

1. Looking into various aspects of Spiritual warfare in Nehemiah

Those things we can expect when God calls us into greater service

- A. **Doubt** about God's will: You sure this is the will of God – you're not rebelling
- B. **Doubt** about your ability to do God's will – You're going to do this! You! Accomplish that!
- C. **Discouragement**: Look at how much is left to do – you've accomplished so little – so much rubbish left
- D. **Dread**: You wouldn't listen to reasoning – then maybe you'll listen to threats! We are going to kill you
- E. **Division**: Jews were causing doubt – trying to stop the work

2. Seen the characteristics of a godly leader

- A. They are people of the Word and prayer who deal with personal sins
- B. They have a confidence in God that exhibits itself in calmness when adversity hits
- C. They are focused on the task God has given them
- D. They are willing to fight for personal holiness

3. We come now to a very significant switch in tactics

- A. Began with abuse, scorn, ridicule, threatenings
- B. Now it moves to something much more subtle - and very effective – spiritual distraction

I. SPIRITUAL DISTRACTION

Ne 6:1–2 (ESV) Now when Sanballat and Tobiah and Geshem the Arab and the rest of our enemies heard that I had built the wall and that there was no breach left in it (although up to that time I had not set up the doors in the gates), ⁽²⁾ Sanballat and Geshem sent to me, saying, "Come and let us meet together at Hakkephirim in the plain of Ono." But they intended to do me harm.

1. The attack: To lose focus – leave the work you're supposed to be doing

- A. Seems so harmless yet so effective
 - 1). Just leave the work for a moment – be nice to get away anyway – nothing wrong with that

2. Notice Nehemiah knows there is something wrong

Ne 6:2 (ESV) ... But they intended to do me harm.

- A. Any time the devil distracts us from what we should be doing – he intends to do us harm
 - 1). Any time he suggests you check the internet when you should be praying – he intends harm
 - a). How many – that's all they do now – waste all their time now on the internet
 - 1a). They use to pray – use to read the Bible – now they don't
But they're experts on YouTube videos – Facebook – social media
 - b). They've exchanged what is essential for what is not
- B. John Piper says his greatest distraction for spiritual disciplines – his phone
 - 1). Stealing attention from God 140 characters at a time - Tweeting
 - 2). He now fasts from his phone – so it doesn't master him – He knows he MUST master it
- C. I find the same thing – Read my Bible – prayer list on my iPad – internet is right here
"I wonder if there is any new news on the Dodgers – USC Trojans..."
 - 1). I have to be intentional – God first – Word and Prayer - THEN if there is any extra time...
 - a). I want my life to count – therefore I must choose intentionally towards that end

Thought: You have to know yourself – I must have an addictive personality

- A. I'm an all-in kind of person – I MUST guard what I allow myself to be all in for
 - 1). I have to be careful about things like hobbies etc. they can become weights to me

Heb 12:1 (ESV) Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, *let us also lay aside every weight*, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us,

- a). Weight = Something not necessarily sinful – but it harmful to you – slows you down
- b). Keeps you from doing what you must do to run well

Question: Why do so many people eventually give up in the Christian life? Could it be weights?

- A. You can't run a marathon while carrying weights – eventually you'll stop

3. We need to ask some honest questions – if we want to be effective

- A. Need to take inventory – what is he trying to use on me? What am I prone to fall too?
What stops me from reading the Word, prayer, church – those spiritual disciplines that make me strong
- B. Do we trade spending time with God for a few more minutes of sleep?
Do we turn on the TV? Go to the internet? Spend time on a hobby?
 - 1). During those times we know we should be spending with Him

Thought: I'm not being legalistic here – not saying – you can't ever watch TV! Ever be on social media!
Never have a hobby. Never watch a YouTube video.

- A. I am saying you must be careful you keep those things in their proper place
If you are doing that instead of spending time with God
 - 1). They have become enemies – robbing you of what is vital to stay strong
You are trading the weight of His glory for that which is weightless
 - 2). You are filling your soul with junk food rather than with good, solid spiritual things
 - a). Problem with junk food is it becomes addictive – instant gratification
It can make good food seem boring! Steal your appetite for it

Transition: So we have to be intentional with all this – have to make wise choices for spiritual health

- A. We are going to have to be diligent – persistent with those choices

4. The nagging of temptation

Ne 6:4 (ESV) And they sent to me *four times* in this way, and I answered them in the same manner.

- A. This is the way it works – the devil tempts – and the flesh nags – it wants what is being offered
 - 1). I want that junk food – I want it – want it – want it – want it
- B. Like a little kid in a store – please – please - please
 - 1). How many times does the parent give in just to quite the little darling?
- C. We can do the same thing with the flesh – we finally give in thinking it will quiet the nagging
 - 1). But we never quiet temptation by giving in – we throw fuel on it – burns hotter
 - 2). Like that little child in the store – you're just training him or her that nagging works
 - a). We discover soon – the flesh is nagging again over the same thing
But the temptation now is stronger – the flesh is yelling louder

5. Nehemiah has made his choice and won't be deterred

Ne 6:3 (ESV) And I sent messengers to them, saying, "I am doing a great work and I cannot come down. *Why should the work stop while I leave it and come down to you?"*

- A. Right on! I'm not going to stop doing what's important to do what is not
 - 1). I'm not going to stop doing what God wants me to do – to just play at life
 - 2). I'm not going to trade the weight of His glory in my life for something that is weightless

6. Application: You MUST decide what your priorities are

- A. You MUST plan your days out so what is important gets done – anybody successful does this
 - 1). Reading – habits of successful people – they all have a daily to do list – what must get done

- B. Here is what I must do – if there is time left over - then I can do those other things
 - 1). But first is first – essential is essential – they cannot be exchanged for worldly fluff
- Transition:** There is something I saw here about the qualities necessary for godly leadership

Godly leadership: Being sensitive to the Spirit

1. How did Nehemiah know there was something wrong?

Ne 6:2 (ESV) ... But they intended to do me harm.

- A. We said that anything that distracts you from doing what you need to do will harm you
- B. But there is also a discernment leaders need – to be able to protect the flock
 - 1). Wolves come in sounding so spiritual – they know the game well

The leader needs to be sensitive to the Spirit who will tell them

“There is something wrong here - Be careful with this one. They mean to do harm.”
 - 2). As you watch – sure enough – they start to cause trouble – promote their own agenda

Thought: This discernment disappears if you’re not living closely to God

- A. Intimacy with Him leads to being sensitive in the Spirit

Transition: So Nehemiah has chosen what is necessary and nothing is going to change that

- A. God is first – His purposes first – everything else is second
- B. Now watch what happens – the heat is turned up big time
 - 1). I’m always amazed at how many angles the devil has – an evil genius – He’s really good at this

Kent Hughes: ... he is supremely cunning. ... He has been honing his methods for millennia. His emissaries visited the church councils at Nicea and Chalcedon. He sat in on medieval faculty meetings. He is an accomplished philosopher, theologian, and psychologist. He has had thousands of years to study.

I am no genius at mathematics, but even with my limited capabilities I could be terrific at math if I worked at it for 100 years. If I labored hard at it for a 1,000 years and read all the learned theories, I would be a Newton or an Einstein. Or what if I had 10,000 years? Given that time, any of us could become the world's greatest philosopher or psychologist or theologian or linguist (we could curse or preach in a thousand languages). Satan has had multiple millennia to study and master the human disciplines, and when it comes to human subversion, he is the ultimate manipulator.

 - a). Because of that we must stay close to God – stray and we’re in trouble
 - b). The devil is clever – watch the next level of this attack

II. LIES, RUMORS AND FEAR

Ne 6:5–7 (ESV) In the same way Sanballat for the *fifth time* sent his servant to me with an open letter in his hand. ⁽⁶⁾ In it was written, “It is reported among the nations, and Geshem also says it, that you and the Jews intend to rebel; that is why you are building the wall. And according to these reports you wish to become their king. ⁽⁷⁾ And you have also set up prophets to proclaim concerning you in Jerusalem, ‘There is a king in Judah.’ And now the king will hear of these reports. So now come and let us take counsel together.”

1. Attack ramps up – from personal invitation to an open letter for all to see

“Nehemiah we’ve tried to be nice guys. We gave you a personal invitation to meet us in this beautiful location on the plains of Ono. It would have been a nice break for you. But you haven’t taken us up on our kind offer. So, let me tell you what we are going to do if you choose to ignore us.”

- A. You have forced our hand – if you don’t come out and see us - this is what we’re going to do

This is what everybody is going to hear including the king

2. The threat: This is what we are going to tell everybody about you

- A. We’re going to tell them about your *evil motive* and your *evil methods*

Ne 6:6–7 (ESV) In it (the open letter) was written, “It is reported among the nations, and Geshem also says it, that you and the Jews intend to rebel; that is why you are building the wall. And according to these reports you wish to become their king. ⁽⁷⁾ And you have also set up prophets to proclaim concerning you in Jerusalem, ‘There is a king in Judah.’ And now the king will hear of these reports. So now come and let us take counsel together.”

- 1). Here’s the letter that’s going to go out for all to see – even the king
 - a). The reason you came to Jerusalem to gather a following for yourself
You’re plan is to revolt against the King
And you already have people put in place that will rise up to proclaim you as King
- B. This is a good rumor – has all the necessary elements
 - 1). **First:** No names – no specifics – It’s been reported among the nations
 - a). Every pastor has gotten the anonymous letter complaining about something
Everybody thinks this is true – everybody agrees...
 - 1a). You investigate and it’s a couple of people
 - 2). **Second:** Rumors are always exaggerated
 - a). Somebody gets bugged about a situation and they magnify it
 - 1a). As it’s told it gets bigger and bigger – less and less accurate
 - b). Like that game called gossip – whisper in one ear – by the time it gets to back of room
From “Bill has two cataracts in his eyes” to “Bill bought two Cadillac’s with the tithe”
Anonymous: Rumor is one thing that gets thicker as you spread it.
 - c). There was no truth in this at all – lies - suspicions
- C. Notice what it was meant to do - cause people to doubt Nehemiah’s leadership
 - 1). Remember this next time you hear something about a leader
Might just being the devil using an immature believer
 - 2). So common - Happened to Moses – to Paul – happens to everybody who leads
- D. Know this – God is against those who spread rumors – gossipers – He hates it

Prov 6:16-19 (NKJV) These six things *the LORD hates*, Yes, seven are an abomination to Him: (17) A proud look, A lying tongue, Hands that shed innocent blood, (18) A heart that devises wicked plans, Feet that are swift in running to evil, (19) A false witness who speaks lies, *and one who sows discord among brethren.*

- 1). You do not want to be a part of this evil
- 2). *Know this when you listen – you are a gossip enabler*

Question: What do you do with rumors – with gossip?

- A. You dare not enter in – then you become part of the sin
“It takes gossiping ears to enable gossiping lips”
 - 1). Why would you want to be a part of something that God hates
 - a). Why would you want to be a part of damaging Christ’s bride
 - b). Men what would you do if you found out people were gossiping about your bride
- B. Have the courage to warn the gossip – why are you telling me? Shouldn’t you go to that person?
 - 1). What good does my knowing this do? Do you know what God thinks about this?
- C. I don’t trust gossips – if they’ll gossip to me – they’ll gossip about me

Transition: So don’t spread rumors – You are doing something God hates

- A. But the interesting thing here is what just the threat of spreading rumors is meant to do
 - 1). It’s meant to create a fear that can paralyze you from doing what you’re supposed to do
- B. I want to show you how this fear works with leaders – and then with the people

THE ATTACK OF FEAR

Ne 6:9 (ESV) For they all wanted to frighten us, thinking, “Their hands will drop from the work, and it will not be done.”

Neh 6:9 (NIV) They were all trying to frighten us, thinking, "Their hands will get too weak for the work, and it will not be completed."

Rumors, Fear and the Leader

1. Every once in a while leaders must lead by doing the hard things

- A. Every once in a while leaders must rebuke somebody – or even remove somebody from the church
- B. *Let me tell you the whisper you will hear from the devil every time*
 - 1). They will go around and they will tell lies about you
They will gather people to their side and who knows how many people will leave
 - a). He is trying to paralyze the leader by fear – so they don’t do the right thing
 - b). I’m amazed at what some Pastors allow in their church because of fear
Two elders swapped wives in one big church! No big deal I guess. Don’t cause waves
 - 2). I’m always amazed at how clever the devil is
 - a). He tempts people to sin – they fall for it – leadership has to deal with it
 - b). Then the devil uses that situation to hurt the church
 - 3). It’s amazing how he will use that sin to back the leader into a no-win situation
 - a). You think – if I confront it – I lose – they will go around spreading lies – people leave
But if I don’t confront it – I lose – the church will see we don’t care about sin
 - b). Because somebody else has chosen sin – you end up losing no matter what
- C. We had somebody who left her husband and was living in adultery
 - 1). We did everything we could to try to help her
Offered her our home to live in while we worked towards reconciliation with her husband
 - 2). But also told her you can’t come into the church – acting like a Christian in this state
 - a). We can’t just act like this hasn’t happened – everybody knows it has
 - 3). Again the whisper – trying to cause paralyzing fear
You remove her from the church – she knows everybody – this will get bad
 - a). She will go around and gather people to her cause – telling lies – rumors
 - b). That is exactly what happened – she gathered people to herself
All of a sudden we were unloving – unfair – this and that

Thought: I’ve also discovered – those who leave – we’re usually those who were never with you

- A. The trouble was just a little brush fire that removed those who needed to be removed
 - 1). Those who would end up causing trouble anyway

2. But you have to do what is right – what Nehemiah did

Ne 6:8-9 (ESV) *Then I sent to him, saying, “No such things as you say have been done, for you are inventing them out of your own mind.”* ⁽⁹⁾ For they all wanted to frighten us, thinking, “Their hands will drop from the work, and it will not be done.” *But now, O God, strengthen my hands.*

- A. Pray – Lord I look at this and seem to lose no matter what – Strengthen my hands to do the right thing
 - 1). I give this situation to you – Thy will be done – protect your church
- B. Nehemiah chose to do the right thing and left the consequences up to God
 - 1). What you are saying is lies - You are not going to force me to go to Ono!
 - a). And your threat will not paralyze me from doing the work

3. Let’s add another **characteristic of godly leadership** here = **courage**

- A. There will be those times where the Lord has you do things you don’t really want too

- 1). I have a Beach attitude – I don't enjoy confrontation – but they are necessary at times
I don't like removing people but to protect the flock – it is necessary at times
- B. You cannot lead if you don't have courage to do the right thing when necessary
 - 1). If you're a people pleaser this is not the job for you

Transition: Let's look at fear in general for all of us

Fear and the believer

1. The devil loves to use fear to stop us from serving the Lord

"If you keep working, the King will hear about these plans to rebel. You know what he will do."

- A. Why won't some step into serving God – fear of the unknown – fear of losing security
- B. Why don't so many witness – I imagine the percentage of people who do is shockingly small
 - 1). It's strange it is one thing everybody admits is necessary – something we all should do
And it is the one thing hardly anybody does

Thought: Let me tell you why it is so important you're ministering to others – keeps you alive spiritually

- A. Carri's been ministering to somebody through FaceBook – she was telling me how good it feels
 - 1). She was excited to be involved in another's life – using what God has taught her
- B. I go to the Spectrum every Friday as much for me as for others – it does something to me spiritually
 - 1). I have fear every time I go – going up to that first person is so hard – then it gets easier after that
 - a). But the devil uses fear on me every Friday – I can't let him succeed
Give in to fear and you'll be mastered by fear
Be mastered by fear and you'll never really live life for God

2. How do we deal with fear

- A. Realize fear always exaggerates reality
EX Children of Israel: Num 13:33 We saw the Nephilim there (the descendants of Anak come from the Nephilim). We seemed like *grasshoppers* in our own eyes, and we looked the same to them."
 - 1). That was a very exaggerated view created by fear and unbelief
Point: You need to think clearly - realizing fear will always exaggerate the danger
- B. Realize most of the things you fear will never happen
A man was asked what in his life had bothered him the most. He answered "That which never happened"
 - 1). Don't live your life afraid of the what ifs
Jesus said: Mat 6:25 (NIV) "Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear..."
Mt 6:33 (ESV) But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, *and all these things will be added to you.*
 - 2). Surrender all those **WHAT IFS** to the Lord - resting in the fact that He is in control
Peter said: 1 Pet 5:7 (NIV) Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.
- C. Realize you've been commanded to be courageous
Jos 1:9 (ESV) Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be frightened, and do not be dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go."
 - 1). I'm so glad this is a command - God's commands are always His enablings
 - a). If I'll make the choice to step out by faith and obey - His enabling power will meet me there
 - 2). It's an intelligent courage – not based on my toughness but on Him being with me
 - a). Courage isn't the lack of the feelings of fear – it is doing what you need to do anyway
Based on the truth that God is with you – He will enable you
 - 3). This fact is what gave David the strength to face Goliath

1 Sam 17:45-47 (NIV) David said to the Philistine, “You come against me with sword and spear and javelin, but I come against you *in the name of the LORD Almighty*, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied. (46) *This day the LORD will hand you over to me*, and I’ll strike you down and cut off your head. Today I will give the carcasses of the Philistine army to the birds of the air and the beasts of the earth, and the whole world will know that there is a God in Israel. (47) *All those gathered here will know that it is not by sword or spear that the LORD saves; for the battle is the Lord’s, and he will give all of you into our hands.*”

- D. Realize you will never beat fear of there is unconfessed sin in your life
 "Fear is the tax that conscience pays to guilt" George Sewell
- 1). Known sin steals your confidence in God
 - a). It is the first thing that your mind goes to when your in trouble isn't it
 - 2). We don't need to be perfect – but we need to be serious about holiness
 - a). When we fall we get back up quickly - confess it - get it right

CONCLUSION

1. The devil wants to distract you with non-essential things

- A. You must be intentional – what is the priority – do that first – keep the main thing the main thing

2. The devil wants to stop you through fear

- A. This is a tactic he uses constantly – if fear masters you – you will be ineffective - mediocre
- 1). Realize fear always exaggerates reality
 - 2). Realize most of the things you fear will never happen
 - a). But *what if* they do? Give all those what if's to a sovereign, loving God
 - 3). Realize you've been commanded to be courageous
 - a). This is not a command to not feel fear – you feel what you feel
 It is a command to think – God is with me – I must obey
 - 4). Realize you will never beat fear with unconfessed sin in your life