

## SUMMER DEVOTIONS WEEK #12: August 24- August 31, 2015

This is the last week of the summer devotions for 2015. If there's one thing I know beyond a shadow of a doubt, it is this – God's Word changes people. Read it daily. Hear it preached weekly. Study it regularly. Memorize it monthly. Live it daily.

I love you guys. Endure. Keep moving forward. Persevere. Be immovable. Stand firm.

Pastor Mike

### **Monday, August 24, 2015• Summer Devotions Day #85**

In this last week of summer devotions, I'd like to walk you through the story of Nehemiah. I love this book and I love this story. It is our story at COV. It is my story and it is your story. First, who was Nehemiah? The Bible says in Nehemiah 1:11 - "*I was the cupbearer to the king.*" This tells us what Nehemiah did for a living, who he was, what his occupation was. What was a cupbearer?

He was a combination Prime Minister, body guard, personal security agent, and assistant to the king. He did all of these things. He was very well trusted. He was the person the most trusted by the king. The reason he was called cupbearer was because part of his job was to taste the wine before the king drank it to make sure it wasn't poisoned. There were a lot of assassination attempts in those days. The king was paranoid and fearful so they would have a guy who would test all of the wine. If he keeled over they knew that was bad wine! It was a pretty dangerous job considering in those days a lot of people didn't like Artaxerxes.

#### **Nehemiah 1:1-4 (NIV)**

*<sup>1</sup>The words of Nehemiah son of Hacaliah: In the month of Kislev in the twentieth year, while I was in the citadel of Susa, <sup>2</sup>Hanani, one of my brothers, came from Judah with some other men, and I questioned them about the Jewish remnant that survived the exile, and also about Jerusalem. <sup>3</sup>They said to me, "Those who survived the exile and are back in the province are in great trouble and disgrace. The wall of Jerusalem is broken down, and its gates have been burned with fire." <sup>4</sup>When I heard these things, I sat down and wept. For some days I mourned and fasted and prayed before the God of heaven.*

Nehemiah is a Jew living in a foreign land as a slave – in Persia. One day, some fellow Jews came to Nehemiah and told him of the terrible condition that Jerusalem is in. Nehemiah is heart-broken; his response is that he wept, he mourned and he fasted – for four months. Has anything broken your heart in such a way?

Does the lostness of people bother you? Does the spiritual condition of our city bother you? The condition of Jerusalem bothered Nehemiah. He was moved to do something about it. Just like the wall surrounding Jerusalem needed to be re-built, there is a wall to be built around the city of your soul. There is a wall to be erected around our church. There is a wall to be built around the valley we live in. There is a wall to be built throughout the whole world.

Whether you be concerned primarily with building the wall in your own soul, or with building the wall of your church, or with building the wall of the Kingdom of God throughout the whole world, you will discover that there is no winning without warfare; there is no opportunity without opposition; there is no victory without vigilance. For whenever the people of God say, "Let us arise and build," Satan says, "Let me arise and oppose."

What is the condition of your soul? Of our church? Of our valley? Do you recognize the need? The problem that Nehemiah faced – the city walls and gates of Jerusalem have been in rubble and decay for 150+ years. In those days, if a city was walled and an enemy came against it, it might take 2, 4, 6 months for the enemy to break in. The walls were very important for the protection and security of the city. The city was in ruins, rubble. All the walls were falling down. It was just junk and the people of Jerusalem were living in ruin and squalor. People are living in rubble, there's low morale, and they're defeated, discouraged, and depressed. What do you do when you have that kind of situation? You need a leader. God is calling Nehemiah to lead. He's also calling you.

## **Tuesday, August 25, 2015 · Summer Devotions Day #86**

We continue looking at the life of Nehemiah, as we look at how God used one man - one person to turn around the prospects and future of a whole country. Yesterday, we looked at Nehemiah's occupation, a cupbearer, the most trusted position in all of Persia. We looked at Nehemiah's response upon hearing the news that he and his fellow countryman were in great distress – he wept and mourned and fasted. I asked the question – How do you respond when you see and hear of people who are in trouble, in distress, people who need help? This morning, we're going to look at what Nehemiah did next. Nehemiah prayed. Read his prayer.

### **Nehemiah 1:5-11 (NIV)**

<sup>5</sup> Then I said: "O Lord, God of heaven, the great and awesome God, who keeps his covenant of love with those who love him and obey his commands, <sup>6</sup> let your ear be attentive and your eyes open to hear the prayer your servant is praying before you day and night for your servants, the people of Israel. I confess the sins we Israelites, including myself and my father's house, have committed against you. <sup>7</sup> We have acted very wickedly toward you. We have not obeyed the commands, decrees and laws you gave your servant Moses. <sup>8</sup> "Remember the instruction you gave your servant Moses, saying, 'If you are unfaithful, I will scatter you among the nations, <sup>9</sup> but if you return to me and obey my commands, then even if your exiled people are at the farthest horizon, I will gather them from there and bring them to the place I have chosen as a dwelling for my Name.' <sup>10</sup> "They are your servants and your people, whom you redeemed by your great strength and your mighty hand. <sup>11</sup> O Lord, let your ear be attentive to the prayer of this your servant and to the prayer of your servants who delight in revering your name. Give your servant success today by granting him favor in the presence of this man." I was cupbearer to the king.

What are the take-aways from this prayer?

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E. M. Bounds, in his book - Power Through Prayer, said this: "We are constantly on a stretch, if not on a strain, to provide new methods, new plans, new organizations to advance the church and secure enlargement and efficiency. But men are God's method. The church is looking for better methods, God is looking for better men."

God said that very same thing a long time ago in Ezekiel 22:30 (LB) "*I (God) looked in vain for anyone who would build again the wall of righteousness that guards the land, who could stand in the gap for the people and the nation, but I found not one.*" God is looking for people to use. He is looking for leaders. Nothing happens until somebody provides leadership. Everything rises or falls on leadership. We're looking for better methods, machinery, motivations. God says, I'm looking for better people, people that I can use.

With that as a background, let me give you the four secrets to answered prayer from the life of Nehemiah.

### **#1. BASE MY REQUEST ON GOD'S CHARACTER**

Verse 5 "*O Lord God of heaven, the great and awesome God who keeps His covenant of love with those who love Him and obey His command.*" It's a prayer of conviction. It's a prayer of conviction of who God is. It's conviction that God is a just God, a great God, in control. He wants to hear me. He wants to answer my prayers. It is conviction acknowledging who God is. This is what praise is all about. Praise is bragging on God.

This is the greatest reason to pray to God. "I'm expecting You to answer this prayer because of who You are. You are a faithful God. You are a great God. You are a loving God. You are a wonderful God. You can handle this problem, God!" Pray for great things, because God can do anything.

### **#2. CONFESS THE SIN IN MY LIFE.**

v. 6b -7 "*Let your ear be attentive and your eyes be opened to the prayer your servant is praying before you day and night for your servants, the people of Israel. I confess the sins we Israelites, including myself and my father's house committed against you. We have acted very wickedly toward you. We have not obeyed the commands and the decrees and the laws you gave your servant Moses.*"

This is a prayer of confession - of what I am and who I am. "God, I've blown it. I've made mistakes and I'm imperfect." This is step number two if you want to have answers to your prayers. The Jews had disobeyed God. As a result, God said, "All right, if you don't obey me you're going to lose the land of Israel." And they lost it. They had not obeyed God and they lost their city, Jerusalem, the Temple and were taken into foreign captivity -- all because they had disobeyed Him.

Part one of Nehemiah's prayer is to base his request on who God is. "God, you're a great God. You're awesome! You keep your promises!" Part two, I admit who I am. He says, "We've sinned." It wasn't Nehemiah's fault they went into captivity. He wasn't even born when this happened seventy years earlier. He was most likely born in captivity. Yet, he is including himself in the national sins. He says "I've been a part of the problem".

There is personal confession and there is national confession. This is something we don't know anything about. We don't have a corporate sense in America today. We are very individualistic. We're taught to confess my sins. When was the last time you confessed the sins of the nation? Or the sins of your family? Or your church? Or your friends? We don't think that way. We're very individualistic. Our society has taught us the concept of you're only responsible for you. And that's just not true! You are your brother's keeper. We are all in this together.

Folks, here is a true statement: Leaders accept the blame but losers pass the buck. If you want to be a leader, you accept the blame and share the credit. Losers are always accusers and excusers. They're always making excuses why things didn't/couldn't happen, it's always somebody else's fault. Leaders accept the blame. "*We have sinned against You.*"

### **#3. CLAIM THE PROMISES OF GOD.**

v. 8-9 *Remember the instructions you gave to your servant Moses saying `If you are unfaithful I will scatter you among the nations. But if you return to me and obey my commands then even if your exiled people are at the farthest horizon I will gather them from there and bring them to the place they's chosen .. in my name.*"

This is a prayer of confidence in what God has promised. God said it, I believe it -- that settles it! If God said it, that settles it, whether I believe it or not. Claiming God's promises. The promises are the keys that unlock the answers to prayer. You've got to learn those promises - all 7,000 of them.

Nehemiah is praying to the Lord and saying, "I want You to remember what You told your servant Moses." Can you imagine saying "remember" to God? He's reminding God what He had said in the past.

Question: Does God have to be reminded? No. Does He forget what He's promised? No. Then why do we do this? We do this because it helps us remember what God has promised. Nothing pleases God more than when you remind God of one of His promises. Do kids ever forget a promise? Never. I know my kids don't! Well, God does not want us to forget His promises!

**Prayer transforms God's promises into performance.** Prayer is taking God at His word. It's holding God to His promises. It's asking God to do what He's already promised He wants to do. Nehemiah says "God, first I'm basing my prayer on Who You are. Then I'm admitting who I am. Then I'm reminding You of what You've said."

Nehemiah could claim these promises because he knew them. The promises he mentions in these verses are Leviticus 26:33 and Deuteronomy 30:4. When was the last time you memorized a promise out of Leviticus or Deuteronomy? **The point is, the strength of my prayer life is determined by how well I know the promises of God.** So, let me ask, How well do you know them?

### **#4. BE VERY SPECIFIC IN WHAT I ASK FOR.**

v. 11 "*O Lord, let your ear be attentive to the prayer of this, your servant and to the prayer of your servants who delight in revering your name. Give your servant success today by granting him favor in the presence of this man.*"

It's a prayer of commitment. "I'm willing to be part of the answer. God, You can use me. I commit myself. I'll be part of the solution."

Nehemiah has the whole prayer just to have the little request at the end. "When I go before the king to ask to be released to go build the wall, give me success when I make that request to the king." Nehemiah is willing to go to Jerusalem. He was available. He was willing to rebuild the project. But he knew he'd have to get the king's permission first who was definitely not a believer. You don't just let your right hand man walk away. The king has the power of death and life over anybody. Nehemiah was asking a leave of absence for three years, to go back to his home town and rebuild a wall the king had ordered not to be rebuilt. This was the reason he was asking for success when he went to talk with the king.

He's not hesitant to pray for success. He's very bold in his praying. Have you ever prayed, "Lord, make me successful!" If you haven't, why haven't you? What is the alternative? A failure? There is nothing wrong with praying for success if what you're doing is ultimately for the glory of God. Pray boldly. Pray that God will make you successful in life for the glory of Him.

William Carey who founded the modern missionary movement used to say, "*Expect great things from God; do great things for God.*" That's a good motto for every Christian.

## **Wednesday, August 26, 2015 • Summer Devotions Day #87**

Yesterday, we looked at the first thing a leader does when faced with a problem - they pray. He/She does other things besides pray but that's the first thing they do. We looked at Nehemiah's prayer and designed a model for our own prayer life. Well, the next step a leader takes is that they plan. You pray and then you plan. This passage reveals Nehemiah as a master planner.

### **Nehemiah 2:1-10 (NIV)**

<sup>1</sup>In the month of Nisan in the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes, when wine was brought for him, I took the wine and gave it to the king. I had not been sad in his presence before; <sup>2</sup>so the king asked me, "Why does your face look so sad when you are not ill? This can be nothing but sadness of heart." I was very much afraid, <sup>3</sup>but I said to the king, "May the king live forever! Why should my face not look sad when the city where my fathers are buried lies in ruins, and its gates have been destroyed by fire?" <sup>4</sup>The king said to me, "What is it you want?" Then I prayed to the God of heaven, <sup>5</sup>and I answered the king, "If it pleases the king and if your servant has found favor in his sight, let him send me to the city in Judah where my fathers are buried so that I can rebuild it." <sup>6</sup>Then the king, with the queen sitting beside him, asked me, "How long will your journey take, and when will you get back?" It pleased the king to send me; so I set a time. <sup>7</sup>I also said to him, "If it pleases the king, may I have letters to the governors of Trans-Euphrates, so that they will provide me safe-conduct until I arrive in Judah?" <sup>8</sup>And may I have a letter to Asaph, keeper of the king's forest, so he will give me timber to make beams for the gates of the citadel by the temple and for the city wall and for the residence I will occupy?" And because the gracious hand of my God was upon me, the king granted my requests. <sup>9</sup>So I went to the governors of Trans-Euphrates and gave them the king's letters. The king had also sent army officers and cavalry with me. <sup>10</sup>When Sanballat the Horonite and Tobiah the Ammonite official heard about this, they were very much disturbed that someone had come to promote the welfare of the Israelites.

## **HOW LEADERS PLAN**

### **#1. THEY THINK IT THROUGH**

v. 1, "*In the month of Nisan*" (remember, he heard the report back in Kislev - November or December. Now it is Nisan - March or April) four months he's been waiting for something to happen. Now, something happens. What had been happening between when Nehemiah first got the idea of rebuilding the wall and when he actually got the opportunity to present his program to the king. What had he been doing? He'd been praying, but he also had been planning. We know that by the way he responded to the king when the king said, "What do you want?" Nehemiah knew what to ask for because he had been planning.

Howard Hendricks said, "*Nothing is more profitable than serious thinking, and nothing is more demanding.*" Leaders set aside time for think time; time to get away, time to plan, time to reflect, and pray. Folks, we all need to build into our schedule regular time away, to hear from God, so he can renew our hearts and our minds!

Proverbs 13:16 *"A wise man thinks ahead; a fool doesn't and even brags about it."* It's wise to spend time thinking about your life. Ask yourself three questions: **Where am I now? Where do I want to be? How will I get there?** That's what Nehemiah did. He was thinking it through. He was praying for four months but he was also planning.

**What happens when you pray and plan?** God gives you a vision. That's the mark of all leadership. You've got to have vision to be a leader. Question: What's God's vision for your life? What does He want to do through you? Not some innocuous general idea but a specific plan and specific vision. **Failing to plan is planning to fail!** You've got to think it through.

## **#2. THEY PREPARE FOR OPPORTUNITIES**

v. 1 *"In the month of Nisan the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes the wine was brought to him. I took the wine and I gave it to the king and I had not been sad in his presence before. So the king asked me, 'Why does your face look so sad and you're not ill? This can be nothing but sadness of heart.' I was very much afraid."* This is the moment Nehemiah has been waiting for. He's been praying for an opportunity to present his idea to the king. He's got an opportunity now to state his case because he had planned he was ready with the answer. Have you heard people say, *"That guy has all the luck. He gets all the breaks."* I've found that the more I plan, the luckier I get. The opportunities are there you just have to be ready for them.

Notice he had a sad face. He had a burden he couldn't hide. I can imagine him thinking *"God, aren't you going to do anything about this wall. I've been praying for it."* Finally the king says, *"What's wrong, Nehemiah?"* Notice it says *"I was afraid."* In those days it was a capital crime to be sad before the king. If you frowned in the presence of the king you'd get your head cut off. If you were depressed in the presence of the king, that was it! Notice it says, *"This is the first time I ever appeared sad."* Nehemiah took a huge risk to do what he did!

**Leaders move ahead in spite of their fears.** There is a myth that leaders are never afraid. Courage is moving ahead in spite of your fear. Story of my ordination and Tim Lahaye's words to me. **"DON'T EVER LET FEAR STOP YOU FROM DOING GOD'S WILL."**

Maybe you have a vision from God, a heart do great things for Him. But fear has so far stopped you. Maybe you have a friend or a neighbor or a family member you need share the good news of Jesus Christ with, but fear has stopped you. Fear of rejection, fear of ridicule. Leaders, people who make their lives count, they move ahead in spite of their fears! **2 Timothy 1:7 (NIV)** says, *"For God did not give us a spirit of timidity(fear), but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline."*

## **#3. THEY ESTABLISH A GOAL**

v. 5 *"I answered the king, 'If it pleases the king and your servant has found favor in his sight, let him send me to the city in Judah where my fathers are buried so I can rebuild the wall.'"* Nehemiah gets specific here. He establishes a goal. He's very specific: He tells the King I want to rebuild the wall.

**If you aim at nothing, you're going to hit it every time.** When it comes to goal setting, ask yourself two questions: **What do I want to be? What do I want to do?** Those are the questions you ask in establishing a goal.

Let me share something with you, most of us make two errors in goal setting: We set them too low and we try to accomplish them too quickly. **Inch by inch anything is a cinch.** Set big goals, make big plans -- so big that God has to bail you out! God loves big planning. It honors God to be a big planner. What do you want God to use you to do? What's your goal? Your dream? Your vision? My dream for COV is big. We have accomplished a lot in 11 years, but we have so much more to do.

#### **#4. THEY SET A DEADLINE**

When God put's a burden on your heart, first, bathe it in prayer. Then think it through. Prepare for the opportunities. Then you establish a goal. And then number four, you set a deadline.

Verse. 6 *"Then the king with the queen setting beside him asked me, 'How long will your journey take? and when will you get back' And I said, 'It pleased the king to send me, so I set a time.'"* **He established a deadline.**

A goal must have a deadline. If your goal doesn't have a deadline on it, it's not a goal. First, you know **what** you want to do and then you know **when** you want to do it. Ask the question: How long will it take? When will I finish? What's the deadline? For those of you who manage people -- oversee others, do you want your people to be more effective? More efficient? When you set goals, give them directions or tasks, always attach a deadline to it. Winston Churchill said *"a task without a deadline is like a race with no finish line -- ultimately, it is a gigantic and monumental waste of time."*

#### **#5. THEY ANTICIPATE THE PROBLEMS.**

Nehemiah's already asked for permission to go, now he's asking for protection. v. 7 *"If it pleases the king may I have letters to the governors of Trans Euphrates so that they will provide me safe conduct until I arrive in Judah."* It's about 800-1,000 mile journey between Iraq and Israel. He's got to go through a lot of provinces. You didn't travel freely in those days - Nehemiah said, "I want you to give me letters of authority so I'll have clear sailing, I need traveling permits to travel unhindered."

This is a clear example of planning. He was not just praying during those four months but he was also planning so that when the opportunity arose he could say what he needs.

Question to ask yourself in your own planning: What could hold me back? In planning a project, ask yourself, what could go wrong? If anything could go wrong, it will. (example of planning a trip with interns. I always required them to come up with a list of 30 things that could go wrong, and have a plan for each of them)

Proverbs 22:3 (Living Bible) *"A prudent man foresees the difficulties ahead and prepares for them; the simpleton goes blindly on and suffers the consequences."* One of the laws of life is that it's always easier to get in than it is to get out. It's easier to get into debt than it is to get out of debt. It's easier to get into a relationship than out of a relationship. It's easier to fill up your schedule than to eliminate things from your schedule. It's a principle of life in every area. A wise man counts the cost.

Nehemiah is thinking ahead. He's already thought ahead where he wants to go. He's already thought ahead when he wants to go. Now he's anticipating the problems. What problems might we encounter here at COV?

## #6. THEY CALCULATE THE COST

v. 8 *"And may I have a letter to Asaph, the keeper of the king's forest so he will give me timber to make beams for the gates of the citadel by the temple and for the city wall and for the residence I will occupy?"* Nehemiah gives the king a shopping list. Remember, Nehemiah is not a contractor. He's never built anything in his life. He's a cupbearer. Yet, when the opportunity arose he rattled off exactly what he needed. Why? He had planned.

How did Nehemiah know what to ask for? He calculated the cost. How in the world did he know there was a royal forest near Jerusalem? Advance planning. He even knew the name of the foreman, the keeper of the forest Asaph!

If Nehemiah had not had his planning done he wouldn't have been prepared. But because his planning had been so well thought out he knew exactly what to ask for. He had calculated the cost. Leadership Law: Leaders are willing to ask other people for help.

**Luke 14:28** says, *"If one of you is planning to build a tower, he sits down first and figures out what it will cost to see if he has enough money to finish the job."* Who's speaking? Jesus. Jesus is advocating counting the cost. My point?

**Leaders plan and prepare for success rather than worry about failure.** You don't see Nehemiah worrying about what happens if it doesn't work. He's not worrying. He's just planning and praying as if it's inevitable. Nehemiah had a job. Pray, plan, and work. God's job was to bless his work, protect him and give him strength. Are you spending more time or more energy worrying about failure than you are about planning for success?

Let's apply these truths to your life:

How many of you really want to grow spiritually? What plans have you made for that? We plan everything else in our life, why don't we plan our spiritual growth?

Do you have a plan to read through the Bible? Do you have a plan to set aside a certain time everyday for prayer? Do you have a plan to talk to that person at work about the Lord? Do you have a plan to invite them over to dinner at your house, get to know them and then invite them to church?

Have you planned it or are you letting it just spontaneously happen? Very few things happen spontaneously. You need a plan. A plan for witnessing. A plan for Bible reading. A plan for prayer. A plan for all of these different things in your life.

Are the plans you have ones that you just think up and then ask God to bless? Or are you getting your plans from the Lord? Whatever your plans, make them big enough they show off God to the world -- that God is a great God!

## **Thursday, August 27, 2015 · Summer Devotions Day #88**

Success is never a one-man show. Nehemiah knew that he could not rebuild the wall surrounding Jerusalem without the help of other people. When he goes to Jerusalem, the people are defeated, apathetic, living among ruins. Twice before in the last ninety years somebody has tried to rebuild the wall. They've failed twice. The people have no confidence. They're negative. For 90+ years they've

been saying it can't be done. Nehemiah arrives on the scene and within a matter of days he has rallied the support of the entire city. He puts them together, mobilizes them, and rebuilds the wall in 52 days. Over the next few days, let's look at how Nehemiah faced the challenge before him.

### Whenever You Set Out To Do Something for God.... #1. EXPECT OPPOSITION

The fact is that the moment you say, "Let's do something," someone will jump up and say, "Let's not." When God's people rise and say, "Let's build," Satan says, "Let's arise and oppose."

Some people are naturally resistant to change. They don't like it. They want the status quo, which is probably Latin for "the mess we're in".

Nehemiah 2:10 *"When Sanballat the Horonite and Tobiah the Ammonite official heard about this they were very much disturbed that some would come to promote the welfare of Israel."* He names two leaders of the opposition. You'll find these people all through the book of Nehemiah. Sanballat was the governor of Samaria, Tobiah was the leader of the Ammonites. Nehemiah has not even arrived in Jerusalem yet and there's already opposition.

**First leadership law today: There is no opportunity without opposition.** If you're going to help change people or change the situation, expect opposition. Someday take me out to lunch and let me tell you the war stories of bringing about change here at COV.

v. 19 *"But when Sanballat the Horonite, Tobiah the Ammonite official, and Geshem the Arab heard about it, they mocked us and ridiculed us."* Another guy is now mentioned. In v. 10, before Nehemiah arrived there was just Sanballat the Horonite and Tobiah the Ammonite. Now we notice the opposition has expanded to include a third party. Opposition usually grows as the project continues. First there are only two opponents, then a third party.

As we get further into Nehemiah we find six different sources of opposition. He got it from every side! The opposition's first strategy: *"They mocked and ridiculed us."* They laughed! Those Jews are never going to get it built. They haven't done it in ninety years; they won't do it now. The second thing they do is they accused them of rebelling against the king. This excuse had been used before. Ezra 4:13 -- that was the very accusation that got the wall stopped the last time. It had worked before when Ezra was trying to get it rebuilt.

The opposition went to the king and said, "The Jews are rebuilding the wall. Once they get it rebuilt, forget any more taxes from those people." Then the king issued his decree: No more wall rebuilding. It had worked before, they tried again. Rebuilding the wall is rebelling against the king, King Artaxerxes. But now it didn't work. The reason it didn't work now is because Nehemiah is on the scene. And Nehemiah is no pushover.

V. 20 *"And I answered them saying, 'The God of heaven will give us success. We, His servants, will start rebuilding. But as for you, you have no share in Jerusalem, any claim or historic right to it.'" Nehemiah refused to argue. If you're wise you will not argue with the opposition. Instead he points out that it's God's project and God's idea. V. 12 he said "I had not told anyone what God had put in my heart to do."* God put the burden on him. It wasn't his idea to rebuild the wall, it was God's idea. Since it was God's idea they would trust Him for its success. That's confidence. He answers the opposition quickly and confidently.

I John 3:13 *"Don't be surprised, my brothers, if the world hates you."* If you start working for God, expect opposition. Anybody who does anything is going to be ridiculed. The moment you hang your sign out, somebody is going to start throwing rocks at it. The only way to not be criticized in life is to do nothing, be nothing, and say nothing. If you decide that you're going to live for Jesus Christ at work, school, or any other place, somebody is going to start laughing at you. Count on it! They're going to ridicule you. Let them laugh! They will question your motives. People will question your motives just like they questioned Nehemiah's. "Are you an empire builder? Are you on some ego trip, trying to do what nobody else has done in ninety years?" That's part of the price of being a leader.

**Leadership Law: Satan's most common tool of attack is discouragement.** This is why we are commanded over and over again in scripture to encourage people. Listen to Hebrews 3:13 – *"day after day, as long as it is called today, encourage one another..."*

People will oppose you. Kites rise against the wind not with it! Salmon swim upstream against the current, not with it! GO AGAINST THE FLOW!!!!

## Friday, August 28, 2015 • Summer Devotions Day #89

Whenever You Set Out To Do Something for God.... **#2. WAIT FOR GOD'S TIMING**

V. 11 says *"I went to Jerusalem and after staying there three days I set out..."* He stops for three days. Nehemiah does not make some grand entrance, flash the flags, bands playing, arrives in on a white horse. He doesn't proclaim, "I'm here to save the day. Now get to work!" When he arrives in Jerusalem, the first thing he doesn't do is get brick and mortar together. He didn't even announce why he was there. He did nothing for three days.

He arrives with a king's escort, into a town that is defeated and discouraged. He goes to his home and says nothing for three days. Don't you think that caused a little curiosity? Do you think the existing power structures in Jerusalem said, "What is this guy here for? What is he going to be doing?" For three days the speculation is rising. What is Nehemiah doing? By the third day everybody has heard of Nehemiah. He's actually using the delay to his advantage. He's using it for psychological build up so that when he presents the proposal, they'll be ready to listen.

Eccl. 3:7 says, *"There is a time to be silent and a time to speak."* Eccl. 8:6 says, *"There is a right time and a right way to do everything."* Notice the phrase - "**right time**". If you're going to share in changing a life or a situation, you've got to wait for the right timing. Jesus had a profound sense of timing in the ministry. Different times in His life He would say, "It's not time yet. My time has not yet come."

In v. 12-16, we have Nehemiah's research party actually going out and inspecting the walls of Jerusalem. You've heard of Paul Revere's midnight ride. This is Nehemiah's midnight ride. In v. 12 he says, *"I set out during the night with a few men. I had not told anyone what my God put in my heart to do for Jerusalem. There were no mounts with me except the one I was riding. By night I went out through the Valley Gate to the Jackel Well and the Dung Gate examining the walls of Jerusalem which had been broken down and its gates had been destroyed by fire."*

He goes on and explains how at midnight he's out traveling around the walls of the city, actually inspecting. He is personally inspecting the damage in the middle of the night. He only takes a small group with him. He obviously didn't want to attract attention.

Every good leader knows exactly what Nehemiah is doing here. He is doing his homework. His background checks. This is the lonely part of leadership, the un-glamorous part of leadership. It's the part nobody ever hears about. It's the guy doing his preparation, checking out the situation, getting the facts. v. 14 says there was so much rubble he even had to get off his horse and walk through it. At this point the size of the project probably starts to sink in and he thinks, "This is worse than I thought. Why did I volunteer for this? I've never built anything in my life."

V. 16 says *"The officials did not know where I had gone or what I was doing because as yet I had said nothing to the Jews, or the priests, or the nobles, or the officials or any other who would be doing the work."*

Why is he being so secretive about this survey? Because he didn't want the plan to be stalled before it got out of the starting gate. There had been 90 years of negativism and he didn't have all the facts yet. Is it easier to promote a good idea or kill a good idea? Have you noticed that negative people tend to be more vocal than positive people? Nehemiah doesn't have all the facts yet so he says before I even announce what I'm going to be doing, I'm going to get the facts.

### **Saturday, August 29, 2015 · Summer Devotions Day #90**

Whenever You Set Out To Do Something for God.... #3. UNDERSTAND THE SERIOUSNESS OF THE PROBLEM

#### **Nehemiah 2:11-20 (NIV)**

*<sup>11</sup>I went to Jerusalem, and after staying there three days <sup>12</sup>I set out during the night with a few men. I had not told anyone what my God had put in my heart to do for Jerusalem. There were no mounts with me except the one I was riding on. <sup>13</sup>By night I went out through the Valley Gate toward the Jackal Well and the Dung Gate, examining the walls of Jerusalem, which had been broken down, and its gates, which had been destroyed by fire. <sup>14</sup>Then I moved on toward the Fountain Gate and the King's Pool, but there was not enough room for my mount to get through; <sup>15</sup>so I went up the valley by night, examining the wall. Finally, I turned back and reentered through the Valley Gate. <sup>16</sup>The officials did not know where I had gone or what I was doing, because as yet I had said nothing to the Jews or the priests or nobles or officials or any others who would be doing the work. <sup>17</sup>Then I said to them, "You see the trouble we are in: Jerusalem lies in ruins, and its gates have been burned with fire. Come, let us rebuild the wall of Jerusalem, and we will no longer be in disgrace." <sup>18</sup>I also told them about the gracious hand of my God upon me and what the king had said to me. They replied, "Let us start rebuilding." So they began this good work. <sup>19</sup>But when Sanballat the Horonite, Tobiah the Ammonite official and Geshem the Arab heard about it, they mocked and ridiculed us. "What is this you are doing?" they asked. "Are you rebelling against the king?" <sup>20</sup>I answered them by saying, "The God of heaven will give us success. We his servants will start rebuilding, but as for you, you have no share in Jerusalem or any claim or historic right to it."*

Nehemiah comes to the people: "I've got some stuff to tell you. Some good news and some bad news. First the bad news." Rather than minimizing the problem, he emphasizes it.

V. 17 *"Then I said to them, 'You see the trouble we're in? Jerusalem lies in ruins and it's gates have been burned with fire. Come let us rebuild the wall of Jerusalem and we will no longer be in disgrace.'"*

These are emotional word pictures he uses here. "The place lies in ruin ... burned with fire ... we're in disgrace." He's lays out the seriousness of the situation. Why? Because these guys had been living with this for years.

Isn't it a fact of life that when you live with a bad situation long enough, you start ignoring it? If something breaks in your house the first two or three weeks it really bugs you; six months later it's still broken. When you live with a situation long enough you can become apathetic about how it is. Nehemiah refocuses their attention to the problem - "We have got a mess." He's getting them to face the facts.

Leaders face the facts; and leaders help others to face the facts. Change never occurs until we become discontent. If you want to create change in your school, work, home, office -- one of the marks of a leader is he creates discontent. If you're content you don't want to change anything. That means you're going to have to put up with some criticism, because anyone who stirs the pot, rocks the boat, is in trouble. They're shaking up the status quo. That's the mark of the leader.

When Nehemiah states the problem he does not use external motivators. We're going to rebuild this wall; whoever gets their section done first gets an all expense paid vacation to the Dead Sea! He doesn't use external things. The older you get, the less external motivations work. External motivators work great on kids. But the older you get those kinds of motivators don't work anymore. Just the facts.

**Leadership Law: The greatest motivation in life is not external, nor internal, but eternal.**

Nehemiah says, "Let's rebuild the wall for the glory of God! So God's name is not in disgrace. Let's rebuild the wall for the kingdom of God and for the glory of His people." He challenges them with the right kind of motivations.

Here at COV, we have a budget problem. Not enough people are tithing. Those are the facts. What will you do about it? I pray you see the problem and join me and the COV leaders to fix it.

## **Sunday, August 30, 2015 • Summer Devotions Day #91**

One of the great tests of leadership is how do you handle opposition. Do you panic under pressure? Do you get uptight, loose your temper, blow up, become discouraged, give up? What do you do? If you're going to be a leader part of the job description includes putting up with attacks. We're going to look at how a leader handles opposition in Nehemiah 4. Sometime in the future, I will need to remember these principles, and so will you.

### **#1. THE TACTICS OF OPPOSITION**

I'm going to mention three of them. There are many more but these three are mentioned in the text and people will use these to stop or stall a project. They're still used today.

1. 4:1 "When Sanballat heard that we were rebuilding the wall he became angry and was greatly incensed and he ridiculed the Jews in the presence of the associates and the army of Samaria and he said `What are those feeble Jews doing? Will they restore their wall? Will they offer sacrifices? Will they finish in a day? Can they bring stones back to life from those heaps of rubble burned as they are?' Tobia the Ammonite who was by his side said, `What are they building? Even if a fox climbed upon it, he would break down their wall of stones.'"

**The first tactic the opposition usually uses is ridicule.** We have a clear example of this here. Notice that. That's a powerful, effective tool. It's still used today. There are books out today on psychological warfare in the office place. How to psych out your competition. The world continually ridicules the church. Puts it down, argues, makes fun of God's people, characterizes them as weak, ignorant, fanatical people, all pastors are wimps or crooks. It's a constant ridicule. Why is it so effective? It's because it attacks our sense of self-worth. A lot of times we can handle everything except ridicule.

The motive. "*He became very angry and greatly incensed....*" Ridicule is always the substitute for reason. Laughter is always the substitute for logic. If people can't reason you out of a position they'll just try to ridicule you. People who ridicule you are usually just afraid. Afraid that you're going to succeed. He uses name calling, "...*those feeble Jews*". He implies that they have a selfish motive. He makes fun of their beliefs. He overstates the case. All of these are typical tools of ridicule. He says "*Are they going to rebuild it in one day?*" No where is there any place they say they're going to rebuild it in one day. That's typical ridicule. They overstate their case, set up a straw man and then try to knock it over.

v. 3. Ridicule is contagious. When Sanballat makes the initial ridicule, Tobia, his side kick, chimes in and starts. There's always people who will ridicule you if somebody else will take the lead. They are cowards and won't do it on their own.

**2. Resistance. Organized resistance.** v. 6 "*We rebuilt the wall until it reached half of its height and the people worked with all their heart. But Sanballat, Tobia, the Arabs, the Ammonites and the men of Ashdod heard that the repairs to the wall of Jerusalem had gone ahead and the gaps were being closed and they were very angry. They all plotted together [circle this] to come and fight against Jerusalem and stir up trouble against it.*" The opposition is getting organized. Instead of just a couple of critics we have a conspiracy. Sanballat has gathered all the disgruntled parties to resist the rebuilding of the wall. Sanballat and the Samaritans were in the North, the Arabs were in the south, Tobia and the Ammonites were in the east, the men of Ashdod were in the west. The Jews were surrounded by these people who were conspiring against them. Have you noticed that negative people tend to gravitate together?

The purpose was to fight and stir up trouble. These folks are all around. Some people, their whole purpose in life, seems to be against stuff.

**3. Rumor. v. 11-12.** "*Also our enemies said, `Before they know it or see us we will be right there among them and we will work to kill them and put an end to their work.'*" The quickest way to spread a rumor is to feed on people's fears. The gist of the rumor is, We're going to get you from all sides. We're going to attack you and you're not even going to know what hit you. The fact is, they didn't have enough power to do this. But the rumor of an attack was enough to incite panic. Rumor is often used by opposition.

Two characteristics of rumors: 1) They are always spread by those closest to the enemy. v. 12 *"Those Jews who lived near them."* The Jews outside the city of Jerusalem, who lived near the enemy, they were the ones most negative. What happens when you're around negative people all the time? You get negative. You become infected. The point here is, if Satan can get somebody inside of the camp saying, "It can't be done." then he's got a major victory. He infiltrates the ranks.

2) They are exaggerated when they are repeated. *"Then they told us ten times over."* Circle that. What happens when a rumor is exaggerated ten times over? People start to believe it. I think it was Hitler that discovered if you tell a lie long enough people are going to start believing it. The point is: the negative always gets exaggerated in a project. Law of Leadership: Leaders don't swallow rumors. They may listen to them, chew on them, but they never swallow them. Because they are always exaggerations.

## #2 THE EFFECT OF OPPOSITION

v. 10-11 *"Meanwhile the people in Judah said, 'The strength of the laborers is giving out, and there is so much rubble that we cannot rebuild the wall. Also our enemies will attack.'" When you're working hard and you're bombarded by ridicule, rumor and resistance you're going to get discouraged. That's the effect of opposition: discouragement.*

When is discouragement most likely to occur? v. 6 *"So we rebuilt the wall until all of it reached half of its height."* Discouragement comes at the half way point. How many of you have half finished projects around your house? Four causes of discouragement:

1. Fatigue -- *"the strength of the laborers is giving out"* 2. Frustration -- *"there was so much rubble"* Frustration is usually a matter of perception. Actually the piles are getting smaller. 3. Failure -- *"we cannot rebuild the wall"* When you're tired, everything looks impossible. Vince Lombardi said, "Fatigue makes cowards of all of us." 4. Fear -- *"the enemies will attack us"* The opposition always has two goals. One of them is to hinder God's word and one is to stop God's work.

## Monday, August 31, 2015 • Summer Devotions Day #92

Last day of summer devotions. What is the right response to opposition? - OR - What do you do when you're under attack?

### #1. RELY ON GOD

v. 4-5 Nehemiah's prayer. *"Here O God for we're despised. Turn their insults back over their heads and give them over as plunder in the land of captivity. Do not cover their guilt or blot out their sins from your sight? They have thrown insults in the face of the builders."*

Nehemiah is hot here. He's letting off steam! When you're being ridiculed you don't suppress it, you confess it. Rely on God. Admit it all to God. He says, "God, we're trusting in You to defend us." He doesn't get caught up in a name calling game. Instead of calling names, he relies on God.

Proverbs 26:4 *"Do not answer a fool according to his folly, or you will be like him yourself."* If you're getting ridiculed for your faith, or whatever, don't answer back. That's dumb! Then you're no better than the person who's ridiculing you. If you've got a project and people are taking pot shots at you, just rely on God. Pray.

The greater the opposition the more you need to pray, to depend on God. Leadership Law: When you're ridiculed don't take it out on people, talk it out with God. That's what Nehemiah does. He hears this initial ridicule but basically he ignores it and goes to God. The best response to ridicule is don't respond. Instead, you go and you pray and you keep on doing what you should be doing in the first place. The first verses says -- they ridiculed, they prayed, they rebuilt the wall. Ridicule can never stop you from doing what you're doing. Not unless you let it.

If you're a leader and you're under attack, the first thing you do is pray. You take it to God. Sometimes if you ignore the opposition the criticism dissipates, vanishes. Sometimes it doesn't. Sometimes it intensifies. When they realized that ridicule wasn't working then in v. 8 it says they plotted together to fight against Jerusalem.

## #2. RESPECT THE OPPOSITION

How do we know that Nehemiah respected the opposition? v. 9 *"But we prayed to our God and we posted a guard day and night to meet this threat."* They did the prayerful thing and then the practical thing. Both. It's fine to lay in bed at night and pray, "Protect me from the burglars." But you also need to get up and lock your door! Oliver Cromwell said, "Trust God and keep your powder dry." Petition without Precaution is Presumption. Rely on God when you're being opposed. But also respect the opposition. And the stronger the opposition, the stronger the response.

v. 9 *"We prayed."* Up to this time, Nehemiah has been doing the praying. Now all of the people are praying. Where did they get that idea? They've been watching their leader. Leaders lead by showing, not by telling. Nehemiah has been praying constantly for four chapters. The people are getting the idea that it must work. They start praying too. If you're a leader in your business and if you want other Christians to follow your lead, start praying. Nehemiah's constant prayer life had affected these people. The point I want to make is that corporate opposition requires a corporate response. Now the whole people of God are praying. They prayed and they posted a guard. Nehemiah sets up an alarm system. He sets up 24-hour guards. He posts a watch. He knows his opposition. To be forewarned is to be forearmed.

A lot of leaders have lost because they've underestimated the opposition. Don't just pray. Be aware. Know your opposition and don't be ignorant about what's happening.

In the Bible the phrase that is used over and over again is *"Watch and pray"*. Jesus said it. Paul said it. John said it. Peter said it. Watch is the human part -- post a guard. Pray is the divine part -- trust God. Watch is lock the door; pray is "God, I'm trusting You." You do both of these things. Rely on God and respect the opposition.

### #3. REINFORCE YOUR WEAK POINTS

v. 13 Nehemiah had prayed and he had relied and respected the opposition. He had posted the guard. *"Therefore I stationed some of the people behind the lowest points of the wall at the exposed places, posting them by families with their swords, spears and bows."* He is reinforcing his weak points, the lower points. This is where the wall was maybe only a couple of feet high. Where it's ten feet high you don't have to worry so much. The weak points, the exposed places, he's making a strategic placement. He's reinforcing his weak points.

Do you know the weak points in your business? Do you know the weak points in your family? Do you know where you're most open to attack? That's the principle he's teaching us. Leadership Law: Good leaders know where they are vulnerable and they reinforce that area.

If you have to make a sales presentation. Know your weaknesses and anticipate the objections and be ready to counter those objections when you make the proposal.

v. 16 *"From that day on, half of my men did the work while the other half were equipped with spears and bows and armor. The officers posted themselves behind all the people of Judah who were building the wall. Those who carried materials did the work with one hand and held a weapon in the other. Each of the builders wore his sword at his side as he worked. But the man who sounded the trumpet stayed with me. I said to the nobles and officials, 'The work is extensive and spread out and we are widely separated from each other along the wall. Whenever you hear the sound of the trumpet join us there and our God will fight for us.'"*

They are working all around the whole city. They couldn't fortify the whole city. They had no army. This is just a bunch of amateurs here building the wall. So Nehemiah said, Whenever you hear the trumpet blowing, everybody run to that side and we'll know the enemy is there and we'll fight them all together. I think the principle here is: Keep your lines of communication open during times of attack and times of opposition. Nehemiah turned the entire city into an armed camp. Everybody did two things. They worked and they carried a weapon.

Principle: Every time you start building for God, you're asking for a battle. If you start trying to build your marriage, you're asking for a battle. If you start trying to build up your own personal spiritual life you're asking for a battle. If you start trying to build a church, that's a battle. Every time a church starts building there is a battle. Why? Because Satan doesn't want churches built. He gets people to oppose you.

Leaders must build and battle at the same time. If you start doing anything of significance in this world, somebody is going to oppose you. What do you do? Nehemiah had three alternatives. When every body started opposing him with rumors, resistance and ridicule he could Give up - Leave the wall and go fight -- do a preemptive strike - Build the wall and arm himself defensively.

Leaders must build and battle at the same time. You never leave the wall to fight the enemy. You could spend all your time putting out fires and never get your job done. You could spend all your time greasing the squeaking wheel (the critic, the complainer, the kook) and never get your dream or whatever God's called you to do, done. You've got to learn to build and battle at the same time.

Notice Nehemiah's building plan and battle plan in v. 13 "I stationed some of the people at the lowest points of the wall posting them by families." Why by families? When you are under attack, more than any other time, you need support. That's one of the benefits of a small group. When you're in a small group, you're less vulnerable to an attack of Satan. God never meant us to be Lone Rangers. There is support and encouragement in small groups.

Nehemiah posted by families. If a guy is working on the wall and his family is on the other side of town, he's in constant fear of "What if the enemy's attacking over there? They may be getting my family." So Nehemiah put all the families on the wall and they stayed together. If the enemy attacked at my point it's do or die! My family's there. If I don't defend them and turn and run, my family's going to get killed. There's value in support.

Principle: Never fight a fight alone. When you're facing opposition, get some support. That is one of the purposes of the church. Every Sunday I preach, I know that on Monday morning you're going back to work and get you're going to get beat up! We need support. It's tough in the business world. It's tough being a Christian at school. It's tough having Christian attitudes in a society where everything says "No, don't live for Christ; live for yourself!"

#### #4. REASSURE THE PEOPLE

v. 14 "After I looked things over I stood up and I said to the nobles and the officials the rest of the people, 'Don't be afraid! Remember the Lord is great and awesome. Fight for your brothers and your daughters and your homes.'" He's rallying the troops. He's relieving their fears. He's reinforcing their confidence. He's raising their morale. That's the task of leadership. When your business/family/church is under attack, the task of leadership is to reinforce the people, raise their morale. Don't be afraid!

What did he say that renewed their confidence? "Remember the Lord." That's where our confidence comes from. Remember the Lord! It's interesting that a lot of wars have been fought with slogans that started "Remember..." The Spanish-American War was "Remember the Maine." World War I was "Remember the Lusitania". In Texas it was "Remember the Alamo". World War II was "Remember Pearl Harbor". All of those battle cries were based on defeats -- Remember that defeat back there, now let's go get them!

Nehemiah does the exact opposite. He doesn't say, Remember our defeat! Remember when we got exiled to Babylon! He says, "Remember the Lord!" He's saying, "Let's look at the future. Get our eyes off the opposition and get our eyes on the Lord." When you're under attack, if the devil can get you to focus on the opposition he's won a major victory. You either focus on the opposition or you focus on the Lord. You can focus on the financial statement or you can focus on the Lord. You can either focus on the rising interest rates or you focus on the Lord. You either focus on the economy and it's jitters or you focus on the Lord. What are you going to focus on? "Remember the Lord!"

Remember what the Lord is like. "Don't be afraid of them. Remember the Lord who is great and awesome." Underline the word "awesome". A couple of sentences earlier where he said "Don't be afraid" underline the word "afraid". In the Hebrew that is the same word in both places -- the word for afraid and the word for awesome. The point that he's saying here is that when you fear God then you're not going to fear other people. The fear of God replaces the fear of man. If I don't fear God then I'm afraid of men. If I'm afraid of men then I'm not afraid of God. If I'm afraid of God -- reverential fear - - then I don't fear anybody else. Because I know that what I'm doing is pleasing to Him.

Jesus said this in Luke 12. He said *"Don't be afraid of people who can kill your body and then they can't do anything after that. Fear the person who can send you to hell after your body's dead."* If you have a healthy respect for God and you reverence Him and you realize how powerful He is you're not going to have any problem fearing other people.

Then Nehemiah challenges them. *"Fight for your brothers and your sons and your daughters and your wives and your homes."* He challenges them to fight for their lives. Everything is on the line here.

V/. 19 *"I said to the nobles and officials, 'The work is extensive and spread out and we are widely separated from each other along the wall. Whenever you hear the sound of the trumpet join us there and our God will fight for us.'" He's got a trumpet as a rallying point. That's a point of reassuring the people*

## #5. REFUSE TO QUIT

v. 15 *"When our enemies heard that we were aware of their plot and that God had frustrated it, we all returned to the wall, each to his own work."* We know there is opposition out there. There are critics. They are ridiculing, rumoring. But that doesn't matter. We're going to keep on keeping on. We refuse to be distracted. They all returned to the wall. When the going gets tough, the tough gets going.

v. 8 *"They all plotted together to come and fight against Jerusalem and stir up trouble against it."* That's the first goal of opposition: to stir up trouble.

The second goal is in v. 11 *"We will kill them and put an end to the work."*

When you're being opposed there are always two oppositions. They want to hinder your work and they want to stop your work. When you know that the opposition's goal is to get you to quit what do you do? Don't quit! You keep on working no matter what!

Calvin Coolidge said, *"Press on. Nothing can take the place of persistence. Talent will not. Nothing is more common than unsuccessful men with talent. Genius will not. Unrewarded genius is almost a proverb. Education will not. The world is full of educated derelicts. Persistence and determination alone are the overwhelming power."*

In spite of the opposition we've looked at, v. 21 *"So we continued to work..."* Underline that. They refused to quit. *"...with half of the men holding spears from the first light of dawn till the stars came out at night. At that time I also said to the people, 'Have every man and his helper stay in Jerusalem at night so they can serve us as guards by night and workmen by day.' Neither I nor my brothers nor my men nor the guards with me took off our clothes. Each had his weapon even when he went for water."*

They worked through the night. He told all the people who lived outside of Jerusalem who were commuting in to work on the wall, "You stay here". When you're under opposition, when you're under attack, it's time to stick together. They even slept in their clothes, that's how committed they were. Nehemiah led the way. He sets the work pace. He's showing endurance, being the prototype. He's enduring the same hardships the people are enduring, facing the same dangers. Leadership Law: Leaders model persistence. They are the last to give up. They are the last to jump ship. They refuse to quit.

What does the devil want you to give up? What has he been tempting you to give up on? Reading through the Bible in a year? A career? A dream? A marriage? An idea? A ministry at church? What does he want you to give up? Your small group? If you know that that is what he wants you to give up what should you do? Keep going!

There is an old legend that one day Satan had a garage sale. He was selling all of his tools that he had used over the centuries. Lying, hatred, malice, lust, greed, envy, jealousy, pride, all of these different things. Over in the corner there was one tool that was priced more than all the other tools put together. It was so priceless that nobody bought it. Why? Because it was "Discouragement" That's Satan's most important, powerful tool. A Fundamental Principle of the Christian Life: God Can't use discouraged Christians

Satan may not get you to commit an immoral sin, but he can get you discouraged! A discouraged Christian is an ineffective Christian. That means that we've taken our eyes off the Lord and put them on the circumstance. Since Satan never sold it, he's still using it today. Whenever we give up, the devil wins. One of the fundamental principles of the Christian life is *Don't give up!*

*I want to let go, but I won't let go.  
There are battles to fight,  
by day and by night  
for God and the right  
so I'll never let go!*

*I want to let go, but I won't let go.  
I'm sick, 'tis true, and worried and blue and worn out through and through, but I'll never let go.*

*I want to let go, but I won't let go.  
I will never yield.*

*What? Lie down in the field  
And surrender my shield?*

*No, I'll never let go!*

*I want to let go, but I won't let go.  
May this be my song, mid legions of wrong, O God keep me strong  
So I'll never let go.*

**Galatians 6:9 (AMP)** says, “*And let us not lose heart and grow weary and faint in acting nobly and doing right, for in due time and at the appointed season we shall reap, if we do not loosen and relax our courage and faint.*”

Persistence is the ultimate test of leadership. This is the acid test. How do you handle it when the going gets tough? When somebody laughs at you or criticizes you for being a Christian? That may hurt but it cannot stop you.

The secret of success is you simply outlast your critics. How do you get to be an oak tree? An oak tree is just a little nut that refused to give his ground.

It doesn't take a lot of intelligence but if you just hang on you'll outlast the critics. There is nothing the devil would rather do than stall us, stop us and move us into neutral. So resist discouragement and keep on.

If you'd like the rest of the story regarding Nehemiah, shoot me an email. Love you guys.

Pastor Mike