

Good to see you here this evening, church. I'm glad you're with us. If you would, go ahead and grab your Bibles. Turn to Nehemiah, chapter 4. That's where we're going to spend our time tonight. If you don't have a Bible, there should be one in the seat back in front of you underneath there. Just grab it. If you don't own one, that's our gift to you to take. As you're turning there, again, Hunter mentioned Matt is out tonight. He's suffering in London and Scotland and Ireland tonight, saving leprechauns and doing what he does. But we're going to continue on in Nehemiah.

If you haven't been with us for the past few weeks, I want to catch you up just a bit and show you where we've been, what we've covered, and what's going on here. The book of Nehemiah in the Old Testament and the character of Nehemiah... He is a reformer God raises up to help go restore what has been broken for God's people. God does an amazing work, and we get to glean a ton of wisdom just seeing how God moves through one of these reformers in the reformation of a people and of a city.

What we've seen so far is a few things. In chapter 1, the first thing we looked at was the *passion* of Nehemiah, where word comes to Nehemiah about how his former city, Jerusalem, is broken down. It's in ruins and is the laughingstock of the nations, and it crushes him. It crushes him on behalf of the city, on behalf of the people, his people.

You see in that moment of brokenness, God births out of Nehemiah this holy discontent. You have a holy discontent when you recognize, "There is something that's not right. This should not be. This ought and should not be, and something needs to be done about it." Those moments in time where that holy discontent just births out of us. God does that with Nehemiah, breaks his heart for the city and for the people.

The second thing we see in Nehemiah, chapter 1, is the *prayer* of Nehemiah and the proper response of someone who is having a holy discontent birthed within them, the natural response to do when something is bigger than you yourself can even go after, that you yourself can ever accomplish. That is to fall to your knees and ask for the One who *can* help to intercede, to go before God Almighty.

In his prayer we see Nehemiah own the sin of the nation. He includes himself in that in confession, recognizing the reason this city is in ruins is because of the sin of the people and God's judgment. He

repents openly in his prayer, asking God to honor God's faithfulness to restore what has been broken and to do what only God can do.

Then when we get to chapter 2 of Nehemiah, we look at the *plan* of Nehemiah. We see what it is God burdens Nehemiah's heart to do. You know this as well as I do. Those moments where you're in the midst of prayer, and you're praying, "God, would you raise up somebody to fix this problem?" What does God do? "Well what about you? How about we use *you* to fix this thing?" Sure enough, God burdens Nehemiah's heart, and he gives Nehemiah a vision. He gives Nehemiah a plan for how this thing can be restored, how this city can be rebuilt and this wall be restored.

So Nehemiah steps in the gap in faith. He asks permission from this pagan king to go and help restore what has been broken. He puts before the king this very clear and articulate plan of how this is going to play out and the role he sees himself playing in this as a reformer. God does what only God can do. He touches the king's heart, and the king not only grants permission, but grants him a full arsenal of resources to go help rebuild this city and rebuild this wall.

Nehemiah moves on, and at the end of chapter 2, when we see Nehemiah arrive on the scene, we then get a snapshot of the *preparation* of Nehemiah, how he goes around and inspects the wall. He sees for himself where it's broken and exactly how this thing is going to have to be patched together. Then he rallies together the people and convinces them this thing is worth dying for. The rebuilding of the city is worth every ounce of their energy and effort. So you see the preparation of Nehemiah.

Then in chapter 3... We didn't get to look at this last week and there isn't enough time this week, but you see in chapter 3 a list of names. Most of us in our daily devotional readings just skip right over this chapter. These are the *people* of Nehemiah. This is a list of 50 names of Jews who came from all over, with various backgrounds, various trades, various skills, but who all came together as one to unite for the building of this wall; fifty names that to you and me are faceless but to God are the faithful, not insignificant, enough that God would etch their names in chapter 3 of Nehemiah in your Bible forever.

You and I may not know who they are or know what they did, but God knows. They were absolutely significant to the work of this rebuilding and this reformation that takes place, so God puts their names recorded in there. So far, in these three chapters, we've looked at the *passion*, and the *prayer*, and the *plans*, and the *preparation*, and the *people* of Nehemiah. We've been talking all along how this equates and parallels to what we see and experience as the church today, at least what *should* parallel as what we see and experience as the church today.

Just track with me on this a little bit. Those moments where you see something that's broken and you're seized by it and God just crushes your heart and gives you that holy discontent... Maybe it's in the community and the culture around you. Maybe it's with injustices that are all across our planet right now, like poverty or human trafficking or abortion or racial reconciliation or abuse. You name it...whatever injustice that's out there. It seizes you, it grips your heart, in such a way that you go, "That's not right. That shouldn't be." You lose sleep at night thinking about it. That holy discontent.

Maybe it's not even injustices. Maybe it's just reform that needs to take place: reform in the church that burdens you, reform in your own family that burdens you, reform in the community, in the business world, areas where you just go, "Man, that shouldn't be happening." God burdens you that this thing needs to get aligned. This thing needs to get rebuilt. Then he drops you on your knees. Whatever those holy discontents are, he breaks your heart for what it is that breaks his heart and puts you on your knees to where you're asking him to do what only he can do to fix this problem, to solve this problem.

Then, again, we mentioned it before, those moments where he goes, "Okay, I'm going to use you to do it," and he gives you a vision or a plan or a dream for how this thing can actually happen. He begins to mobilize you toward it, and sure enough, your passion that starts as a little flame catches fire, and other people join in with you. The next thing you know, you have a crowd of folks who all want to see this thing fixed.

If Nehemiah ended right there in chapter 3, or if your holy discontent story ended right there in chapter 3, we'd be filled with excitement. "This is awesome! Look at this! Look what God did to break his heart and put him on his face in prayer, and then answered his prayers with this king and sent him back, and all of the people are rallied and they're ready to build."

If it ended right there, we would unfortunately be misled with the thought that everything is perfect. God gives you a burden, you go, and he'll take care of it perfectly. You'll go out there, and it'll be smooth sailing, and there will be no issues. You'll be hitting on all cylinders, and really nothing could possibly go wrong. You know as well as I do in that moment you find Nehemiah, chapter 4, or Nehemiah, chapter 4, finds you. All of a sudden, when all you can think is how great this is going, the wheels fall off.

What begins to happen is this thing called persecution, this thing called opposition, difficulty, when what you hoped and have prayed for and feel burdened for now comes under attack and people are ridiculing you for what it is you feel God has burdened you to do, or burdened the church to do. Have you ever been there, by the way? Have you ever been in those moments when you're so fired up and excited about that dream and somebody just comes in and pours water on it? They just deflate you and discourage you, telling you, "It'll never happen. Why are you wasting your time doing this?"

We're going to look at Nehemiah, chapter 4, this evening. We're going to see how Nehemiah responds. Because if this hasn't happened to you yet, I guarantee you it *will* happen. I want you to make a note so far in our study of Nehemiah in what Bible study methods will call "the law of proportion" to tell you how serious this issue of persecution is.

When it comes to Nehemiah's passion, we get one verse on it. When it comes to Nehemiah's prayer, we get six verses on it. When it comes to Nehemiah's plan, we get eight verses on it. When it comes to his preparation, we get eleven verses on it. When it comes to the persecution, we're going to get three straight chapters.

The reality is, starting in chapter 4 all the way through chapter 6, what we're going to learn is no matter how great your passion is for something the Lord puts on your heart, no matter how deep your prayers are that you'll pray for God's intercession, no matter how much attention to planning and preparation you put into it to make sure this thing goes well, no matter how many people you can try to rally around you for this holy discontent, the reality is that the one thing you're going to have to prepare your heart for more than anything else is the persecution that will come. Not *if*, but *when*.

What we're going to realize is that persecution and suffering are part and parcel to the Christian life and the Christian ministry. It *will* come, and you must learn to persevere under it. Jesus said in John, chapter 16, **"I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world."** Peter reiterated this in 1 Peter, chapter 4, when he said, **"Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you."**

It shouldn't be foreign that you're suffering, that you're being persecuted. **"But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed."** Likewise, Paul told a young Timothy, a young pastor, in 2 Timothy 3, **"...all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted..."** It's part and parcel. Again, if it hasn't happened yet for you, it will.

There is an Enemy lurking around the corner who wants nothing else than to come in and break your holy discontent, break your dreams and your passions, crush them and pour water on them and put out that flame. As an individual, what will you do when that happens? As a church, what will *we* do when that happens? Let's look at Nehemiah 4 and see if we can learn a thing or two here.

The first thing you will almost always face when your holy discontent goes public is that of criticism, ridicule, and open mockery. You will be made fun of. Look at verse 1: **"Now when Sanballat heard that we**

were building the wall, he was angry and greatly enraged, and he jeered at the Jews." Sanballat is this guy we saw back in chapter 2. He's a Persian politician. He didn't like the Jews coming in and setting up shop again in Jerusalem.

After they had been ransacked by the Babylonians and then the Persians came in, Sanballat kind of took this territory and started building his micro-empire under there in that region, and now he doesn't like the idea of the Jews coming in and taking back what was rightfully theirs, so he starts making fun of them. Again, you saw him in chapter 2. You see him here in chapter 4. You're going to see Sanballat again in chapter 6, and then you'll see him all the way down in chapter 13. That's the problem with haters. They always keep showing up.

Throughout this whole thing, they just keep showing up with their bucket of cold water to try to dump on your passion. They never go away. They're always going to be there. So the first thing we have to learn is when you go public with a holy discontent the Lord has put on your heart, you're going to get mocked for it. It's coming. As we'll notice in verse 2, very seldom do these haters operate solo. They always have a little crowd around them of their fellow "grumpasaurus rexes" and "crankapotamuses" that love to come out and gather with them and throw their own mock parties.

Watch this in verse 2: **"And he said in the presence of his brothers and of the army of Samaria, 'What are these feeble Jews doing? Will they restore it for themselves? Will they sacrifice? Will they finish up in a day? Will they revive the stones out of the heaps of rubbish, and burned ones at that?'"** You can just imagine them laughing, just sneering at them a little bit. I want you to think of the most god-awful place of persecution on earth, the places on earth where literally hundreds of thousands of folks are being ridiculed and persecuted every day.

If you're thinking rightly, you'll think of junior high school, because that's where it always, always goes. That's the most god-awful place I can think of, all of the middle schools that are in the area. You show up just one time wearing the wrong piece of clothing, and you will hear about it the rest of your life. Right? They will haze you. That's what middle schoolers are meant to do. Their whole life's existence is to make fun of one another.

I'll never forget when I was in junior high (this will date me a little bit), what was hot back then... If you were going to fit in, you had to either be wearing Vuarnet or Generra or Z. Cavaricci. Anybody tracking with me? You liars. There are liars in here. I went to a school that had a lot of wealthy people in it. I just wasn't one of them. My single mother could not afford for me to dress like the rest of the school.

I so deeply wanted to fit in. I'll never forget. She went to one of these resale shops, and she found a pair of Generra pants. She's like, "Hey, I found Generra." I was like, "Sweet!" The only problem is they were green. They were real bright green. I thought, "Hey, it's Generra, though. I'm in the club if I get these." So we dropped the \$10, and we got the pants.

I'm walking up, kind of like, "This is it. This is my day. This is the day I enter into the cool club." Well sure enough, they were green. So I walk in, and the first thing I'm going to get is... I remember I had a kid come up to me, and he was like, "You know those are green, right? Those are green pants. Nobody is wearing green pants around here, bro. You're wearing green pants." To this day, I lie to you not, even on my Facebook wall I'll have old middle-school friends who will drop, "Green pants? You wear any green pants lately?"

Junior high, man. They're horrible. They'll just haze you. They will not let it go the rest of your life. It's just crazy. That's what I think of when I think of this scene here in Nehemiah. This is your classic junior high school right here, and the school bully shows up and just starts making fun of Nehemiah, just punkin' him. Look again at verse 2. All of the things he says... "Those feeble Jews," meaning they're weak. "You don't have the ability to do this. You guys are over the hill. There's no way you're going to be able to do this. You're a bunch of old men. You can't do this."

"Will they restore it unto themselves?" He's mocking their commitment here. "They're going to be the ones to do it? Are you serious? You're going to do this by yourself?" "Will you sacrifice to get this wall up?" Meaning, "The only way you're going to get this wall up is to sacrifice to your God. You'd better pray hard to your God." We'd put it this way: "You'd better get on your knees and pray to the God of wall making, because you don't have a snowball's chance of getting this up on your own." He's just punkin' them.

"Can you finish in a day?" He's mocking their intelligence, that they're overestimating this project. They think they can get it done so quickly. "You think you're going to get this done in a day? No way." "Will they revive the very stones to do this?" They're mocking their past defeat at the hands of the Babylonians. "Look at the rubble that's all around you. Shame all around you. What are you going to do? Are you going to rub your hands together and make all of this stuff that has all been burnt and charred come back to life? You don't have enough resources."

He's just making fun. It's junior high ridicule at its finest. You can just see all of the people around him just clapping, cheering him on. "You get them, Sanballat! That's awesome! Did you hear that? Did you hear what Sanballat did? Yeah, that's great!" They're just punkin' them. Then in verse 3 it gets worse. How does it get worse in junior high? Every bully always has this little skinny sidekick with him. Right?

Have you ever seen the movie *A Christmas Story*? Remember the bully? Remember that puny little brother, or whatever he was? The sidekick who comes along? The same thing happens here in verse 3. This guy Tobiah the Ammonite rises up and says, "Yeah, what are they building? If a fox goes up on it, it'll break down their stone wall! Ha!" You can just see them high-fiving again, going, "Man, that's sick! No you didn't! A fox? Tobiah, that's awesome!" They're just jeering. They're just making fun of them here.

If we go back to chapter 3... We saw that list of names, those 50 names. You have to recognize all of these people who are helping aren't professional stone builders here. Some of them were, but the vast majority of them weren't. That list tells you what trades they had. Do you know what one of the most popular trades was of this group? Perfumers. What in the world? You have a target on your head for being made fun of, because just the day before, do you know what you were doing? You were crushing up rose petals and putting them in alabaster jars. Then somebody comes along and gives you a trowel and some mortar and says, "Get after it, boys."

So here come Sanballat and Tobiah, just making fun of them. "You really think you're going to get this done. This work is so shoddy that what's going to happen is a little five-pound fox is going to jump up on the thing, and the whole thing is just going to fall apart," and they all just start laughing. It's ridicule at its finest. Here's the deal. It's not just empty ridicule. This isn't just making fun of them to make fun of them. If you notice it says it's fueled with anger. This is ridicule that was meant to discourage the people, that they would stop working, that they would cease their work and quit.

When that happens, you need to know, in the same way, when you step forward in obedience to God for a burden he has laid on your heart, or laid on the church's heart, for the sake of his name, the sake of the gospel, and you stand up in that moment, they are coming after you. The Sanballats and Tobiahs of the world are waiting to mock you. They're waiting to discourage you so you'll quit and won't fulfill what God has called you to. They are everywhere. I can't tell you the amount of hate mail and emails we get at this church. Every church I've gone to has been a part of it. Here is no exception.

Any time the Lord burdens us as a church to move forward in obedience with something... I don't care what it is. The elders are gathered around, and we're in prayer over something, and the Lord is just making it clear, "We have to go forward with this; we have to do this." The moment we go public with it, here comes the hate mail. It comes from all over. It comes from the outside. It comes from the inside. It's just always there, and it's always going to be there.

I'm going to give you a little secret, in case you're in this camp. If you write a critical statement on one of the Connect Cards in the back and you drop it in and don't put your name on it and you just take a shot at the church, do you know what we're going to do with it? We're going to throw it away. That's what we're

going to do. The ones who aren't going to put their names on it, who aren't going to step in with us and help us with this and all they want to do is take shots at the church, we're going to throw those away.

The amount of discouragement that brings from people who don't want to be a part and have a face-to-face conversation about it but just simply want to play armchair quarterback and throw grenades at the church on every decision we make, that can spread like a yeast. You know it too. Whatever it is, whether it's the folks on the outside, or folks in your own family, when God burdens you for something and you decide to act on it and the mockery starts coming, it can discourage you. So what do you do? What do you do when you have people like Sanballat and Tobiah in your life who want to jeer at you?

First, notice what Nehemiah doesn't do here. He doesn't volley back at them. He doesn't throw ridicule back in their faces, as they probably would deserve. He's silent before them. He doesn't give them what they gave him. Imagine this, by the way. Don't read verse 4 yet. What if verse 4, right after this, just simply said this: "And Nehemiah, giving them the finger, began to yell back at them with some terrible 'yo mama' jokes"?

You and I would want that there. We would want that verse there. We'd go, "Yeah! Get them!" But that's not what a man of God does. You don't entertain the mocking of others by mocking back. It was said of Jesus on the cross that while he was suffering he uttered no threats, but he entrusted himself to the One who judges righteously.

Nehemiah does the same here. He drops to his knees, and he runs to his God. He prays, and he asks God for God's divine spanking on these enemies. Watch this here in verses 4-5: **"Hear, O our God, for we are despised. Turn back their taunt on their own heads and give them up to be plundered in a land where they are captives. Do not cover their guilt, and let not their sin be blotted out from your sight, for they have provoked you to anger in the presence of the builders."**

That seems harsh. Right? That seems harsh, but this is the essence of his prayer. "God, this attack isn't on us. This attack is on you. We don't want you to overlook this. We want you to step in, because your name, God, is on the line with the rebuilding of this wall. So you step in, and you take care of us. You defend your honor and your name on these people's threats toward us." What do you do when persecution and ridicule come? You don't volley back. In silence you drop to your knees, and you trust yourself and your situation to the Lord.

Notice one other thing you do here. Notice in verse 6 the people simply chose not to believe their enemies' threats, but instead they chose to believe God and continue on with the work on the wall and get to work here. Look at verse 6: **"So we built the wall."** I didn't read that right. You need to read this almost

in a man voice. All right? "So we built the wall. That's what we did. I prayed to my God, and we built the wall." **"So we built the wall. And all the wall was joined together to half its height, for the people had a mind to work."**

That's amazing. Despite these threats and these insults and the ridicule, it actually didn't fracture or fragment the people, but it united them as one in faith. "No, no, no. God called us to this." So they got to work, and they knocked out 50 percent of the wall just like that, in unity. It's amazing what God's people can accomplish when they're unified for God's calls together. What did they do in response here? They persevered. They kept going. They prayed, they gave the insults to their God, and they kept their eyes fixed, and they just kept working.

Has God given you a holy discontent? Has God burdened you with something that is so great and so ambitious that would defend his name's sake? If that's you, or maybe that's your home group, or us as a church, can I just tell you, don't stop. Don't stop. Why? Because you have to be obedient and answer to God, not to the Sanballats and Tobiahs of this world. You don't have to answer to them. You have to answer to God. When God calls something to be, the only response is obedience, despite the persecution that may come.

What God calls, he will resource. What God requires, he will provide. So you just keep trusting, and you just keep persevering. Question, though. When you do, what do the enemies think of it? How do they respond after you keep going and don't pay them any attention? Look at verse 7: **"But when Sanballat and Tobiah and the Arabs and the Ammonites and the Ashdodites heard that the repairing of the walls of Jerusalem was going forward and that the breaches were beginning to be closed, they were very angry."** Uh-oh. Somebody is mad now. They done ticked somebody off.

Incidentally, though, notice where these folks are from. Sanballat is from Persia, so that's up north. Tobiah is an Ammonite. He's from the east. The Arabs were from down south. The Ashdodites are Philistines. They were from the west. So where is this persecution coming from? It's coming from all around. There is nowhere they can go that there is not persecution. It's all around them. They're surrounded by mocking enemies.

These enemies decide, "Okay, words and threats aren't enough anymore. Now we're going to resort to physical intimidation." Verse 8: **"And they all plotted together to come and fight against Jerusalem and to cause confusion in it."** Again, we move from simply ridicule to physical attacks that are pending. What do you do now? This next verse is going to speak both to the super-righteous pacifist and the lazy conformist. It's going to speak to both these worlds.

Notice what Nehemiah does in verse 9: **"And we prayed to our God and set a guard as a protection against them day and night."** In fear of attack, Nehemiah does two things together simultaneously. He prays, and he defends. He does both. In one sense he's not leaning on a shovel and praying for a hole. In the other sense he's not digging a hole in his own strength without leaning on God. He does both. He prays, and he defends. He's both spiritually dependent upon God and practically engaged with the people.

This is a great model for us of how to stand in the gap against persecution. Pray and defend. I'd love to tell you at this point that all of these Israelites who were coming together to help rebuild the wall were some spiritually bowed-up people, and no matter what attack comes their way they're not going to compromise; they're not going to bend to it at all. Unfortunately, but honestly, thankfully, they're just like us. They're just like you and me, these Jews who were working on the wall. They get afraid. They get discouraged. They even get tired, and they lose their strength.

Look at this in verses 10-11: **"In Judah it was said, 'The strength of those who bear the burdens is failing. There is too much rubble. By ourselves we will not be able to rebuild the wall.' And our enemies said, 'They will not know or see till we come among them and kill them and stop the work.'"** Doubt sets in now. Discouragement sets in now. They begin saying, "Can we really finish this thing?"

Truthfully, I'm thankful this is here, because this passage reminds me of me. It reminds me of my weakest moments of despair, my temptation to doubt, to not trust God, and to ultimately just want to fold when things get heavy and persecution sets in. That's where these people were at. They were discouraged by two things. They were discouraged by the amount of work that was in front of them, but they were also discouraged because of the rumors that were circulating about pending attacks from the enemy that were getting them scared.

In verse 12 we see where some of these rumors and attacks were coming from. **"At that time the Jews who lived near them came from all directions and said to us ten times, 'You must return to us.'"** Here are some Jews from the surrounding suburbs, and these Jews are interesting here. Evidently they weren't taking part in the building of the wall. They were sitting back in the suburb communities, and they weren't engaged in what was going on in the city.

All of a sudden, these folks become scared a little bit because they hear about these attacking enemies, so these folks, who would not align themselves with the reformation project, who would not grab a trowel and some mortar and get after it and start building, all of a sudden they come, and they don't just come once; they come 10 times and say to the builders, "Hey, I think you may need to quit. They're getting heated out here, and you may need to just come back. You need to retreat and come refuge with us, and maybe if you do, the enemy will stop, and maybe they won't attack us."

Have you ever known folks like that? Do we have folks like this in our own church? Maybe you have folks like this in your own family or your own community. The Lord births this holy discontent, lights you on fire for what he wants you to go after, and the moment you do, this persecution starts, and it's not just the folks on the outside who get you the most; it's the folks from your own camp. It's your own family. It's your own friends.

It's other believers who will not align themselves with what God has called you to do, but they are great at sitting back and vocalizing and verbalizing how displeased they are with what you're doing. They just love to play Monday-morning quarterback. They just love to take shots at you and tell you how everything you're doing is wrong. "You're wasting your time. This is foolish. I can't believe you're doing this." Their ultimate goal is to get you to quit.

I can assure you there are times, honestly, where there are more people from within our own camp who cause more problems in what God wants to do here than it is the people on the outside. That's a discouraging place to be. Believers who would rather just play it safe than align themselves with the radical call of Jesus Christ in the world around us. In addition to our enemies, we have the persecution from within. There's going to be more on that when we get to chapter 5.

In verse 13, what does Nehemiah do? What does he do at this point when he has all of these people who are being tempted to quit and just fold? What does a reformation leader do? Look at this in verse 13: **"So in the lowest parts of the space behind the wall, in open places, I stationed the people by their clans, with their swords, their spears, and their bows."**

Nehemiah does not retreat. He stays put, and he diverts some of the builders of the wall to stand in the gaps of the wall and prepare for battle if need be. It's a great picture of a persevering leader who does not fold under the pressure of opposition. Proverbs 24:10 says, "If you are faint in the day of distress, then your strength is small," or literally, "your strength is limited."

Meaning, if you do all this training and all this passion and all this prayer, and you're all prayed up and you have prepared and planned and you're ready to go, and then you hit the battlefield and the moment persecution comes you fold, it's as if all that was worthless. It's as if you never had strength to begin with. It's as if you never trained or prepared to begin with. I can't ever read this passage without thinking about that scene in *Saving Private Ryan*, where the dude is in the tower, and he's about to get killed by the enemy.

Then that one little scrawny guy is in the stairwell. Remember that? He has that big old gun. Huge. Tons of ammo just coming out of it. He has everything he needs to run right up there and stop the enemy from killing his buddy, but he just folds. He just starts weeping. It's like all the training you did, all the resources you've been given, the skill sets and this massive gun with all this ammo... All you have to do is run up there and do what you've been called to do. And he folds. It's Proverbs 24:10. "If you're faint in the day of distress, your strength is small." It doesn't matter.

For Nehemiah, though, God's glory is too great to stop. His work is too precious to him. Nehemiah is like, "No, we're not stopping. You want to come fight? Come get us. But we're going to get after this wall, and we'll be ready." In verse 14... I love this. Here's his *Braveheart* speech. If I had a Scottish accent right now... **"And I looked and arose and said to the nobles and to the officials and to the rest of the people, 'Do not be afraid of them. Remember the Lord, who is great and awesome, and fight for your brothers, your sons, your daughters, your wives, and your homes.'"**

It's Nehemiah saying, "This thing is too big to be centered around you. You're fighting for more than just yourself. This holy discontent the Lord has given us to go and repair what is broken is bigger than any one of us. It represents your families, your city, your community, your homes, the generations yet to come." I think I may have shared this before, but I'll never forget being at a conference where John Piper was speaking.

He was on a Q&A panel, and they asked him, "Why, John Piper, do you always preach so much about suffering in America? Why do you talk so much about doing missions when dying is gain from Minneapolis, Minnesota?" His response was so classic. He just said, "I'm not preaching on suffering for you. I'm preaching on it for your kids and your grandkids, because though you may feel that'll never happen here in America, the day is coming where Christianity will have to be defended and you will be a minority." Honestly, folks, turn on the TV.

No, you represent something far more than just yourself. This represents the generations that are yet to come. This is worth fighting for. In verse 15 we find out that when God becomes big, the enemies really do become small. Watch this, verse 15: **"When our enemies heard that it was known to us and that God had frustrated their plan, we all returned to the wall, each to his work."** God gets all the glory here. Nothing can thwart the work of God. In verse 16, notice how they continue on from this point forward.

"From that day on, half of my servants worked on construction, and half held the spears, shields, bows, and coats of mail. And the leaders stood behind the whole house of Judah, who were building on the wall. Those who carried burdens were loaded in such a way that each labored on the work with one hand and held his weapon with the other."

In one hand they carried a sword, and in the other hand they had a trowel. They were always like this. They were working that wall, building and defending at the same time. I always use this passage in marriage counseling as well. Every marriage must be fixed on both of these at the same time, building and defending. It's not one or the other; it's both. That's what they're doing here. In verse 20, Nehemiah gives these people one last charge of encouragement for the work ahead. **"In the place where you hear the sound of the trumpet, rally to us there. Our God will fight for us."**

"If you hear that trumpet sound, that means it's time for battle. You rally together, and we'll go after the enemy, but know this...this is your encouragement...our God will go for us. He'll fight for us." Essentially, that's how this chapter ends. The persecution will continue the next two chapters, but the question we ask is... *Why is this here?* What is it about this chapter we need to know? Church, I would simply tell us this: Opposition, persecution, is part and parcel to the Christian life and the Christian ministry.

Has God burdened you for something? Have you opened up the Scriptures and read what God says should and could be? Then have you looked around in our culture and realized that's not what is? Has he singled your heart for it? Has he pressed you into it? Has he brought you on your face in prayer? Has he given you a plan and a dream for how this thing could be fixed as you rally people around it? That's fantastic. Praise the Lord.

But rest assured the mockers are coming, and they will seek to take a big bucket of cold water and dump it on that passion, to get you to quit in your obedience to God. Those people are out there, and I would simply say the gospel is too great, the calling is too infinite, and his purposes are too glorious for us to quit. You preach anyway. You serve anyway. You build anyway. Amen? We have to be a persevering church. I want to close with Jesus' words to his own disciples in Matthew, chapter 10.

"Behold, I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves, so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves. Beware of men, for they will deliver you over to courts and flog you in their synagogues, and you will be dragged before governors and kings for my sake, to bear witness before them and the Gentiles. When they deliver you over, do not be anxious how you are to speak or what you are to say, for what you are to say will be given to you in that hour."

For it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you. Brother will deliver brother over to death, and the father his child, and children will rise against parents and have them put to death, and you will be hated by all for my name's sake. But the one who endures to the end will be saved."

Folks, that's not a condition; that's a fact. That's our hope. Great is your reward in heaven. Suffer well. You're not crazy for what you're serving for. You're not crazy. It'll all be made right in the end. Get after it. Let's pray.

Father, we are grateful that this chapter is here. If all you gave us was Nehemiah 1-3, we would be set up for some pretty false expectations. We'd be convinced this whole thing you've called us to in the Christian life and in the church would be smooth sailing, but, God, you have told us all throughout the Scriptures that we will suffer. That is normative. We *will* be persecuted.

So, God, not if but when that happens, would you strengthen us together as your church? Would you unify us? Would you put us on our knees in complete dependence for your intercession, both in and through us? God, would you strengthen us by your Spirit's power to persevere, to not fold at the first sign of opposition, but to press forward in faith, that you would get all the glory, that lives would be transformed from your wonderful gospel. It's in the name of Jesus Christ we pray, amen.

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