

How to Overcome

Discouragement



Life2Life Discovery Series
Nehemiah 4

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Nehemiah 4:1-15, 19-21

Introduction to the Study

C.S. Lewis wrote: If Satan's arsenal of weapons were restricted to a single one, it would be discouragement."²

Old parable about the devil selling some tools at a yard sale. He sold hatred, malice, envy, jealousy and pride...all of them were worn but still very expensive. There was one tool set aside and not for sale: DISCOURAGEMENT. When questioned, the Devil said, "It's more powerful to me than any other tool. When I can't bring down my victims with any of the rest of these tools, I use discouragement."

Discouragement plagues people everywhere. You don't have to be poor or in a time of trouble to feel discouraged. People all around you might be discouraged and you would never know it. They hide it well under fake smiles. They may talk a good game and feel like they cannot be real but inside they are hurting.

Joe Bayly wrote a poem that describes this well called, "Psalm from the Hotel Room":
I'm alone Lord a thousand miles from home. There's no one who knows my name except the clerk and he spelled it wrong. No one to eat dinner with, laugh at my jokes, listen to my gripes, be happy with me about what happened today, and say that's great. No one cares. There's just this lousy bed, and slush in the streets outside between two building. I feel sorry for myself, and I've plenty reason to. Maybe I ought to say, 'I'm on top of it, praise the Lord things are great...but they are not. Tonight it's all gray slush."

When a person is discouraged, it often feels like gray slush. It often feels like nothing is going right or ever will go right. How can a person overcome discouragement?

One of the best examples in the Bible of a person and a group of people who faced discouragement is Nehemiah and the people of Israel.

Historical and Interpretive Background

The Book of Nehemiah is about a man who had a major conviction and calling to do something for God that would involve leaving his prestigious job, rallying people to a cause, taking on extreme risks and facing criticism at every turn. Not much is known about Nehemiah, except that he was a cupbearer in the court of King Artaxerxes, king of

Persia. The book opens around 444B.C. after the seventy long years of exile and follows the Book of Ezra.

Nehemiah gets word from his brother, Hanani (1:1-3) that the walls of Jerusalem have been torn down, burned and “the remnant there in the province who had survived the exile is in great trouble and shame. Nehemiah took the news hard and mourned for many days. This was not just a personal tragedy but a national tragedy. The nation had already been through so much and now this. What could be done? What should be done?

Nehemiah is the last historical character and the events of the book are the last in the Old Testament. Nehemiah travels to Jerusalem less than a year after he gets the news having collected supplies from the king and given permission to go help repair the walls. The journey is arduous and the work ahead of them monumental. However, Nehemiah presses forward feeling a call from God to complete the work. The work closes around 430BC.

The meaning of Nehemiah’s recording of the wall rebuild and the opposition they faced, cannot be understated. The effort is a lesson in leadership as as been stated in may works, but for this study, we are focused on how Nehemiah strategically and spiritually overcame the discouraging attacks that could have derailed his work.

How Do we Apply this Study?

In many ways, that is what every Christian faces in a world dominated by the purposes of Satan to derail the work of God through His Church. Christ followers are the target of Satan’s discouragement. If he can discourage believers, make them believe they are less than what God says they are and cause them to focus on their situation more than focus on the promise and provision of God, then he would had succeeded in moving them off their path to victory in every situation!

The Purpose of the Study and Suggestions for Using It

The purpose of this bible study is to help you work through where you might be discouraged and point you toward the help you have through the Spirit of God. Use this study in a number of ways. There are five main points being made. You can do this study as a personal bible study or a small group study or a family devotional study. Either way, it can be done in one sitting or you can take each of the five major points and spread them over five days or five weeks. However you do this study, my hope and prayer is that it encourages you, lifts your spirit and causes you to love the Lord who has provided all you need for life and godliness in Christ Jesus our Lord.

1. Bring God in on the Situation (4:4-5)

- Nehemiah does not pray this prayer from a heart of revenge or anger. He had already brought God into the situation (Nehemiah 1:4). Nehemiah prayed with fasting and a broken heart.
- Nehemiah prays knowing he is in a spiritual battle against a real enemy. Prayer is the greatest weapon we have against spiritual attacks (Eph. 6:18).
- When we pray bringing God in on the situation, He takes control of our emotions. Rather than be vengeful, we confront the situation realistic in prayer and leave the judgment to God. The task of the believer is to fight in love and be kind in every situation (Eph. 4:29-32).
- Prayer was a critical component Nehemiah uses to combat those who would try to discourage them from fulfilling their task. Discouragement is a natural reality for a prayer-less person.

Sometimes, we respond to a crisis by lashing out in fear or anger, and at other times, we run away not wanting to face the situation.

When is the last time you faced a crisis situation? What was your first response?

Is there anything you would change about your response?

How does bringing God in on the situation impact a person handling discouragement?

2. Don't Lose the Right Perspective (4:6)

- Coming out of a time of prayer, the people rallied to stay on the job! In the face of opposition, Nehemiah and the people did not quit. Through pray and courage they remained.
- Often, our perspective changes when we are faced with fear or doubts or criticism. We can begin to look inward rather than upward and outward.

- Discouragement has been the impediment of many people who have pushed to accomplish something great only to be derailed by naysayers who were given legitimacy.

What are some alternative actions Nehemiah and the people could have taken?

How does it encourage you to see another person push through a discouraging moment? *[Cite: In the movie: **Greater**...where Brandon Burlsworth was discouraged from fulfilling his dream of playing football for the Arkansas Razorbacks by his family, friends and coaches. When he walked on, his teammates try to discourage him, but Brandon kept his perspective and belief. He works hard and earned a scholarship. His senior year, Brandon earned a spot as a First Team All-American].*

3. Prepare Yourself for Future Attacks (4:7-9)

- Nehemiah had won a battle against his naysayers, but Nehemiah's discouragers are not finished. The Christian life is not about one battle and it's done. The Christian life is not about hiding in the back room leaving the rest to God. Yes, the battle is the Lord's, but Christians are not given God's armor (Eph. 6:10-18) to hide away. They are called to join the fight.
- Future attacks are inevitable. We must prayerfully prepare.

What did Nehemiah do to demonstrate that he was in the battle with the Lord?

How would you apply this to your day to day life?

4. Stay Focused on Your Purpose (4:10-14)

- Nehemiah and the people were constantly being bombarded with doubts and discouragement. The people close to them wanted them to stop. Death threats were circulating all around. Nehemiah kept the people focused on their purpose without wavering. He used measures to protect the people which gave them confidence.
- People or problems often pull people off their purpose when the purpose of the people is to discourage (Ezra 4:4)
- Anthony Liccione wrote: "Don't let someone keep putting out the flame God keeps re-lighting, we all have a purpose. As a wing to a bird. As wind that goes the distance over the sea."

Why is it difficult for people to stay focused when they are getting bombarded by discouraging words or situations?

What might you be going through right now that could blur your vision forward?

5. Develop a Strategy that Glorifies God (4:15, 19-21)

- Nehemiah developed a strategy to protect the people while also doing the work.
- Here is a man who did not back down from the greatest challenge and calling of his life.
- Discouragement has often been just the thing that led someone to the greatest breakthrough.
- My dad lost his job as he was approaching 50 and his prospects seemed minimal. The bills were still coming in, but all my dad had to fall back on was a small table-top press where we printed a few letterhead. We had started a small printing business to help put me through college. Little did we know, in the days following the dark days of unemployment for the first time in his adult life, that God was going to bring my family to see His hand of blessing through loss. While losing his job was allow point, my dad got on his knees and began to cry out to God. The Lord heard his cry and began to pour business into that little print shop. Before

long, dad began making more money than he had at the job he had lost. It took the loss to realize the gain.

What would Nehemiah have lost if he had not gone through the days of discouragement?

What lessons have you learned through discouragement that have helped you?

How will you apply this bible study this week?