

Series Slide

July 2nd, 1982 was a crystal clear day in Southern California.

It was perfect weather for a truck driver by the name of Lawrence Richard Walters...to go down in history.

What happened that day- is forever memorialized in the Smithsonian and the National Air and Space Museum in Washington DC.

The 33 year old man known to his friends as "Larry" had always had a dream of flying- but his poor vision wouldn't allow him a pilots license. So, with the help of his girlfriend in his backyard, he grabbed a couple of peanut butter sandwiches, a BB Gun and 6-pack of cold Miller Lite- attached 43 weather balloons from a military surplus store to a lawn chair-with no seat belt, and no notice to the FAA....and quickly ascended to 16,000 feet in the atmosphere.

He was spotted by two commercial airline pilots...before he started shooting the balloons one by one with the pellet gun until he descended into a power line which shut down a whole portion of the electrical grid in LA.

He safely disembarked from his craft...was promptly arrested...and from that day forward would be known to the world as "Lawnchair Larry".

Pic of Larry

Following his flight. A news reporter asked him why he did it.

to which he replied.

"A man can't just sit around."- Lawnchair Larry

He later appeared on David Letterman's late night show..

When Letterman asked him what he accomplished that day he said.

"I achieved inner peace. I'm a happier person today."- Lawnchair Larry

11 years later- he killed himself.

Of course, Larry isn't the only one to chase after a dream...only to catch it... be temporarily fulfilled, but soon fall back into the same dissatisfied malaise.

"A man can't just sit around"...and "I've achieved inner peace" represent a common human journey.

No matter who you are...at some point you are going to look at your life.....you're going to see a rut you are in...a cycle of listlessness and you are going to wonder...How do I get out of this? Have I done enough? Do I matter in the grand scheme of things?

After all...a man can't just sit around. ...

This "sitting around" is classically known as Acedia. A lack of care or a feeling of meaninglessness. In the category of the 7 deadly sins...its sloth. I

Social scientists have noted that this plays itself out often in early adult life, midlife and end of life existential crises- where we feel like we haven't really accomplished anything...and need more.

For Lawn Chair Larry- he tried to solve his acedia with 43 weather balloons and a 6 pack.

And though he went up 16,000 feet- he didn't go high enough.

He was looking for Transcendent purpose. and all he found was temporary inner peace and 15 minutes of fame.

There are terms for the thing that Larry was looking for.

Rebirth.

Renewal.

Revival.

Larry was chasing after something spiritual.

Lawnchair Larry showed us something in his statement. He thought he could **achieve** inner peace through an individual accomplishment.

Title Slide "Can't Just Sit Around: Overcoming Acedia thru Awakening, not Achieving"- Nehemiah 7-8

The truth is...you can't **achieve** that kind of peace...you can only be **awakened** to it.

We've come to the point in the book of Nehemiah when the building project is over. The lawn chair has landed for Israel because the wall is finished. But God didn't call Nehemiah back for an achievement. He called him back to lead an awakening.

And What you're going to see today- is actually something very ordinary... something in fact...that we're doing right now...is absolutely crucial to this revival.

Nehemiah 7:1-2

Then the wall had been rebuilt and I had the doors installed, the gatekeepers, singers, and Levites were appointed.

2 Then I put my brother Hanani in charge of Jerusalem, along with Hananiah, commander of the fortress, because he was a faithful man who feared God more than most.

7:73-8:18

The priests, Levites, gatekeepers, temple singers, some of the people, temple servants, and all Israel settled in their towns. When the seventh month came and the Israelites had settled in their towns,

all the people gathered together at the square in front of the Water Gate. They asked the scribe Ezra to bring the book of the law of Moses that the Lord had given Israel.

2 On the first day of the seventh month, the priest Ezra brought the law before the assembly of men, women, and all who could listen with understanding. 3 While he was facing the square in front of the Water Gate, he read out of it from daybreak until noon before the men, the women, and those who could understand. All the people listened attentively to the book of the law. 4 The scribe Ezra stood on a high wooden platform made for this purpose. Mattithiah, Shema, Anaiah, Uriah, Hilkiah, and Maaseiah stood beside him on his right; to his left were Pedaiah, Mishaël, Malchijah, Hashum, Hashbaddanah, Zechariah, and Meshullam. 5 Ezra opened the book in full view of all the people, since he was elevated above everyone. As he opened it, all the people stood up. 6 Ezra blessed the Lord, the great God, and with their hands uplifted all the people said, "Amen, Amen!" Then they knelt low and worshiped the Lord with their faces to the ground.

7 Jeshua, Bani, Sherebiah, Jamin, Akkub, Shabbethai, Hodia, Maaseiah, Kelita, Azariah, Jozabad, Hanan, and Pelaiah, who were Levites, explained the law to the people as they stood in their places. 8 They read out of the book of the law of God, translating and giving the meaning so that the people could understand what was read. 9 Nehemiah the governor, Ezra the priest and scribe, and the Levites who were instructing the people said to all of them, "This day is holy to the Lord your God. Do not mourn or weep." For all the people were weeping as they heard the words of the law. 10 Then he said to them, "Go and eat what is rich, drink what is sweet, and send portions to those who have nothing prepared, since today is holy to our Lord. Do not grieve, because the joy of the Lord is your strength." 11 And the Levites quieted all the people, saying, "Be still, since today is holy. Don't grieve." 12 Then all the people began to eat and drink, send portions, and have a great celebration, because they had understood the words that were explained to them.

13 On the second day, the family heads of all the people, along with the priests and Levites, assembled before the scribe Ezra to study the words of the law. 14 They found written in the law how the Lord had commanded through Moses that the Israelites should dwell in shelters during the festival of the seventh month. 15 So they proclaimed and spread this news throughout their towns and in Jerusalem, saying, "Go out to the hill country and bring back branches of olive, wild olive, myrtle, palm, and other leafy trees to make shelters, just as it is written." 16 The people went out, brought back branches, and made shelters for themselves on each of their rooftops and courtyards, the court of the house of God, the square by the Water Gate, and the square by the Ephraim Gate. 17 The whole community that had returned from exile made shelters and lived in them. The Israelites had not celebrated like this from the days of Joshua son of Nun until that day. And there was tremendous joy. 18 Ezra read out of the book of the law of God every day, from the first day to the last. The Israelites celebrated the festival for seven days, and on the eighth day there was a solemn assembly, according to the ordinance.

Three points today.

1) Revival begins when an awakened people get hungry for God.

Nehemiah and Lawnchair Larry share some similarities.

They both did something that took initiative and vision- but there is also a glaring difference. Lawnchair Larry did something individual. For himself. For INNER PEACE.

But Nehemiah didn't go back to Jerusalem to prove he could do something he always wanted to do- like lead a successful wall-building project.

He didn't go there for some personal journey.

He didn't go because he realized a man can't just sit around.

He wasn't going to find inner peace.

He went because he had an awakening from his own acedia- with a vision for a people.

Nehemiah was living a comfortable life- sure in exile, but he was at the Kings table as a cupbearer. He got all the nice stuff, ate all the good meals, enjoyed as much influence as a Israelite could have in Persia.

As far as we know- he's fine with what he thought was happening in Jerusalem...but he wasn't motivated to go back. Its also not that he doesn't have a relationship with God. He clearly is very familiar with his God and is comfortable praying and practicing spiritual disciplines....he knows his Torah.

But he doesn't move. He doesn't get up and go...Until God wakes him up with a broken heart.

Nehemiah 1:3-4

They said to me, "The remnant in the province, who survived the exile, are in great trouble and disgrace. Jerusalem's wall has been broken down, and its gates have been burned."

4 When I heard these words, I sat down and wept. I mourned for a number of days, fasting and praying before the God of the heavens.

God places a huge burden on Nehemiah. By burden I don't mean some suffering or difficulty...I mean a passion...a vision...something that will weigh on Nehemiah if he doesn't get it done. Kind of like Lawnchair Larry felt about flying.

But Nehemiah isn't in it for his own accomplishment like Lawnchair Larry. He cares about more than just his individual accomplishment. He wants his burden...the awakening from his Acedia- to spread to all of Israel.

Rebirth- beginning of a personal relationship with God

Jesus tells Nicodemus in John 3- You must be born again. You must have a spiritual birth. We have talked about the importance of spiritual connection. This can only happen through that rebirth.

Renewal- awakening from acedia for an individual

This is what happens to Nehemiah.

Revival- awakening from acedia for a group

8:1-

All the people- it is literally translated "gathered as ONE MAN"

After the wall is built- Nehemiah is intent on more than just his own personal sense of accomplishment.

He wants all of his people to deeply desire the presence of God- and to be about his mission- the transcendent purpose he's called them to.

And here- it says that Israel is so together- after so much opposition, so much dangerous hard work together for a purpose- that they are acting as ONE MAN.

Its almost like Israel together has become an embodiment of Nehemiah from chapter 1.

They have collectively awakened from their Acedia. And notice what they ask.

They call Ezra to come and read the bible out loud to them.

They are so hungry- so desperate for spiritual connection- that they are almost chanting for somebody to preach Leviticus! That is a hunger a desperation.

Note 2 things that Nehemiah does to feed and grow this revival.

7:1-2

First, directly after finishing the wall- he organizes the people by appointing leaders.

Notice- his qualifications for these leaders, particularly Hanniah-

He fears God more than most- and is faithful.

In other words- he has an obvious spiritual connection- a deep awareness of God's presence that translates to a loyalty to God and his word.

This is called- Confessional Integrity. He knows what he believes and it deeply affects how he lives. He is loyal to the calling of God.

In the NT- it's what elders of a church are called to be. And those elders are an example to what everyone is called to be.

One more thing about a hungry people.

8:10b- "The Joy of the Lord is your strength"

What drives them is not some inner drive attempting to quell a sense of acedia. No...for this group the acedia is gone. They aren't chasing a sense of accomplishment. They are expressing the joy that they have encountered by knowing God sees them and loves them and has a mission for them.

That is all the strength they need to keep going.

Raising up leaders with joy. Unafraid. Overflowing. Sent.

City Church- are we hungry together? Are you with us?
Are you going to be a part of this revival- or are you living a lawnchair Larry life.
Pursuing an individual project to bring you some temporary inner peace that will only fade.

your acedia doesn't need another achievement. You need an awakening...

2) The weekly worship gathering is fuel for revival.

It may seem strange that something that happens every week actually works against acedia- since mostly we think to break out of the boring rat-

race malaise we have to spice it up...have something that just feels out of the ordinary or spectacular. Like Larrys' Lawnchair.

But look what happens here...

7:1

Nehemiah appoints singers.

Does this seem odd? They have been building and defending from attacks....and now- singers.

Its because all the building and all the defending was leading somewhere. To their purpose- Worship.

Singing- is often discounted.

Ephesians 5:18-21

And don't get drunk with wine, which leads to reckless living, but be filled by the Spirit: 19 speaking to one another in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, singing and making music with your heart to the Lord, 20 giving thanks always for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, 21 submitting to one another in the fear of Christ.

Colossians 3:14-17

Above all, put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity. 15 And let the peace of Christ, to which you were also called in one body, rule your hearts. And be thankful. 16 Let the word of Christ dwell richly among you, in all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another through psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts. 17 And whatever you do, in word or in deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him. -

Back to 2)

- Dwell in you- isn't that the curse of a song. **Isn't that the curse of a song?**
 - Can't get it out of your head. Can't shake the words.
 - Mowing lawn to Billboard top 100 1990
 - So many songs I forgot I just started singing.
 - Its why 36 years after it was first released...I can still say **"Alright stop. Collaborate and listen. Ice is back with a brand new invention. Something grabs a hold of me tightly, flow like a harpoon daily and nightly."**
- I didn't really TRY to memorize those words. I didn't really WANT to...but I heard it so much they stuck.
- Thank God, that wasn't the only song I heard. I also heard the playlist of the church. Song lyrics like- **"Oh to grace how great a debtor, daily I'm constrained to be. Let thy goodness like a fetter bind my wandering heart to thee."**
- And now, when I don't know what to pray...I can sing.
- Now, when I don't what to say after my son dies or my marriage fails, and both did...I can sing **"It is well...it is well with my soul"**

- Every single week, there are people in here, some of you today, no doubt, that need the peace of Christ to rule your heart. You need words that you can remember when life doesn't leave you with a clear head or a happy heart.
- The moments where **"Flowing like a harpoon daily and nightly"**]aren't going to help you.
- See, its not that you necessarily need to have those moments **IN HERE**...its that you need the lingering tune of that song to bring up the words that will confess what you believe
 - ...even when you aren't sure you believe it in that moment.
- **16 years ago, to the day- July 12 2010-** I sang **"It is well with my soul"** when my son died...even though It sure didn't FEEL like it was well with my soul.
- **When my anger swells at someone for their sin against me, I sing "Prone to wander, Lord I feel it, Prone to leave the God I love"**...even though in that moment I don't FEEL prone to wander. I feel like I'm righteous and I should be able to judge. But I need to be reminded of what I believe...or at least what I say I do.
- See that's truth when it doesn't feel true.
- **Our songs don't PRODUCE our emotions on Sunday....they help us not to be tricked by our emotions on Monday.**

Body position

Nehemiah 8:6

Ezra blessed the Lord, the great God, and with their hands uplifted all the people said, "Amen, Amen! " Then they knelt low and worshiped the Lord with their faces to the ground.

Preaching

8:3-4a (End at purpose)

While he was facing the square in front of the Water Gate, he read out of it from daybreak until noon before the men, the women, and those who could understand. All the people listened attentively to the book of the law. 4 The scribe Ezra stood on a high wooden platform made for this purpose.

1- He preaches the Bible. torah- first 5 books

Commitment to the Bible. We are a word-centered preaching. Everything is driven by the Word. We are not sacrament centered. We only understand the sacraments through the Word. We are not emotion centered. We are not culture centered. We are word centered. AND BTW- the center of the word is pointing to the gospel. The good news about God remarking and ruling and reigning over the world. We are word centered preaching that always points to the gospel of Jesus.

2- He preaches for understanding.

There is a reason I don't just get up and read the bible. The power of the word is not just in its recitation, but in your understanding it. Its living and active. It must be understood and believed and applied.

The Bible says that faith in Christ- the rebirth that must happen before the revival- comes through hearing. That hearing means UNDERSTANDING.

Thats why I tell stories. Thats the power of a sermon, not just to give you the raw material, but to connect you to what it means and how its supposed to feel.

3- Raised platform in front of a gathered people.,

And we're doing that together. This isn't just information decimation. Its something transcendent that is happening as we are gathered as ONE MAN... the body of Christ.

Back to 2)

Transition: where does all this lead...Unafraid. Overflowing. Sent.

3) The joy of the Lord is our traveling castle.

Think about Larry on that Lawnchair.

Surely it took being unafraid. He was moved by this sense of what he needed to do to find peace- and it overcame any fear he had.

Overflowing- he became a motivational speaker....inspired people.

Sent- but this is where he failed. There was no transcendent purpose. Nothing really beyond Larry himself. His entire purpose was over when he landed on those power lines. ...and the power went out in LA...and in Larry.

Nehemiah 8:10

Then he said to them, "Go and eat what is rich, drink what is sweet, and send portions to those who have nothing prepared, since today is holy to our Lord. Do not grieve, because the joy of the Lord is your strength."

Its actually Stronghold. Castle. Fortress. Ironically- its a defense... So its a comment on strenght- but its actually highlighting their weakness- They are not strong enough in themselves- they have to have a stronghold...a Castle.

But would it last more than a moment. This is the beauty of God- he goes with you.

Nehemiah 8:17

The whole community that had returned from exile made shelters and lived in them. The Israelites had not celebrated like this from the days of Joshua son of Nun until that day. And there was tremendous joy.

- The people go back to their houses...their new houses...and they have a good nights sleep.
- **ANYWAY, the next day some of the men who were leading their households came together with Ezra for a Bible study.**
- And as they are reading together they realize that Christmas isn't just about presents.
- (Well, ok, actually they realize the Feast of Booths isn't just about the harvest...but you understand what I mean when I say Xmas isn't about presents)
- See, these men got together and realized that the feast they had celebrated for decades had been drained of its meaning.
- They thought it was about the harvest...but they realized it was about God saving them.
- **ILLUS:** Its like this...Nearly our entire country celebrates Xmas. But not everyone understands the meaning behind that celebration.
- Imagine if you had celebrated Xmas for years, Xmas tree, presents, a dramatic reading of "The Grinch", some Bing Crosby tune in front of the fireplace in your Santa Hat. You practically LIVE in Hooville. ..half the electric company draws their salary from your Wattage use in the month of December.
- You loved Xmas every year.
- But then one year, you discover something. Christmas has a deeper meaning.
- The gifts, the presents, the tree, the star...they were all pointing you to something else...actually to SOME ONE else.
- You had seen one of those set ups with a baby in a stable before... but the whole scene just didn't seem to fit everything else.
- Why would you put a glowing baby on your lawn?
- But then, one day, you read a story. A story about a cosmic king who became a human...but it wasn't just a magic trick...it was a mission.

- As you keep reading, you discover what this mission is.
- That baby, who is God himself, grows up...and though he's one of us...he's different. Set apart. Holy.
- ...and its not just that he has the power to do supernatural things... its that he does them for broken, hurting people.
- He heals the sick. He has dinner with the outcast.
- Even though he's good, he makes friends with very bad people.
- Even though he's powerful, he gently cares for the weak.
- Then he's arrested. This "Christ". He's killed. They said he deserved it...the story seems to indicate otherwise.
- Then you understand. He wasn't killed. He gave his life up.
- He wasn't purposelessly executed...he was sacrificing. For the mission.
- ...and the mission WAS the people. And it wasn't just the people he lived among...it was the people who would come after him. It was for people who came before him.
- You realize when this man...this CHRIST of the CHRIST-mas you thought you knew all about....when he died...he was dying in your place. He was taking your sin, your brokenness, your past....and he was giving you a holy future.
- You realize finally you've been doing it all wrong.
- So you rush out and buy 1,000 electric baby Jesus' and fill your yard. And in that moment, you want to read the rest of this book... because who knows what else you missed?
- This is a story that has to be told...and you want to make sure you tell this Christmas story on CHRIST's terms....not your own.
- See, the Feast of Booths wasn't about the Harvest anymore than Christmas is about the Grinch.
- The people of Israel, when they devoted themselves to understanding the Scriptures realized that the Feast of Booths was about God rescuing them from slavery in Egypt. And how in the desert, along the way, they had to build little temporary houses to stay in.

- The Feast of Booths was another act of worship...to remind them that it was God that saved them...it was God that freed them from their captors...It was God that forgave their sin and rebuilt their city....
- So...in all of their brand new houses, in their beautiful new city...they didn't sleep in their beds...All of Israel climbed out on their rooftops and went camping. A reminder that God- their stronghold..their fortress...travels with them.
- A very strange act of obedience. But one infused with a DEEP MEANING. That God was behind their salvation. That he had saved them together...as a people...as ONE MAN's BODY...
- **LORDS SUPPER**