We’ve been looking at several different parallels between our lives and the process of restoration in the book of Nehemiah. God wanted his people to experience restoration back then and he wants the same thing in our lives today and the process he uses is very much the same. So Nehemiah has helped us to see that we are all still in need of restoration and what that process looks like. Last week we talked about the common enemy of fear that can really get in the way and this morning we’re going to talk about another barrier that is much less obvious.

One of the things I learned in driver’s ed was about something called “blind spots.” I remember our instructor taught us to “check your blind spots” when you’re about to switch lanes. A blind spot is an area around your car that you can’t see. When you’re driving a car there are two main blind spots you have to be aware of. It’s the area on both sides of the car that you can’t see through the front side windows or the rearview mirrors. (Picture) And it’s an area that other cars have a tendency to hide in.

In March I was driving to the airport with Amy and another pastor and we were cruising down I-94 and in the middle of a conversation. We were approaching the 494/694 exit which is where I wanted to turn, but I had my GPS on so I wasn’t really paying attention and apparently it was going to send me a different way. All of a sudden I looked up and realized we were going to pass the exit, so I hit my brakes, looked to the right to see if there were any cars, and started to cross into the exit lane. As soon as I did that someone laid on the horn right next to me and flew by, way too close for comfort. They had been right next to me, but I didn’t see them because they were in my blind spot.

Now a blind spot isn’t just an area you can’t see around your car, it can also be an area you can’t see in your life, and it can lead to a lot of problems. I have a book called Blind Spots by Bill McCartney of Promise Keepers, and the sub-title is “What you don’t see may be keeping your church from greatness.” On the back cover it says, “We can’t expect our churches to grow, our pastors to thrive, our teens to serve the Lord, and our marriages to triumph until we help each other see the things we can’t see ourselves.”
All of us have areas of our lives that are part of our brokenness that we can’t see and they hinder the process of restoration God is doing in our lives. These are “blind spots.” Often times other people can see them, but we can’t for different reasons. Often it’s because that’s just the way we’ve always been, like a personality trait we developed as a kid. Or it might be a coping mechanism we learned because of difficult circumstances. It might be a behavior we learned to control and manipulate people or protect ourselves. Many of our blind spots have roots that go way back and they don’t register as being a problem. We think of them as normal or don’t think about them at all.

I’m sure you all know what I’m talking about because we can see them in other people. The problem is we can’t see them in ourselves. You can safely assume you have blind spots in your life that are causing problems and still in need of restoration. What are your blinds spots? How are you going to become aware of them?

Our passage for today from the book of Nehemiah can help us see what we should do. Nehemiah received permission from the King of Persia to take a leave of absence to go to Jerusalem and oversee the rebuilding of the walls of the city. And today we are going to see what he did when he got there.

Read Nehemiah 2:9-10.

9 Then I came to the governors of the province Beyond the River and gave them the king’s letters. Now the king had sent with me officers of the army and horsemen. 10 But when Sanballat the Horonite and Tobiah the Ammonite servant heard this, it displeased them greatly that someone had come to seek the welfare of the people of Israel.

The only thing I want you to see in these verses today is that not everyone was in favor of the city of Jerusalem finding restoration. We’ll run into these guys a few more times in the following chapters and I want to preach a sermon about them, but for now I just want you to notice them and we’ll keep going.

Read Nehemiah 2:11-16.

11 So I went to Jerusalem and was there three days. 12 Then I arose in the night, I and a few men with me. And I told no one what my God had put into my heart to
do for Jerusalem. There was no animal with me but the one on which I rode. 13 I went out by night by the Valley Gate to the Dragon Spring and to the Dung Gate, and I inspected the walls of Jerusalem that were broken down and its gates that had been destroyed by fire. 14 Then I went on to the Fountain Gate and to the King's Pool, but there was no room for the animal that was under me to pass. 15 Then I went up in the night by the valley and inspected the wall, and I turned back and entered by the Valley Gate, and so returned. 16 And the officials did not know where I had gone or what I was doing, and I had not yet told the Jews, the priests, the nobles, the officials, and the rest who were to do the work.

The first thing that Nehemiah did when he got to Jerusalem was to inspect the city walls to get an accurate read on the areas that were still in ruin and in need of restoration. He mentions some of the details of where he inspected and from what I can see he started along the western wall and walked around the southern edge until he eventually ended up where he started. He could see the ruin and disrepair of the walls and the gates and had an accurate idea of the work that needed to be done. With that understanding he then approached the people of Jerusalem.

Read Nehemiah 2:17-20.

17 Then I said to them, “You see the trouble we are in, how Jerusalem lies in ruins with its gates burned. Come, let us build the wall of Jerusalem, that we may no longer suffer derision.” 18 And I told them of the hand of my God that had been upon me for good, and also of the words that the king had spoken to me. And they said, “Let us rise up and build.” So they strengthened their hands for the good work. 19 But when Sanballat the Horonite and Tobiah the Ammonite servant and Geshem the Arab heard of it, they jeered at us and despised us and said, “What is this thing that you are doing? Are you rebelling against the king?” 20 Then I replied to them, “The God of heaven will make us prosper, and we his servants will arise and build, but you have no portion or right or claim in Jerusalem.”

Again you see the enemies of restoration show up here and we’ll come back to this in another sermon. What I want you to see today is that after Nehemiah inspected the walls, he told the people about their condition and invited them to rebuild. He told them of the favor God had given him with the King of Persia and encouraged them, and that’s all it took. They decided right then and there to move forward and started getting things ready to do the work.
Notice, they didn’t put up any resistance to Nehemiah’s invitation. They didn’t say, “What do you think we’ve been trying to do all these years?” Nor did they start giving him a long list of things they tried and reasons why they couldn’t rebuild. It actually seems to me that they hadn’t even been thinking about it – as obvious as it was. It was like it was a new idea to them and all they needed was someone to come around to point it out and inspire them. They had been surrounded by the ruins and brokenness but weren’t doing anything to restore it. How could that be? How could such a major thing be so obvious to other people and not to them?

I think it may have been because it had become a blind spot for them. It had been 70 years since they completed their last major building project, which was the temple. And at that time I bet the brokenness of the walls was very obvious to them. But maybe they didn’t have permission to rebuild them or had too many other things to do – whatever it was, the restoration of the walls didn’t happen and eventually it seems their brokenness was forgotten and overlooked. By the time Nehemiah showed up the walls had been in ruins for so long, they may have not even noticed them anymore. I know that can happen with projects around my house. Whatever was going on, rebuilding the walls wasn’t really on their radar and it may have been a blind spot.

But then something happened to change all that – Nehemiah came and did an inspection and brought a report of his findings to their attention. He pointed out the areas of brokenness and when it was brought to their awareness they were willing to rebuild.

That’s what I think needs to happen with the blind spots in our lives. We don’t see them. We aren’t aware of them. They aren’t on our radar, but they’re causing problems and hindering our restoration. We may be ready and willing to work on them if we knew they were there, but we can’t see them. How is that going to happen?

Nehemiah reminds me of what I think needs to happen. In the same way that the people of Jerusalem needed someone to do an inspection and give them a report, we too need that in our lives. Nehemiah represents what we need the Holy Spirit
to do. We need him to examine us and help us see those areas we can’t see so that we can bring them before the Lord for restoration.

I’m reminded of Psalm 139 – a Psalm of David. In the beginning of the Psalm he expresses the ability God has to see and know everything about our lives. It says in verses 1-4: “O Lord, you have searched me and known me! 2 You know when I sit down and when I rise up; you discern my thoughts from afar. 3 You search out my path and my lying down and are acquainted with all my ways. 4 Even before a word is on my tongue, behold, O Lord, you know it altogether.”

God knows exactly where our blind spots are. When David was commissioning his son to build the temple, he told him this in 1 Chron. 28:9: “And you, Solomon my son, know the God of your father and serve him with a whole heart and with a willing mind, for the Lord searches all hearts and understands every plan and thought.” Our blind spots may not be seen by us, but they are seen very clearly by God. He sees deep into our hearts and minds and knows the hidden areas that are in need of restoration. He knows all those areas right now and if we are going to be fully restored we need him to reveal them to us.

David knew that as well, which is why at the end of Psalm 139 he writes this in verses 23-24: “Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! 24 And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting!” David invited God to do an inspection of his life, especially in those areas he couldn’t see, to show him if he had any blind spots and lead him in restoration.

Are you willing to do the same thing? Are you willing to find out some things about yourself that might be kind of ugly? I’m telling you from experience it can be an unpleasant process. But I can also tell you that in the end it’s worth it…

One of the blind spots that God revealed to me was that I was depending way too much on the approval of people in order to feel good about myself rather than being grounded in my relationship with God and his unconditional approval of me in Christ. Because of that I needed people to like me and when they didn’t it was very troubling.
Whenever I had a conflict with another person, I would try to alleviate the tension by doing something to get them to like me again or at least feel like they did. I’d try to lighten the mood by joking around or changing subjects, or giving false assurance about their concern by not telling the whole story. I was trying to have peace with them without actually dealing with the issue. And it led to unresolved, growing conflict, because the issues didn’t just go away. They actually had to be dealt with.

God revealed that blind spot to me when I had a conflict with someone that no matter what I did, I couldn’t restore harmony to the relationship and it just tore me up. The fact that they didn’t like me was devastating to me. But thankfully someone noticed and asked me, “Why does it bother you so much that this person is upset with you?” And God used them to point out what my blind spot was – in that relationship and others. I was depending way too much on the approval of people rather than on God’s approval. And it was negatively affecting my relationships and ability to lead. So through that painful process, God brought that blind spot to my attention and restoration was able to happen. I was able to start finding my security in God’s approval of me as my heavenly Father so that I didn’t need people to like me all the time and could actually deal with issues.

Finding out about our blind spots can be a painful process, but it’s well worth it so that restoration can happen in those areas of our lives. Are you willing to invite the Holy Spirit to do an inspection in your life and show you what he finds? I don’t think of this as something we just sit down and ask for and wait to hear the answer. If we do that we probably won’t hear anything and think we’re good to go. I see it as more of an ongoing attitude of willingness and submission – an open invitation for God to bring things to our attention that we don’t see and need to be restored.

The reality is that we have many blind spots and only God knows the timing and circumstances in which we’ll be ready to see them. And thank goodness he doesn’t reveal them all at the same time or we’d be completely overwhelmed. But if we trust him and are willing, we give him an open invitation in his timing to reveal our blind spots to us. I encourage you to begin taking that step today as the process of restoration continues in your life.