

## Plot Twist

A plot twist is only truly effective if the reader or viewer of the story has little to no premonition or warning of the twist, causing an exclamation of, “**Woah! I didn’t see that coming!**” In my opinion, a well designed plot twist is one of the most deliciously satisfying morsels placed at strategic points in a story or revealed at its astonishing conclusion. One beautiful example of this technique is the 1999 Oscar nominated psychological thriller, *The Sixth Sense*, in which the writer and director, M. Night Shyamalan, included numerous verbal and color clues to hint at the story lying below the surface of the main plot. Some of these “tips” seemed so obvious to him, that he second-guessed himself on several occasions and wondered whether he should remove them from the film prior to its release. Alas, he left them in and made the plot twist at the film’s conclusion even more powerful.

Similarly, as we read the final chapter of Nehemiah's account, we are initially surprised by its concluding plot twist. Previously, Israel - convicted by the reading of the Torah - reinstated the annual festivals, confessed their sins, promised to steadfastly follow the Lord, and enthusiastically worshiped and celebrated God’s faithfulness (see chs. 8-12). It seems like we will witness a happy end, right? Yet there are hints throughout Israel's history and the writings of the prophets indicating an upcoming plot twist. As a matter of fact, the hints are quite obvious if we know what to look for. Israel’s relationship with God is simply a non-stop cycle of rebellion, that begins with sin and moves through oppression, repentance, deliverance, and peace, only to begin again with sin. So, as Nehemiah concludes, Israel has already grown complacent in its obedience and broken its promises made just a few chapters earlier. How can this be? Why can’t **God’s people** get out of their own way? How can they continually forget His grace and mercy?

The truth is that we are not much different than God’s people, Israel! While the Apostle Peter describes believers as “... a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, ... called ... out of darkness into his marvelous light” (1 Pet 2:9), the Apostle John indicates that we, like Israel, continue to battle sin:

If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.  
(1 John 1:8)

Even the great missionary to the Gentiles, the Apostle Paul, continued to wrestle with sin and recognized its sinfulness (Rom 7:15-20). Similar to Israel, we need

more than external reform by following a set of rules to shake sinful habits.

**Following rules, no matter how determined we are, simply is not sustainable, because it doesn't change our heart.** We need a heart that is alive and beats with passion for God's glory. So, John gives further help:

No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God's seed abides in him; and he cannot keep on sinning, because he has been born of God.  
(1 John 3:9)

By God's grace and through faith in Jesus' atoning work, we are born again into God's family (Jn 3:5-7). Our dead heart is replaced by a new, living heart and we are metamorphosed into an entirely new creation (2 Cor 5:14-15, 17). Practically speaking, God, the Holy Spirit takes residence in us. He guides us into truth (Jn 16:13) and convicts us of sin and righteousness (Jn 16:7-11). Also, He produces fruit in our life - love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Gal 5:22-23). Finally, we are given the privilege to call on our Heavenly Father at any time and from any place, admitting our limitations and turning to Him for strength to do what is right (1 Jn 5:14-15).

It is shocking how often we are surprised by our sinful failures as if they were a plot twist. Our repeated failures are part of the battle we continue to wage in our flesh, plain and simple. We should be vigilant, but never surprised. By the way ...

**Never forget! When you fall into that sin that continues to stalk and trap you, repent and be engulfed by His grace and mercy!**

***Romans 7:15-20 (ESV)*** - "For I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. Now if I do what I do not want, I agree with the law, that it is good. So now it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me. For ***I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out.*** For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing. Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me."