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Dealing with Bad Decisions

For use: Dec. 15 - 21

Texts: Nehemiah 13:23-25; Deuteronomy 7:3, 4; 2 Corinthians 6:14; Ezra 9, 10; 1 Corinthians 7:10-17

Last week, Justin Lammers of Windsor, Ontario, took his family to Florida for a relaxing vacation. While setting up chairs on the sands of Palm Beach with his wife and two kids, he spotted a tired swimmer out in the water, waving his hands. The surge of energy in his mind and body was "definitely familiar" for Justin, who works as deputy chief of professional standards at Essex-Windsor EMS (Emergency Medical Services). He admits, "The paramedic mode kicked in." [1]

Justin didn't have a life jacket or flotation device, so he grabbed his son's Wham-O bodyboard—basically a block of foam—and jumped into the water, shouting to others to call 9-1-1. Though Lammers was a pretty good swimmer, he knew the situation could turn ugly fast if the man panicked and tried to grab onto him. "The risk of going out to somebody who's drowning is that they wind up wrestling with you and taking you down too." Fortunately, Justin was able to stretch the board toward the man who was able to rest on the board. Slowly, with the board between them, the two men made it back to shore.

The drowning swimmer was saved because Justin took quick and decisive action.

Similarly, quick and decisive action was needed to save Israel from another disaster. In this week's Sabbath school lesson, "Dealing with Bad Decisions," we learn that Ezra and Nehemiah faced a difficult situation in the community with intermarriage with non-Israelites. The influence of idol worshipers on the nation threatened to turn Israel away from God. At this critical period in reestablishing the Jewish connection with the Lord, it was a sink or swim moment.

Desperate times call for desperate measures, and Nehemiah responded promptly. Sacred history provided plenty of examples to warn Israel of the deadly consequences of marrying unbelievers, not to mention children who may not easily understand the language and history of the Hebrews. So, Nehemiah publicly punished men who had taken wives from outside the Jewish faith.

The primary issue was not that these women were from foreign countries. After all, other people, like Moses and Boaz, had married non-Israelites. The big concern was idolatry

and its impact on the Jewish community. Being unequally yoked can potentially sink a spouse's relationship with God. Just ask Solomon. That's why Ezra, along with the assembly of leaders, decided to have the wives from other faiths return to their families.

When Justin Lammers decided to take action and save a drowning man, he knew the risk of being pulled under himself. That's why he cautiously approached the situation. The apostle Paul advised caution when dealing with others: "Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, *considering yourself lest you also be tempted*" (Galatians 6:1, emphasis added).

Sometimes quick and decisive action is called for, but let it always take place with a prayer for humility and wisdom.

~Curtis Rittenour

[1] https://windsorstar.com/news/local-news/essex-windsor-ems-deputy-chief-hailed-for-heroism-while-on-vacation-in-florida

For Reflection

Connecting: Have you ever rescued someone (or watched someone being rescued)? Did the rescue go smoothly? Were desperate measures used in order to complete the rescue?

Sharing: Read Nehemiah 13:23–30. Do you think Ezra and Nehemiah responded appropriately to the situation of intermarriage with unbelievers in Israel at that time in history?

1. It is telling that "half of their children could not speak the language of Judah" (v. 24), meaning they could not understand Israel's sacred laws.
2. It is surprising that he "contended with them and cursed them, struck some of them and pulled out their hair" (v. 25). It appears to be a form of public punishment.
3. Nehemiah points out Israel's past mistakes as a warning, including the bad example of Solomon who married wives who "caused even him to sin" (v. 26).
4. The sin in Nehemiah's time was not interracial marriages, but was in this case, pagans who worshiped idols.
5. Israel went into captivity because they turned away from God. Strong measures were needed at this specific juncture in Israel's history.
6. Other:

Applying: In contrast to Nehemiah's time, Paul, in the New Testament, suggested that believers not separate from unbelieving spouses (1 Corinthians 7:12–16). Why was his advice different? What principles can we learn from comparing these two situations?

Valuing: Pray with one other person in your Bible study group for God to give you wisdom on why, how and when to take decisive action on situations that arise in your life which threaten to lead you or someone you love away from God.

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