

Nehemiah 3-4 - Obedience in the Face of Opposition

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Open your Bibles, please, to the Book of Nehemiah. We're in the third chapter, Nehemiah, chapter 3. I want to begin tonight, actually, while you're turning there to put a scripture up on the screen for you for just a moment from 2 Timothy. And I want you to take a look at this passage because it's going to be a huge key to what we're going to be seeing here tonight in the Book of Nehemiah.

And it says very simply, that,

2 Timothy 3:12 (ESV)

...all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted...

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Let me paraphrase that for you for just a moment. Basically what Paul is saying to Timothy is that whenever you make a determination in your heart or you decide in your heart that you're going to obey God. That you're going to live in such a way your life is intended to bring glory to the name of Jesus, you can expect opposition, you can expect hardship, you can expect struggles every time. That's what Paul is saying.

I bring that up because this is what we see played out in this section of Nehemiah. We're going to be covering here 2 chapters tonight beginning in chapter 3.

Now, in order for opposition to be raised, the work has to begin, or the determination has to begin at some point in your life that says, I'm going to be obedient to God. I'm going to do what God wants me to do. Sometimes it's very, very hard but there's that starting point. There's always got to be that starting point where you say, you know what? I'm going to obey God and you just start doing it.

Chapter 3 is all about just getting started and we're going to go through this chapter fairly quickly, but you'll notice that it's essentially an exercise in

Hebrew pronunciation as far as names go. And it's just the list of people who got involved under Nehemiah's leadership, starting to rebuild the walls around Jerusalem. And it began with some of the leadership.

It tells us in verse 1 that, *“Then Eliashib the high priest rose up with his brothers the priests, (in other words, the fellow Levitical priests) and they built the Sheep Gate. They consecrated it (your Bible may say dedicated it) and set its doors. They consecrated it as far as the Tower of the Hundred, as far as the Tower of Hananel. ² And next to him the men of Jericho built. And next to them Zaccur the son of Imri built.*

³ The sons of Hassenaah built the Fish Gate. They laid its beams and set its doors, its bolts, and its bars. ⁴ And next to them (and it just goes on) Meremoth the son of Uriah, son of Hakkoz repaired. And next to them Meshullam the son of Berechiah, son of (that guy) Meshezabel repaired. And next to them Zadok the son of Baana repaired.” (ESV)

And this is basically how the chapter goes. It's just going to be one after the other, and what I want you to see is that this was a group effort. These were many individuals who got involved and the way they decided to rebuild the wall around Jerusalem was for people to take a specific section of the wall and build just that section.

That's a nice way to approach obedience to God. Just say, I'm going to do this, instead of looking at that huge wall that went all the way around the city and it's just like, I'm going to build this section right here. And there was a lot of work that had to be done.

It's not just building, there was a lot of rubble that had been sitting there now for a long, long time and that rubble needed to be cleared. And then they had to bring in all of these huge stones that are going to be there, put in place for the wall. And of course, this is all manual labor. You don't have any Cranes or, machinery to get this sort of stuff done. Certainly they had beasts of burden and that sort of thing. But still, this is a lot of hard work, elbow grease, and sweat that's going to go into this project.

And it's a huge project, but you'll notice as you go through and just look at each one of these verses, it begins by saying, every verse pretty much is somebody else who took another section of the wall. Verse 5, verse 6, verse 7, it keeps saying, next to them, and then, and next to them, and it goes basically through the chapter, one after the other. Lot of work that needed to be done.

Ending in verse 32 by saying, in “...*between the upper chamber of the corner and the Sheep Gate the goldsmiths and the merchants repaired.*”

I'm not reading all of this information because for most of us, this doesn't really mean anything. We don't have a frame of reference to know where this gate began and this one ended and these sections of the wall. But these were important things for the Jews to write down and record and to show that all of these people were involved.

But chapter 3 of Nehemiah is basically the work. Now, what I want you to see in Nehemiah chapter 3, is I want you to see an act of obedience on their part. That's what I want you to see. And that's what I want you to see as seeing this in your own life. I want you to see this as, this is stepping out in an act of obedience.

Now this act of obedience could be anything. It could be in your marriage. Maybe things are a challenge in your marriage and so the Lord is speaking to your heart and just saying, listen, I want you to obey Me.

I've not held back from explaining to you guys over the years that it was really the failure of my own marriage that brought me to the Lord, to really beginning to take the Lord seriously. I told you in my teenage years, I flirted with the Lord but it never took from the standpoint of really embracing His Lordship.

After about 5 years of marriage, and after my marriage literally coming to an end, all but the legalities of the divorce, I suddenly had time for God, got serious about walking with the Lord. And it was a very difficult thing.

And Sue and I had really pretty much wrecked our marriage, and there really wasn't anything necessarily to build on anymore. I think we both felt a sense of a real challenge that lie ahead of us related to, beginning to do this.

We knew that this was something God wanted us to do. We knew that it was an act of obedience on our part to step out and to begin to walk out what the Lord wanted us to do. But man, let me tell you, was it hard and was it overwhelming from time to time? We're going to see that in this chapter.

One of the things the Lord said to me and in a time of weakness, and I don't mean to make it sound like I had one time of weakness. Let me tell you, there were daily times of weakness, but there was one particular time of weakness when I even remember where I was. I drove my car to the grocery store. I don't know what I was going to get. I don't even remember eating back then.

You ever remember that? You think about that? What did I eat when I was younger? I don't think I ate anything. Anyway, I drove to the store and I pulled up in front of the grocery store and I shut off my car. And this wave of discouragement just rolled over me like the breakers of the ocean, and it was just this momentary sense of overwhelming, I can't do this. I can't do this. It's too hard.

And at that time of personal weakness and discouragement, the Lord spoke to me very clearly sitting there in my little Honda Prelude. And the Lord said to me, all I am asking from you is for you to obey, I will do the rest. And it was that simple. It was, and I knew what the Lord meant.

He meant, you just put one foot in front of the next, that's all I'm asking. I'm not asking you to fix this thing. I'm not asking you to make the pain go away. I'm not asking you to rebuild this thing on your own power or strength. I am simply asking you to obey me and that I will give you grace for. Day by day, step by step, even hour by hour, you are just called to obey.

And I remember taking a deep breath and thinking, okay, alright Lord, going to begin to obey. And when I thought of it in terms of obedience, it made a completely different perspective appear before me, you know what I mean? When you look at your life, when you look at the things in your life that need to be repaired, if you're like me and most men are this way, not to say that women aren't, but men particularly are fixers. And we look at what lies ahead of us and if it's a big job or an overwhelming job, we tend to just get discouraged. There's no way I can do this.

And when you look at your life and what needs to be repaired in your life, you can tend to go, there's just no way. There's just no way I can do this. And the Lord, I think, would speak to you at a similar juncture in that and say, I'm not asking you to repair this. I'm not asking you to fix it. I'm asking you to obey. One step at a time, one act at a time, one word at a time.

It's one of the reasons why when I'm doing pre marriage counseling or even marriage counseling for that matter, we go through and we talk about what the Bible says related to marriage and what it means to obey God in your marriage.

And I know I'm referring this to marriage and that's only one area where God may be calling you to be obedient. But that's one of the reasons we go over those scriptures because it's so important when couples go through difficulty that they fall back. They fall back on the simplicity of, husbands, love your wives, respect your husbands, and just begin to obey and let God do that work.

Now, here's the caveat or the fly in the ointment as they say. You begin that work of obedience, you make that determination, I'm going to obey. Here comes the 2 by 4. Here's the enemy. (Pastor Paul makes a reference to swinging a bat) Yeah, I'll call wacko right alongside the head.

The enemy will attack when you make that determination. Okay, God, I'm going to obey you. The next thing you know, you're lying on your back, looking up at the sky and there's stars because you just got clobbered. Paul said it to Timothy. Anyone who makes that determination to live a godly life in Christ Jesus, which is the essence of obedience will come under attack. Whatever persecution, whatever opposition, whatever difficulties may arise from within or from without, it will happen. Count on it. Count on it.

Nehemiah chapter 4. You ready? This is when it happens. *“Now when Sanballat heard that we were building the wall, he was angry and (the ESV says,) greatly enraged, ...”* I don't know if you've ever been greatly enraged or see someone who's been greatly enraged, could be pretty scary.

And it says that *“...he jeered at the Jews. ² And (then) he said in the presence of his brothers and of the army of Samaria, “What are these feeble Jews doing? Will they restore it for themselves? Will they sacrifice?...”* And what that means is, will they get this thing done and offer sacrifices of praise and thanksgiving afterwards? They were already sacrificing in the temple, that had been rebuilt many years before.

“...Will they finish up in a day? Will they revive the stones out of the heaps of rubbish, and burned ones at that?” ³ Tobiah the Ammonite was beside him, and he said, “Yes, what they are building (anyway)—if a (little) fox goes up on it he will break down their stone wall!””

What's going on here? What is this? What's happening to the Jews in the face of their determination to be obedient to God? They're enduring mocking, aren't they? Now, you might not be very sensitive to this particular thing, but frankly, the majority of people are.

Mocking is a very effective means that the enemy will use to discourage you and to get you to give up. British critic and author Thomas Carlyle calls mocking, the language of the devil. And I agree wholeheartedly. It's a work of the enemy that he loves to perpetrate in our lives. And there are people..., when there's a when there's like a physical attack, there are people who are just ..., they'll stand ready, no matter what it is.

You come at me, you know with arms and violence and I'll stand my ground, but you begin to mock me and I'll collapse. Whoever said, sticks and stones will break my, break your bones, or my bones, or whatever, whoever's bone÷≥s but words can never hurt me, wasn't playing with a full deck. Because words can hurt a lot and words cannot only hurt, but they can cause you to absolutely, positively give up. I mean, lay it down, give it... Crazy sort of a thing that mocking will do.

And this isn't even the first time that Nehemiah and the Jews have endured the mocking of Sanballat and Tobiah. Do you guys remember... it seems like forever ago that we started Nehemiah. It's only been 2 weeks, but I was talking to Sue, I said, how long ago did I start Nehemiah? She goes, it was 2 weeks ago. I said, you're kidding. It had to have been a month, it felt that long. But do you remember, chapter 2, do you remember?

Nehemiah 2:19 (ESV)

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?"

But when Sanballat the Horonite and Tobiah the Ammonite servant and Geshem the Arab heard of it, (that they were even going to begin the work, it says) they jeered at us and despised us and said, "What is this thing that you are doing? Are you rebelling against the king?"

And all these other things? And so forth. And this has been going on for some time. But now as they begin the work and they begin to step out in the act of obedience to God, they're turning up the heat. And they're not done turning up the heat, by the way.

Do you remember, when we looked here at this, at what they said. Look with me back in verse 2, would you please? Verse 2. This is Sanballat again speaking in the presence of what it says is his brothers in the army of Samaria. We don't know what his connection to the army was, but he begins by saying, "*What are these feeble Jews doing?*" Did you notice that he called them feeble?

Now he was he was intending that to catch them off guard and to make them feel like they're weaklings. And there's no way you're going to be..., there's no way you're up to getting this job done. This job is way too big for you. You're a feeble individual.

I am so thankful and I bet you are too. When you think about being called feeble, aren't you glad that our understanding from the New Testament perspective is that this is exactly who God uses. Feeble people just like us. That's who God is looking for. That's who He wants to do His work through.

Let me show you this passage from 1 Corinthians.

1 Corinthian 1:27-29 (ESV)

But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God.

But God chose what (in the world?) is foolish (people) in the world (why?) to shame the wise; God chose (what else did He choose?) what is weak (people) in the world (why) to shame the strong; (it goes on to say that) God chose what is low (lowly) and despised in the world, even things that are not, (as far as the world is concerned) to bring to nothing things that (that the world thinks) are, (and the whole reason for this is this) so that no human being might boast in the presence of God.

God's big on that thing about not letting people boast. He takes boasting right out of our hands by using people like you and me to get the work done that He wants to accomplish. When the enemy..., I'm telling you this so that when the enemy comes along through whatever means he uses to mock you or to get you feeling like you're feeble, and there's nothing you can do to really be obedient to God. You can't do this.

And that's what the enemy will come along and say, you're not strong enough. You can't serve the Lord in this way. You can't be obedient to God in this area of your life. You just come back and you quote 1 Corinthians chapter 1 and those verses and say, oh, but that's exactly who my God uses. That's exactly who He picks. It's weaklings and wimps, just like me, to accomplish His work. I like that about God.

Now, there you go. Now, knowing that, of course, doesn't mean that taunting and mocking isn't going to still be effective as a means of getting you discouraged because it certainly can be.

The question then is, when that happens, when you begin to get that opposition to your acts of obedience, what are you going to do? What are you going to do?

What's your response going to be? Do you know what the majority of Christians will do when they start getting opposition? Quit. Just quit.

And they'll even say something like, and you've heard me say this before, many times over the pulpit, they'll say things like, well, it's obviously not God's will, it's just fraught with trouble. Ever since we started this project, we've had nothing but trouble. Well, this obviously isn't God's will.

Isn't it good Nehemiah didn't think that? Isn't it good Jesus didn't think that on the way to the cross? Right? Where did we get the idea that when it's God's will, it's going to be easy? Where do we come up with that? Is that what Paul said to Timothy in that passage we looked at initially? That when you're doing God's will, it's going to be easy. He said the exact opposite, didn't he?

We have to begin to retrain our thinking in this sort of a way to understand that stepping out and obedience means, the enemy's going to open fire. What are you going to do? Well, don't quit. In fact, the opposition that you are getting is probably proof that you're in the will of God.

What are you going to do? I think Nehemiah gives us a great example here, beginning in verse 4. It says that he prayed. *“Hear, O our God, for we are despised. Turn back their taunt on their own heads and give them up to be plundered in a land where they are captives. ⁵ Do not cover their guilt, and let not their sin be blotted out from your sight, for they have provoked you to anger in the presence of the builders.”*

If this sounds similar to the way David prayed sometimes you're absolutely right. David did pray this way sometimes. And he would often, pray that God would like knock their teeth out, or something similar.

Now, you and I have a different model to follow than this sort of a pattern. I'm not saying that there's anything, I'm not speaking against Nehemiah's prayer necessarily because he was going with the revelation that he had. But the fact of the matter is, you and I have the words of Jesus to deal with when it comes to our enemies, right?

Jesus told us, love your enemies, pray for those who persecute you. (Matthew 5:44) And that doesn't mean pray that God would drop a millstone on their head either. I've had people say that, oh, I'll pray for them, all right. Oh yeah. I'll, pray they get theirs. No, no, we're to bless even when we are being cursed, right? (Luke 6:28) We're not to return cursing with cursing, but cursing with blessing.

We're to pray a blessing on that person's life who is actually hurting you, using you. Here's a word that'll curl your hair: abusing you, right? That's what the Bible, that's the New Testament understanding. That's what Jesus told us to do, alright?

But I love the fact that Nehemiah begins to deal with this issue in prayer. He doesn't respond back to these people. He doesn't stick out his tongue. He doesn't, throw things at them. He doesn't write a letter to the king, which he could have done. I mean, it takes forever for things like that to get delivered. He was there under the king's approval and with the king's permission, he could have appealed to the king, even though it would have taken a long time to get the word back.

But he appealed to the King of kings. He began to pray about it and I love that. Now, there are some Christians, and you know who you are, who just love a good fight. And that's your old nature. I mean, before you knew Jesus, you were the kind of person who never backed down from an argument, ever. And if somebody wanted to go toe to toe, you were their man or woman, as the case may be, and that's just who you were.

And then you got saved, and God, washed away all of your sins, and He changed you from the inside out. But you know, you know that when somebody gets in your face and starts to, scream. And you can feel their hot breath, yelling at you, that there's this button that could easily be activated, where you just haul back and just want to punch them in the face. And that's the old man. All too ready, to meet these kinds of mocking words with similar words or even fists.

But Nehemiah is reminding us here, that when we are dealing with this sort of a situation, we must deal with what's really going on and what's really going on in the face of your obedience to God, is a spiritual backlash. And God has told you in the New Testament that these sorts of things are brought about by the work of the enemy and he's the one that's behind it.

And that's why Paul says our battle isn't against flesh and blood. It's not those people who are yelling and screaming at you. That's not where the battle specifically lies. In fact, he says it's powers, principalities, rulers. There is a system of leadership and authority that exists in the spirit realm that you and I just can't ignore.

And so when we're dealing with opposition to our walk of obedience, our desire of obedience, we've got to deal with the real issue at hand. And that you can

only deal with in prayer and we cannot stoop to the level of response that, we're getting from other people.

In fact, you know what, when people begin to mock, the only way that mocking can be effective is if you let it. You know that? It's only if you let it. Mocking has one goal and that is to reach your flesh, it's the only goal. And if mocking can get through the shield of faith that otherwise should be up. And it can reach the flesh, the center of that carnality that still exists within you and I and so forth. And we and then we respond in kind. Mocking has won. Mocking has won the victory.

If, however, mocking does not get to your flesh, and you deflect it first with the shield of faith and so forth, then mocking can't affect you. It can't touch you. It's only effective if you let it be. Okay? Very important thing to keep in mind.

Nehemiah did not let the victory of mocking take place. He responded in prayer. And that is a spiritual response instead of a carnal one. Well, then what did they do after that?

Look at verse 6. *“So we built the wall.”* I like that. They got back to work in the midst of all this mocking and all this stuff going on. He says, we got back to work building on the wall. And it says, *“And all the wall was joined together to half its height, (and then look at this last phrase) for the people had a mind to work.”*

And again, you can think of that as obedience, that people had a mind to be obedient to God. They had a mind to obey. Okay. They didn't have a mind to fight. That's the carnal mind. That's that was the mind...

Oh, do you ever think... I just had a little videotape image go through my brain of when I was in the 6th grade and I'm walking along after school, home with this friend of mine and a girl. And that's never a good combination because you always want to do something or say something to impress the girl.

And I remember, I was drinking I think a can of pop or something and I just threw the can after I was done with it. Had no concept of not supposed to litter and I just and I threw it. And the guy said hey pick that up, and my response was, you want to fight? He probably could have cleaned my clock, but it just came out of me. It's like, what are you doing? It was, it's just the flesh. Our flesh wants to fight. But I love how these guys decided instead of fighting, they're going to get back to work. They're going to be obedient. We're going to walk in obedience.

Says, “*So we built the wall.*” Verse 7, but guess what? We got another attack coming. When the enemy's attacks don't gain ground in your life. He'll just change it up. Verse 7, “*But when Sanballat and Tobiah and the Arabs and the Ammonites and the Ashdodites heard that the repairing of the walls of Jerusalem was going forward (in other words, we've decided to be obedient regardless) and that the breaches were beginning to be closed, (it says) they were (and here's these words again) very angry.*”⁸ *And they all plotted together to come and fight against Jerusalem and to cause confusion in it.*”

By the way, you know who the author of confusion is, right? Yeah, that's the work of the enemy. If you're confused in the midst of the battle, that is the enemy working. God is not an author of confusion. The enemy is and so he uses it as a means of paralyzing us from continuing on to be obedient.

But now, what do we see going on? Stronger measures. This is what the enemy does. Turn up the heat a little bit here. And the next stage after mocking is the threat of physical attacks and confusion. Again, what is the response of the people?

Look at verse 9. I love this. “*And we prayed...*” Guys, this is good. This is really good.

“*And we prayed.*” “*...we prayed to our God.*” But then I want you to go on and read the rest of the verse with me. “*... and (we) set a guard as a protection against them day and night.*” Now, this is going to be Nehemiah's pattern of response along these lines. It's going to be pray and prepare.

The reason I like this pattern is because when most of us Christians are threatened or find some sort of a threat in our life, our usual pattern is to act first, to prepare first against whatever is happening. And then after we've done everything that we can possibly think to do, then what do Christians say? What's the common thing they say? Well, I guess there's nothing left now to do but pray. Right?

That's basically what we do as Christians. I guess now it's time to pray. No its time to pray first! Right? Because that's the priority that we see in God's Word. This is what we see Nehemiah doing. He prays first and then he prepares. Only after he prays, does he come up with a determined course of action on his part. And that's an important reminder.

Our actions against whatever threat or issue that we are facing should always come out of prayer. They should not..., prayer should not follow our actions.

The action should follow prayer, right? Pray first, then be directed by the Lord. All right.

And the action here that we see in these verses that Nehemiah felt was prudent, was to post a sentry to keep watch in the case of possible attacks. Look what he says again in verse 9.

He says, we “...set a guard...” We “...set a guard as a protection...” And he was there day and night. We're going to be diligent about this thing. We'll talk about being diligent here in just a little bit from a New Testament perspective.

Now we come to the third attack. Verse 10. *“In Judah it was said, “The strength of those who bear the burdens is failing. There is too much rubble. By ourselves we will not be able to rebuild the wall.””*

Can you see all that pain that's in that voice? On top of all of these attacks, you got mocking, then you got these threats of violence and confusion and so forth coming from without. Now, on top of all that, you got to deal with the attacks from within.

And the feeling of just being overwhelmed by looking at the work that so often brings on a sense of discouragement. And that's what's going on here. You've got people who are coming in from Judah. These are people who live outside the city, but they're moving in and, they've got other things they're going to say, which we'll read about in a minute. But they're coming in and they're saying, we can't do this. It's too hard. It's too hard.

Let me tell you something. Fundamentally, they're probably right. What they are not considering at this point is the strength of the Lord and we rarely do whenever we have our eyes fixed on the issue that needs to be resolved right? Peter had to learn this the hard way, right. If you're walking on the water, don't look at the waves because guess what? You're going to sink.

When you get your eyes on the problem or the threat, whatever that may be, you will sink. And the only thing left to do is to call out, cry out to Jesus to save you. Thank God He's merciful and He will. But the point is, He wants you to stay buoyed up on the water through the power of the Spirit to face this sort of a thing. But that won't happen as long as your eyes are on the problem.

It'll only happen as you keep your eyes on the solution. The solution. And that's always Jesus. Keeping your eyes on Him. Right? That's hard to do, especially when you got somebody, nipping at you on this angle and you got somebody

coming over here with these words of discouragement. We can't do this. It's just too hard. And you got all these things going on and threats of violence and so forth. And boy, what do you do? Talk about wanting to give up, and stress can do this to you. Those feelings.

Have you ever been overwhelmed by the enormity of just the task that was at hand that you looked at a situation and for you, as a mountain. And it's like, I can't climb that mountain. It's insurmountable. I can't do it. That's because you're looking at the mountain. But that's that feeling of that overwhelming sense of discouragement and so forth.

And, it often will come when you're physically tired. What's been going on here? What's been happening? They've been working, haven't they. They've been working. And when you know there's a threat, when you know there's a danger, you don't sleep that well. Usually.

I mean, we got to have 24/7 guard up on the wall. Man how can I go to bed at night and sleep soundly when I know that at any moment, I could hear the trumpet sound saying that an attack is underway and I've got to jump out of bed and face this thing. You sleep, like they say, with one eye open. It's not a restful.

Well, guess what happens when you're not rested? Have you guys noticed the connection between the physicality of your existence and your emotional existence? Have you noticed that connection? That when you're physically tired and under it from physical stress and so forth, that you are more vulnerable emotionally?

You guys know, don't you, that when the Bible says that God created us in His image? It doesn't mean that He's 6 foot tall and has gray hair and glasses. It means that He created us like Him in the sense that as He is a trinity, He made you to be a triunity. He's Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. He's made you to be physical, emotional, and spiritual, and they're connected. They're one.

Just as the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are One, so also the triunity of your existence is one. And that means that when you are physically under it, you are going to be emotionally under it as well, and spiritually as well.

In fact, I remember years ago when Sue and I were beginning to work out issues in our life, we noticed something. We noticed that whenever we had a conversation that involves some level of emotionalism or difficulty after 10 PM, it was always counterproductive. We just suddenly went, you know what? This doesn't work after 10 o'clock to have these kinds of conversations so we made a

rule in our house. And we tried to pass it along to all the girls that we raised too in our house to say, no emotional conversations after 10 o'clock, go to bed.

You know what is incredible about that? You start having a conversation and pretty soon, the tears start to flow and then you...(Pastor Paul imitates an emotional conversation while crying) Oh, yeah, hey, a little after 10, let's go to bed. Okay. And they wake up in the morning and they're like, it's okay. I'm good. Oh, a night's sleep is amazing. It really is. You get a good night's rest and sometimes your problems can literally evaporate. It's just it's truly amazing.

Anyway, so here they are physically under it, emotionally under it. And you got people with this sort of a thing coming up and telling you, we just, we need to stop. We're going to..., we can't do this. And if all that isn't enough, there's more goodies coming their way. Seems like when it rains, it pours, doesn't it? Right? Isn't that what they say? If it isn't one thing, it's 10.

All right, verse 11, *“And our enemies said, “They will not know or see till we come among them and kill them and stop the work.”* ¹² *At that time (it says, all the Jews who lived near them came from all directions and said to us ten times, “You must return to us.””* This is the fourth attack, threats and rumors. Threats and rumors.

Word gets to the people who are working on the wall that the enemies are planning a surprise attack. And I don't know how the word got to them. Have they got spies? I don't know what the deal is. They got a mole in there somehow. I don't know. Somehow they get the word, these guys are going to do a surprise attack. They're not even going to see us coming and we're going to kill them.

Do you understand? This is not a threat of we're going to stop the work. I mean, that's their goal, but they don't care what it takes to stop the work. We will kill them. This is a threat of murder. All right? Nothing less.

And on top of that, you got Jews coming again into Jerusalem from those outlying areas, and what are they bringing with them? Rumors. Rumors. Oh, don't you love rumors? I mean, hate rumors. Oh, they're just, yeah, they're terrible.

Their intentions are probably good. And sometimes our friends and family who bring those little rumors, and bring those little tidings of bad joy, they really do have good intentions. I don't think you should do this anymore, this is just too

dangerous. And their intention is to help protect you from what appears to be a very real and ongoing threat.

But the point is, you're stepping out in obedience to God here. This is something God told you to do. And now they're coming and they're saying, you got to stop. You're going to, you're going to get hurt. Right?

Now they've got a very real threat to deal with, and they've got the rumors on top of it from people who are corroborating this threat. This is not just a something in the wind, this is real. Wow. I mean, isn't this the way life sometimes goes? There's layer upon layer upon layer upon layer upon layer of challenge. You don't just get one, you get a smorgasbord of challenges.

Here's Nehemiah's response. Verse 13, very important verse. *“So in the lowest parts of the space behind the wall, in open places, I stationed the people by their clans, with their swords, their spears, and their bows.”* What's going on here? I'll tell you what's going on.

This is a piece of incredible, smart leadership. That's what's going on. Nehemiah knows as he looks around and surveys the potential for attack. He thinks to himself, is any good leader would, where are they going to, if they do attack, where are they going to attack us?

Well, they're going to attack us obviously where the wall is the lowest, right? They're going to come where the wall is the least finished, and that's the way they're going to... We're going to post a special, group of people, they're fully armed to stand against this threat.

And that is exactly what Nehemiah should have done, and that's an important thing for you and I to remember.

Listen, if Satan is going to attack you in the midst of your obedience, where is he going to attack? Where the wall is the lowest. That means in the area of your greatest weakness, your greatest vulnerability. He's not going to waste his time attacking you in an area where it's not a temptation for you.

And we have areas in our lives, all of us in this room. We all have areas where if he threw something at us, we'd go, what is that? I'm not even tempted and there are areas like I'm just not tempted. You could... and you are too. I could put those things in front of you or those opportunities and you'd go, what? I'm not going to read my Bible, leave me alone.

But then there's another area in your life where if that door opens up, now we got a temptation on our hands. Now we got a very real possibility. Why? Because the wall is lowest in that area of your life.

The important thing that we learn from this passage is, there is a diligence that is required in our lives, especially in those areas where we are most liable to attack.

Now, this presumes something, that your area of greatest weakness. That's what Nehemiah had to do. He had to probably get on his horse or walk around the area and go, okay, there and there, those are the areas where we are most liable to attack.

I would ask you right now, what are your areas where you are most liable to attack? What are your areas where the wall is the lowest? What are those buttons that the enemy can push that would just easily allow him entrance into your life?

It's important that you know that so that you do what Nehemiah does in this passage. You post guards in that area. Let me show you this passage from 1 Peter, chapter 5. He writes,

1 Peter 5:8-9 (ESV)

Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world.

Be sober-minded; be watchful. (where? In the areas where the wall is the lowest. Why? Because) *Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.* (where is he seeking it? At the area where you are most vulnerable. What are you going to do?) *Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world.*

Alright, so we understand that. We get it. Now I got to figure out what operation I'm going to put in place to guard those areas of weakness. And that's an important thing. And, as the Lord makes you aware of those areas of your life, where you are most liable to attack. If you need some direction, it's good to go to somebody who you trust in the Lord and just explain, hey, I've got some areas in my life that the enemy can just, he just steps over the wall like that cause it's just barely up. And I need help to know what guards I can set in place

in my life while the Lord is building the wall around my heart and life. While that construction is going on, how can I be sober minded, be diligent, and be watchful? Because this is where the enemy, if he's going to get anywhere, it's going to be right here. And that's where somebody who you know in the Lord, somebody who you trust in the Lord, will hopefully give you some good advice. Here's some things you can do, depending on what your area of weakness is. Do this, don't do that.

And it's not legalism, it's wisdom, okay? It's just wisdom. You don't want to play, or if you don't want to fall off the cliff, don't play around the edge. That's just wisdom. Oh, that's legalism, pastor Paul. No, it's not. It's just being wise, being watchful.

Verse 14, he says, *“And I looked and arose and said to the nobles and to the officials and to the rest of the people, “Do not be afraid of them. Remember the Lord, (oh I love that) who is great and awesome, and fight for your brothers, your sons, your daughters, your wives, and your homes.”*

What's he doing here? It's time for a pep talk. You know, we all need these. We all need..., you know what this is? This is encouragement. And the Bible says that there are people in the body of Christ who have the gift of encouragement. It's a gift from the Holy Spirit. And it sounds just like this. It sounds just like this.

The person who has that gift of encouragement comes to you, they put their arm around you, and they say, don't be afraid. Keep your eyes on God. Isn't that what Nehemiah is saying right here? He says, *“remember the Lord.”* That's just another way of saying, keep your eyes on God and how incredible and awesome that He is.

Don't stop thinking about and focusing on the power of God in your life and so forth. Boy, we need these people. If you have the gift of encouragement, come out of the shadows. We need you in the body of Christ. I've seen this gift operating in the church, it's wonderful. And people flock to it because they need it.

And, I have a feeling that there's probably a lot of people who haven't yet gotten saved, who have the gift of encouragement, and they're out there doing those success seminars. Those self-help seminars, and they're probably making lots of money out there doing it. They just need to get born again and start using that in the kingdom of God because we need those people who are talking to us about success in the kingdom of God and what it means to trust the Lord with all of

your heart and lean not in your own understanding, but lay your heart before Him and so on. And we need those people.

And if you're one of those people and you might say, well, pastor Paul, how would I know. There is this flow that just begin when you see somebody who's hurting, you are drawn to them, you people with the gift of encouragement know. You can also have that same drawing if you have the gift of compassion.

But if you have that desire to come alongside people and just say, don't be afraid, trust in God, He will give you the strength to walk this thing out and to walk in His victory. That is the gift of encouragement. And you need to be busy doing it because when the Lord comes back, you want to make sure you were able to say, I used the gift that you gave me. And we need you too, by the way.

He says, don't be afraid. Remember the Lord. What do he say? Third thing? Fight for your families. I find it interesting that Nehemiah appeals to the men here and the natural work of God in men to rise up and protect their families. I hope you all know that.

God has hardwired into the male species, a desire to provide and protect. And what does Nehemiah do? He says, hey guys, protect your families. Get out there in the strength of the Lord, keep your eyes on God, don't be afraid, and fight for your families. Believe me, that goes a long way with a guy.

Even in the gift of encouragement, when you're talking to a man who is dealing with great temptations related to sin, it's important to come back and speak to that man about, listen, this could decimate your family. You need to protect your family by keeping yourself away from this sinful behavior.

Now get out there and fight for your family. Get out there and fight for your wife. Fight for your kids. You walk in the power and strength of God and don't give up this fight because your family is at stake. Right? That appeals to a man.

It's not just this battle with me and the devil. I've got my family to look out for. And when I start caring about people beyond just myself, it causes something to rise up within a man, and want to like...

And I was always amazed to this when I saw this in my boys, when they were, even when they were very little. I would see it in my sons where they were just like, yeah, protect the girls, sort of thing. My girls never did that. The girls never went, we're going to protect you. No, they were always wanting to be protected. The boys were always making swords, out of a stick. You want

trouble, you got me, and they're like 4 years old, I'm going to protect, it's just. I didn't teach him that but it was just it's just in there. It's hardwired in a man. All right. Let's appeal to that. Fight, get in there and fight. You know this, we've talked before. This life in Christ is a battle.

Verse 15. *“When our enemies heard that it was known to us and that God had frustrated their plan, (by exposing it) we all returned to the wall, each to his work.”* I love this!

The whole threat came to nothing. Why? Because God exposed the thing. He took away their element of surprise, the enemies, right? And, so they abandoned the attack altogether because they realized. Who knows, they probably had some people doing their own surveillance and they look at this thing and go, oh man, they're armed to the teeth all the way around here. They got guys, oh, and look at, especially at those places where the wall is really low, they've got double the guards right there. Forget it, go home, they're ready for us.

We need to be ready for the enemy. The Bible says we're not unaware of his schemes. We're not unaware, we know the devil's schemes. We know the kind of things he's going to do in our lives. We know the kind of temptations he's going to produce so let's be ready, no surprise attacks here.

Verse 16. *“From that day on, half of my servants worked on construction, and half held the spears, shields, bows, and coats of mail. (they were literally wearing armor) And the leaders stood behind the whole house of Judah, ¹⁷ who were building on the wall. Those who carried burdens were loaded in such a way that each labored on the work with one hand and held his weapon with the other. ¹⁸ And each of the builders had his sword strapped at his side while he built. The man who sounded the trumpet was beside me.”*

Isn't this a great picture of just diligence? They are they literally, have a tool in one hand to do the work and they've got a weapon in the other hand to fight against the enemy. So it's obedience and warfare, and those things go together sometimes in our walk with God.

Now, the weapon in our hand is the sword of the Spirit, isn't it? We have the Word of God, which is the sword of the Spirit. We carry that around. But, we're also, in the other hand, walking out obedience to whatever God has called us to do in our lives. We're going to keep working, keep doing the work that God's called us to do while we're ready. Because the enemy could attack at any time.

And you'll notice here in verse 18 that it says that Nehemiah had a guy with a trumpet who stayed with him all the time, just in case an attack was recognized, he would blow the trumpet and so forth.

And he says in verse 19 that he told “...*the nobles and (also) to the officials and to the rest of the people, (he said) “The (this) work is great and widely spread, and we are separated on the wall, far from one another.”*”

And that's dangerous, right? That's dangerous, you guys know that. I know I'm preaching to the choir. It's Wednesday night. You guys are the cream of the crop, but let me just say it again. Don't get separated.

Don't get separated from the body of Christ. That's really dangerous. Okay? The enemy's looking. You see that in the animal kingdom. How does a predator take hold of one of the flock? He separates it. Right? Get them separated from the rest of the flock. Easy kill.

And the enemy has that same predatory old sort of a spirit to get you separated and dismembered from your membership in the kingdom of God, the body of Christ. He wants to pull you away and get you, and oh, he just loves when people go, oh, I don't need 4 walls to be a Christian. Everybody knows you don't need 4 walls to be a Christian, but you do need the fellowship of the saints to be a stronger, safer Christian. Okay? Let's call it what it is.

We need each other in the body of Christ. The I can't say to the nose, the ear, the foot, the whatever, I don't need you. We need each other. It's hard to admit. We have to swallow our pride sometimes, but we need each other. That's what he's saying here. Listen, we're spread out, and that makes us more vulnerable. We got to come up with a plan here.

He says here in verse 20, “*In the place where you hear the sound of the trumpet, rally to us there. Our God will fight for us.*” I like that. Nehemiah truly speaks like God is actively involved in the work.

Guys, did you hear that? Nehemiah talked like God is actively involved in his life and in the work that is going on. And that's important for you to hear because that's an expression of faith. When people talk about their problems and their challenges and their woes, you can tell whether or not they believe God's really there. And you can tell if they don't believe He's there too, because they never ever acknowledge God. They only acknowledge the problem. That's all they talk about. And it does my heart good when I hear somebody say, hey, we need prayer. This is happening. This is going on, but God is there.

He knows God knows and I'm asking for prayer because this is something God's told us to do and so forth. But God is there. God knows God's going to see us through this time.

That's an individual who has an understanding of God's active involvement in their life. It's called faith, by the way. And that's what you hear from Nehemiah. *"Our God will fight for us."* Doesn't mean you and I aren't going to have to swing our sword, but God will fight for us.

Verse 21, *"So we labored at the work, and half of them held the spears from the break of dawn until the stars came out. (that's a long day, by the way) ²² I also said to the people at that time, "Let every man and his servant pass the night within Jerusalem, that they may be a guard for us by night and may labor by day."*

What that means is they put guys on a rotation They let you sleep for a while But then you also got up and you did nighttime sentry duty. And then you worked all day long you had probably had a period of time maybe I don't know how many hours at night, you got to get out of bed. You got to go sit on the wall. You got to just keep an eye out and then you can go back to bed because you got to get up in the morning and work the whole day again. These people are working hard.

"So neither I nor my brothers (verse 23) nor my servants nor the men of the guard who followed me, (and those are the Persian soldiers that brought them there, and) none of us took off our clothes; (in other words, they didn't get their jammies on at night) each kept his weapon at his right hand."

Wow, that's called diligence, *"...kept his weapon at his right hand."* And they were prepared and ready. We're going to stop there. I hope you got some usable things here as far as just staying diligent, it's hard to stay diligent. I don't like staying diligent. I'll be honest with you. I like to take time off in my mind or just from the difficulties of life. It's like, wow, God, I could really use a day off from this struggle.

Problem is the enemy doesn't care about giving me any rest from what he might be doing at that particular time. He doesn't say, ah, Paul's tired, I'm going to give him a day. Get a breather. The enemy doesn't do that ever. So we have to stay diligent and that's hard. But that's why we have one another.

And that's why we need those of you with your various spiritual gifts to use whatever spiritual gifts God has given you so that we can be strong together.