

From Exile to God's Dwelling Place

-- let your ear be attentive and your eyes open to hear the prayer your servant is praying before you day and night for your servants, the people of Israel. I confess the sins we Israelites, including myself and my father's family, have committed against you. ⁷ We have acted very wickedly toward you. We have not obeyed the commands, decrees and laws you gave your servant Moses. ⁸ "Remember the instruction you gave your servant Moses, saying, 'If you are unfaithful, I will scatter you among the nations, ⁹ but if you return to me and obey my commands, then even if your exiled people are at the farthest horizon, I will gather them from there and bring them to the place I have chosen as a dwelling for my Name.' Nehemiah 1:6-9

The Christian Church in general has essentially abandoned the Biblical principles for healthy social and family life. We're in trouble.

Yes, there are still some conservative elements in the church where men have the dominant power. I grew up in that environment. I heard lots of preaching on "wives submit to your husbands" but rarely, if ever, "husbands, love your wives as Christ loved the Church and gave Himself up for her." It is that dynamic which gave opportunity for feminism to take root in the church in the growing lawlessness of the late 1960's and 1970's. Today's dysfunctional families are evidence of feminism's effectiveness.

There was a need in the Church for correction in how men expressed leadership. A deep need. Male leadership was not nearly as life-giving as God intends it to be. The benefits of companionship and of experiencing women as valued partners and co-laborers in life and Christian service, were often disregarded. In that context men cannot be fully men, or women fully women.

A man's relationship with his wife is to be his most treasured blessing in life except for his relationship with God. A husband and wife who walk together before God in a love and respect relationship, each add to the other in a way that is indescribably enriching. In that context, one plus one equals three or four – and I'm speaking of richness of life and fruitfulness of service to our Lord

The testimony of a godly family speaks loudly in any day and in any culture, but never more so than today, in America. The strength and life-giving qualities of authentic masculinity, and the enriching nature of the gentle and quiet spirit of feminine women, produce offspring who are at peace. Little else bears such testimony to the wisdom of God's creation design and to the blessing of living under His rule.

For Men Today

When Elaine and I started our teaching ministry in Kenya in 1990, I was overwhelmed by the spiritual darkness around us. Really – what was the point of little us trying to do anything when we could hardly even be a tiny drop in a big bucket?

As we continued though, I saw something happening. My students received the teaching and it began to change their lives. And then they started to share it with others. I was greatly encouraged, and while I had no hope of changing the nation, I was empowered to press on, one by one, and it began to seem very worthwhile. Yes, that is how change often happens.

Our world is covered by pervasive darkness. And our nation is in trouble. Our churches are, in reality, not very life-giving and our homes bear the brunt of the whole mess. We have been captured by the enemy of righteousness and carried away into exile. We can hardly call ourselves a dwelling place for God's Name.

But then there's Nehemiah's prayer. Honest confession of his sins and those of his family and his nation. "We have acted very wickedly toward you. We have not obeyed the commands, decrees and laws you gave your servant Moses."

It is only because of our arrogant and foolish hearts that Christians can pray for revival for America, and for God to open the heavens and pour blessing out upon us, without our first having accepted responsibility for being in such a place of need. The humiliating "If" of confession and repentance in [II Chronicles 7:14](#) must precede the wonderful "then" that we so cherish there. Nehemiah shows us how to do that. His, is the prayer of a humble man, and it is the kind of prayer that God hears.

In verse 8 he recounts a warning God had given them, and in 9 he reminds Him of His promise. I cherish the line, "even if your exiled people are at the farthest horizon, I will gather them from there and bring them to the place I have chosen as a dwelling for my Name." Read that again.

From the Farthest Horizon to the Dwelling Place

Men, some of us feel like we're at the farthest horizon and we don't have a clue what to do. We despair of ever becoming a man who is a dwelling place for God.

Masculinity has been overrun by feminism and diminished by misinformed concepts of masculine and feminine spirituality, and the Church has played into that. But we have also been disempowered by our own sins; intimidated by our vulnerabilities; and cast down by the false accusations Satan has thrown against us.

I say confidently that God is ready to gather us in, no matter how far out we are and regardless of how we got there. He is ready to bring His love and power to bear upon the wounds and scars of abuse of every kind. He is ready to redeem and restore our masculinity and manhood which have been forfeited or stolen through our own sins or the sins of others against us. He is ready to make us a dwelling place fit for His presence.

The first step is to confess our sins and believe that God forgives, as in [I John 1:9](#). And we must surrender to His rule if we want to experience His life. We are either in the place where God rules, and which brings authentic and full-blown masculinity – or we're in exile. If we don't like it there, let's follow old Nehemiah's example and do something about it. We won't change the world or even the church, but by our masculine initiative we can become one through whom God makes Himself known to others. From exile to dwelling place is a pilgrimage, and an incredibly rewarding one at that!

This is #13 in the series "For Men Only", and is one of many short articles that can be found at www.john2031.com. © 2011, Ken Stoltzfus, P.O. Box 228, Kidron, OH 44636 USA. May be printed for personal use and may be reproduced for non-commercial purposes without further permission if proper acknowledgment is given. Unless otherwise noted, Bible quotations are from the New International Version. Posted: March 12, 2011