

Review: What have we seen?

1. Chapter 1 – Nehemiah receives heartbreaking news from his brother Hanani

- A. He was a part of the second wave of exiles returning to Judah to rebuild the walls of the city
 - 1). The Temple had been re-built in the first wave of exiles led by Zerubbabel
Then the second wave had left 14 years earlier to rebuild the city and its walls – led by Ezra
- B. But Hanani returns with devastating news – nothing has happened
 - 1). The work was stopped by the king – the walls are still down – the gates have been burned
The people are living in great distress – without walls they are vulnerable to any attack
- C. This drives Nehemiah to intense – earnest prayer – weeping – fasting that lasted 4 months
 - 1). This wasn't a momentary showing up at a prayer meeting every once in awhile
This was prayer that was battling for God's purposes – God's kingdom
"God this can't be! These are your people. This is the city your glory is linked too!"
 - 2). This was the kind of Prayer Charles Spurgeon spoke of

CHS – Listen to this – aim your prayer life at this: Never cease your prayers. No time is wrong for prayer. The glare of daylight should not tempt you to cease, and the gloom of mid-night should not make you stop your cries. One of Satan's chief objects is to get the believer to put away the weapon prayer. As long as we continue to cry to the Most High, Satan knows he cannot devour the very weakest lamb of the flock. Prayer, mighty prayer, will yet prevail if it has but time.

Let your faith be still more resolved to give up all dependence anywhere but upon God, and let your cry grow more and more fervent. It is not every knock at mercy's door that will open it. He who would prevail must handle the knocker well, and dash it down again, and again, and again. As the old Puritan says, "Cold prayers ask for a denial, but it is red-hot prayers which prevail:" *Bring your prayers as some ancient battering ram against the gate of heaven and force it open with a sacred violence.* The whole army of your soul must come into the conflict, and you must besiege the mercy seat, *determined to win the day, and then you shall prevail. If there are delays, take them as good and sound advice to be more firm in your faith and more fervent in your cry.*

- a). That was Nehemiah – dependent upon God alone
Knocking on heaven's door again and again and again – Something MUST be done!
- b). *This is the prayer warrior in action – this is the prayer that moves the hand of God*
- D. As he prays God is moving – not only orchestrating circumstances
But also working in Nehemiah's heart – placing that call upon him
 - 1). Nehemiah is praying – God you must do something in Jerusalem
God answers: *I will and you are the one I am sending to do it*

Point: The burden for God's work and the call from God come as we pray

- A. As we draw near we are moved by a divine hand
Henry Ward Beecher: I pray on the principle that wine knocks the cork out of a bottle. *There is an inward fermentation, and there must be a vent.*
 - 1). God so moves in our heart that there must be an outlet – that call to serve
- B. To many prayerless men and women are trying to do God's work
They are doing it in their own power – therefore it is weak and ineffective
Vance Havner: Prayer is not the least we can do; it is the most. To attempt any work for God without prayer is as futile as trying to launch a space probe with a peashooter. We need more Christians for whom prayer is the first resort, not the last.

Thought: You'll never make much of a difference if you don't pray

- A. That is why the devil fights so aggressively to stop you from praying
 - 1). Prayerless theologians – prayerless Bible teachers – prayerless worship leaders
Prayerless evangelists – prayerless servants don't worry him one bit

Samuel Chadwick: The one concern of the devil is to keep the saints from praying. He fears nothing from prayerless studies, prayerless work, prayerless religion. *He laughs at our toil, he mocks at our wisdom, but he trembles when we pray.*

- 2). No one is a firmer believer in the power of prayer than the devil – Why?
 - a). Not because he practices it – but he does suffer from it
- B. Therefore the one who prays is the one that has made a determined – intentional choice to pray
 - 1). They are not foolish enough to let their emotions dictate that decision
 - 2). They are mature enough to realize they will pray many times when feelings are contrary
 - a). They understand that prayer is a primary battleground in spiritual warfare
And the devil and the flesh will do everything they can to stop you from prayer
 - 3). Here is the truth – you can take this to the bank
If you choose to have a hit and miss prayer life – you cannot escape spiritual mediocrity
- C. As Nehemiah prayed - God set that calling so deeply into his heart – he had to obey it
 - 1). Regardless of the danger in asking the king to go
Regardless of the opposition he would face when he did go
 - a). When a calling is upon your heart that doesn't matter – you MUST respond

2. We also saw how Nehemiah worked through discerning God's will

- A. First question – is this desire scriptural? It was so he could continue on
 - 1). If the desire wasn't scriptural – stop – God will never contradict His Word
 - 2). Nehemiah's desire was approved by Scripture so continue to the next step
 - B. Then prayer – God said He would restore His people and His city
But was Nehemiah the one who is to go? Was He being called?
 - 1). As he prayed the burden grew – didn't decrease – until he was convinced
 - C. Circumstances – Would the king allow him to go? Would provision be made? Yes.
 - 1). The Word approved the desire – Prayer increased the desire
Circumstances confirmed the desire
 - D. I added counsel from SPIRITUAL brothers and sisters – in the word and in prayer
 - 1). Do they think what you're praying about is a good fit for you? Matching your gifts etc.
- Transition:** If you want to see more on that – download the study from our website – up tomorrow
- A. So all these have lined up for Nehemiah – He knows this is definitely God's will – no doubt
 - 1). This is going to be easy right! Piece of cake! Right! **WRONG!!!**

I. THE RESISTANCE

Ne 2:10 (ESV) But when Sanballat the Horonite and Tobiah the Ammonite servant heard this, *it displeased them greatly that someone had come to seek the welfare of the people of Israel.* **NKJV** - Deeply disturbed. **NLT** – They were very angry

1. Whenever we rise up to answer that calling from God into fuller service

- A. The enemy will ALWAYS rise up to oppose it
Alan Redpath: There is no winning without warfare; there is no opportunity without opposition; there is no victory without vigilance.
- B. There are many ways he will do this – in this verse he uses man – but we know it is him
Eph 6:12 (ESV) For *we do not wrestle against flesh and blood*, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.
 - 1). The attack will come in many forms - this first attack is all about doubt about the call
Next we'll see doubt about our ability to answer the call

- There will be discouragement – and fear - He uses worldly temptation and heresy
- 2). He's been studying man for 1000's of years and has honed his techniques
 - a). They all have one purpose in mind to stop the believer from being effective for God
1 Pe 5:8 (ESV) Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, *seeking someone to devour.*
 - C. I loved being in England – but I can say there was one constant there – warfare!
 - 1). But that should be expected anytime you get serious about serving God
C. H. Spurgeon: I have never won an inch of the way to heaven without fighting for it.
Warren Wiersbe: The Christian life is not a playground; *it is a battleground.*
 - 2). If you are serious about living for Christ – you know how true this is
- Thought:** But let me come at this from another angle – for those who know nothing about the warfare
- A. I remember hearing a speaker once say something that rung so true to me
Along these lines: What concerns me the most about spiritual warfare is, so many Christians know nothing about it. What I mean, they have been so lulled to sleep by spiritual apathy and indifference that the devil never has to oppose them. As the saying goes. “Let sleeping dogs lie.” The devil will not strike a sleeping saint because it might wake them up.
 - B. Listen. Spiritual warfare is hard – the resistance is very real
 - 1). But living in a way that never brings spiritual warfare would scare me to death
J. Gresham Machen: It is impossible to be a true soldier of Jesus Christ and not fight.

2. This is the reason we went into Nehemiah

- A. Since I've announced the startup of “Grace Missions OC” – the warfare has increased
 - 1). Not only in my life but in others – I see it – I hear about it
 - a). All of a sudden you're fighting with your wife more – that's weird – NO it's not
 - b). Circumstances seem to be going south at work etc. Tension in relationships...
 - 1a). Recognize it for what it is – and stand against it in the power of the Spirit
 - 2). We expect that don't we? If it didn't I would wonder why the enemy isn't concerned!
- Thought:** What I want you to see before we move on – something I think we can get confused about
- A. I think – we think – when God clearly calls us into something He will make it easy
 - 1). We can be surprised when we step out into his will and it's not easy
 - 2). I believe Nehemiah had no doubt at all – but a theme of this book is spiritual warfare
 - B. Like I said last week – I'll be using England as an example a lot in this study
 In England we hit the ground so excited – the call was so clear – so powerful - God's in this!!!
 “Going to be huge! Making England great again!”
 - 1). I'd heard how hard England was spiritually – but this time it's going to be different
 Those other guys probably hadn't heard the kind of call I did
 I might as well have heard a voice from heaven and had a dove land on me
 - 2). We hit the ground running – gave England our best shot – England didn't flinch an inch
 - a). I put an ad in a local paper – new church starting up – hope we can answer all the calls
 - 1a). Got two and both of them were negative – wanted to tell me off
 - b). After 1 year of my incredible teaching and leadership skills
 The church grew from 8 to 5 – and that included me, Carri and Taylor
 - 3). I had never experienced anything that devastating – I didn't understand what was happening
 Finally I fell on my face crying out to God
 “What are you doing? This wasn't my idea. This was yours! You CALLED ME!”
 “I never wanted to go to England. I was thinking Asia. This was all you!”

“Now I’m 6000 miles away from home and NOTHING is working.”

a). I was desperate and to be honest a bit upset

Why have you called me so clearly if you’re not going to do anything?

Thought: I was learning a couple of invaluable lessons about ministry

Now listen up you who are serious about serving God and want to make a difference

A. **FIRST:** The clear calling of God to His work *is a call to warfare not ease!*

1). Don’t expect easy! You won’t find that in scripture – so soldier up Bill!

B. **SECOND:** BUT the hardship warfare brings – *if handled correctly* will always drive you closer to God

J. Hudson Taylor: It doesn't matter, really, how great the pressure is; it only matters where the pressure lies. See that it never comes between you and the Lord—then, *the greater the pressure, the more it presses you to His breast.*

1). That was Hudson Taylor’s spiritual secret wasn’t it

a). Don’t let the pressure push you away from God – learn to use it as a tool to press you closer

b). Now the warfare has become a servant for your growth and intimacy with God

C. As we set our focus upon God – plodded along – eventually things started to happen

1). At first families would come – but not stay - Eventually they started to stay

a). The only explanation I had was God was starting to keep them there

2). That little church that started in our house with a whimper actually started to make a difference

a). Carri was the worship leader and the Sunday school teacher

1a). Taylor’s bedroom was the Sunday school room

2a). She would lead worship – run upstairs teach Sunday school

Then back down to lead us in one last song

b). Eventually it started to grow – became a healthy mid-size church

1a). We learned how to put a radio show together

Transworld radio loved it – kept giving us free shows – all over globe

2a). A favorite picture – Rob Miller in my garage – doing the intro

Freezing - with mic taped to a box - Didn’t even have a mic stand

Point: I learned a clear calling to service is always a call to war not to ease – but the warfare is well worth it

A. You can choose not to serve – I know many do – they want ease and comfort over service

But you will settle for spiritual mediocrity – you’ll know very little of the touch of God on your life

1). To answer the call – whatever it is – pray and ask him what He wants you to do

a). It might be evangelizing at the Spectrum – going up to people – or at the table

It might be going to the evangelism prayer meeting – Friday night

It might be the day laborers – homeless ministry

1a). Like it or not YOU ARE called to the Great Commission in some way – we all are

b). I have no idea what God wants you to do – but pray and ask

2). I’m telling you – If you do that – you will begin to see God move in your life

a). He will use you – move through you – provide the resources for you

Transition: So every call to serve is a call to war – but it is well worth it – want to hear “Well done...”

A. Every church that gets serious about serving God – that starts wanting to make a difference – that starts looking outward will experience an increased warfare

B. With that said – let’s look at the first attack here in Nehemiah 2

But first the background leading up to this attack

Ne 2:11–18 (ESV) So I went to Jerusalem and was there three days. ⁽¹²⁾ Then I arose in the night, I and a few men with me. And I told no one what my God had put into my heart to do for Jerusalem. There was no animal with me but the one on which I rode. ⁽¹³⁾ I went out by night by the Valley Gate to the Dragon

Spring and to the Dung Gate, and I inspected the walls of Jerusalem that were broken down and its gates that had been destroyed by fire. ⁽¹⁴⁾ Then I went on to the Fountain Gate and to the King's Pool, but there was no room for the animal that was under me to pass. ⁽¹⁵⁾ Then I went up in the night by the valley and inspected the wall, and I turned back and entered by the Valley Gate, and so returned. ⁽¹⁶⁾ And the officials did not know where I had gone or what I was doing, and I had not yet told the Jews, the priests, the nobles, the officials, and the rest who were to do the work. ⁽¹⁷⁾ Then I said to them, "You see the trouble we are in, how Jerusalem lies in ruins with its gates burned. Come, let us build the wall of Jerusalem, that we may no longer suffer derision." ⁽¹⁸⁾ 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.

B. Nehemiah has answered the call – now in Jerusalem

He tours the wall seeing the damage - I'm sure he's praying – getting God's mind – and plan

He then goes back and presents what God has called him to do to the residents of Jerusalem

1). Explaining how God's hand has been upon him

a). How the king has approved and even provided for the work

C. Look at the response of the people

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.***

1). But as they arise to build the enemy arises to oppose

II. FIRST ATTACK: DOUBT ABOUT THE CALL

Ne 2:19 (ESV) But when Sanballat the Horonite and Tobiah the Ammonite servant and Geshem the Arab heard of it, they jeered at us and despised us and said, "What is this thing that you are doing? Are you rebelling against the king?"

1. The cast of characters: Men of great power and influence

A. **Sanballat** was the governor of Samaria

B. **Tobiah** was a well-connected man – a member of a powerful family in the area

1). Neh 6 find him corresponding with nobles of Judah – JEWS! – bound by oath to him

C. **Geshem** – He and his son lead a league of Arabian tribes that took control of Moab and Edom

Transition: Let's look at the first attack – this is *always right near the beginning* of God's call to service

Doubt About the Calling Itself

Ne 2:19 (ESV) But when Sanballat the Horonite and Tobiah the Ammonite servant and Geshem the Arab heard of it, they jeered at us and despised us and said, "What is this thing that you are doing? ***Are you rebelling against the king?***"

1. Need to know the background to see how powerful that statement is

A. 14 years earlier when Ezra led the second wave of exiles out of Persia to Jerusalem to rebuild the walls

1). The work was stopped when the Gentile inhabitants wrote to King Artaxerxes

If you let the Jews rebuild the walls they will feel so secure they'll stop paying taxes and tributes

2). King Artaxerxes – same king Nehemiah now claims sent him – stopped that work

B. So the Jews hearing these words are the same people who were stopped

by this same king from building this same wall before

The Attack is really two-fold: Doubt about the call and about doubt about Nehemiah (the leader)

A. Are you sure Nehemiah's not lying?

Why would the king suddenly change his mind? Doesn't make sense!

B. Then throw in a bit of fear - You know what happens when you rebel against the king don't you?

2. Doubt is brutal

A. The devil will do whatever it takes to make you doubt the call you were so sure of

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- B. If he can steal your confidence that God is in the work
It will rob you of any solid footing when it starts to get tough
 - 1). Instead of standing in God's strength – convinced He will take care of you
You think: "Maybe this is happening to me because I'm out of His will."
 - a). Now you're in trouble – you're weakened - start to panic
"He's not going to provide! Why would He? I'm just out here doing my own thing!"
 - 2). Are you sure you were supposed to start a church in Irvine? Really? YES I AM
 - B. I've finally gotten use to this – this attack of doubt always comes early
Or when there is trouble – or when the work takes longer than you anticipated!

Thought: Why it is important to take time to seek God in the word and prayer

 - A. You need to be convinced it is His will – so you can stand when it gets tough
 - 1). You don't want to make huge decisions guessing – the devil will beat you up
 - 2). One reason why I like obstacles being in the way – God overcomes them – helps you to know
 - B. In England, the thing that held us when it got hard – we KNEW God had called us
 - 1). When those fiery darts were hurled in – I could answer – I'm supposed to be here
 - 2). Since I know I'm supposed to be here – I KNOW God will provide and sustain me

Transition: Let's look at Nehemiah's response – here we'll also see another quality of godly leadership
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III. NEHEMIAH'S RESPONSE

I love the simplicity of this: Ne 2:20 (ESV) Then I replied to them, "The God of heaven will make us prosper, and we his servants will arise and build, but you have no portion or right or claim in Jerusalem."

Intro: Remember – we're looking for 3 things – attack – response – characteristics of godly leader

- A. Seen 3 so far – leaders are people of the word – prayer – and they are willing to deal with personal sin
- B. Here we have another vital characteristic of a godly leader

1. They exhibit a calmness in difficulties that comes from trusting God

- A. Nehemiah was not shaken – here is a leader leading correctly
 - 1). He doesn't panic – he calmly says – "The God of heaven will make us prosper"

Question: Why is this important for a leader? Because people are watching!

- A. If the leader panics they panic – if he is confident they will be confident
- B. Flyers - ever been in extreme turbulence? Who is the leader around you? The stewardess.
 - 1). I'm use to turbulence now – doesn't bother me - normal
 - 2). When I first started flying it did bother me – I would watch the stewards and stewardesses
If they were calm I was calm – "must be normal"
 - 3). But once on my second flight – back from Philippines – radical turbulence
Pilot had stewardesses sit down and buckle in – that's when you know it's going to be rough
Seated right in back of me – heard one say
"Every time we hit that kind of turbulence I think we're going down"
 - a). Wait! What! Freaked me out!
 - b). The leader was panicking – I – the sheep followed their example!

2. What enabled Nehemiah to act this way

- A. This is a confidence gained in living closely to God
 - 1). That trust gained in spending enough time with God in His Word and prayer
 - a). To know His will for you – not just doing what you want to do
 - 2). Trust gained in walking with God consistently – learning how faithful He is

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- B. Therefore this attack to create doubt fell short
 - 1). Nehemiah remains calm and confident
 - “God will make us prosper – and we His servants will arise and we will build”
 - a). God’s told me this – what you are saying is a lie – clear off
 - C. In chapter 3 you see the people respond to his leadership – they are working with all their hearts

Thought: This is why the devil is always aiming his big guns at a leader – at the Senior Pastor

 - A. He can affect the whole church through this one man
 - 1). If he can make him fall – many stumble – some leave and never return to any church
 - 2). If he can get him to compromise – compromise will flow from the pulpit to the pews
 - 3). AND He knows if the leader catches fire – many will be affected by the sparks
 - B. What happens to the man in the pulpit always affect the people in the pews
 - 1). Why Pastors long for their people to pray for them!
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CONCLUSION

1. Our first attack - doubt

- A. It always comes early on – if it succeeds you will be weakened considerably

2. The first response is a confident calm

- A. That flows out of the strength gained in being with God through the Word and prayer
 - 1). The first thing that leaves me if I drift at all = peace - confidence
 - a). But I know the way back – intentional living to draw near to Him
- B. That calmness also comes by spending enough time in the word and prayer seeking God for His will
 - 1). Surrendered listening – wanting His will NOT your own
 - 2). Saw last week – willing to deal with sin – so He will hear – sin blocks that

Thought: He wants you to know His will more than you do – He’s not playing games with you

3. If you are a leader – it is important you get to this place of trust and confidence

- A. Can I say this – you are a leader somewhere – in your house – kids – grand kids - work
 - 1). You want to lead in this godly way – trusting confidently in God
 - a). Shining when things go South – because you’ve been with Him! You KNOW Him!
You’ve read His Word and know the promises

4. Next week – interesting – doubt about our own ability to serve

- A. This week doubt about the call
- B. Next week – doubt about our ability to answer that call