



Nehemiah 2:1-8 New Revised Standard Version

2 In the month of Nisan, in the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes, when wine was served him, I carried the wine and gave it to the king. Now, I had never been sad in his presence before. ² So the king said to me, "Why is your face sad, since you are not sick? This can only be sadness of the heart." Then I was very much afraid. ³ I said to the king, "May the king live forever! Why should my face not be sad, when the city, the place of my ancestors' graves, lies waste, and its gates have been destroyed by fire?" ⁴ Then the king said to me, "What do you request?" So I prayed to the God of heaven. ⁵ Then I said to the king, "If it pleases the king, and if your servant has found favor with you, I ask that you send me to Judah, to the city of my ancestors' graves, so that I may rebuild it." ⁶ The king said to me (the queen also was sitting beside him), "How long will you be gone, and when will you return?" So it pleased the king to send me, and I set him a date. ⁷ Then I said to the king, "If it pleases the king, let letters be given me to the governors of the province Beyond the River, that they may grant me passage until I arrive in Judah; ⁸ and a letter to Asaph, the keeper of the king's forest, directing him to give me timber to make beams for the gates of the temple fortress, and for the wall of the city, and for the house that I shall occupy." And the king granted me what I asked, for the gracious hand of my God was upon me.



"What if?" It is a question with which we all have wrestled at some point in our lives. In many cases, it is posed as important decisions are being considered. Options are investigated and variables are weighed in an effort to "get a feel" for what may be called for in a given situation. We don't wish to "put ourselves out there," so we carefully think, meditate, pray, perhaps even converse with others. We know what is, but need a better concept of what might be.

It's admirable for a person to consider the ins and outs of a situation before making a commitment. However, there are many who pose the same question "What if?" in retrospect. They wonder what might have been had they thought things through, done the difficult work, taken a stand, etc. A song by Christian artist Matthew West poses this very question. In the lyrics, West speaks of the kind of life that does not have to look back on missed opportunities with regret. The chorus concludes with the words "No regrets, I wanna know I got no what ifs."

Having been made aware of the plight of his people, Nehemiah could have sat in the shadows and waited for things to sort out. Perhaps he could have prayed forever and a day in pursuit of God's intervention. However, Nehemiah knew in his heart of hearts that he must be a part of God's solution. Being burdened by matters was insufficient. Praying, while important, was not to be the fullness of his action. Nehemiah believed he had to take a chance even if it came at great risk to himself and his position.

As I have suggested in Bible studies and last week's sermon, we can look at our surroundings and feel a bit like God's people following the Exile. A pandemic, political unrest, violence all around, and tension in the home can leave us feeling unsettled and maybe even distant from God. It is natural to be discouraged by such circumstances, but we have a choice to make concerning what our response will be. Nehemiah's story is a model of faithfulness and endurance when times were difficult and his experiences can prove helpful in our own lives when we too feel scattered.

1. We cannot wait for perfect situations to create themselves.

2. Risk-taking invites us to consider the fears which hold us back.
3. If something is truly important, we must be a part of its answer.

Prayer Pebble: Lord, grant me courage to step out in faith each day.