

Knowledge, Wisdom and Understanding



"They read from the book, from the law of God, translating to give the sense so that they understood the reading...All the people went away to eat, to drink, to send portions and to celebrate a great festival, because they understood the words which had been made known to them".

Nehemiah 8:3, 12

**A KEY FOR AWAKENINGS
AND REVIVALS**

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TITLE: **KNOWLEDGE, WISDOM AND UNDERSTANDING**

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Leadership Series

Book 4

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PREFACE

Welcome to the discipleship / leadership series. These little booklets were designed to give basic information concerning various topics about our Christian faith in Christ Jesus.

The purpose of this series is to stimulate thought and to foster a clearer understanding of discipleship and servant leadership. These booklets can be used as a discussion tool for personal study, family devotion, youth meetings or in cell groups. Our hope is that this information will stir the readers and encourage them to go deeper into personal research and study.

Our desire is that these booklets will be a blessing to the reader and a tool that can be shared with others as a gift of encouragement.

Please feel free to mail or e-mail us for more copies or to just write to us with any feedback concerning the content of these studies. We hope you enjoy this offering of knowledge and experience. We pray that Christ will draw you into an ever deeper personal relationship with Himself as you study.

Your servants in Christ,

Rev. Dr. James and Hkaw Win Humphries

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INTRODUCTION

*They read from the book, from the law of God, translating to give the sense so that they **understood** the reading...All the people went away to eat, to drink, to send portions and to celebrate a great festival, because they **understood** the words which had been made known to them. Nehemiah 8:3, 12*

The door to a joy-filled life is understanding. The key is to keep focused on whom we serve. God must be first and foremost. He is the foundation we build upon. As He calls, we need to respond and be open to undergoing a change that is totally cross-culture in nature. I believe God speaks to us and gives us a passion that aligns with His will.

In the times of Ezra and Nehemiah the people had been released from bondage to freedom. They had spent a number of years in Babylon in captivity and the city of Jerusalem had been destroyed. The temple and the walls had been totally levelled. Now they were going back to the city of peace known as Jerusalem. God had moved in the heart of King Cyrus of Persia. He was not only sending them back, but was giving back to the people the possession of the temple plus provision and a tithe to be given to the priest. This home going was a fulfillment of a prophecy that Jeremiah had given concerning the people of Israel and the city of Jerusalem. God now was moving the people who had been under slavery and bondage back to a place that had been previously destroyed. But they had seen the hand of the Lord and there was a renewed faith and optimism. Their focus needed to be changed if they were going to move forward.

God has a will and a plan for our lives but it starts by a shift from being self-centred to being God-centred. As the Lord's Prayer

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states, it is "not my will be done but His will to be done here on earth as it is in heaven" (Matthew 6:9). People who live in oppression or under bondage see things differently. When they are released, their eyes look forward and they desire not to get back into bondage again. They also want to review their past and understand what must change if they hope to move on into the future life of freedom and blessing from the hand of God. Life is full of challenges, but hardship does not have to be a place that we stay in. We can do something about it as we look to God and His Word, and be willing to move from fear to a life of faith. We can overcome because we are born of God. This means we have the victory through Christ Jesus our Lord (1 John 5:4-5).

I believe that Ezra and Nehemiah will show us from their writings that this is possible. Most of the people who were coming back to Jerusalem had been born and raised in a life of bondage and slavery in and around Babylon. They were reaping the harvest of the sin of their forefathers and that of their own lives. The people of God had once again turned their backs on God and forgot the One who had delivered them out of the land of Egypt. But God had not given up on them. He began again to speak into the leaders' and the people's hearts. They knew that there needed to be a change if they were to survive and move forward. The only way was to turn back to Jehovah God.

The people of Myanmar and especially those of the Kachin State whom I have lived and worked with, have been under bondage for over 60 years. They have been forced to give up much of their identity and culture. Their traditions and culture have been smothered by other countries and by various people groups within their own country. They have fought and died for freedom through many wars and presently have a shaky ceasefire with the ruling Junta of the land. (As of June 2011 the ceasefire has been broken.) Their only hope is to return to the Word of God and to its Author,

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Jesus Christ, and to begin to undergo change that comes through repentance. There is a great need to make Jesus Christ the true Lord of their lives. They do desire this and want to move forward but it will take a Nehemiah experience if they hope to come out of the endless circle of bondage and despair.

I have been blessed to travel to various parts of the world and I have discovered that people are hungry for more of God. In their hearts they desire to know more about who God is and how to live a Godly life. Some people have a little knowledge about God and others have even some wisdom of who He is; but what God desires is that we understand and have an intimate personal relationship with Him. I have learned that people know in their heart where they are falling short and going wrong. But what they want to know is how to get back on track and move forward again.

How do we know this? In Scriptures, we are told that people will produce fruit from the kind of tree that they are. Jesus told the disciples that by their fruit they will be known. All they need is someone to show them a way out of these endless circles of despair and destruction. Scripture teaches that in true fellowship with God, He will show us and direct us. This results in a daily change that will take place in one's life. The process of growth will happen each day. As you look back you will see that you have changed and are different from who you once were. The reason is because God desires you to become more like Him. It is a two-step process. First, we must come to a place of clearly understanding who He is and, secondly, from that understanding will come change. This is change that will flow out from the heart, through your mind and even into the body which will change your outer countenance for others to see.

Each day we will undergo some type of change. This change comes through various types of communication.

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Communication can help us to learn more about ourselves and about who God is. We can learn how to personally relate and walk with God each day. It does not matter where we have been or what we have done – all that matters is that we are willing to change. Put yourself into the hands of God who desires to move you from a sinful nature of this world to being a new creation for Him that is unique and special in His eyes.

All change is cross-cultural and lifestyle-changing. You are moving into a different way of thinking and living. The Bible challenges us with wisdom and knowledge from God to live differently. God also uses people to be teachers, to help others to understand. Many things get forgotten or misplaced and there are times that we are too busy just trying to survive what life throws our way. God does not want us to go through an endless cycle of reinventing the wheel over and over again. We must learn from our past history and take that knowledge, wisdom and understanding and build on it for the present and for the future. What we do will affect and influence those who will follow after us.

What I desire to communicate is how something old can change the present way people are living. In the book of Nehemiah we see two men that God had teamed together to bring people back from bondage to life and freedom in Him. The people needed to see their calling and potential as a people again. They needed to work and serve God and each other. They had forgotten the Word of God and the freedom that it brings to the individual and to the people as a whole. The people had become desperate again for more of God. But the key was that people needed to understand clearly what God was trying to say to them.

God does not give up on us but the problem so often is that we give up on trying to hear and understand what it is He wants us to learn and do. That is why, as Scripture tells us, we need to keep

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looking, seeking and knocking. If we do this, Christ promises us that the door will be opened to us (Matthew 7:7).

People in bondage need to know how this change can take place in their lives today. It comes by desiring to learn and to understand what was being taught to God's people and by His Word, the Bible. The people needed to move from just having head knowledge, or having a certain type of wisdom in their hearts, to actually understanding and doing what God was speaking to them to do. True discipleship is a journey of understanding God and His word. As we do, the result will be that we will bear forth precious fruit of change. It will take time and it must be something that we desire above any other thing in our lives. Change comes with challenges but if we persevere, we are promised that "the joy of the LORD will be your strength" (Nehemiah 8:10).

There are at least four key words that will give a clearer view of the picture that I am trying to portray. As you study these words you will see a lot of similarities, but they also hold within their meaning some very specific differences. If we take the time to understand these words clearly it will open up our eyes and ears to more of God and the presence He desires to have within us.

Key Words

Knowledge – to know in one's mind

Understanding, comprehension, grasp, grip, command, mastery, apprehension; expertise, skill, proficiency, expertness, accomplishment, adeptness, capacity, capability.

Wisdom – to internalize in one's heart

Intelligence, understanding, insight, perception, perceptiveness, penetration, discernment, sense, good sense, common

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sense, shrewdness, astuteness, smartness, judgement, foresight, clear-sightedness, prudence, circumspection; logic, rationale, rationality, soundness.

Understand – able to do and act out through one’s life
Comprehend, apprehend, grasp, see, take in, perceive, discern, make out, puzzle out, recognize, keep up with, master, get to know, follow, fathom, get to the bottom of, penetrate, divine, interpret, unravel, decipher.

Translate – cross cultural communication in word and actions
Interpret, render, gloss, put, express, convert, change, construe, transcribe, transliterate. paraphrase, reword, rephrase, recast, convert, decipher, decode, gloss, explain, unravel, reveal, elucidate, expound, clarify, spell out.

Now that we have some key words locked into our minds let us start by looking at the account that takes place in Nehemiah chapter 8 and see if we can pull from it some truth that will possibly bring about change in our lives.

Key Scripture

*And all the people gathered as one man at the square which was in front of the Water Gate, and they asked Ezra the scribe to bring the book of the law of Moses which the LORD had given to Israel. Then Ezra the priest brought the law before the assembly of men, women and all who could listen with **understanding**, on the first*

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*day of the seventh month. He read from it before the square which was in front of the Water Gate from early morning until midday, in the presence of men and women, those who could **understand**; and all the people were attentive to the book of the law. Ezra the scribe stood at a wooden podium which they had made for the purpose. And beside him stood Mattithiah, Shema, Anaiah, Uriah, Hilkiah, and Maaseiah on his right hand; and Pedaiah, Mishael, Malchijah, Hashum, Hashbaddanah, Zechariah and Meshullam on his left hand. Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people for he was standing above all the people; and when he opened it, all the people stood up. Then Ezra blessed the LORD the great God. And all the people answered, "Amen, Amen!" while lifting up their hands; then they bowed low and worshiped the LORD with their faces to the ground. Also Jeshua, Bani, Sherebiah, Jamin, Akkub, Shabbethai, Hodiah, Maaseiah, Kelita, Azariah, Jozabad, Hanan, Pelaiah, the Levites, explained the law to the people while the people remained in their place. They read from the book, from the law of God, translating to give the sense so that they **understood** the reading. Then Nehemiah, who was the governor, and Ezra the priest and scribe, and the Levites who taught the people said to all the people, "This day is holy to the LORD your God; do not mourn or weep." For all the people were weeping when they heard the words of the law. Then he said to them, "Go, eat of the fat, drink of the sweet, and send portions to him who has nothing prepared; for this day is holy to our Lord. Do not be grieved, for the joy of the LORD is your strength." So the Levites calmed all the people, saying, "Be still, for the day is holy; do not be grieved." All the people went away to eat, to drink, to send portions and to celebrate a great festival, because they **understood** the words which had been made known to them. Nehemiah 8:1-12*

Did you notice the word "understand or understanding" and how often it was used in these twelve verses? Also, did you see the

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hunger the people had for more of God? I believe that as we break this passage of Scripture down into its smaller pieces we will glean from it principle and truth that will help us to change the way we think, act and live our daily lives. What follows is a reflection on what is needed for the disciple and for the church of today and how Nehemiah chapter 8 verses 1-12 can be an answer to any people group that desires to be restored back to walking in the will of the Lord and having the joy of the Lord as their strength. It is my desire to shed some light on what I believe are twelve principles that can help us to understand who God is and will also open a door for personal revival and renewal within our lives.

1. Unity: men and women (children) gather as one. v.1

*And all the people **gathered as one** man at the square which was in front of the Water Gate, and they asked Ezra the scribe to bring the book of the law of Moses which the LORD had given to Israel.*

We see that the people came together in unity and harmony, there was a oneness. They knew there needed to be change and it was time to implement those changes. They saw a need and together they were coming to learn what they needed to do, so that they would not have to remain in bondage. Their past was clear and they had learned that God wanted to bless them but they needed to understand who He was and what His will for their lives was.

There is a great need for the disciples of Christ to come together as one -- to have unity and harmony to seek God's face for a clear call that will not only change us, but also greatly impact the people and world around us. We have been called to be part of one body where Christ is the head (1Corinthians 12:12-14). Throughout the New Testament we have the "one another

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principle” that shows that we must connect and become channels for God’s blessing (1 Thessalonians chapter 4, 5). We have to gather together under the umbrella of God’s protection and get back into His hand of love. His arm is outstretched to all who will receive (Deuteronomy 33:27).

We are also told that they gathered in front of the Water Gate. This was one of the closest gates to the temple mound. Water is a basic need for all life. The people needed it for their daily existence. Water was used for cleaning and washing. In the Bible water makes things pure and fresh. Water is life giving to the physical body but it is also the same for cleansing the spiritual man. We need the water of the Word of God daily in our lives if we hope to exist and to grow. The Holy Spirit comes to us like refreshing rain falling down from heaven to refresh God’s people.

Another interesting point is that this event took place at the beginning of the New Year for the people of Israel. For many the New Year is a starting point for new beginnings. It is a place where we hope to leave the old behind and start off fresh into a New Year full of hope and expectations.

This was going to be the setting where God was going to dramatically step back into the people’s lives as their Chief Shepherd. One who would take them back under His protection and would touch them once again with His healing hand, as a loving Father would for His children. It would be an open air meeting -- no building or finely built things to give special effects or atmosphere. It would be open under the heavens and the only thing built was a pulpit for the leaders to speak from. It was the people, God and His Word.

It is interesting that this revival was instigated by the people. They were hungry to know their God. Through their oral

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tradition and the teachings that they had received in the past, they were moved by God to proceed – a letting go of the past, a new opportunity to get it right. A stirring began deep in their hearts to make a change in their thinking and in how they had been living. They came as one to their leadership and asked them to bring out the books of Moses and begin to read and teach them. They somehow knew that the only hope for change was to get back to the books that God had given them, together as men, women and children.

Like the Kachins of Northern Myanmar, there was a great move of God that brought them out of animism to a faith in one Creator God (Karai Kasang). (I now live amongst these people with Hkaw Win my wife, which in itself is a real miracle and blessing that God has truly done.) Their history as Christians is only 135 years old but during that time they underwent terrific changes. Some changes brought about freedom but others brought bondage and enslavement to themselves and others. Some of their teachers and leaders were removed and others just left the country. They were left alone to begin the journey of moving forward. They knew that God was with them and He could help them along the way. Great improvements were accomplished, but their enemies did not stop trying to overcome them with compromise and false teaching. The early church fathers (in Myanmar) walked from village to village teaching the few words that they understood concerning the Gospel of Christ. Out of that effort came a great harvest. But just as it so often happens, the generations that follow did not know God the way their patriarchs did. It has only been in the last few years that the elders have seen the need to come back once again to a place of unity and harmony, to become one voice and to seek after that which is good for the group and not just for various individuals. They have formed organizations to promote this truth amongst the people.