



Scott Turansky, Senior Pastor
November 10, 2019

NEHEMIAH 4:1-6

Series: Life Lessons from Nehemiah

Let's pray together.

[PRAYER] Heavenly Father, I do thank you for the opportunity to work with the leaders and extend your work in the family to these other places. Lord, I thank you that at Calvary Chapel we can demonstrate what it means to love you in the area of the family. I know that even in our church not everybody is in that stage of growing their marriage or strengthening their work with their children, but we all want to pass the faith onto the next generation. So we ask for your guidance in our church as we do that as well. Lord, I ask for safety for us as we travel. I ask for good health as we travel as well. And we ask for open hearts as we share your message with others. Lord, we even ask that as we do this parenting seminar that people would come to know you in a personal way, those that might come from the community. So Lord, we now want to turn to your word and open it up and ask that you would speak to us and teach us from it. We ask this in Jesus' name, amen.

You can open your Bibles to Nehemiah 4. Some people take the Bible and they use it like other literature. Even Christians do this. They'll take the Bible along with other literature and they will look at it was like a success or a self-help manual, giving ideas about how to be successful. And it is that, but it's much more than that. You see if we are just taking the Bible and other books and we're trying to help ourselves be successful in life, that's a very humanistic approach to life.

Here's what we know: That God created us. He created us as special beings and He created us in a way that we could be fulfilled in Him. But sin corrupts our lives and that sin messes with us. And so we're stuck over here not able to be the people that God would have us to be unless God reaches out to help us. So He did that with Christ. He reaches out and sends His Son, Jesus Christ, to us so that we could respond to Him. So you never want to think that it's our job to get saved. We respond to God. We're responding to God. It's really our response to His initiative. God is the one who initiates. We're responding to that initiative. Because when He initiates with us then the words we use are we accept Jesus Christ. Why do we accept? Because He's given. So we receive it, we accept it.

Why do we use the word yield? Yield to the Holy Spirit. You see because God is the one initiating and we're responding to God. This is very important because the words I'm about to share with you about our mouths could be interpreted as oh well this is just some more success ideas that we can apply to our lives. But really that it means for us to look at our mouths and our speech means that God has something very special for us. We're responding to Him, yielding our mouths to Him, and allowing Him to do a work inside of our hearts. So if the Lord convicts you

today in the area of your speech, then what you want to do is yield yourself to God and let Him do a work inside of you in regards to this. This isn't just about being more self-controlled or being more positive (thinking positively) or we'd end up with a success or a prosperity doctrine. We end up with something very humanistic. We believe that God is in control, He's the one empowering us, and we are responding to Him. Okay?

Now before I read the passage in Nehemiah 4, I want to talk about the power of the mouth because that's what I believe God is going to touch us here in our lives right now. That's where He's going to speak to us and help us to walk away with some practical principles. So I want to take you to a couple verses before we get to Nehemiah 4.

Notice in Proverbs 18:21 it says this: *The tongue has the power of life and death, and those who love it will eat its fruit.* Now as Christians we look at this as Christ-followers, we see that has so much meaning. That even the words we use have the power of life in them.

I think it grieves parents' hearts when they see their children yelling at each other or calling names or arguing or whatever they do, putting each other down. I was working with parents who had an eleven year old who just was malicious with his words against his seven year old brother. Always saying put-down words. So we set out to make some changes. We used a number of tools to bring about those changes. But one of those tools was to use the second verse to help this young man understand something that I think we all need to learn. *The soothing tongue is a tree of life, but a perverse tongue crushes the spirit.*

I think that's why parents will grieve when our children say unkind things to each other because we know it's crushing to the spirit of that person. And this verse actually had an impact on this young man and this eleven year old as he's recognizing that his words aren't just something he throws out there, but his words are powerful and they carry life and death. Sometimes our words crush the spirit.

We want to be careful about those words. Now there are some people who intentionally use words that crush the spirit, right? You're probably the victim of that. Or you've heard people or people that you know or love or have cared for in the past now are angry with you or whatever, so they use words that crush the spirit. There are some people who don't recognize what they're doing and they're just careless in their words that crush the spirit, but there are some people who are just mean and they crush the spirit of a person.

I want to look at that a little bit because that's what Sanballat is doing in our passage today. He's intentionally trying to hurt someone with his words. He's intentionally trying to crush the spirit of these people. We don't want to be like Sanballat, so we're going to learn. My dad always used to say you can learn something from anyone. Sometimes you learn what to do, sometimes you learn what not to do. Today we're going to learn what not to do as we look at Sanballat.

Would you stand with me as we read Nehemiah 4, just the first six verses of the passage. It says – *When Sanballat heard that we were rebuilding the wall, he became angry and was greatly incensed.* Notice that emotions are driving his words. We have to be careful because emotions can drive our words and that's often when we find ourselves careless or even malicious. So *he*

ridiculed the Jews, and in the presence of his associates and the army of Samaria, he said five questions, all sarcastic. “What are those feeble Jews doing? Will they restore their wall? Will they offer sacrifices? Will they finish in a day? Can they bring the stones back to life from those heaps of rubble—burned as they are?”

Tobiah the Ammonite, who was at his side, said (he tries to tell a joke), “What they are building—even a fox climbing up on it would break down their wall of stones!”

Here is Nehemiah’s response starting in verse 4. *Hear us, our 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.*

And verse 6, a concluding statement in this idea. *So we rebuilt the wall till all of it reached half its height, for the people worked with all their heart.*

You may be seated. I want to talk about the anger idea that’s mentioned in the first verse because often our anger is what prompts us to say things that are inappropriate. It's our anger that gets us into trouble. Notice it says *he became angry and was greatly incensed* or indignant. Maybe he believed that he was right and Nehemiah and these people were wrong for intruding into their land or their status quo that had been there for so long. Or maybe Sanballat was just being selfish, wanting to protect what he had because if Jerusalem became stronger there would be another power force in the area. I don’t know exactly, but it says he became angry and intense.

I think we need to talk about our anger for just a little bit and try to understand about anger. Is anger always wrong? I don’t think we can say anger is always wrong. In fact I would suggest that Jesus got angry in Mark 3:5. Notice it says there – *Jesus looked around at them in anger and, deeply distressed at their stubborn hearts, said to the man* and he healed the man. So Jesus Himself got angry. So we don’t want to say that anger itself is wrong. Even Paul says in Ephesians 4:26 – *In your anger do not sin.* So there is an anger that doesn’t involve sin. There’s a righteous kind of anger that we might have in our lives.

The problem I think that we have is that most of the time we think our anger is righteous because someone else has done something wrong. So we think our anger is a good response and a measured response to someone else. Because almost always when someone’s angry, it’s because something’s wrong. So if you see something wrong that someone else does, there can be a temptation to say my anger is righteous. That because a person is wrong I have the ability to attack them really is what happens in our anger. So I think we end up with a problem because we believe that our anger is justified.

Anger isn’t always wrong, but I would suggest the amount of anger that’s justified is pretty small compared to the larger picture of anger. I think we can start, if we’re going to make a balanced statement of biblical anger, we can say that anger isn’t always wrong. We have to finish it with this statement. Anger is always dangerous. Because that’s what the Bible teaches.

These are just a few of the verses that warn us of the danger of anger. Notice in that same passage where it said *in your anger do not sin*, just a few verses later it says *get rid of all* and there's six words for anger here. Notice it says *get rid of all of these: Bitterness, rage, anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice*. Anger is dangerous. Be careful is what Paul is saying.

In James it says because *human anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires*. You may think that the other person is wrong and maybe they are, but anger doesn't produce the righteousness that God wants is what he's saying there.

Proverbs 29:11 – *Fools give full vent to their rage, but the wise bring calm in the end*. We have to be careful of anger.

Ecclesiastes 7:9 says – *Do not be quickly provoked in your spirit, for anger resides in the lap of fools*.

There's some pretty strong warnings in the Bible about anger. I think we have to recognize that even if we are angry about something and it's justified that often that response that we have is not justified and we have to be very careful about anger because anger is always dangerous.

Let me show it to you more in a picture form. Anger isn't always wrong, but it's always dangerous. I want to suggest that when we feel angry most of the time it falls into these other categories. We really need to be careful about our anger. Yes, there is some righteous anger. And it's a small piece of the bigger piece. But most of the time in the Bible we're warned about these other things. We need to be careful of them. Bitterness and rage, criticism, and brawling and slander, and just being a reaction and resentment and revenge and insults and selfishness and meanness and threats, and all those things that form inside of us when anger starts to take control. Anger is dangerous. We would do well to air on the side of not be angry or getting rid of that anger in our lives. Yet there is a time when righteous anger is appropriate. It's a small part of this bigger picture that we often find ourselves in the midst of anger.

Now in the story of Sanballat he's going to be motivated by anger to ridicule, to be a mocker, and to hurt the people.

But I want to give you a warning. Mainly this is for young people. I want you to understand this. When you're planning to get married, as maybe you're planning to get married or you'd like to get married, you want to have a list of the things that you would like to have in a mate. Right at the top should be that this person is a Christ-follower. Not just someone who says they are a Christian, not just someone who goes to church, but someone who is a Christ-follower. Someone who is allowing Christ to live out in their lives. That's very important. That's the highest thing on your list. But somewhere pretty close to the top of the list you want to have someone who is not easily angered. Not easily angered. The problem is, see, if you have an anger problem or your spouse has an anger problem then they enter into all of these things – insults, sarcasm, meanness, and unkind words, and sharp comments that are dangerous and hurtful. You want to be really careful about the person you marry.

The idea of this comes in this passage in Proverbs 22:24. *Do not make friends with a hot-tempered person, do not associate with one easily angered.* That means if you're developing a business partnership with someone, anger is one of those things you want to mark out, you want to be careful of. Anger is dangerous. When you're hiring someone, if you're a person who hires people, of all their qualifications one of the things you want to try to weed out is is this person an angry person. An angry person in the midst of your team can ruin your team. Anger is a dangerous thing. So you want to be careful.

So I just want to suggest before we jump back into our passage that you avoid angry people as much as you can. Now if you're married to one, you can't avoid them, but you're going to have to try to work in that and try to help that person overcome their anger and learn how to respond appropriately to it.

Let's go back to our passage. Anger. Sanballat was angry. In fact it says he was incensed. This intense anger. So he ridiculed the Jews. He became a mocker. The biblical term for ridicule is mocker. *And in the presence of his associates and the army of Samaria, he said...* So he's not alone in this. He has an audience.

You know if you're a young lady in your early teenage years and you're in school and someone is attacking you, that is your friends, the people that are your friends don't like what you do, what do they do? They go to their audience. Where is their audience? Snapchat, Facebook, and they'll post something negative about you. Because it's the audience. If you've got an audience you can really make the person feel bad. So Sanballat has this audience that he goes to. So *he ridiculed the Jews, and in the presence of his associates (his Facebook group) and the army of Samaria, he said* five things.

Sarcasm. Now sarcasm is dangerous because there's always two meanings. There are the first words that are harmless, the words that you're using are usually positive words, and then there's always this underlying second message. It's the second message that's often a dig to someone. If things are going bad for me today and then all of a sudden I get a flat tire, I might say sarcastically, "Oh just what I need today." That's sarcasm. Because it has two messages. I'm saying this is what I need today, but that's not what I mean. I'm saying this is terrible, I can't believe another thing that's happening here. Sarcasm happens like that. But much of the sarcasm we have makes a joke somehow at someone else's expense. It laughs at the person. It makes a point at the person.

If you get in the habit, you have to be pretty smart to use sarcasm and sometimes children, young people tend to be pretty smart and we call them having smart mouths because they use sarcasm to somehow get into and make a dig at their parents. Is sarcasm wrong? No. Sarcasm isn't always wrong, but it's dangerous like anger is. Sarcasm is one of those things that can be used to get across a message in an unhealthy way. The best way to respond to sarcasm, by the way, is to say, "I think what you're saying to me is you're not happy with what's going on," or to raise and bring it above the table and take that message that's under the table and put it on top of the table to talk about because the person is trying to communicate a message in this negative way.

He says – *What are those feeble Jews doing?* Well he’s not really asking the question. What he’s saying is, can you believe this? These guys are foolish for doing what they’re doing. *Will they restore their wall?* Like this is such a task. They can’t do this. They have no idea what they’re doing. *Will they offer sacrifices?* In other words, will they celebrate when they’re all done and praise the Lord for this? No, they’re not going to get that far. They’ll never make it. *Will they finish in a day?* This is such a big job they’ll never get the job done. Who do they think they are? *Can they bring the stones back to life from those heaps of rubble—burned as they are?* In other words, this job is too big for them. They can’t do this. So he’s using sarcasm five different times in the presence of all of his associates.

One of those associates is Tobiah. Tobiah is another leader in the area and he decides he’s going to make a little joke here. He says, “*What they are building—even a fox climbing up on it would break down their wall of stones!*” Humor sometimes is done at someone else’s expense and you can hear the laughter of all the associates laughing at the joke. It’s really sad when this happens to a young lady who’s in her early teens and she’s at school. You know how girls can sometimes jibber jabber and then they’re still posting something here. It can really be hurtful. It crushes the spirit of a person. Same thing is true if your friends turn on you and then they start making fun of you. It’s painful. It crushes the spirit.

I think we want to not become like Sanballat and Tobiah. I think there’s an application here for us. That we have to be careful about the words that are coming out of our own mouths. If we have a tendency to say things quickly, we have a tendency to respond inappropriately we need to check that so that we don’t become like Sanballat. And everything that we do I suggest needs to pass the edification test.

The edification test comes in Ephesians 4:29. It says – *Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths.* Unwholesome. None. Don’t let any come out of your mouth. Three things will measure whether it’s wholesome or not. *Only what is helpful for building others up* (one) *according to their needs* (two), *that it may benefit those who listen* (three). We must check every word that comes out of our mouth and have a gate that prevents unwholesome talk from coming out of our mouths. Right now we’re talking about slander or ridicule or mocking or mean words, but it could be any kind of words that come out of our mouths that are not appropriate or helpful.

The very next verse after this says – *And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God.* In other words, God has initiated with us and He wants us to respond and give ourselves to Him even in the area of our mouth. So don’t grieve the Holy Spirit, he says.

Dealing with our mouths is a spiritual issue. So maybe you’re at the place where you’re saying, “You know what, I realize I have a problem with my mouth, but I have a real hard time because I’ve been doing this forever. I grew up in this family and I have this heritage and I was in this military group and we talked this way and so on, and so I have a problem with my speech.” I just want to talk to you and give you some ideas about correcting this problem inside of your life. If you have a problem with inappropriate speech in one way or another, here’s some answers from God’s word.

James 1:19-21 says – *My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to anger.* It's interesting that slow to speak and slow to anger are both in there. For *man's anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires.* See, he's talking about listening and be careful of your mouth and your emotions. Then he says as a result or *therefore, get rid of all moral filth and every expression of evil and (do what?) humbly accept the word planted.* Go to the scriptures, accept and receive the word planted in you, *which can save your soul.* So there's something about God's word that can help you overcome a speech problem. That when you allow God's word to fill you then good things can happen.

Notice these other verses from the Bible. In Matthew 12:34 it says – *For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks.* So it's all the stuff that's in the heart. The heart has an abundance of stuff. So all this abundance in the heart and the mouth comes out of that.

Therefore I have hidden your word in my heart, so that I might not sin against you. So if we pour God's word into our hearts, if we're memorizing God's word, if we're thinking about God's word day and night, then the things that come out of our mouth will change. We will be more edifying.

If you have a problem using toilet language or swearing, that maybe you picked up even before you were a Christian, or maybe you backslid for a while and then got some habits in your vocabulary that are unhelpful, God can change you. But the way that change takes place is when you yield yourself to the Holy Spirit. It's not just being successful on your own. It's when you allow God to make that change and He wants to impart grace through your word into your life to improve your speech.

Well let's go back to our passage because I want to look at it from the other side. So far we've looked at ourselves as the Sanballat or Tobiah. We do not want to become that way. Yet we all have a sin nature that means that we have a tendency toward selfishness. So that sin nature can draw us to speak like a Sanballat or Tobiah. We don't want to be like that. But I'd like to look at it from the other side. If Sanballat or Tobiah are out here in your life and they're saying mean things about you and they're criticizing and they're accusing you of things that are not true and they're making fun of you, how do you respond? I think there's a valuable lesson here from Nehemiah in his life that we can apply in our lives.

This is what Nehemiah does in verse 4. *Hear us, our God, for we are despised.* So he ignores what's going on. He goes straight to God. And he says – *Hear us, our God, for we are despised.* So he comes out and he pours his heart out to God. If you've got some negative things to say about someone, God can handle it. So Nehemiah is saying, God, this is what I want you to do with these people. *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.*

I think we need to know how to respond when other people attack us. I think our young people, our children need to know how to respond when other people attack them. I want to suggest there are some ideas here in the passage that we can apply to ourselves.

The first one is that we can ignore. Maybe I should say ignore in the moment. Because maybe we do have to come back around in another time and do something else, but ignoring in the moment is a very important option that we have. I'm not saying we always have to ignore. Sometimes we may choose another option, but that's what Nehemiah does. He ignores in the moment.

Sometimes when someone is attacking us and we start to defend or attack, we create a worse situation. That's what this Bible verse says. *Whoever corrects a mocker invites insults; whoever rebukes the wicked incurs abuse.* You see if someone is attacking you, someone is ridiculing you and you take that opportunity right in that moment to defend yourself, then it says right there you're going to invite insults, you're going to incur abuse.

Just a few weeks ago a mom was just so disheartened because her eighteen year old son reacted to one of her actions. Mom took an action and said no about something and this eighteen year old boy sent her a text that was flaming, evil, terrible, downgrading. Just calling her names and saying things about her that were just bad. "You never do this, you always do this, you are this and that." And she made the mistake in that moment of saying, "You have a problem. You're not being grateful for what you have or for all the things that I've done." You know what that did? It opened the door for this young man to pour more abuse and insults into the situation.

Should this mom correct her son? Yes. But not through text. And certainly not in the moment because this man is so enraged that a response in that situation was not a valid or a good response. Sometimes in the midst when someone attacks you...

Just this week another child who's a young child ten or eleven years old, something like that, is saying mean things to mom. The child is seven. I remember now. Seven years old saying mean things to mom. And mom defends herself to the seven year old. I said, "Why are you defending yourself to a seven year old? You just need to say, 'You need to stop and you need to take a break.'" What she does when she defends herself (and this is what we all do), as soon as you defend yourself, you're validating the process that's going on here. You're saying to someone, the way you've attacked me is okay. You've opened a dialogue. I'm going to dialogue with you about that. So we validate the pattern that's going on. We cannot do that. Secondly you open your heart up because you share some truth with that person and they attack you some more.

We have to be really careful when someone is attacking us. Just remember you don't have to set everything right at the same time. Yes, you can come around and we'll talk about the second step in a minute. But you might ignore in the moment. Because when someone is attacking and saying all these things, this verbal abuse, they create a vacuum right in front of you. The problem is we get sucked into that vacuum and we start saying things we should say and we get into this argument. We need to be the ones who are stepping back and not doing that.

Nehemiah doesn't get sucked in. Rather, he goes... Well before we get to what he does, I want to talk about another option that we have and that is to confront the person. Now Nehemiah does not confront in our passage here today, but he did confront in Nehemiah 2. So I want you to see that is an option. But you have to be wise in knowing when to confront and when to ignore.

Back in chapter 2 he did confront Sanballat and Tobiah and he said to them – *The God of heaven is the one who will grant us success. We his servants will start rebuilding, but you have no portion, right or claim in Jerusalem.* So in that passage, Nehemiah does confront. But when you confront and when you ignore requires a lot of wisdom. I think it might be wise to do more ignoring in the moment than confronting in order to move forward.

The third thing that Nehemiah does in our passage is that he gets help or he turns it over to God or others. So often when I'm talking to young people or children about sibling conflict, I encourage them to get help. Getting help is one of those options that we can do. So you talk to parents and you say, "Hey, my brother's saying mean things about me or he's attacking me in some way or another." Getting help is an appropriate response. Sometimes at work you have to appeal to the boss or someone else because someone else is mistreating you. Sometimes at school you go to the counselor and you get help because this person is bullying you. Those are very good responses either to ignore, confront, or get help.

But I want you to see that there's a secret weapon that we as Christians have. That secret weapon is to go to God and allow God to take over the justice of the world. Because if I believe that I can right all the wrongs that are done to me, then I'm in trouble because it's going to turn me into this vicious person. I'm going to be looking for ways to get back at people. It's going to create a bitterness or resentment inside of my heart. I must be very careful about that. And so the secret weapon is to go to God like Nehemiah does. "I've got work to do. I want to offload this to you, Lord. Would you please take care of this person and work on this?"

That's what Nehemiah does and that's what Jesus did, as Peter tells us in 1 Peter 2:23 – *When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, (what did He do?) he entrusted himself to him who judges justly.* He gave Himself over to the Father. Even Jesus Himself didn't try to rebuke or correct in the moment. He used the secret weapon that we have as Christians to allow God to take over here. Why? So that we can do this fourth step that Nehemiah does. Focus on the goal and do what's right. We get so distracted by other things, it ruins our hearts. It gets us distracted from what we need to do and then we're in turmoil because we can't get anything done.

I'm going to take you back to the final verse because this is what this is taking us to. It says down here – *So we rebuilt the wall till all of it reached half its height, for the people worked with all their hearts.* All their heart was focused on doing right. You've heard of someone doing something half-heartedly. If someone does something half-heartedly it means that they're distracted by other things that they wish they could do.

If your goal is to right the wrong of personal injustice of the world in your own life, then you're going to be distracted from doing what's right. But God has a purpose and a mission for each one of us. God has established this purpose and a mission for you and me so that we have this purpose in life and that is to follow Him and to do what He has called us to do. So there are times when it's very easy for us to get sidetracked by meanness, criticism, by being mistreated. When that takes place it's just so hard for us to come back into this situation and do the right thing. We need to learn how to focus on the goal.

You know there's this story in Isaiah where Isaiah is given this vision of God in His throne and the angels are around there singing the songs about "holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty." And God says, "Who can I send to go and do this message?" Isaiah says, "You can't send me because I'm a man of unclean lips." So what God does is He takes this charcoal and He has the angel come in and the charcoal touches his mouth and cleans up his mouth, brings the holiness and the beauty of God into his mouth.

I just pray that God will do that in my mouth so that I can pass the edification test so that I can do the things that God would have me to do, focus on what He wants me to focus on so that I can be the person who is speaking life, not the person who's speaking death. And when death is spoken to me that I can respond in a way that's wise given the situation and be able to trust God in the midst of that.

Would you stand and let's pray together.

[PRAYER] Heavenly Father, I ask that you would, as you often do, use your Holy Spirit to convict us. We want to yield ourselves to you. We want to give our hearts to you. We want you to be praised in the things we say and do. So Lord, take our mouths. Use them for your words of wisdom in people's lives. Allow us to yield this part of our heart to you. In Jesus' name, amen.