

**REBUILDING A LIFE FOR GOD - Studies In Nehemiah - Part seven
Sunday, October 22nd, 2023, 5:30 p.m.**

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THE WAY OF GOD IN DISCOURAGING TIMES (continued)

Nehemiah 4:10-23 - “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.” [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 the Jews who lived near them came from all directions and said to us ten times, “You must return to us.” [13] 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. [14] 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, who is great and awesome, and fight for your brothers, your sons, your daughters, your wives, and your homes.” [15] When our enemies heard that it was known to us and that God had frustrated their plan, we all returned to the wall, each to his work. [16] From that day on, half of my servants worked on construction, and half held the spears, shields, bows, and coats of mail. 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. [19] And I said to the nobles and to the officials and to the rest of the people, “The work is great and widely spread, and we are separated on the wall, far from one another. [20] In the place where you hear the sound of the trumpet, rally to us there. Our God will fight for us.” [21] So we labored at the work, and half of them held the spears from the break of dawn until the stars came out.”

[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.” [23] So neither I nor my brothers nor my servants nor the men of the guard who followed me, none of us took off our clothes; each kept his weapon at his right hand.”

Last week we covered two important points on the way of God in discouraging times. *First, in all our lives there come times when we sense our own lack of strength.* And *second, in all our work for the Lord there come times when we lack vision.* Neither of these seasons means we have failed or slipped beyond the care and devoted attention of our Lord.

Now on to point three:

3) NEHEMIAH TURNS THE PEOPLE’S ATTENTION BACK TO GOD

Nehemiah 4:9 & 14 - “And we prayed to our God and set a guard as a protection against them day and night....[14].... 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, who is great and awesome, and fight for your brothers, your sons, your daughters, your wives, and your homes.”

They were all inspired at the beginning. But now it's half way through the task. Nehemiah is a good leader. He knows the particular dangers of the half-way point in any venture for God. When you're half way into the project, it's easy to lose sight of what started you off in the first place. We need to consistently be **recalled** in our attention to God.

This is what makes the church so important for Christian people. The Bible is full of glorious promises designed just for such times of discouragement:

“They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength.”

Notice, not **obtain** strength, but **renew** it. This is a promise to people who already know what it is to receive strength from God. They come to have it renewed to a previous level.

“He restores my soul.” What a beautiful picture! Like refurnishing a precious but tattered beautiful piece of furniture. He makes it strong and attractive again.

That's why Nehemiah calls the people back to God and away from the incriminating, discouraging accusations of their enemies. They need to come back to God if they are to finish the work. If nothing else, the book of Nehemiah teaches someone like me that ***I will only make it about half way rebuilding my circumstances with my own wisdom and strength.*** My best efforts will only take me half way to the finish line. ***We need to come back to God again and again.*** This need never passes because He is the one who renews and restores.

2 Corinthians 4:16 - "So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day."

4) **NEHEMIAH TURNS THEIR MINDS TO THE GREAT ISSUES AT STAKE IN THEIR FUTURE**

I touched on this point just briefly a few minutes ago. Let me expand it here:

Nehemiah 4:13-14 - “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. [14] 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, who is great and awesome, and *fight for your brothers, your sons, your daughters, your wives, and your homes.*”

You can see how the Holy Spirit works through Nehemiah here. It's not enough to shun the voice of the enemy. ***There are crucial, long term issues at stake here.*** Nehemiah reminds the people ***why*** they started rebuilding the wall in the first place. There are precious benefits for them in this project. I may give up working on a ***stone wall.*** But I'm not going to give up on my ***children***

Nehemiah points to ***the reason*** for the wall. ***You wouldn't think he'd have to point that out at all.*** They must have known ***why*** they were building the wall. Or is it just possible that in the middle of the work, ***you start to only see the work itself?*** Do you just begin to see layers of stone upon stone? Do you just see a ***job***, rather than an ***objective?***

I wonder if that's true in the rest of the Christian life. It's easier to see all the bits and pieces of the Christian life as mere **duty**, without seeing how they all relate to the **goal of rebuilding what God has for my whole life**. Bible reading, prayer, church attendance, giving, and then there's all those other church things we do - choirs, nurseries, classes to teach, meetings to attend, so many hours of work - **if we ever begin to see only the tasks without seeing the goal of the tasks, we'll lose heart in the work for sure.**

It's easier to see all of those pieces rather than the **kind of life in God's Kingdom that the Spirit wants to use all of those things to build**. In other words, I don't teach because I happen to like this church or everything it does. If that's my motive, I'll quit and leave for another church as soon as someone does something I disagree with. No, I teach because I'm **very much in love with Jesus and He wants to use my service for Him to build me into a fruitful member of His Kingdom!**

And I don't give because I feel cheap if I don't give God a good tip. I give because I see it as one way God has given me to take people to heaven with me long after the rest of my investments have rotted into mud. I see it as **"laying up treasure in heaven."**

That's what Nehemiah does here. ***“Listen people, it's not walls we're building. It's our lives. It's our homes. It's our families!”***

Don't just see the work. See the ***goal*** of the work.

“I work in children's church.” That's sadly understating it. ***“There are future missionaries and political leaders in our church. And every week, as long as I don't miss it, God has blessed me with the opportunity to get their lives ready for that task. What an assignment I have!”***

“I deliver Bread of Life baskets for my church.” You'll soon get tired if that's how you view it. ***“Jesus said that even a cup of cold water, given in His Name would not lose its reward. And every week, I take far more than just a cup of water, I get the blessing of giving a whole basket!*** Imagine the blessing stored up for me and the impact on those who receive! I wouldn't miss it for all the world!”

5) **NEHEMIAH PROVIDES POINTS OF RALLY FOR THE PEOPLE AS THEY WORK**

Nehemiah 4:19-20 - ***“And I said to the nobles and to the officials and to the rest of the people, “The work is great and widely spread, and we are separated on the wall, far from one another. [20] In the place where you hear the sound of the trumpet, rally to us there. Our God will fight for us.”***

Much of the time the work had to take place while the people were far apart. ***Each individual couldn't see the progress the others were making.*** That's the important teaching point. They couldn't see the walls going up in any other section but their own. They faced much of the ridicule of the enemy on their own. And they felt small and inferior because they ***couldn't see all the other parts of the wall going up at the very same time their little section was.***

Because the people were so spread out, Nehemiah plans special times of united gathering for specific problems and challenges that might arise. ***The reason is simple. The people will be stronger together than apart.***

I wish I could tell you how hard is it to get this simple concept across to people in busy 2023. Yard by yard, there is more spiritual help and strength and hope for your future in the church than anywhere else on earth. ***Yet the simple truth is that people aren't as committed to the church as they used to be.*** The truth is your marriage needs the church. Your home needs the church. Your future walk with Jesus needs the church.

Think back to the days of the old fashioned barbecue - the ones with actual charcoal briquets. I used to find them terribly hard to light. Then I made a discovery. If you spread the briquets out from each other, they will very quickly die out. But put them close together, in a little pile, and they keep each other white hot.

That is the way God has created each of us. You will get less discouraged if you stay with the saints - even the ones you don't like. Get into the habit of encouraging everyone you meet. Don't discourage them. Build them up. Speak well of them and of their future in Jesus. Leave them feeling uplifted every time they speak with you. Get them to pray with you for your burdens.

Hebrews 10:24-25 - “And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, [25] not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.”

Notice, this is the only verse specifically telling people to go to church in the New Testament, and it says nothing whatsoever about what they ***get out of going***. That's because it's not about ***getting*** anything. It's all about ***putting in***. ***It's about contributing. It's about getting together to give and encourage.***

I don't know if you've noticed it, but there's actually enough out there in the world to depress you. You and I both need the church. Even when it rebukes or corrects, the goal is to mend what is broken and get lives airborne again.

God help each one of us never to lose sight of it. Whatever you're rebuilding, don't stop! God is behind all who spend their lives fixing things for His Kingdom. Count on His grace and His reward!