testament. Some of these books are filled with numbers and strategic placements of the twelve tribes, along with descriptions of the tabernacle and the temple. Whatever you do, do not stop reading! Keep on. Your brain is absorbing more than you think it is! An astonishing thing happens as you read the Bible year in and year out. You begin to understand what God is saying and trying to describe to you. Your brain is assembling the information and comprehending the picture the Master Artist is drawing. On top of that, you may find a hidden zinger in one of those difficult passages. Is God just waiting for you to find it?

Please remember one thing: Some questions will not be answered. We can only wonder about the details. That's okay. I'll say this about the discussions that will ensue in these chapters: No arguing allowed! Just try to keep an open mind and realize there are some places where we do not have the final answer. It is not for us to know just yet.

You and I are on a treasure hunt when we open the Bible, so let's see what jewels we can find. Travel with me, fellow Christians, and let's discover what the Father wants all His children to see—fascinating verses from the lips of God.



WADING IN THE WATER



“I’VE GOT TO LEARN!”

It was a typical busy Sunday morning at the church building—kids flying everywhere, parents rushing to deposit their children, and then on to class. My friend Susan, a co-teacher for the little ones, was tending to her students’ needs while observing all the goings-on out in the hall. Time went by; the doors to the classrooms were closed, and Susan was standing at her classroom door. Suddenly, the door to our annex flung open and Peyton, a first grader, rushed down the hall. Finding his classroom door closed and feeling he had missed everything, Peyton very politely but urgently kept knocking on the door, repeatedly saying, “I’ve got to learn! I’ve got to learn!”

Oh, the hearts of children, and how special children are! We cannot help but picture the scene of Jesus gathering a child from His midst and giving us all an unforgettable teaching. Somehow we understand more clearly what Jesus meant in this passage from Matthew:

At that time the disciples came to Jesus and said, “Who then is greatest in the kingdom of heaven?” And He called a child to Himself and set him before them, and said, “Truly I say to you, unless you are converted and become like children, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever then humbles himself as this child, he is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven (Matt. 18:1–4).

In contrast to the disciples always arguing about who was number one, Jesus showed them and all of us that unless we change and have a childlike faith and trust in Him, we won’t enter the kingdom of heaven.



In His Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said an amazing thing about people who have the supreme desire to know more about God—people who are hungry to learn. Jesus said, “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied” (Matt. 5:6). My mom always paraphrased this verse: “When you are hungry and thirsty for righteousness, God will see to it that you get your answers.”

Mankind is on a quest to know God. Some people will eagerly seize His Word, obey it, and look diligently there for answers all the days of their lives. They will become active, faithful, and strong Christians, always wanting to learn more about God. Others will look to men and society for their beliefs and follow strange doctrines. And some will look to God and even obey the gospel, but then gradually they will stop asking the questions and growing their faith. The saying is true: “We are either growing in the faith, or we are dying on the vine.”

Every time I tell Peyton’s story, I ask myself, “Becky, are you like Peyton? Do you say to God, ‘I’ve got to learn! I’ve got to learn!’? Or are you too busy for God?”

Then I ask myself the question of all questions: “Becky, who is number one in your life?”





Remember Me, O My God, for Good

Scriptures: Nehemiah 1:1–11; 2:11–20; 5:1–19; 9:1–3; 13:1–31

Song: “I Am Thine, O Lord”

We all make mistakes—every single one of us. We goof up. We sin. We make a mess of our lives and relationships, too. But we pray—or we should—and keep plodding on down the road called life. How thankful we should be that our Father is always with us, directing us, and hearing our pleas! We repeat certain passages to ourselves to encourage our spirits—passages like:

“I will never leave you nor forsake you” (Heb. 13:5 NKJV).

“Casting all your care upon Him because He cares for you” (1 Pet. 5:7 NKJV).

“In my distress I called to the Lord, and he answered me” (Ps. 120:1 ESV).

“And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose” (Rom. 8:28).

“I will instruct you and teach you in the way which you should go” (Ps. 32:8).

We collect signs and display them around the house such as this these:

Lord, help me to remember that nothing will happen to me today that together we can't handle.

As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.

It is plain and simple: We need God every moment of every day that we live. God told Solomon to write repeatedly in the book of Ecclesiastes: "There is nothing new under the sun." Problems are not new, sin is definitely not new, and destroyed lives are not new, either. Those are just three reasons why we pray. Prayer brings us into the presence of God where we can pour out our souls to Him as Hannah did (1 Sam. 1). I saw a post on Facebook where Corrie Ten Boom wrote,

The wonderful thing about praying is that you leave a world of not being able to do something, and enter God's realm where everything is possible. He specializes in the impossible. Nothing is too great for His almighty power. Nothing is too small for His love.

My husband and I read through the Bible every year. We have been doing this for years. But about ten years ago, we decided to see the Bible differently. We wanted to read it together—out loud. We divided the chapters in the Bible by 365, the number of days in a year. The number of chapters we needed to cover daily was about four. We also decided to start in Genesis and continue until we finished Revelation.

Oh, my friends, do you know how long that reading took every day? Fifteen minutes at the most. Surely we can all give the Lord at least fifteen minutes a day! If you have been contemplating reading the entire Bible, please try this!

Jeff and I turn off the television or any other distractions—a must—and in a quiet setting we read the Bible. We divide each chapter in half, and Jeff reads the first half; I read the second half. Not only has this helped our marriage, but it has also strengthened our faith. As we progress, we stop and ask questions. Sometimes we don't understand what is being said, but we keep right on going.

If we are apart for some reason, we make a note of how far we must read until we are together again. I cannot describe how wonderful this is for Jeff and me and our family. If our grandchildren are present, they happily join in! But I give you this warning: Do all you can to stay on top of your reading. If too many days lapse without reading the Bible, it is easy to feel overwhelmed and quit. Please don't do that. Don't let Satan win, for his goal is to get you to quit! Someone once said, "Satan's cleverest tool is man's ignorance of God's Word."

Read what you can and pick up anew. Always remember that the brain God created in each one of us is working and storing information. My mom often described the brain as a God-designed tape recorder that never quits.

Speaking frankly, it is through this daily Bible reading that the zingers have occurred to me. The Bible has a huge amount of information to be absorbed, and there is no way that I can remember everything I have read throughout the years. I may have read a passage for more than forty years when suddenly I read it, and it absolutely explodes before my eyes. There is nothing as amazing as the Word of God!

I get stuck on zingers, and I am currently stuck on Nehemiah. What an amazing, strong, courageous, and take-charge guy! A Jewish servant in the palace of Artaxerxes, Nehemiah travels back home to a ruined Jerusalem, helps to restore the walls, fights off the enemy, and demands that God's people straighten up and fly right. All of that, plus all the while he reminds the Jews why they were carried off into Babylon captivity in the first place! One more *and*: Throughout the book named after him, we see him praying, praying, and praying. Six times we see Nehemiah asking God to remember something. Three times the prayers concern Nehemiah and three times someone else.

In this lesson we will focus on Nehemiah 13:31, the very last verse in this book:

And I arranged for the supply of wood at appointed times
and for the first fruits. Remember me, O my God, for good.

And here is our first zinger: *Remember me, O my God, for good.* What a wonderful prayer that Nehemiah is asking God to remember him

and to remember the good he was doing for Israel. Notice also how Nehemiah refers to God as *my* God, his acknowledgement of God belonging to Nehemiah, and Nehemiah belonging to God.

Why wouldn't God want us to know Nehemiah's story? Note that he is one committed man of God! When you read all that Nehemiah said, all that he accomplished for the Lord, and how he lived for the Lord, you come to this conclusion: Here is a godly man who walked the walk, talked the talk, and pulled no punches when it came to obeying God. Nehemiah's story proves that God was number one in his life. He reminds me of Benaiah, "the son of Jehoiada, the son of a valiant man of Kabzeel, mighty in deeds. . . . He also went down and killed a lion inside a pit on a snowy day" (1 Chron. 11:22). Men like these are rare.

This zinger is now my prayer when I am troubled. Nehemiah taught it to me: "Remember me, O my God, for good." Don't you love that this prayer is not "Remember me, O my God, for all the bad things I did and the sins I committed." Instead it is: "Remember me, O my God, for good," that is, "for the good things I am trying to do, for the good life I am trying to live for You, for all the good, my God."

Come on, don't you want to meet Nehemiah?



TIME TO LEARN

1. Explore the timeline for this book. What was the approximate date for Nehemiah's coming to Jerusalem?

2. What was his official role, according to Nehemiah 5:14?

3. Name the following problems Nehemiah encountered with his fellow Jews:
 - a. Neh. 5:1–13 _____
 - b. Neh. 13:1–9 _____
 - c. Neh. 13:10–14 _____

d. Neh. 13:15–22 _____

e. Neh. 13:23–31 _____

4. Define *usury*.

5. What is the connection between Eliashib, the priest, and Tobiah, the Ammonite?

6. Three times Nehemiah prayed, “Remember me, O my God” (13:14, 22, 31). Write out Nehemiah 6:14 and 13:29.

7. Who did Nehemiah want God to remember in the above verses?

8. Where does it say that Nehemiah left Jerusalem for a period of twelve years?

9. Where did he go? _____

What is that distance? _____

10. Do you think Nehemiah was popular for his beliefs? Why or why not?

11. Write Nehemiah 4:14 and discuss its difference from the other five “remember” verses.



WHAT OTHERS HAVE SAID

Burton Coffman

Nehemiah 13 is one of the saddest chapters in the Bible, for it relates Israel's prompt rebellion against God's law as soon as Nehemiah's back was turned. Of course, Nehemiah once more attempted to get Israel back on the right track, as related in this chapter; but that great effort on his part may also be viewed as a total failure.

Israel obeyed God only so long as some powerful administrator compelled them to do so. The sadness of this tragic failure of the once Chosen People is emphasized by the fact that Nehemiah was their last chance to get right in the sight of God.

After Nehemiah, there would be no more prophets until John the Immerser; their king had been taken away from them by the Lord; and they would never have another; the whole racial nation, with the exception of a tiny "righteous remnant" sank rapidly and irrevocably into that state of 'judicial hardening' foretold by Isaiah. Israel had stopped their ears, closed their eyes, and hardened their hearts; and, from that state of spiritual oblivion, there could be no recovery until the Christ should come; and the vast majority of them failed to seize even that opportunity.¹

The Nelson Study Bible NKJV

The completion of Jerusalem's walls is only half the story of Nehemiah. The walls are rebuilt by chapter 6, but the book has seven more chapters. These last chapters record a revival and describe the repopulation of the city. The subject of the book is not merely the rebuilding of the walls, but the complete restoration of the people of Jerusalem. The book of Nehemiah makes it clear that God did not restore His people only one time; rather, He repeatedly, constantly, and continually restored His people. . . . In spite of their unfaithfulness, God accomplished His will. The restored walls of Jerusalem, the repopulation of Jerusalem, and the repeated reformation of the Israelites was clearly God's work. In the end, His name would be glorified.²

BOTTOM LINE

Why does God let us meet Nehemiah? Would you have been his friend? Explain.



PRAYER

Our Father, we thank You for this amazing story of Nehemiah and how faithfully he stood on Your words and statutes. Please help us to imitate his love for You. Help us to obey You in all things. We want to know You better and love You more, O God. Please forgive us of all the wrong in our lives and help us to put away all things that cause us to sin. Please deliver us from temptation and show us the way. We love You. Please remember us, O God, for good. In Jesus' name, Amen.



WORDS OF WISDOM

Don't preach to make friends or so we will be loved—don't do that. Preach so God will be loved and souls will be saved.

—**Marshall Keeble**³