

REVIEW

1. We continue with our series on spiritual warfare in Nehemiah

A. He's called to rebuild the walls – we've seen the calling by God is not to ease but to warfare

2. The attacks so far

A. The **first attack** was doubting the call – “Are you sure you are not rebelling against the king?”

1). Nehemiah keeps their eyes on the Lord and the work continues

2). This only incenses the enemy – they were greatly angered – now greatly enraged

B. The second attack – Misdirected focus – attempting to get them to take their eyes off of God

1). To focus instead on their inability to complete the task – their weakness rather than God's strength

2). To focus on difficulty of the task – sacrifice it will take – how long that sacrifice will be required

3. We've also been looking at the characteristics of a godly leader

Transition: That brings us to our next attack - discouragement

I. THE ATTACK OF DISCOURAGEMENT

1. Discouragement is one of Satan's big guns

A. It happens when we are tired – when the work takes longer than you expected

It happens where there are set backs – It happens when our feelings disappear

Transition: You must understand how normal this is – how everybody goes through it at times

2. Discouragement is a normal part of life – in all things

A. If you don't learn how to deal with it – to push past it – it will stop you!

B. Notice the change in their attitude

Excited: Ne 2:18 (ESV) And I told them of the hand of my God that had been upon me for good, and also of the words that the king had spoken to me. And they said, *“Let us rise up and build.” So they strengthened their hands for the good work. (Let's do it!)*

This lasted all the way to: Ne 4:6 (ESV) So we built the wall. And all the wall was joined together to half its height, *for the people had a mind to work. (NIV) for the people worked with all their heart.*

1). This is the way most new works look – you're convinced it is God

a). You're excited – doesn't matter how hard – thrilled – big dreams

2). But now something has happened – look at the change

Ne 4:10 (ESV) 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.”

(NIV) “The *strength of the laborers is giving out*, and there is *so much rubble* that we *cannot* rebuild the wall.”

Thought: Let me suggest what has happened here

This is the point adrenaline wore off – and discipline must kick in

A. This is that point where you're tired and you can only see all the hard work that's left

B. You lose your focus on what has already happened – the good things God has done

1). The wall was already half way up! So much good had happened – they lost sight of that

2). England – whining one small mid-week service – frustrated because of who wasn't there

a). Lord whispered – stop complaining about who isn't here – rejoice in who is

b). As I looked around – saw people who had come to life spiritually – marriages restored

c). I had lost sight of what had happened – only saw what hadn't yet

Thought: I want to show you how normal this is in everything – so you can fight it

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- A. You start a new diet – all excited – soon the adrenaline is gone – now it’s all about discipline
 - 1). Will you continue on even though you don’t feel like – *or quit – many do right here*
 - a). Will you stop listening to the diet experts that say you have to be disciplined
 - 1a). Or will Miss Piggy’s wisdom start to make sense
 - “Never eat more than you can lift” = Yes! Nailed it!
 - 2). I love what Orson Wells said about dieting:
 - “My doctor told me to stop having intimate dinners for four. Unless there are three other people.”
 - 3). So many quit when the feelings go – they don’t overcome discouragement with discipline
 - B. Exercise is the same way
 - 1). Gyms love those New Years resolutions that last two weeks
 - a). The thrill of exercise wears off quickly – feelings flee
 - Again all you see is the rubbish – I’m supposed to do this the rest of my life!
 - 1a). You forget you’re actually starting to feel better – that it’s working
 - 2). You kind of adjust your work out program – like the guy who said...
 - "I do 5 sit-ups every morning. May not sound like much, but there’s only so many times you can hit the snooze button"
 - C. College – Somebody going for a 4 year degree
 - 1). About half-way – they get tired – college is no longer exciting
 - 2). 2 more years of this – discouragement sets in – and discipline must counter it or they will quit
 - D. It is the same way in any work of God
 - 1). Ministry is tiring – there are so many setbacks – the feelings go
 - 2). If you think feelings are going to sustain you in ministry – think again – this is warfare
 - a). There are many times you must do what you don’t feel like doing at that moment
 - b). There are many times you look around and it seems like rubble – so much more work!
 - 1a). I think discouragement is one of the most common attacks on a minister

Point: It is normal to get tired – it is normal to lose all of your feelings – it is normal to not feel like serving

- A. What do you do? You plod! One foot in front of another – God here I am – use me!
 - 1). If God has called you – you know you dare not stop – to stop would be disobedience
- B. How many have stopped right before the blessing
 - Ga 6:9 (ESV)** And let us not grow weary of doing good, for *in due season we will reap, if we do not give up.*
 - 1). So many give up before they reap – aren’t willing to wait for that due season
 - a). God determines when that season is – it’s never as soon as we want it to be
 - 2). The time of waiting can be hard –
 - a). God will send trials to fashion us into a person that can handle success
 - 1a). David is called to be king – but must be chased around for years by Saul first
 - To make him into the man that can handle being king – to humble him
- C. To accomplish anything in life – to accomplish anything in ministry – you must be disciplined
 - 1). Those who persevere will eventually reap – those who can’t won’t!
 - Charles Swindoll:** Most men fail, not through lack of education, but from lack of dogged determination and dauntless will.
 - CHS:** By perseverance the snail reached the ark.
- D. This is why so few ever change after a spiritual retreat – have the mountain top experience
 - Come down thinking “I’m going to be different from now on”
 - 1). It lasts about a week – adrenaline wears off

Now it takes discipline and they just slowly but surely become who they were before they went

- 2). Feeling driven believers are driven all over the place – up and down – at church then not

Transition: We'll see more when we get to the end – let's move on to the next attack

- A. Just know – in everything you do – there will be this weariness – discouragement – see rubbish left
 1). And to carry on and be successful you'll have to discipline yourself

II. ATTACK: THE ENEMIES EXAGGERATED STRENGTH

Ne 4:11 (ESV) And our enemies said, "They will not know or see till we come among them and kill them and stop the work."

1. Reminds me of a boxer – enemy sees discouragement – thinking of quitting v. 10

- A. Now he pounces and starts flailing away
 "You should quit! Listen it's going to stop anyway! If we have to kill you to do it, no problem"
- B. Effective – I've seen people stop serving God because of what might happen to them
 1). I don't need all the warfare – who knows what he will do to me
- C. Personally: I've heard this lie so many times – especially when I was getting ready for a mission trip
 Thought flash through my mind – "If you go you won't be coming back this time"
 1). What will happen to your family? Your wife needs a husband!
 2). But if I put my family before God's will in my life – they are an idol! God MUST BE first

Mt 16:24–25 (ESV) Then Jesus told his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. ⁽²⁵⁾ *For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.*

- a). A call to Christ saturated living – that is the path to that abundant life – Him in it
 b). I keep Him at arm's length to protect my life - my will
 1a). I lose what makes Christianity incredible – His touch – His presence – His joy

2. The lie the enemy wants you to believe that he is in control

"I have the ability to stop this work AND I have the ability to stop you – even if I have to kill you"

- A. Again a misguided focus – off the power of God – onto the power of Satan

Question: Can the devil do whatever he wants? Of course not!

- A. The devil must always get permission from God to touch us in any way (Job 1)
 "I can't get to Job - you have put a wall around him"
- B. When he gets permission there is always limitations put upon it (Job)
 1). He grants permission because God uses the devils work for our good - maturing us
Stephen Charnock: "God makes the devil a polisher while he intends to be a destroyer."
- C. When the devil whispers those lies – do this and you'll die – he still whispers that lie to me
 1). Answer him Biblically: The day of our death is never determined by Satan but by God
Ps 139:16 (NCV) *All the days planned for me* were written in your book before I was one day old.
 2). When that number comes up I can't outrun it or hide from it
Job 14:5 (NLT) You have decided the length of our lives. You know how many months we will live, and *we are not given a minute longer.*
 a). So I might as well just serve God and not worry about it

Point: You MUST be Biblical in your thinking in all these attacks – the attacks are lies – answer with truth

- A. Discouraged feel like quitting – Gal. 6:9 I will reap in due season if I do not give up.
 B. Devil threatens your life – Ps 139:16; Job 14:5 – It's not up to you – God will determine that!

III. ATTACK: RESISTANCE FROM YOUR OWN PEOPLE

Ne 4:12 (ESV) At that time the Jews who lived near them came from all directions and said to us ten times, *“You must return to us.”*

Intro: Notice the pace of the attack - again like a flurry of punches - one right after another

- A. Discouraged - feeling like quitting
- B. Lies of enemy – you should quit, if you don’t I’ll stop the work – it’s going to end one way or another
- C. Now those you would expect support from discourage you even further
 - 1). Don’t be surprised by this – believer’s adding to your discouragement with their words

1. Satan uses whatever means available – including fellow believers

Mt 16:21–23 (ESV) From that time Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised. ⁽²²⁾ And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, “Far be it from you, Lord! This shall never happen to you.” ⁽²³⁾ But he turned and said to Peter, *“Get behind me, Satan!* You are a hindrance to me. For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man.”

- A. The cross is on Jesus mind – what He will go through – Now Peter “Don’t go through it!”
 - 1). Notice Jesus identifies that as Satan speaking through him – “Get behind me Satan!”
- B. You get excited about serving the Lord in an area

Just expect a person with a wet blanket ministry to try to quench that excitement

 - 1). I think “Can’t” is the favorite word of some people – “Can’t be done. To difficult.” = no faith
- C. You feel like quitting – when you should continue
 - 1). Expect someone to encourage you to do just that! “Calm down. Don’t be such a fanatic!”

Thought: Take a lot of what you hear with a grain of salt – assess who you’re hearing it from

- A. If I know the person walks closely with God – reads, prays – I pay a lot more attention
 - 1). But carnal Christians – their words carry little weight

Listen to what one said to William Carey the father of modern missions: Young man, sit down: when God pleases to convert the heathen, he will do it without your aid or mine.

- A. There are a lot of people like that – sit down – stop being so radical!
 - 1). Stop dreaming about what you can do for God – be like me – be a spectator

Point: The devil has a lot of ways of opposing God’s work - we’ve seen many up to this point

- A. Sometimes it is things like persecution and the fear that produces
- B. Many times it is by Satan joining the church - he just comes in and sits down too!

J. C. Ryle “Nowhere is the devil so active as in a congregation of gospel-hearers.”

 - 1). He subtly moves around from member to member - trying to cool them down
 - a). Those already asleep – he just keeps rocking the cradle
 - 2). Those who are somewhat awake he wants to weaken you – use you for his purposes
 - a). Turn you into a gossip – hyper-critical – use your tongue to discourage others
 - C. You know what a heat sink is – you attach it to a metal part that gets hot
 - 1). It steals away the heat from that part to cool it down
 - a). There are a lot of carnal heat sinks in the body – don’t be one!

Transition: Let’s look at Nehemiah’s response – it is fivefold – very helpful with any attack

IV. NEHEMIAH’S RESPONSE

Recognize – Resist – Refocus – Remember – Return

1. **RECOGNIZE:** Where you are vulnerable to the enemies attacks

Ne 4:13 (ESV) 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.

- A. We have seen some of the attacks that you must post guards against
- 1). Doubt about the call of God – wrong focus on us instead of God
Discouragement in the work – exaggeration of the enemy’s ability to harm you and stop the work
Resistance from church members around you
- B. You also have low points – things that tempt you – personal weaknesses – Gossip. Lust. Anger...
- 1). You know what they are - areas enemy has poured through again and again to defeat you

Transition: You have to be honest with yourself and admit you have weak spots – we all do

- A. But don’t stop there – you must be intentional – do something about them

2. **RESIST: Set up guards at these low spots**

Ne 4:13 (ESV) 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*.

- A. To leave these weak spots unguarded is to suffer regular defeat

Question: What are the guards we are to set up?

- A. **Scripture:** Memorize specific scriptures that pertain to that area of weakness
- Ne 4:18 (ESV)** And each of the builders had his *sword strapped at his side* while he built...
- 1). You need to have the Sword of the Spirit ready at the first sign of temptation
 - 2). Is your low spot anger memorize scriptures that deal with that... pride... gossip...
 - a). More of the Bible you have in your mind - more guards you have set in place
 - b). Your tempted you pull out that sword and fight! Truth will set you free!
 - 3). If you have problems with ungodly thoughts – be memorizing scripture
Then force that thought out of your mind – replace it with that passage you’re working on
- B. **Prayer:** Pre-Pray your weak spots (you know what they are)
- 1). Go to God and ask Him to enable you to overcome these areas that day
 - a). To help you to desire holiness and to hate sin
 - b). To warn you when your getting close to sin & enable you to heed that warning
 - c). To help you to walk in total dependence upon the Holy Spirit that day
 - 2). Get into the habit of immediate prayer when under attack
 - a). Give it to God in prayer – use the Sword to fight
 - 3). People who are holy – who make a difference - know how to use these two weapons well
- C. **Accountability:** A friend, wife, husband who will ask the hard questions
- 1). Somebody you can trust - here or over the phone
 - a). Let them know your weak spots - and have them ask you about them when they see you
 - 2). If you don't have this kind of friend yet – pray the Lord would give you somebody
- D. **Sanctified Common sense:**
- 1). Struggle with drunkenness - don't go visit your friends in a bar – “just to witness”
Doug Barnett: If you don't want the devil to tempt you with forbidden fruit, you had better keep out of his orchard.
 - a). Have to discipline yourself – can’t go there – can’t watch that – can’t be with this person
 - 2). Success comes when you make those moment-by-moment wise choices
 - a). Wisdom is the art of living – how to get where I need to get – the choices I must make

3. **REFOCUS: Get your eyes back on God**

Ne 4:14 (ESV) 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...*”

- A. So many of these attacks are meant to take your eyes off of God and onto self, work, devil
 - 1). So Nehemiah refocuses them "Remember the Lord and what He is like Great & awesome"
 - a). They say their going to stop this work - can they thwart God's plan?
They say you're too weak to get the work done - But this God is our strength
They say the will kill you - but what can they do if He is on your side?

Thought: I like the Balance here: He set up guards BUT His faith was in God

- A. I *diligently* do what I know I must do to have victory
 - 1). But I do that in *absolute dependency* upon God's power to make it effective
 - 2). You can set up guards but if it's in your own strength you will fail

4. **REMEMBER: He got their eyes back on the importance of their work**

Ne 4:14 (ESV) 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.*"

- A. He reminds them of how important this work is
 - 1). Your loved ones are in danger if this wall is not finished - under threat of constant attack
- B. To lose this battle for holiness can bring defeat to your whole family
 - 1). The husband can drag the whole family down with him
 - 2). The person giving into sin can lose the family – they can lose everything
 - 3). You lose your testimony to a lost and dying world who needs somebody to tell them about Christ
- C. Satan has an end goal for every temptation – your ruin – he wants everything!
 - 1). I know the sin may seem small right now – but small sins open the doors to greater
 - a). Greater sins can take your family – your career – your bank account – your reputation

Point: This is not a game – remember what you're fighting for – everything!

- A. If you're toying with sin this morning – stop!

5. **RETURN: To the work**

Ne 4:15–18 (ESV) 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...

- A. Fight yes – put up guards certainly – THEN return to the work God has called you to do
 - 1). We fight and we work at the same time – We set up guards and we work at the same time
- B. The devil would love you to stop working and concentrate on him – that is a victory for him
 - a). Set up guards then – get eyes fixed on God – and get back to doing what God's called you to do

Transition: Here I think we see one more characteristic to add to godly leaders

Godly leaders

1. What we've seen

- 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 – they don't get distracted

2. Now - They are willing to fight for personal holiness

- A. They are willing to do whatever is necessary to live a holy life
 - 1). They are honest about their low spots and set up guards where needed
 - a). They know they must be intentional – that too much is at stake to play games

CONCLUSION

1. It is so important we fight well – on so many levels

- A. For your own joy – for your loved ones – for the lost all around us
 - 1). The devil wants to stop you – God is bigger – The victory is ours
But we must be intentional – we cannot coast into victory – into effectiveness

2. We've seen the attacks of discouragement that is so normal

- A. It happens when the feelings go and we have to discipline ourselves to continue
 - 1). At this point we tend to focus on the rubbish left – not on the good been accomplished

3. We saw the devil will use other believers to add to that discouragement

- A. He will use their mouths to say the wrong thing – devastating – when you are already down
- B. Jesus is thinking about the horrors of the cross – Peter – “Don't go – you kidding me!”

4. We saw the exaggerated threats

- A. We feel like quitting – suddenly these thoughts come in
We should quit – this is dangerous anyway – I'll probably get hurt – even killed
 - 1). The devil doesn't have that kind of power
 - 2). Plus me living or dying isn't the issue – obedience is

5. We saw the guards we need in place when temptation heats up

- A. Recognize the low points – where we are vulnerable
- B. Resist by setting up guards at those points
 - 1). Scripture. Prayer. Accountability. Sanctified Common Sense.
- C. Refocus on God – don't lose sight of His ability – His power – Keep Him in view always
- D. Remember how important fighting well is – to lose this war could mean losing a lot
- E. Return to the work – We set up the guards – we fight – AS we serve