

Rebuilding the Rubble Selected Verses in Nehemiah

Good morning! Today we're concluding our series on "Conquering Your Giants". I hope you learned some valuable lessons during the past two weeks on how to overcome your greatest obstacles. Today, I'm going to talk about how to deal with troubles that come your way when you decide to forge ahead. I've entitled this message, "Rebuilding the Rubble". We're going to look at the story of Nehemiah and the Israelites and try to learn how they rebuilt the rubble that they were surrounded with.

Have you ever noticed that once you commit to destroying the giants in your life, things suddenly get messy? You see, if you're serious about asking God to slay some giants in your life, I'm also certain that you'll encounter some obstacles along the way. It's not an easy path to victory. **1 Peter 4:12: "Dear friends, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that has come on you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you."** You and I have a choice to make when this happens. We can give up on God, or we can give in to God.

Now, allow me to set the context of my message today. After King Solomon died the country was split into two kingdoms. The Northern Kingdom had ten tribes and was referred to as Israel. Judah, the Southern Kingdom contained two tribes. Because of deliberate disobedience, the Assyrians conquered Israel. Even though Judah saw all this happen, they continued to rebel against God. In 586 B.C. the Babylonian army destroyed Jerusalem and deported God's people to the area we now know as Iraq.

The good news is that many of God's prophets predicted that this captivity would not destroy the nation and the people would be allowed to go back home. Daniel understood this truth when he was reading the book

of Jeremiah. Take a look at Daniel 9:2: **“...I, Daniel, understood from the Scriptures, according to the word of the Lord given to Jeremiah the prophet, that the desolation of Jerusalem would last seventy years.”**

This chart depicts the three returns to Jerusalem and also helps us see how the Old Testament books of Ezra, Esther and Nehemiah fit together.

With that as a very brief background, let's look at what happens in Nehemiah 4. The people have faced their giants, they're back in the land and they're whistling while they work on rebuilding the wall. It says of them in verse 6 that the **“people worked with all their heart.”** And then discouragement sets in. We see this in verses 1-2: **“When Sanballat heard that we were rebuilding the wall, he became angry and was greatly incensed. He ridiculed the Jews... ‘What are those feeble Jews doing?’”** Notice that he called the workers **“feeble”** which means “withered and miserable.”

Friends, whenever you attempt to get involved in the work of God, you will always encounter opposition. There will be people who will discourage you through their criticism, their apathy, their lack of zeal, their disobedience, etc. Not only that, discouragement can come from within yourself.

Are you discouraged today? Let's look at **three causes of discouragement** from Nehemiah 4.

Causes of Discouragement

1. Fatigue.

Verse 10 reads, **“Meanwhile, the people in Judah said, ‘The strength of the laborers is giving out...’”** Simply put, the workers were tired. They were hitting it hard and needed some rest. The phrase **“giving out”** carries with it the idea of “staggering, tottering, and stumbling.”

When you are physically drained, it is very easy to become discouraged at the slightest problem. It's also interesting to notice when the workers became

fatigued and discouraged. Verse 6 says that the wall was built to *half its height*. Many times when we start a new project the first half goes quickly because we're excited about accomplishing the goal. But, when the newness wears off and the work becomes routine and boring, then it's easy to become fatigued. Verse 10 says: **"...we cannot rebuild the wall."** Interestingly, these are the same people who were described in verse 6 as those who **"worked with all their heart."**

2. Frustration.

Verse 10 continues by saying that there is **"so much rubble"** that they cannot rebuild the wall. They became discouraged because they were aggravated about all the obstacles. I'm sure they were encountering old broken rocks, dried-out mortar, and other debris that was underfoot. This junk was everywhere. And it was frustrating.

Just as they lost sight of their goal, so too we can lose sight of our goal when we have gobs of garbage in our lives. Hebrews 12:1 challenges us to get rid of everything that causes us to be frustrated in our pursuit of godliness: **"...let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with endurance the race marked out for us."**

I don't know what the rubble is in your life but it may be your phone, it might be a possession you're holding on to, or even an unhealthy relationship. Is there a sin you've been playing around with too long? Do you have a drinking or drug problem, or are you involved in some other kind of entanglement that is tripping you up?

3. Fear.

Those most affected by fear were those who lived near pessimistic people. You see, the enemies of the Lord's work had struck fear in the hearts of God's people and they felt like giving up. Notice in verse 12 who gets afraid the quickest: **"Then the Jews who lived near them came and told us ten times over**

‘Wherever you turn, they will attack us.’ Those most affected by fear were those who lived near pessimistic people.

If you want to limit the discouraging thoughts that bring fear into your life, then it’s best to not hang around with negative people. It’s like the old saying, *“If you’re going to soar with the eagles, you can’t run around with turkeys.”*

Now, if fatigue, frustration and fear are some of the causes of your discouragement, let’s look at some cures.

Cures for Discouragement

1. Request God’s help.

Nehemiah looked up before launching out, he prayed before proceeding in verses 4-5: ***“Hear us, O God, for we are despised. Turn their insults back on their own heads. Give them over as plunder in a land of captivity. Do not cover up their guilt or blot out their sins from your sight, for they have thrown insults in the face of the builders.”*** This was quite a prayer – he wasn’t praying for his enemies to become believers but instead for God to judge them. He knew that the enemies were really fighting against God and so he asks God to deal with them.

He didn’t give lectures to the workers, organize raiding parties against the enemies, or create propaganda campaigns to put a different spin on things. Here’s the principle we can learn from Nehemiah: ***When people talk against you, don’t talk back – talk to God.*** Verse 9 tells us that they prayed to God and posted a guard. When their enemies started talking, Nehemiah continued to pray, and the people stayed on track.

2. Reorganize your priorities.

In verse 13 Nehemiah said, ***“Therefore I stationed some of the people behind the lowest point of the wall at the exposed places, posting them by families, with their swords, spears and bows.”*** If the enemies were going to attack they would most likely do so at the weakest places. So Nehemiah put guards at all

the vulnerable spots. This served two purposes – it discouraged the enemy and it encouraged the people because it dealt with their fear.

When we're discouraged, one of the things we can do is to reorganize our priorities. Where are you most vulnerable? Do you have a problem in your marriage? If so, don't bail on your spouse! Change your approach. Adopt a new attitude. Get some help. Is there junk going on in your job? Don't give up! Change your priorities. Are you going wayward in your walk with God? Don't stop following Jesus! Reorganize your schedule so you can meet with Him on a regular basis. Plug into a small group. Don't be overcome by discouragement. Do something about it!

3. Remember who God is.

After looking everything over and sensing the discouragement within his team, Nehemiah rallied his troops in verse 14: **"...Don't be afraid of them. Remember the Lord, who is great and awesome..."** Nehemiah knew, even in the face of opposition, that the success of the wall was wholly dependent upon God who inspired its beginning. They needed to remember God and what He had promised.

The people complained about all the rubble in verse 10. Here's a question. Wasn't the rubble there in the beginning? Of course it was. The difference was that when they started the project they were focused on God and His character. And then, distractions and disturbances came their way and before you know it, they became discouraged. Friend, if you focus on all the junk in your life, and in what others are doing to you, you *will* become discouraged. Let's remember our God who is greater than anyone else and keep our focus on him.

Now, as we focus and make him the central part of our lives, let us concentrate on some spiritual disciplines or principles that will help us **rebuild the rubble** in our lives.

1. Read faithfully and Listen attentively to God's Word.

Let's turn to Nehemiah 8:1: ***"All the people came together as one in the square before the Water Gate. They told Ezra the teacher of the Law to bring out the Book of the Law of Moses, which the Lord had commanded for Israel. So on the first day of the seventh month Ezra the priest brought the Law before the assembly, which was made up of men and women and all who were able to understand."***

Verse 3 tells us that Ezra started reading at dawn and read until lunch. The people listened to the Word of God for over six hours! We know from verse 18 that this continued for a week. And they didn't just sit in their pews – they ***"listened attentively."***

There's no greater thrill to a preacher than when people listen alertly to the Word of God. And when someone asks you for a copy of your sermon, then that really helps you to know that you are making a difference in people's lives. Now, now, I know no one asks for a copy anymore because it's available on our web site. And you can read it right there or download it and return to it over and over again. But early in my pastoral career when the web site term wasn't invented yet, there was an old lady in our church who would always approach me after the service and asked for a copy of my manuscript. Back then and until a few years ago I brought my manuscript on paper to the pulpit and it was so easy to give it away. But now, if you ask for a copy, I can't give you my iPad. Anyway, it was a delight to see the lady come up to me almost every Sunday and ask for a copy of my sermon.

Now, when Ezra opened the Book in verse 5, the people honored God by standing up. They knew this was not just a man speaking; they were about to hear the very Word of God. After Ezra praised ***"the great God"*** in verse 6, all the people lifted their hands and responded, ***"Amen! Amen!"*** No one fell asleep in this service. *Everyone* listened attentively and *everyone* responded.

Then they **“bowed down and worshipped the Lord with their faces to the ground.”** (v. 6b) The anticipation of hearing the Bible in a way that they could understand totally gripped them. They were locked in, focused, and ready to hear from their great God.

In verses 7-8, the Levites joined Ezra in helping to instruct the people. They **“made it clear”** and gave the meaning **“so that the people could understand what was being read.”** They probably mingled with the people and, when there was a break in the reading, answered questions and told them how to live out the Law. There was both a public proclamation of the Word in a large assembly and then face-to-face interaction in a small group.

Friends, the Bible is divinely inspired and designed to be understood. You and I need to contemplate the Word privately, hear it preached corporately, and then apply it in a small-group community.

2. Minister as a team purposefully.

Chapter 3 shows how people working together can accomplish more than if just one person tried to do all the work. In this chapter, you’ll find the phrases **“next to him,” “next to them.”** These expressions are recorded 20 times in this chapter! Each person had a part as they worked side-by-side in the task God called them to. The biblical principle is this: **every person is to be involved in ministry because everyone has a job to do. No one can do everything but everyone can do something.** We are saved to serve and mobilized in order to minister.

Nehemiah was able to build his team around a central rallying point. He pointed them to the purpose of the work – the glory of God. They weren’t just working on walls; they were worshipping their worthy God. The goal of all ministry, and really of life itself is the glory of God. 1 Corinthians 10:31 puts it succinctly: **“So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.”**

3. Pray passionately.

There are 12 different prayers recorded in the book and are filled with *adoration* in chapters 8 and 9; *thanksgiving* in chapter 12; *confession* in chapters 1 and 9; *petition* in chapters 1 and 2. There are prayers of anguish, joy, protection, dependence and commitment. The book is brimming with compassionate, persistent, personal and corporate prayer. Prayer gives Nehemiah perspective; it widens his horizons, sharpens his vision and dwarfs his anxieties.

Nehemiah's public life was the outflow of his personal life, which was steeped in, and shaped by, a lifestyle of prayer. His devotion to God, his dependence on Him for everything, and his desire for the glory of God found equal expression.

He knew that only ventures that are begun in prayer and bathed in prayer throughout are likely to be blessed. Are you committed to prayer? It has been said that prayer is not getting our will done in heaven but getting God's will done on earth.

4. Worship God joyfully.

Worship can be defined as "worth-ship," where we engage our mind, our emotions, and our will to gratefully acknowledge the worth of our God. There is no other human activity as lofty as that of adoring God. The Westminster Shorter Catechism states **"The chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy him forever."**

Please turn to Nehemiah 12. In verse 27 we read about a dedication service for the newly constructed wall. The Levites were brought **"to celebrate joyfully the dedication with songs of thanksgiving and with the music of cymbals, harps and lyres."** Grateful celebration, thanksgiving and dedication are the three main themes, and they take us to the heart of what worship is all about.

Celebration is the primary aspect of praise. It does not begin with us, but with who God is, what God has said, and what God has done. God is the main

event – not the music or even the message. *Thanksgiving* was a way of marveling at God’s generosity. By offering themselves in *dedication*, they were surrendering themselves to God.

It should be obvious, but it’s not often the case, that worship is all about God, not about us. It’s not ultimately a question of musical style but of majestic substance. Praise must take precedence over our preferences.

The secret of acceptable worship is not simply what we do but *how* we do it. The new residents of Jerusalem radiated joyful hearts with jubilant songs of thanksgiving. Worship was never meant to be drab and boring. There was nothing stereotyped or monochrome about this thanksgiving service. A wide variety of musical gifts were used to express adoration and praise.

I’m glad that our worship team is composed not only of women singers but of men as well. Even though it happens only once a year or twice a year. It’s never boring, right? And I’m glad too that we have young singers like Kuya Elvin and RJ. It’s evidence that you may retire from office work, but you don’t retire from God’s work, Amen?

You see, each of us can be used by God if we make ourselves available to him. A 14 yo instrumentalist, in fact, can join and play an instrument for God’s glory. The father of this young girl must be feeling proud! And I’m sure God is pleased.

5. Care for Others lovingly.

In the middle of the book, we read that the community of believers starts to self-destruct because of some festering grievances. The workers now face a new enemy who is harder to conquer than the previous ones. The timing could not have been worse because the walls are almost done!

In chapter 5 Nehemiah has to put down his hard hat and turn his attention from the construction of the wall to the walls that were being put up *between* his

workers. While their external enemies helped to rally the people, internal conflict threatened to divide and destroy them. It's much easier to conquer and subdue an enemy who attacks us than it is to forgive and restore a friend who hurts us.

In the midst of a **“great work”** in 4:19 for a **“great God”** in 1:5, in 5:1 **“the men and their wives raised a great outcry against their Jewish brothers.”** This was not just a little disagreement or a minor problem.

Nehemiah stops everything and deals with the division because God's people must not only share, they are called to care. He appeals to their love, he reminds them of God's redemptive purposes, and he challenges them to remember their witness.

We don't have time to fully develop this idea but let me just say that there is a direct correlation between the effectiveness of our mission and how we treat each other. If you're in conflict right now with someone, take the initiative, meet face-to-face and make it right.

6. Telling Others the Gospel.

Nehemiah 12:31-39 tells us that the leaders went up on the top of the wall. They were accustomed to having *workers* and *watchers* on the walls, now the people are assigned to be *worshippers* on the walls. The people were bearing witness to the watching world that God had done the work, and He alone should be glorified. The enemy had said in 4:3 that the walls were so weak that a fox could knock them down, but here the people are *marching on the walls!* It was another opportunity to prove the truth of 6:16: **“...this work had been done with the help of our God.”** As they marched on top of the walls, everyone could see what was happening, and for miles around unbelievers heard the sound of praise. Look at verse 43: **“The sound of rejoicing in Jerusalem could be heard far away.”**

Let's remember that whenever we face trouble, we must deal with the rubble. And we do that by looking up, not down. And by looking out, not within

ourselves. God will rebuild the rubble in our lives when we put Him and His purposes first. But first we must make sure Christ is at home in our hearts. If you've drifted from Him, it's time to come home.

Please bow your heads and close your eyes as I call the PW Team to the front. With every eye closed and every head bowed, please just listen to these next few things I'm going to say.

You see, God gave you life and He made you for His purposes. It's time to allow Him to rebuild the rubble in your life. But you must first come home. He's drawing you to Himself. Allow Him to take you and to use you and to fill you. But if you've never been home in the first place, the first step is to accept Jesus as your Lord and Savior. Acknowledge that he died for your sins, he was buried, and he rose again from the dead. Believe in what he has done for you and you will be saved. It means, you'll enter heaven when you die. The Bible says, *"Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit."* When you are born again, you become a child of God. The Bible says, *"But to all who believed him and accepted him, he gave the right to become children of God."*