



Scott Turansky, Senior Pastor
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NEHEMIAH 4:6-15

Series: Life Lessons from Nehemiah

The reason I want Margie to share is because as we come in touch with what's going on in the world in missions, we realize that these other Christians in other places are trying to do what we're doing. They're trying to serve the Lord, many of them under much more difficult circumstances than we find ourselves. So it should be an inspiration to you to live your Christian life now, recognizing that God is eager to spread His gospel everywhere. Christians in other parts of the world. It's just great.

I'll take some time and share about Dubai on another Sunday. I want to teach today. But I'll share more with you about the mission trip I just got back from too and let you know more about that and what happened with Hudson and I as we were on that trip together.

You'll see in your bulletin that the announcement about marriage letters. How many received a letter in the mail about marriage? Okay. We are committed to the ministry of marriage. Marriage is a ministry. It's important to support you. We want to support you in your marriage. The problem is that things that happen behind those doors in your house often aren't talked about and the pressures that you experience in marriage are often kept secret. If you're having trouble, sometimes you feel ashamed of those things. I want you to know that we are eager to support you and help you. So if you too find yourself interested in supporting marriage, would you talk to me? I could use some partnership in that as we minister to people in regards to their marriage over the next year.

Today we're going to look at the book of Nehemiah. If you'd turn there with me in your Bibles to Nehemiah 4, that's where we're going to spend some time. Nehemiah 4. Let's pause for a moment and talk to the Lord.

[PRAYER] Lord, we do pray for this Leadership Institute and for these men that are very young, but have come to know you and they want to serve you with all of their hearts. Lord, give us that kind of inspiration that we would take your gospel back to the places where there aren't any Christians, even in our businesses, in our neighborhoods, and we would serve you wholeheartedly. We do ask, Lord, for monies for the Leadership Institute building that they would be able to train more men in that regard. And we do ask for your protection on those men as they serve you. Also, Father, we're asking that you would open up the hearts of people in India to receive you as their Lord and Savior. And Father, for us this morning we're asking that as we open your word that you would give us an understanding of how we might apply it to our own hearts and lives. In Jesus' name, amen.

It's my goal as we go through the scriptures to look for practical applications that we can use in our lives. So I want to kind of imagine myself being in the story back there in the Bible times, wherever we are in the Bible. It won't be hard today to see what happens in this passage in Nehemiah 4.

I want to call this the halftime chapter of the Bible. I know some of you are sick of football. You've had enough of it over the last few days. But the interesting thing about being a halftime... You're going to see where I get the idea of halftime. You know you do all this work and they're building the walls and they're doing all the things that they're trying to do. Yet what do they have? They get halfway done, we're going to see and they end up with a problem. Now do you ever wonder what the coaches say to those players in the locker room in halftime? I don't know what they say, but somehow their job is to inspire the players to get back out on the field. I think God wants to do that today. So I trust that God is going to open up the locker room of your heart and He's going to speak with His Holy Spirit into your life so you can go back out of here today. Your halftime. You're going to go back in and do the work that God has called you to do in your personal life.

So as we start, would you stand with me as I read the passage in Nehemiah 4:6-15. This is Nehemiah's journal and he's writing. He says – *So we rebuilt the wall till all of it reached half its height (therefore the halftime illustration), for the people worked with all their heart. But when Sanballat, Tobiah, the Arabs, the Ammonites and the people of Ashdod heard that the repairs to Jerusalem's walls had gone ahead and that the gaps were being closed, they were very angry. They all plotted together to come and fight against Jerusalem and stir up trouble against it. But we prayed to our God and posted a guard day and night to meet this threat.*

Meanwhile, the people in Judah said, "The strength of the laborers is giving out, and there is so much rubble that we cannot rebuild the wall."

Also our enemies said, "Before they know it or see us, we will be right there among them and will kill them and put an end to the work."

Then the Jews who lived near them came and told us ten times over, "Wherever you turn, they will attack us."

Therefore I stationed some of the people behind the lowest points of the wall at the exposed places, posting them by families, with their swords, spears and bows. After I looked things over, I stood up and said to the nobles, the officials and the rest of the people, "Don't be afraid of them. Remember the Lord, who is great and awesome, and fight for your families, your sons and your daughters, your wives and your homes."

When our enemies heard that we were aware of their plot and that God had frustrated it, we all returned to the wall, each to our own work. Notice they go back to work after they go through this path of being discouraged and feeling this discouragement. They are able now to go back to do their work. We'll come back to this verse at the end, but I just want you to see that they're in a period of time where they're discouraged and that's where we're going to spend some time

because we need to go back to work and work on the walls. Whatever those walls are that God has given you to work on, that's what we want to do.

You may be seated.

So I call it the halftime passage of the Bible because they are halfway done, as you see in verse 6. They had reached *the wall* to bring it up to *half its height* because *they worked with all their hearts*. And that took a lot of work to get things started. It's often the starting of the project that is the most difficult. So they worked at it with all of their hearts to get it to halfway done.

I can just imagine football players in the locker room who are behind. You know they're discouraged. They thought they were going to go out and win this game, but they're behind and they're going to try to figure out what they're going to do. I'm sure the coaches talk to the players and they re-tool, they re-strategize, they re-focus so they can go out and not focus on the past and go on and do what they need to do.

Some of that is going to take place in our story today. Because these people are not done with their work. They've done a lot of it. They got it started. But sometimes as you're in the work, things happen and you feel discouraged. I think that's what's going to happen in our passage today as these people are experiencing discouragement in their own hearts.

Now sometimes discouragement comes from the outside. In fact usually it starts there. You know things are going bad somehow outside of us and then there's the internal response to that, the discouragement we have on the inside. We see both of those things happening in this passage. So let's start with the outside, the external that's taking place. Because we see these bad guys getting together. We have *Sanballat, Tobiah, the Arabs, the Ammonites and the people of Ashdod* and notice it says in verse 8 – *They all plotted together to come and fight against Jerusalem and stir up trouble against it.*

Imagine you're the people. Okay. You're the people trying to do the right thing. You're trying to get things done. You know you're doing what God wants you to do. But there's opposition, there's problems, there's challenges that are there that make it difficult to do what you need to do. And so discouragement is going to set in.

Let me just show you the map here. Because if we take this map and I just want you to see right in the middle there, do you see where Jerusalem is? It's right there is Jerusalem. If you would add the others, the Ashdod people, they would be over here on the coast line. But what that tells me is that everybody is around them. They are surrounded by problems.

In my own life I know that if I have one problem that comes my way, I can usually manage that, dedicate my time to it, and I'm fine. The problem is when I have multiple things going on at the same time that I often feel discouraged. My sink is clogged in my kitchen and the water won't go down at all. I know I've got to dedicate some time to that to get this fixed just to live in our kitchen. And then you get a call from someone in the church, people I love, and there's a problem there, and I want to help solve that problem. And then I go to my car and I find out I got a flat

tire. I mean it's that kind of thing where you go, "I can't believe I've got all these things going on at the same time."

I know that sometimes you experience that in your lives. You've got challenges in one area and then you turn around and there's another challenge and another challenge. When it happens that sometimes does something to our hearts. We feel discouraged. Discouraged. That means to take courage out of. We just don't have the energy to move forward. We feel like wow, I'm working hard and I just can't go on. I can't do what I need to do. You're going to see some of that in the passage among the people as they're talking.

So you see the challenge here. It's from the external. It's all these guys coming at them in this united front. I know that sometimes we look at life and we say I think there's a conspiracy against me. Even about inanimate objects, you know. These inanimate objects are getting together to... This broke and that broke and that broke all at the same time. There must be some conspiracy here. But obviously there is a conspiracy in the passage where they're all coming at the Jewish people and trying to discourage them and dishearten them. Because they want something different. The enemy wants something different than God wants in your life. The enemy wants to destroy you. He wants to damage you. He wants to tear you down.

So notice what they did in the passage. Verse 9 says – *But we prayed to our God and posted a guard day and night.* We prayed and we posted a guard. Two things.

Let's just talk about prayer for a moment. Why do we pray? I want you to know that the reason we pray is because God uses our prayers to accomplish His work. That's why we pray. He uses our prayers. Just like He uses people to share the gospel with other people, God chooses to do that. He chooses to work that way. He could have chosen to work a lot of other ways, but when we pray, God uses our prayers to accomplish His work. So we pray.

I'd encourage you to pray for big things. Pray that God would do big things in your life and the lives of those around you. Pray that God would do those things. Now God isn't a genie where you just rub and say a magic prayer and He's going to give you anything you want. That's not what the Bible tells us. But sometimes when we're praying, God wants to do something different. We need to have this sense of willingness to go where God is working. The Bible talks about move where the Holy Spirit is moving. Sometimes He uses challenges in our lives to move us in a direction. We need to be willing to move in that direction.

You might be praying, "Lord, would you please take this thorn in the flesh from me." That could be a mate. It could be a job. It could be anything. Lord, take this thorn in the flesh from me. What's God's response to that? *My grace is sufficient for you.* The idea is I love you very much, Paul, and I want you to stay in that situation. I'm going to give you grace to be able to deal with it, to meet the challenges. I'm going to do something deeper in your life than you ever imagined.

But God uses prayer to do big things. That's why we pray for healing here at Calvary Chapel Living Hope. We want to pray that God heals people. Sometimes we see miraculous healing take place, sometimes God uses doctors, and sometimes healing doesn't take place. But we want to

position ourselves well because we know that God is big, He's awesome, and we know that we can come to Him in prayer.

So the first thing that they did was they prayed. The second things that they did was they posted a guard. Just think with me about the guards because I think this will be helpful in our own lives. He says – *We prayed to our God and posted a guard day and night to meet the threat.* What this means is they were working at first for the first half of the wall to get it going. They didn't really have to pay attention to the threat. But now they had to change their expectations. Now they had to expect that the enemy could attack at any moment.

I would suggest that our expectations often get us into trouble. We expect our spouse to do something and our spouse doesn't do it, so we say, "Oh she doesn't love me" or "he doesn't love me," so then we start getting upset about that. Or we get discouraged that this thing didn't happen that we hoped would happen. Lord, we're trying to do these things and it's just not coming out. So our expectations get us into trouble. I think we need to post these guards. These guards in our lives that free us up from the unmet expectations that take place. Which means that those guards are often things like flexibility inside of our hearts. Or the word of God that allows us to latch on to the word of God in a way that frees us up from embedding our hands into earthly things so much that when it doesn't come we get upset.

Proverbs tells us to *guard our heart, for it is the wellspring of life.* I think we need to post these guards because of the threats that are out there that want to damage us, that want to hurt us, that want to harm us, that want to destroy us in our lives. Those threats are there.

So the response to these external threats that were there is number one to pray, number two to post a guard. But there's also this other kind of discouragement that comes when things are going on inside of our own hearts. Sometimes we generate our own discouragement because of the way we talk to ourselves or the way we think or the things we do. We get ourselves in our own set of misery situations, and that's what happens here.

The word *meanwhile* is while the outside things are going, meanwhile we've got some things going on on the inside. Notice what's happening. Three different ways in which the enemy is attacking on the inside. I think the enemy wants to do that in our lives too. So watch this and let's see how we can prevent this.

Meanwhile, the people in Judah (those are the people building the wall) *said, "The strength of the laborers is giving out, and there is so much rubble that we cannot rebuild the wall."* We can't do it.

There's sometimes when we come to that place in our lives where we feel like saying, "I can't do it. I can't keep going on like this. I can't live my life this way. I can't keep going on in the midst of this." Now you're going to see at the end of the verse...you remember the last verse? They do go back to the wall and they are rebuilding it. So they can and they do. But there's sometimes in our lives where we feel like things are so dark that we say I can't go on, we can't continue this. Those are dangerous moments. Dangerous moments that the enemy wants to sneak in there and discourage us and dampen our vitality so that we end up giving up. If you get to that place where

you say, “I can’t continue obeying God the way He’s told me to; I can’t do this,” then you end up with a problem. We just have to be careful.

I’m pondering the question (and you can ponder it with me): Does God give you more than you can handle? How would you answer that? No. God doesn’t give you more than you can handle. The reason you answer it that way is because we are in church. And also 1 Corinthians 10:13 says these words: *But God is faithful; he will not allow you to be tempted more than you are able, but will with the temptation also make a way to escape so you can bear up under it.* Not so you can run away. So you can bear up under it. So that verse lends itself to this idea that God does not give us more than we can handle. I like that.

But there are times I think when we think we can just handle anything. I think sometimes if we can look at it this way that God gives us more than we can handle so that we are forced to go and trust Him because I can’t live this life by myself. We get to that place where we say, “I can’t do this.” I think we’re in a right place to say, “God, I need you to do this through me. I need you to work in my life.” So I’m not really sure at this point in my life how to answer that question (does God give us more than we can handle?) because I know that sometimes we can say no, He’s going to empower us, but even then it means He’s going to do some work in us. Because sometimes life is more than we can handle. We come to it and we say I can’t do this.

Sometimes when I’m working with parents... You know life is hard when you’re parenting children, these little people, that we’re trying to help form and guide and help them to be disciples. Sometimes a parent will say, “I don’t think I can do this anymore.” How old is your child? “He’s four.” I’m thinking you’ve got a long way to go, ma’am. You can do this. God wants to give us the strength to deal with the challenges we face. But one of the ways that the enemy gets into us is we start saying to ourselves, “I can’t do this.” It’s a mistake. And it leads to discouragement. It’s a dangerous one. Be careful of it. You’ll see in a moment how Nehemiah is going to address it, but right now just let it sit there for a minute. “I can’t do this” is over here in the corner.

Let’s go to the next one because the word is also there in verse 11. In other words we’re not done yet because – *Also our enemies said...* So now they’re going to quote the enemy? The Jewish people now are going to quote the enemy and they’re going to say, *“Before they know it or see us, we will be right there among them and will kill them and put an end to the work.”*

Oh this is really dangerous. Sometimes the people you hang around with start to because of their negativity or their perspective on life you end up kind of embracing that and the enemy starts to speak through them and you start repeating what the enemy is saying. The enemy wants to tell you you’re not worthy. You’re not forgiven. You’re not good enough. God isn’t going to obey you or do what you want or help you. As the serpent said in the garden – *Surely you will not die.* So we start repeating the message of the enemy inside of our hearts and we find ourselves in a bad place. We get discouraged. On the one hand we say, “I can’t do it.” That’s going to get us into trouble. On the other hand we start repeating the enemy’s words.

What we listen to in our leisure moments, how we respond when other people are talking to us, what we say to ourselves when people are saying things you know are ungodly. Boy, if we start

repeating the enemy's words inside of our hearts, we can find ourselves in serious trouble and we can find ourselves discouraged. That's the second thing. Be careful about repeating the enemy's words.

Verse 12 – *Then the Jews who lived near them came and told us ten times over, "Wherever you turn, they will attack us."* Ten times over. Is that an exaggeration in my life. Because sometimes when I get upset and I get discouraged, my mind goes round and round and round and we've got about a hundred times I'm saying to myself some bad thing is going on and I can get discouraged because I'm repeating the wrong thing over and over and over again. Does that make sense? Do you see how we get discouraged? I know I'm spending a lot of time on the problem here, but I'm just going through the passage. You can identify with the discouragement that takes place in our lives when we say I can't or when we repeat the enemy's words or we're going over the negative thinking over and over again. It's a problem.

Let's see how Nehemiah responds to this. In the next verse in verse 13 he says – *Therefore*. So the word *therefore* is our connecting word. I didn't spend a lot of time talking to you about each one of those connecting words, but we have *meanwhile*, we have *also*, and now we have *therefore*. But they're giving us a train of thought through the passage that guides our thinking. And so this is what Nehemiah did because the people were discouraged because of outward forces and internal forces in those three areas. *Therefore I stationed some of the people behind the lowest points of the wall at the exposed places.* We all have weaknesses in our lives, challenges. Satan wants to destroy us. He wants to attack us. He wants to damage us.

I like the story about Satan's Black Friday sale. The visitor came into the showroom and saw three big tools right in the middle. They had the spotlights on them because those were the main tools that Satan uses to destroy us. They are bitterness in our hearts (harboring anger and turning into bitterness), materialism (that's getting sucked into physical and earthly things), and immorality (sexual immorality). Those are the three big ones. So wow, those were all highlighted. And then along the wall there were all those other ones that can get us torn down because the goal of Satan is to tear us down, to destroy us, and to take away life, the life that God wants to give us. So along the wall where those other ones (like jealousy and regret). Just think about the things that get you off track (anger and so on). They're lined up neatly against the wall.

But over in the corner over here there's this one tool that sits there and the visitor goes over there and looks at the tool. It looks all worn, pretty shabby. But it has the highest price tag on it. So he says, "Why is this one so expensive?" The answer comes that this particular tool is the most valuable tool we have. It works when nothing else works. It's the tool of discouragement.

I would suggest that Satan would love to discourage you and me. When you start getting discouraged, you start doubting things, you start doubting whether God is real, whether God loves me, whether God cares about my life, that the bad things that have happened in my life, I don't think God has my best interest in mind. So we start imagining these things and it starts going in our hearts and we start cycling in.

So what does Nehemiah do? He posts guards at the lowest points, the most vulnerable places. You need to have a plan for those vulnerable places in your life.

I was working with one mom and she responded. Her older son sent her a really viscous and vial text. She responded to him. My conversation with her I said you've got to view yourself as not qualified. You are not qualified to answer texts or emails because the temptation, the low point in your life, is to get justice and seek revenge. You can't do that. You've got to find those low places and you have to set guards there and realize I am in danger. That's why I don't go anywhere near a bar, you might say, because I have danger in that area of my life. I don't watch this kind of movie or I don't do this kind of thing because those are vulnerable areas.

So he posts a guard. But notice what else he says in the passage there. He says – *lowest points of the wall at the exposed places, posting them by families*. I am just so intrigued. My team in Dubai, nine of us were there. Our mission in the world is to help people and churches understand family ministry and help develop it. We're continually finding more and more passages in the Bible that talk about families, households, marriages, parenting. There's just so many of them. It's just fascinating.

Here's another one. They're posted by families. That Nehemiah says this family has a mission. You are on a mission to protect that part of the wall.

I would suggest that every family has a mission. But sometimes the tension that's generated inside of the home makes focusing on the mission difficult. Because so much energy has to be dealt with (conflict or challenges or whatever). So we have to deal with that tension inside the home so that the family can experience its mission and do what it needs to do. In fact as I'm working with families, many times I'll say to them, "You know, I know you've got tension here and we're going to work on that. But while we're working on the tension, start working on your mission. Do the mission that God has called you as a family to do. Your family is made up of different individuals who have different gifts and talents and so on, but you can form a mission from that that God has given your family to function and use and to fulfill." So Nehemiah knows the value of families and the support that can come in them, and he puts them out there.

There's a verse in Psalm 68 that says – *God places the lonely in families*. I love that verse. Of course God has created His church to be this family, this catch-all net so that those of us who are in different stages of family may join together with others. Some of us grandparents, our grandchildren aren't around a lot (as in my home) so I can invest in the lives of other people's children. There's this sense of working together and family is so important. He posted *them by families, with their swords, spears and bows*.

Nehemiah's continuing to speak here. *After I looked things over, I stood up and said to the nobles, the officials and the rest of the people...* Here's his message. This is the coach's message in the locker room at halftime. Maybe this is what God brought you here to hear this morning. He said two things. "*Don't be afraid of them. Remember the Lord.*"

I wonder when he says those words *don't be afraid of them*, because how many times has fear limited us from going forward and doing what God has for us. I wonder if Nehemiah as he's thinking about this is remembering about Joshua's words when Joshua said something similar. He says – *Keep this Book of the Law always on your lips* (these are words being said to Joshua);

meditate on it day and night so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful. Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go.

As Christians we are in place where we always have God with us. We never have to be afraid. We can always trust Him. We can go forward with courage to do the work God has called us to do and we don't have to be falling down and being discouraged. We can go forward because we are not afraid.

He doesn't stop there though. He says do not be afraid and remember the Lord. What does it say after that? *Remember the Lord, who is great and awesome.* He is so awesome. If you focus on how great and awesome God is, you're not going to be discouraged because you're part of the winning team. See, that's one of the beautiful things about being Christians is that we've already read the last chapter of the book. We already know we're going to be victorious. We are courageous because we are conquerors. We are the ones going forward. *Remember the Lord.* And Nehemiah, I'm sure, is thinking back on other things as he's trying. Lord, what can I do? Do you have any examples for me?

I want to take you to a passage that talks about remembering the Lord found in Deuteronomy. This is the passage that Moses is sharing with the people before they go into the land for the second time. Actually this time they're successful to go across the Jordan River into the Promised Land. Notice what Moses says to the people: *Remember the Lord your God.* Why? It's because we tend to forget. We want to remember the Lord. We need to focus on how great and awesome He is. *For it is he who gives you the ability to produce wealth.* Did you know that? Because if you get so sidetracked with money issues, retirement account, having certain things, you're going to get discouraged.

You have to remember that God is the one who gives you the ability to produce wealth and so confirms your covenant, which he swore to your ancestors as it is today. If you ever forget the Lord your God and follow other gods and worship and bow down to them, I testify against you today. They will surely be destroyed.

There are many people today who don't even need Satan's help. They get so focused on things that are not godly, not the things that God wants them to focus on, they end up destroying themselves. We must recognize and remember always that God is great and God is awesome. That will help us deal with the discouragement that we experience every day.

So notice the last statement and this is so great because after the speech that Nehemiah gives them they find this encouragement to refocus, retool, recalibrate their lives. Because that's what we need sometimes. If we got sidetracked by all kinds of other things, you want to get your eyes focused back on the Lord. Maybe it will look different now than it did before when you thought you took a lot of things for granted. And now things didn't go the way you thought they were going to go because now God's got some new things for you. You need to see God in new ways and you need to remember who He is. You need to see how great and awesome He is.

Notice what they do. *When our enemies heard that we were aware of their plot and that God had frustrated it, we all returned to the wall, each to our own work.* I'm going to send you out of here today, you're going to go back to do your work. I hope you can be encouraged in the Lord and allow God to do something. You can take a stand in your home. You can take a stand in your neighborhood and you can be the person that God wants you to be. Amen?

The coach's speech is given several times in the Bible. I just want to take you to Paul's. This is Paul's locker room speech as he's speaking to the people who might be discouraged. He says it this way: *Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? As it is written: "For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered." No, in all these things we are more than conquerors (let that resonate) through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

When we go out of here today, we're going out to get back on the field. The Christian life isn't a game. It's not a game that we play. It's a war that's fought. It's a race that's won. But it requires us to feel real and often painful things in our lives. God wants to do deep things in our lives and He wants to change us, He wants to mold us to be the kind of people that He wants us to be. Right now the situations around you, you may pray that God changes those and maybe He will. I would say pray with all your heart that God changes your situation and maybe He will. But if He doesn't change, it must mean that He has something better planned right in the situation you're in to grow something inside of your heart, to grow something deeper inside of you that you wouldn't have had before.

God wants us to be encouraged. That means to have courage put into (not discouraged, which is courage taken out of). He wants us to be encouraged in order to move forward with Him, to remember the Lord that He is great and awesome.

Would you stand with me and let's pray together.

[PRAYER] Lord, I especially pray right now for those who might be discouraged. A young person who might be discouraged living in their home, wishing they could be out of their home. A husband or wife who feels discouraged about their relationship. People who might be discouraged about health issues or financial issues. Lord, we know that you're a God who wants to reveal that we're conquerors in all things. So Lord, I ask that you would give us a perspective of who you are and understand the God we serve. Lord, reveal yourself to us that you are amazing and awesome and give us glimpses of your hope right now in the situations that we find ourselves. Lord, we dedicate ourselves to you and ask that you would work in our hearts. In Jesus' name, amen.