

NEHEMIAH: LESSONS IN REBUILDING

*How To Repair,
Restore And Rebuild
What's Broken In Your Life*

ERIC ELDER

Nehemiah: Lessons In Rebuilding
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ISBN 978-1-931760-27-0

DEDICATION

To my Dad, Robert Howell Elder,
who laid the foundation upon
which I'm now rebuilding.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

*Special thanks again to my wife, Lana,
who read and revised these devotionals,
infusing them with additional spiritual
insights and practical wisdom.*

Introduction

NEHEMIAH: LESSONS IN REBUILDING

Scripture Reading: Nehemiah 6:15-16

Is there something broken in your life that you'd like to fix, but don't know how? A broken marriage, a failing business, a dying relationship? Or is there something that's fallen apart that you'd like to rebuild: a house, a church, a ministry, a career? If so, then you'll love to learn some lessons in rebuilding from the biblical book of Nehemiah.

Nehemiah took on a rebuilding project that seemed imposing, impractical and nearly impossible. But when he told God what he wanted to do, and God gave him the green light to do it, God walked him through every step of the project. With God's help, Nehemiah and his people rebuilt a wall around the entire city of Jerusalem.

People told Nehemiah it was impossible; people tried to stop his work; people threatened his life. But Nehemiah pressed on. After many months of planning, praying,

fighting and building, the work was finally complete. When all the surrounding countries, including his enemies, saw what Nehemiah had done, they also knew *how* he got it done. The book of Nehemiah says:

“...they realized that this work had been done with the help of our God” (Nehemiah 6:16).

If you'd like to learn how Nehemiah did it, and how God helped him along the way, I invite you to join me in learning about this great rebuilding project as recorded in the book of Nehemiah. If you've got something on your heart that you want to rebuild, I'd like to encourage you in the weeks ahead to do it.

Here's a simple truth: if it matters to you, it matters to God. God cares about the details of your life. He cares about the things that you care about. That doesn't mean that He always wants you to head out and do whatever you want to do. Our plans are not always His plans.

But if He *doesn't* want you to do it, He'll let you know, if you're willing to listen. God has redirected many people's good plans so He can do something better through them, (see 2

Samuel 7, for instance, where King David wanted to build a house for God, but God wanted to build a house for David).

But if God *does* want you to go forward with your plans, He'd love to help you succeed. He is undoubtedly *for* you. He created you, He loves you, and He has an incredible plan for you life. You could say He has a "vested" interest in you, because He's invested so many gifts and skills into your life, because He has so many things He wants to do through you.

The hardest part of starting a project is often believing that God really wants you to do it; that He really cares, and that He'll really help you every step of the way. Once you know that, you're half-way there! After that, it's just a matter of figuring out the details of how to proceed. I hope this study encourages you on both levels, giving you both the confidence to believe in the project that's on your heart and giving you the practical steps to do it.

Nehemiah followed a series of practical steps to rebuild the wall around Jerusalem, steps which you can follow to rebuild the things in your own life that need rebuilding.

It involved much prayer, much planning, many people and fair amount of hard work. But He didn't have to do it alone: God helped him all along the way.

By the end of this study, I hope that you'll have the confidence and the tools that you need in order to reach the goal that Nehemiah reached as recorded in Nehemiah 6:15:

“So the wall was completed...” (Nehemiah 6:15).

Those words are stated with such simplicity that they could never do justice to the work involved, nor the accomplishment that was achieved. But they are stated in a way that when I hear them, I'm inspired that what Nehemiah was able to accomplish, I just might be able to accomplish, too, with God's help. My prayer is that they inspire you as well.

As we go through this study, I'll include a Scripture Reading to go with each devotional. I hope you'll read these passages along with what I write, because I can only touch on one or two thoughts in each devotional, but God has so much He wants to say to you! By the end of the study, when you're finished reading

each of these Scripture Readings, you'll have read through the entire book of Nehemiah.

I've also included a prayer that you can pray with me at the end of each devotional. I hope this helps you to begin a quiet time of prayer with God in response to what you've read. Here's today's prayer:

PRAYER: FATHER, OPEN MY EYES TO SEE WHAT NEHEMIAH SAW THAT HELPED HIM TO ACCOMPLISH WHAT WAS ON HIS HEART, AND HELP ME LEARN HOW TO DO THE SAME. IN JESUS' NAME, AMEN.

Lesson 1

SIT DOWN AND WEEP

Scripture Reading: Nehemiah 1:1-4

Where do you start to rebuild something in your life that's been broken? Whether you're trying to rebuild your marriage, family, city, nation, house, career, business, or whatever's important to you that's been lost, where can you possibly begin to undertake such an overwhelming project?

The best place to start is where Nehemiah started: he sat down and wept. When Nehemiah heard that the people in Jerusalem were in distress and the wall around their city was in ruins, the very first thing he did—before he prayed, before he ran back home, before he lifted even one stone to try to fix it—he sat down and wept.

Here's how Nehemiah says it, as recorded in the Bible:

"In the month of Kislev in the twentieth year, while I was in the citadel of Susa, Hanani, one of my brothers, came from Judah with some other

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men, and I questioned them about the Jewish remnant that survived the exile, and also about Jerusalem.

“They said to me, ‘Those who survived the exile and are back in the province are in great trouble and disgrace. The wall of Jerusalem is broken down, and its gates have been burned with fire.’

“When I heard these things, I sat down and wept”
(Nehemiah 1:1b-4a).

When something has fallen apart in your life, the best first step you can take toward rebuilding it is to sit down and weep over what's been lost, to let the depth of the destruction sink deep into your soul. Without a full understanding of what's been lost, it's very hard to take the steps you need to take to reclaim it. But once you grasp what's happened, along with all of its implications, God can use that understanding to help you take the rest of the steps you need to reverse what's been done.

I remember when I first heard about a couple who was going through adultery. I was stunned, shocked and numbed by what I'd heard. I could sit with them and listen, I

could pray for them, but I felt helpless about what else I could really do. It wasn't until several days later that the full weight of what I had heard finally hit me, along with all of its implications. When it did, I just sat down and wept, and wept and wept.

There was something about the tears that brought me to the place where I knew I had to do something to intervene in this situation. I knew that no matter what it took, I needed to step in and do what I could to help repair what had been broken. While people usually see tears as a sign of weakness, it was—ironically—the tears that gave me the strength to do what I needed to do.

What is it in your life that's been broken that you desperately wish could be repaired? What is it that you've lost that you wish you could restore, and how badly do you want to see it restored?

The best first step you could possibly take is to sit down and weep.

The rebuilding project I'm working on right now is the restoration of the farmhouse where I grew up. Our ministry bought it a few years ago to turn it into a personal retreat for people who want to renew their relation-

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ship with God. But the project didn't start with tearing down walls, or sanding the floors, or even signing the papers at the bank. It started one day when I visited the farm after it had fallen into disrepair.

I just knelt down on the grass and wept, praying that God would someday restore it, remembering these words from 2 Chronicles:

“If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land” (2 Chronicles 7:14).

It turned out to be the best first step I could take. And, if you follow Nehemiah's example, it could be the best first step you can take as well: to simply sit down and weep.

**PRAYER: FATHER, HELP ME TO WEEP OVER WHAT'S
BEEN LOST, AND GIVE ME YOUR STRENGTH TO
REBUILD IT AGAIN. IN JESUS' NAME, AMEN.**

Lesson 2

GET UP AND PRAY

Scripture Reading: Nehemiah 1:4-11

There's a scene in the middle of the classic Christmas movie It's A Wonderful Life that I hardly noticed in all the years that I've watched it—until I became a Christian, that is. The message of the movie is so powerful, I missed the fact that the whole chain of events that takes place throughout the movie starts with a prayer.

When George Bailey, the character played by Jimmy Stewart, finds himself at a loss for what to do next, he prays:

“God...God...Dear Father in Heaven, I’m not a praying man, but if You’re up there and You can hear me, show me the way. I’m at the end of my rope. Show me the way, God.”

And God does.

There's a time to weep over the losses in your life, but there's also a time to move forward. And the best way to move forward is to get up and pray. Although you may feel like

George Bailey at times, not even sure if God's there and listening at all, I assure you He is. God is there and God does care. Knowing that can make all the difference in your prayers.

If you think of prayer as just a time to be alone, or a time to talk to yourself and try to work things out on your own, then you may not have much incentive to pray at all. But if you truly believe that God is there, and that when you talk, He listens—and responds—then turning to prayer takes on a whole new meaning.

When the prophet Nehemiah suffered a great loss in his life, he sat down and wept, but the next thing he did was to get up and pray. Listen to the words of Nehemiah, and his prayer, as recorded in Nehemiah chapter 1:

“When I heard these things, I sat down and wept. For some days I mourned and fasted and prayed before the God of heaven. Then I said:

‘O LORD, God of heaven, the great and awesome God, who keeps his covenant of love with those who love Him and obey His commands, let Your ear be attentive and Your eyes open to hear

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the prayer Your servant is praying before You day and night for Your servants, the people of Israel. I confess the sins we Israelites, including myself and my father's house, have committed against You. We have acted very wickedly toward You. We have not obeyed the commands, decrees and laws You gave Your servant Moses.

Remember the instruction You gave Your servant Moses, saying, 'If you are unfaithful, I will scatter you among the nations, but if you return to me and obey my commands, then even if your exiled people are at the farthest horizon, I will gather them from there and bring them to the place I have chosen as a dwelling for My Name.'

'They are Your servants and Your people, whom You redeemed by Your great strength and Your mighty hand. O Lord, let Your ear be attentive to the prayer of this Your servant and to the prayer of Your servants who delight in revering Your name. Give Your servant success today by granting him favor in the presence of this man' " (Nehemiah 1:4-11).

Nehemiah knew that God was there, that God was listening, and that God knew best

what to do next. Nehemiah mourned, fasted and prayed. He confessed his own sins, as well as those of his countrymen. And he reminded himself—and God—of God’s promises, asking for God’s favor as he moved forward.

I don’t know whether you’re more like George Bailey, who didn’t think of himself as a praying man, or more like Nehemiah, who prayed regularly, or somewhere in between. But I do know that whoever you are, you can pray to your Father in heaven and He will hear you—and He will respond. That prayer could very well be the one that starts the whole chain of events of the rest of your life.

Come to God today and pray, even if it’s as simple as saying, “I’m at the end of my rope. Show me the way, God.” And He will.

PRAYER: FATHER, I’M AT THE END OF MY ROPE AND I DON’T KNOW WHAT TO DO NEXT. I CONFESS MY SINS TO YOU. SHOW ME THE WAY, LORD, AND HELP ME TO KNOW WHAT TO DO NEXT. IN JESUS’ NAME,
AMEN.

Lesson 3

ACKNOWLEDGE YOUR POSITION

Scripture Reading: Nehemiah 1:11b

If God has called you to rebuild something in your life, do you have any idea why He called you to do it? Why He didn't call on someone else?

Maybe you don't feel particularly qualified to undertake the project God has put on your heart. If so, I'd like to encourage you to take a closer look at a few of the reasons God may have called you, *specifically*.

Nehemiah may have thought that he was an unlikely candidate to rebuild the wall around Jerusalem. As far as we know, he wasn't an architect, a bricklayer or a gate builder. He was, as he tells us at the end of Nehemiah chapter 1, a cupbearer:

"I was cupbearer to the king" (Nehemiah 1:11b).

As cupbearer to the king, Nehemiah was a servant in the king's court, serving the king

Acknowledge Your Position

his wine. Yet God called him to undertake one of the greatest rebuilding projects documented in the Bible. He may have wondered why God called him specifically, too. In fact, just a few verses later, when Nehemiah approached the king with his idea, Nehemiah says,

“I was very much afraid” (Nehemiah 2:2b).

He had a lot to fear as a servant to a king in a foreign land. Yet there was something about Nehemiah’s position that made him a more likely candidate than even he may have realized. As cupbearer, Nehemiah was in a highly trusted position. The king literally had to trust his cupbearer with his life, because anyone might try to poison him at any time. The cupbearer helped to keep the king alive.

As you can read throughout the rest of the book of Nehemiah, you’ll see that God used the trust that Nehemiah had earned to give him great favor with the king. God moved on the king’s heart to provide Nehemiah with the resources he needed to rebuild the wall, to send him letters of safe passage back to Jerus-

alem, and to eventually appoint Nehemiah as the governor of the rebuilt city.

So even though Nehemiah felt “very much afraid,” God had very good reasons for choosing him! Nehemiah acknowledged his position, both the fear he felt and willingness he showed to use whatever favor God had given him to advance this project.

Queen Esther faced the same dilemma when her people were about to be destroyed. As wife of another king, she was in a unique position to ask him to overturn a wrongful law of the land. Yet, she also knew that approaching the king with such a request could mean death for her if the king felt insulted by her approach. Still, Esther’s cousin Mordecai reminded her of her unique position, saying,

“And who knows but that you have come to royal position for such a time as this?” (Esther 4:14b).

So Esther acknowledged her position, recognizing both the incredible *impossibility* and the incredible *possibility* of what God had laid before her. In the end, she concluded that she would go to the king no matter what, saying,

Acknowledge Your Position

“And if I perish, I perish” (Esther 4:16b).

God used both her humility and her unique position to save the lives of her people.

Maybe you feel like there's no way you can move forward with what God's called you to do. But know this: if God has put a special project on your heart, know that He has a very good reason for choosing you! And if you look closely at some of His reasons, they may just give you the confidence you need to move forward, too.

Maybe it's simply because you have a stronger desire to see it succeed than anyone else. Maybe it's because the project involves people or places close to you, so you have a greater vested interest in the outcome than anyone else. Maybe it's because of the unique position God has given you in life, a position that gives you access to resources others may not have.

Whatever the reasons, acknowledge your position, recognizing both the incredible impossibility and the incredible possibility of what God has laid before you. Then ask Him for help to move past your fears and move on with the task at hand.

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PRAYER: FATHER, HELP ME TO SEE WHY YOU HAVE CALLED ME, SPECIFICALLY, TO THIS TASK. GIVE ME INSIGHT SO THAT I CAN GET THE COURAGE I NEED TO MOVE PAST MY FEARS. IN JESUS' NAME, AMEN.

Lesson 4

FIND YOUR RESOURCES

Scripture Reading: Nehemiah 2:1-10

Has God called you to do something that's bigger than you can pull off yourself? Then it's time to call on Him to help you find the resources you need from somewhere else.

It's hard to ask for help, though. But the good news is that when you ask God first, He'll show you who to ask next. Listen to this conversation that Nehemiah had with King Artaxerxes, just after Nehemiah had been praying to God about rebuilding the wall around Jerusalem:

"In the month of Nisan in the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes, when wine was brought for him, I took the wine and gave it to the king. I had not been sad in his presence before; so the king asked me, 'Why does your face look so sad when you are not ill? This can be nothing but sadness of heart.'

"I was very much afraid, but I said to the king, 'May the king live forever! Why should my face

not look sad when the city where my fathers are buried lies in ruins, and its gates have been destroyed by fire?

“The king said to me, ‘What is it you want?’

“Then I prayed to the God of heaven, and I answered the king, ‘If it pleases the king and if your servant has found favor in his sight, let him send me to the city in Judah where my fathers are buried so that I can rebuild it.’

“Then the king, with the queen sitting beside him, asked me, ‘How long will your journey take, and when will you get back?’ It pleased the king to send me; so I set a time.

“I also said to him, ‘If it pleases the king, may I have letters to the governors of Trans-Euphrates, so that they will provide me safe-conduct until I arrive in Judah? And may I have a letter to Asaph, keeper of the king’s forest, so he will give me timber to make beams for the gates of the citadel by the temple and for the city wall and for the residence I will occupy?’ And because the gracious hand of my God was upon me, the king granted my requests. So I went to the governors of Trans-Eu-

phrates and gave them the king's letters. The king had also sent army officers and cavalry with me” (Nehemiah 2:1-9).

Even though Nehemiah was “very much afraid,” God opened a door for him with the king, and Nehemiah walked through it. I can’t guarantee that God will send a king to give you what you need, but it may surprise you who God does put in your path.

I was afraid to ask for help when we began renovating Clover Ranch, but I knew there was no way we could do it on our own. So when I asked God for help, He began to put me in touch with people who had the resources I needed to move forward. One person knew about plumbing and came along to help; another knew about electricity and offered a hand.

At one point, God brought someone with significant resources at their disposal, but I was too afraid to ask for their help. I didn’t want to seem presumptuous. I didn’t want to jeopardize our new friendship. I didn’t want to hear another “No,” as I had often heard before. But God reminded me that this was His project, not just mine. So I asked—and

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God answered. It turned out to be the most significant contribution to the project to date.

There's a story told about Mother Teresa, who went walking door-to-door to raise money for her orphans. At one door, when she asked for help, a man spat in her face. She took her habit, wiped her face clean and said,

"Well, that's for me. That's for my humility. Now how about something for the children?"

The man gave her some money.

If God has put a project on your heart, remember that He wants you to succeed even more than you do. My prayer for you is that when God opens a door in front of you, you'll have the courage you need to walk through it and find the resources you need.

PRAYER: FATHER, HELP ME TO FIND THE RESOURCES I NEED TO ACCOMPLISH WHAT YOU'VE PUT ON MY HEART. WHEN IT JUST SEEMS TOO OVERWHELMING FOR ME TO DO ON MY OWN, GIVE ME THE BOLDNESS TO ASK FOR HELP. IN JESUS' NAME, AMEN.

Lesson 5

EXAMINE THE SITUATION

Scripture Reading: Nehemiah 2:10-16

There will come a time when it's important to enlist the help of others to do all that God has called you to do. But there's also a time when you need to talk to God, and God alone, about your project, letting Him help you to examine the situation at hand so you can take the next steps together.

Nehemiah reached this point when he arrived in Jerusalem. There were already a couple of people who had heard about what he wanted to do, and they weren't happy about it. Nehemiah says:

“When Sanballat the Horonite and Tobiah the Ammonite official heard about this, they were very much disturbed that someone had come to promote the welfare of the Israelites” (Nehemiah 2:10).

So Nehemiah took his next steps alone. He had heard about the condition of the walls surrounding Jerusalem from others, but now

was the time for him to see the site for himself. He went at night, taking with him only a few trusted friends. Here's how Nehemiah describes it as chapter 2 continues:

"I went to Jerusalem, and after staying there three days I set out during the night with a few men. I had not told anyone what my God had put in my heart to do for Jerusalem. There were no mounts with me except the one I was riding on.

"By night I went out through the Valley Gate toward the Jackal Well and the Dung Gate, examining the walls of Jerusalem, which had been broken down, and its gates, which had been destroyed by fire. Then I moved on toward the Fountain Gate and the King's Pool, but there was not enough room for my mount to get through; so I went up the valley by night, examining the wall. Finally, I turned back and reentered through the Valley Gate. The officials did not know where I had gone or what I was doing, because as yet I had said nothing to the Jews or the priests or nobles or officials or any others who would be doing the work" (Nehemiah 2:11-16).

As important as it would soon be for Ne-

Examine The Situation

hemiah to tell others about his plans, it was also important that he see for himself the extent of the work involved beforehand. So Nehemiah examined the situation, looking over his project from one end to the other and getting a good grasp of what needed to be done.

I remember hearing about a couple who had gotten a divorce. God put it in my heart to pray that they would be reconciled. But as I talked to others, I heard something totally different: their family didn't want them to be reconciled, their friends didn't want them to be reconciled, and neither the husband nor wife wanted to be reconciled!

I had to go back to God and listen carefully to what He wanted me to do for them, which was to continue to pray for their reconciliation. So I kept up with what God had put in my heart to do until one day, to the shock of their family and friends, and even to themselves, they were finally reconciled and remarried to each other once again. (*If you'd like to hear more of their story, you can watch it on The Ranch website at www.theranch.org. In the Stories section, click on the title "It's Never Too Late."*)

The time will come when it's wise and crit-

ical to involve others. But there are also times when you need to spend time with God, and God alone, as you honestly examine the situation.

It could be easy to get discouraged at this point, with so much to do and with others possibly opposing your efforts. But I'd like to point you back to something Nehemiah said as he set out to examine the situation in front of him. He wrote:

“I had not told anyone what my God had put in my heart to do for Jerusalem” (Nehemiah 2:12b).

Nehemiah knew that rebuilding the walls wasn't just a good idea, it was God's idea—an idea that God had put in his heart. Let God encourage you today as you carefully examine the situation at hand. Let Him show you what needs to be done next. Then trust Him to walk beside you as you move forward, every step of the way.

PRAYER: FATHER, I COME TO YOU TODAY TO ASK FOR YOUR HELP AS I EXAMINE THE SITUATION IN FRONT OF ME. LET ME SEE THE FULL SCOPE OF

Examine The Situation

WHAT NEEDS TO BE DONE SO I CAN KNOW WHAT TO
DO NEXT. IN JESUS' NAME, AMEN.

Lesson 6

GATHER OTHERS TO HELP

Scripture Reading: Nehemiah 2:17-20

Do you ever feel like you're all alone in the world? That no one else cares about the things that God has put on your heart? That if anything is ever going to get done, you're going to have to do it yourself?

This is one of Satan's best strategies to discourage you: to make you feel isolated, alone, without help and without hope. Let me assure you today, you're not alone. There's always hope. And God wants to help you more than you know. The Bible says:

“For the eyes of the LORD range throughout the earth to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to him” (2 Chronicles 16:9).

Nehemiah knew the importance of spending time alone with God. Up to this point, Nehemiah had only told a few trusted friends about his plans, even inspecting the walls of Jerusalem at night so he could see for himself

what needed to be done. But when it was time to begin the work, he gathered others to help: the Jews, priests, nobles, officials and all the others who would be doing the work. When the time was right, Nehemiah told the others of his plans, as recorded in Nehemiah chapter 2:

“Then I said to them, ‘You see the trouble we are in: Jerusalem lies in ruins, and its gates have been burned with fire. Come, let us rebuild the wall of Jerusalem, and we will no longer be in disgrace.’ I also told them about the gracious hand of my God upon me and what the king had said to me.

“They replied, ‘Let us start rebuilding.’ So they began this good work” (Nehemiah 2:17-18).

There were still nay sayers who opposed the work: Sanballat the Horonite, Tobiah the Ammonite and Geshem the Arab. They mocked and ridiculed the Israelites, but Nehemiah simply replied:

“The God of heaven will give us success. We His servants will start rebuilding, but as for you, you

have no share in Jerusalem or any claim or historic right to it” (Nehemiah 2:20).

Nehemiah was ready to move forward—no matter what—and God moved on the hearts of others to help him along the way. There may be nay sayers in your life who aren’t lifting a finger to help you right now. But that doesn’t mean you have to go it alone. Gather others to help: pastors, spouses, friends, relatives, volunteers, paid workers, youth groups. If you get a “No” from one or two or three or more, just keep asking others, or come back to the same ones at a later time.

I remember asking one man to share his testimony at an event we were putting on in town. I really felt God had prompted me to ask him. He said, “No, there’s no way I could do that.” I went home and prayed again and God kept putting his name on my heart. I went back to him the next week and asked him again. Without batting an eye, he said, “Sure, I’d be glad to do it!” His testimony turned out to be one of the highlights of the event.

I couldn’t count the number of times I’ve felt like I was all alone in what God had called

me to do. But the truth is, I also couldn't count the number of times God has sent people to help me to do what He's put on my heart to do. It's taken persistence, time and a continual realization that there's no way I would be able to do it on my own. That, plus knowing that God is for me—not against me—in the plans that He's put on my heart, has helped me to continue to gather others to help along the way.

Don't let Satan keep you down. Don't give in when he tries to magnify the negative and minimize the positive in your life. Keep coming back to God and let Him strongly support you in what you're doing. Take courage from the story of Nehemiah and keep asking others for help. I pray for you that like Nehemiah, "the God of heaven will give you success."

PRAYER: FATHER, HELP ME KNOW WHO TO ASK FOR HELP. HELP ME HAVE THE WISDOM AND THE DISCRETION TO ASK THOSE WHO CAN TRULY HELP WITH MY SITUATION. IN JESUS' NAME, AMEN.

Lesson 7

START REBUILDING

Scripture Reading: Nehemiah 3:1-32

You know how to eat an elephant, right? One bite at a time. It's the same with any big project that God has called you to do. While it may seem overwhelming, there comes a time—after all the thinking and planning and praying—that you just have to take the plunge and start rebuilding.

Nehemiah and his friends were finally ready to take the plunge themselves in Nehemiah chapter 3, when they began to rebuild the walls around Jerusalem, section by section and gate by gate.

Nehemiah gives a detailed description of all they did, starting with the work of Eliashib the high priest and his fellow priests:

"Eliashib the high priest and his fellow priests went to work and rebuilt the Sheep Gate. They dedicated it and set its doors in place, building as far as the Tower of the Hundred, which they dedicated, and as far as the Tower of Hananel. The

men of Jericho built the adjoining section, and Zaccur son of Imri built next to them. The Fish Gate was rebuilt by the sons of Hassenaah. They laid its beams and put its doors and bolts and bars in place. Meremoth son of Uriah, the son of Hakkoz, repaired the next section. Next to him Meshullam son of Berekiah, the son of Meshezabel, made repairs, and next to him Zadok son of Baana also made repairs..." (Nehemiah 3:1-4).

This detailed description of the work continues for the rest of the chapter. They repaired the Jeshanah Gate, the Broad Wall, the Tower of the Ovens, the Valley Gate, the Dung Gate. They worked on the Fountain Gate, the wall of the Pool of Siloam, and up to the House of the Heroes. They continued on to the Water Gate, the Horse Gate, the East Gate, the Inspection Gate, and the Sheep Gate. As you read the report, you can tell this is one of the largest building projects undertaken in the Bible. And many of the gates in Jerusalem today still have these same names!

You could say it all started back when God first put the idea into Nehemiah's heart. But the work of his hands was just as important.

After thinking and planning and praying

about your own project, you may have some good ideas for what needs to be done. But sometimes it's taking that first step of actual work that's the most important. They say that a journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step, and today may be the day for you to take yours.

What specific action step can you take today to advance the project that God has put on your heart? If you've been blocked at various points along the way, what other steps can you take in the mean time? If you're waiting on God, that's fine. But if He's waiting on you, then you'd better get going!

When I first began my Internet ministry, I went to pick out a computer. I had just quit my job and didn't have a computer of my own, so I needed to get one to begin the work. So I shopped and shopped, checking prices and features, trying to find just the right one.

At one point, I felt like God was saying: "I've called you to walk alongside Me in this, but My stride is long, so you'd better get going if you want to keep up!" I knew I'd better get moving! Twelve years and several computers later, I still have more steps to take to keep up

with all that God wants me to do. I just need to keep moving forward, too, step by step.

Have you ever seen a round tuit? If not, join the club. They must be pretty rare, though, and they must be pretty valuable, too, because when people talk about the big dreams they want to accomplish in their lives, they often add, “But I’ve just never gotten a round tuit.” :)

Maybe today’s your lucky day and you’ll finally get “a round tuit” for yourself! Look around and see what specific steps you can take today toward fulfilling the dream God has put on your heart. Then take it!

PRAYER: FATHER, I WANT TO KEEP UP WITH YOU AND YOUR PLANS FOR MY LIFE. HELP ME TO TAKE WHATEVER STEPS I NEED TO TAKE TODAY TO ADVANCE THE PROJECT YOU’VE PUT ON MY HEART.
IN JESUS’ NAME, AMEN.

Lesson 8

PRAY AGAINST OPPOSITION

Scripture Reading: Nehemiah 4:1-5

Has anyone ever laughed when you told them about your “good idea”? It can be disheartening, but it doesn’t have to destroy your plans. Just keep going back to the Lord in prayer, putting your hope and trust in Him.

I remember someone laughed at me when I told them I wanted to start a ministry on the Internet. She said, “But not everyone has a connection to the Internet!” I already had doubts of my own, and her comments didn’t help.

But in the same instant, God brought to mind the incredible potential He had shown me for the idea. I had put a great deal of thought into how it could work, and I knew the idea had merit. More importantly, I felt God had His hand in the idea. Somehow I found the courage to respond to her remark by saying, “You’re right, not everyone has a connection to the Internet yet. But I’ll start with the 30 million that are connected and

work my way up from there!” (That was back in 1995 when the Internet was just taking off for public use. As I write this, there are now over 1.5 billion people connected to the Internet—and counting!)

It’s hard to face opposition to your ideas especially when you have you’re just getting started. But by going back to the Lord in prayer, He can help you through it.

People laughed at Nehemiah and his fellow Jews when they had the “good idea” to rebuild the wall of Jerusalem, too. Here’s what a couple of people said to them as they began rebuilding:

“When Sanballat heard that we were rebuilding the wall, he became angry and was greatly incensed. He ridiculed the Jews, and in the presence of his associates and the army of Samaria, he said, ‘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, ‘What they are building—if even a fox climbed up on it, he would break down their wall of stones!’ ” (Nehemiah 4:1-4).

Nehemiah and his fellow Jews may have had their own doubts, too, but they didn't let the ridicule discourage them. They simply went to the Lord in prayer. They prayed:

“Hear us, O 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” (Nehemiah 4:4-5).

It was a pretty strongly worded prayer, but the fact is they prayed. They put their hope and trust in their God to vindicate them in their cause. You may prefer to pray as Jesus prayed, asking God to bless those who don't yet understand what you're attempting to do, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing” (Luke 23:34). In any case, turn to the Lord in prayer.

God vindicated Nehemiah, and time after time, God has vindicated me. Sometimes He even blesses those who have previously laughed at my ideas in ways they couldn't have imagined.

When I used to work for a secular com-

pany, I promoted a project that would allow the employees to work from home. This was before the idea of “telecommuting” had caught on, and very few people had such an opportunity. One man in my company told me point blank it was dumb idea and would never work. But I went forward with the project and ten of us moved home to test it out. Within six months it was shown to be so successful the company allowed more people to apply to do the same.

This man who had laughed at my idea decided to apply. He moved back to his own hometown, about four hours away from where he used to work, and he later told me what a blessing it was to him and his family, and how thankful he was that our project had proved him wrong.

The next time someone laughs at your “good idea,” just turn your heart back to God in prayer.

PRAYER: FATHER, HELP ME HAVE THE WISDOM TO
PRAY TO YOU WHEN OTHERS LAUGH AT WHAT
YOU’VE CALLED ME TO DO. BLESS THEM, LORD,
EVEN IN SPITE OF WHAT THEY ARE SAYING. IN
JESUS’ NAME, AMEN.

Lesson 9

WORK WITH ALL YOUR HEART

Scripture Reading: Nehemiah 4:6

I was praying about my goals for the new year when I felt God saying to me, “Finish the ones from last year.” Three projects popped into my head that I’ve been working on but haven’t finished yet. I wrote those down as my “new” goals for this year—to finish the old ones!

It’s easy to look at what’s “undone” in your life, but it’s just as important to look at what has been done already, to see just how far God has brought you.

Nehemiah paused in the midst of his story about rebuilding the walls around Jerusalem to take note of what had been accomplished so far. It’s just one sentence, but it’s worth noting what he says:

“So we rebuilt the wall till all of it reached half its height, for the people worked with all their heart” (Nehemiah 4:6).

The people had worked with all their heart and now the wall was half-way finished. I don't know if you're the type of person who sees half a glass of water as half-full or half-empty. But today I want to encourage you to look at the projects you're working on as half-full. I also want to encourage you to dive into the rest of the project with all your heart.

In the movie, *Fireproof*, there's a scene where the husband in the movie confesses that he was just going through the motions of trying to save his marriage, but that his heart wasn't really in it. Through prayer and a realization of just what this meant to him and his family, he was able to get his heart back in the game. Rather than working out of duty, he began to work "with all his heart" like those in Nehemiah's story did. From that moment on, the husband's work changed from a chore to a passion, and ended up saving his marriage in the end.

One way to help get your heart back in the game is to think about how far God has brought you already.

I like to keep a prayer journal and I often want to dive in by writing out all the questions that are on my mind, asking God for His help

in walking me through each day. But some time ago I decided to make it a habit to always begin my journal with the words, “Father, thank You...” and then write down several things for which I was truly thankful. God will often bring to mind things He’s done for me, and the progress He’s helped me to make so far. Once I see the glass as half-full, it prepares my heart to be ready to do whatever God says to fill the rest of the glass.

What has God brought you through this past year? What has He helped you to accomplish? What projects, goals, ambitions, dreams, desires were you able to start? You may want to sit down for a few minutes today and just thank God for the progress you’ve made up to this point. You may even want to write down some of the things He’s walked you through that you never thought you’d be able to do. Once you see how far you’ve come, God can give you the heart to keep moving forward. Then work at it with all your heart. As the Apostle Paul told the Colossians:

“Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men, since you

know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving” (Colossians 3:23-24).

Whether you’re moving forward with brand new goals, or moving forward to finish some old ones, remember that God really is for you in accomplishing what He’s put on your heart to do. He wants you to succeed at it. He wants to walk with you through it. He wants to help you day by day. So take some time to remember what God has done for you so far, then “work with all your heart” to finish the good work He’s put on your heart to do.

PRAYER: FATHER, THANK YOU FOR ALL YOU’VE HELPED ME TO ACCOMPLISH THIS FAR. I PRAY THAT YOU WOULD HELP ME TO “WORK WITH ALL MY HEART” TO FINISH THE WORK YOU’VE PUT ON MY HEART. IN JESUS’ NAME, AMEN.

Lesson 10

DON'T BE AFRAID

Scripture Reading: Nehemiah 4:7-14

Many times in the Bible, when things were getting tense, someone would often show up on the scene and say the words, “Don’t be afraid.”

What I’ve found interesting in reading through these stories is that the person speaking is not saying, “There’s nothing to fear.” They’re saying, “Don’t be afraid,” even though the danger is very real. Real threats are at hand. Real attacks are on their way. Real lives are at stake. It’s not like telling your kids to go back to bed because there’s no such thing as monsters. In these stories, the “monsters” are very real, just like they may be in your life right now, too.

So, if the danger is real, why would God send angels or others to tell people, “Don’t be afraid?” The reason is that even though the danger is real, so is God. As someone has said, “Don’t tell God how big your storm is. Tell the storm how big your God is.”

When Nehemiah and his people faced life-

threatening attacks in Nehemiah chapter 4, Nehemiah said:

“Don’t be afraid of them. Remember the Lord, who is great and awesome...” (Nehemiah 4:14a).

If you look at the threats that were being made against Nehemiah and his people, you'll see that Nehemiah wasn't trying to discount the threats, or make light of them, or say that they didn't exist, like fairy-tale monsters in a closet. He wanted to remind them to remember the Lord, the one who had called them to this project in the first place.

As you read the story, you'll see that the situation looked bleak—and it was bleak. When those who opposed the rebuilding of the wall around Jerusalem heard that the repairs 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” (Nehemiah 4:8-9).

“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' " (Nehemiah 4:10-12).

It was in the midst of these very discouraging times that Nehemiah took bold action and spoke bold words:

"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 brothers, your sons and your daughters, your wives and your homes' " (Nehemiah 4:13-14).

I'm not here today to tell you there's nothing to fear. Real attacks may come. There is fighting throughout the world, and even Israel is under attack once again. For you, it may be that your finances are crumbling. Your health

may be failing. The adulteress who threatened your marriage may be back in the picture. But as real as those threats may be, I want to tell you today that God is just as real. I want to tell you today: “Remember the Lord, who is great and awesome, and fight for your brothers, your sons and your daughters, your wives and your homes.”

When fatigue sets in, remind yourself that “this matters.”

As the Lord told Jehosephat:

“Do not be afraid or discouraged because of this vast army. For the battle is not yours, but God’s”
(2 Chronicles 20:15).

As the Lord told the Israelites through the prophet Isaiah:

“Do not be afraid, for I am with you.” (Isaiah 43:5a).

As the Lord told Daniel:

“Do not be afraid, Daniel. Since the first day that you set your mind to gain understanding and to humble yourself before your God, your words were

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heard, and I have come in response to them”
(Daniel 10:12).

Don't be afraid. Remember the Lord, who is great and awesome. Keep putting your trust in Him.

PRAYER: FATHER, THANK YOU FOR PROMISING TO NEVER LEAVE ME NOR FORSAKE ME. HELP ME TO REMEMBER YOU TODAY SO THAT I DON'T HAVE TO BE AFRAID. IN JESUS' NAME, AMEN.

Lesson 11

FIGHT FOR WHAT YOU HOLD DEAR

Scripture Reading: Nehemiah 4:14-23

One of the most powerful scenes in the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy comes in the final movie, when Aragorn implores his men not to give in to fear, but to fight for what they hold dear. Riding his horse back and forth in front of his troops, Aragorn calls out:

“I see in your eyes the same fear that would take the heart of me. A day may come when the courage of men fails, when we forsake our friends and break all bonds of fellowship, but it is not this day. An hour of woes and shattered shields, when the age of men comes crashing down! But it is not this day! This day we fight! By all that you hold dear on this good Earth, I bid you stand, Men of the West!”

If you find yourself overwhelmed by fears today, don't let them take your heart! If God

has called you into this battle, don't give in to your fears. Fight for what you hold dear. Fight for your faith. Fight for your marriage. Fight for your children, your business, your friends, your family, your neighbors, your ministry, your health, your career.

Fight the way Nehemiah encouraged his people to fight when they came under attack: Nehemiah called out:

“Don’t be afraid of them. Remember the Lord, who is great and awesome, and fight for your brothers, your sons and your daughters, your wives and your homes” (Nehemiah 4:14).

Nehemiah didn't discount that the battle was real. He encouraged the people to remember the Lord who had called them into this battle in the first place. But Nehemiah didn't stop there. He didn't throw up his hands in despair and act as if the battle would go away on its own. He called on his people to prepare for battle.

He called for half the men to keep on working, and he equipped the other half of the men with spears, shields, bows and armor to stand guard behind the workers. He had

those who carried materials do their work with one hand and hold a weapon in the other. And he had those who worked with both their hands still wear a sword at their side.

He had a man stay with him at all times who could sound a trumpet. He knew that the work was extensive and the workers were widely separated from each other, so he told them,

“Wherever you hear the sound of the trumpet, join us there. Our God will fight for us!” (Nehemiah 4:20).

Even though Nehemiah fully trusted that God would fight *for* them, he still armed his people so that God could fight *through* them. If God has called you into this battle, He's certainly willing to fight for you. But don't be surprised if He chooses to fight through you, too!

Nehemiah and his people worked from the first light of dawn till the stars came out, and they stayed inside the city at night. Neither he nor his brothers nor the guards with him even took off their clothes. Each had their weapon, even when they went for water.

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Nehemiah's plan worked, and God's plan kept moving forward. The same wisdom that worked for Nehemiah can work for you, too. Look to the Lord and follow His lead.

Work with one hand and hold a weapon in the other. If the work is too extensive and spread out, sound the trumpet and call for help. Work all day, but stay in at night. Don't let your guard down, even when you go for water.

A day may come when the courage of men fails...but it is not this day! This day we fight! Don't give in to fear. Don't give up on the work God has called you to do. And don't turn your back on the battle, either. At the risk of sounding repetitive, I want to repeat Nehemiah's quote just one more time!

"Remember the Lord, who is great and awesome, and fight for your brothers, your sons and your daughters, your wives and your homes."

Don't give in to fear. Fight for what you hold dear!

PRAYER: FATHER, HELP ME TO FIGHT THE GOOD FIGHT OF FAITH TODAY. HELP ME TO LOOK TO

Fight For What You Hold Dear

YOU SO THAT I CAN FOLLOW YOUR LEAD. SHOW
ME WHAT I CAN DO TODAY TO FIGHT FOR WHAT I
HOLD DEAR. IN JESUS' NAME, AMEN.

Lesson 12

HELP THOSE WHO ARE HELPING YOU

Scripture Reading: Nehemiah 5

There was a creative ad campaign a few years ago called, “Don’t Almost Give.” Its purpose was to raise people’s awareness of the needs around them, encouraging people to help meet those needs.

One ad showed an elderly woman sitting alone in her chair, staring blankly ahead. The narrator said,

“This is Sarah Watkins. A lot of people almost helped her. One almost cooked for her. Another almost drove her to the doctor. Still another almost stopped by to say ‘Hello.’ They almost helped. They almost gave of themselves. But almost giving is the same as not giving at all.”

The series of ads concluded with the words,

“Remember all those times you almost helped?”

You meant to, but somehow you forgot. You were too busy and it slipped your mind. Well, it's only human, this almost giving. But if you almost gave, there's a good chance everybody else almost gave, too. Don't almost give. Give."

In the story of Nehemiah, there was a point where Nehemiah became aware of the needs of those who were helping him rebuild the wall around Jerusalem. When Nehemiah recognized their need, he didn't just "almost give." He gave, in terms of both his personal resources and his influence over others, to help ease their burden.

Nehemiah found out that the Jews who were working with him were having to mortgage their fields, their vineyards and their homes just to get food to survive. They were selling their sons and daughters into temporary slavery until they could pay off their debts. Unfortunately, it was their fellow Jews who were buying these slaves and charging interest on the loans.

When Nehemiah heard these things, he was angry. The Jewish law was clear that while there was nothing wrong with lending money to their brothers in need, the Jews

were not to charge interest to their fellow Jews, which they were doing. And by holding their property as collateral, those who needed the money could not continue making a living. So Nehemiah gathered the nobles who were making these loans and told them:

“What you are doing is not right. Shouldn’t you walk in the fear of our God to avoid the reproach of our Gentile enemies? I and my brothers and my men are also lending the people money and grain. But let the exacting of usury [charging interest] stop! Give back to them immediately their fields, vineyards, olive groves and houses, and also the usury you are charging them—the hundredth part of the money, grain, new wine and oil” (Nehemiah 5:9-11).

The people responded:

“We will give it back. And we will not demand anything more from them. We will do as you say” (Nehemiah 5:12).

Nehemiah also agreed to ease their burden by not collecting the tax that was due to him to meet his own needs during the entire time

that he served as their governor. Instead, Nehemiah regularly had a hundred and fifty Jews and nobles eating around his table, as well as those from surrounding nations. Nehemiah did this from his own resources, because the demands on his people were so heavy.

Because of the nature of my work, I often have to call on others to help me do what God has put on my heart to do. Nehemiah's actions are a helpful and necessary reminder to think about ways I can practically help those who are helping me, both for their own sake, and for the sake of the project that God has called us to do together.

If there are people helping you do what God has put on your heart to do, I'd like to encourage you to take some time in the coming days to listen to their hearts. See if they have needs that you could help meet, whether directly or through your influence, then do what you can to meet those needs.

Don't almost give. Give. Help those who are helping you so that together you can do all that God has called you to do.

PRAYER: FATHER, SHOW ME THE NEEDS OF THOSE WHO ARE HELPING ME SO THAT I CAN HELP THEM AS

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WELL. GIVE ME THE RESOURCES AND INFLUENCE TO
HELP MEET THEIR NEEDS IN PRACTICAL WAYS SO
THAT TOGETHER WE CAN ACCOMPLISH ALL THAT
YOU'VE PUT ON OUR HEARTS TO DO. IN JESUS'
NAME, AMEN.

Lesson 13

DON'T GIVE IN

Scripture Reading: Nehemiah 6:1-4

Some people will try to discourage you from reaching your dreams because they love you, they care about you, and they don't want to see you get hurt in pursuing something that may never happen.

But others will try to discourage you because they're afraid you might actually accomplish what you've set out to do. They're not interested in your future, your success, your well-being. They're interested in their own dreams and goals and will do whatever they can to stop you from achieving yours.

Nehemiah faced his share of opposition. But one group opposed him throughout his project because they were afraid he'd actually accomplish what he had set out to do. They tried to lure him away from his project, calling out to him:

“Come, let us meet together in one of the villages on the plain of Ono.” (Nehemiah 6:2).

But Nehemiah saw through their plan. He knew they meant to harm him, not help him. So he sent messengers to them with this reply:

“I am carrying on a great project and cannot go down. Why should the work stop while I leave it and go down to you?” (Nehemiah 6:3).

Those who opposed Nehemiah didn't just ask him to leave the work and meet with them once or twice. Four times they tried to lure him away. And four times, Nehemiah gave them the same answer: “Why should the work stop while I leave it and go down to you?”

Sometimes it may seem impolite if we don't respond to all of our critics. We feel we need to explain ourselves to them, hear them out, and negotiate with them through our disagreements. But sometimes we just need to follow Nehemiah's example. You don't negotiate with a wolf.

Even Jesus warned his disciples:

“I am sending you out like sheep among wolves. Therefore be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves” (Matthew 10:16).

When others want you to give up on your plans, give careful thought to their reasons. Is their advice really for your benefit, or simply for their own? While it's important to listen to those who truly care about you and who care about what you feel God has called you to do, it can be just as important to ignore those who don't care about you, who care mainly about their own plans instead.

I was hard at work renovating our Clover Ranch retreat center one day when a man came by and asked if I would be willing to sell the place. He wasn't a wolf, but he also wasn't aware of what God had spoken to me about the project. He said he'd had his eye on the property for some time and would really like to buy it if I'd like to sell it. His offer was tempting. I was starting to wear out from working on the project myself. It would be much easier, I thought, to just give in and sell the place to him.

I talked to my Dad later that day and mentioned this man's offer. My Dad said, "Don't sell it to him. You've put in too much work into it to sell it off now." His words woke me up to the reality of the situation, and to the vision that God had put on my heart for the

project in the first place. My Dad was right. The project *had* been a lot of work, but this wasn't the time to give in. This was the time to press on and finish what God had put on my heart to do.

There are times when you might be tempted to give in to the demands of others. You may even see their offer as a welcome relief at the time, getting you out of more hard work. But if God has put this project on your heart, don't even go there. Don't give up. Don't give in. Don't go down and meet with those who would try to distract you from what God has called you to do, especially wolves who don't have your best interest at heart.

Don't give in. Keep pressing on with all that God has put on your heart to do.

PRAYER: FATHER, HELP ME TO NOT GIVE IN TO THE DEMANDS OF OTHERS WHO DON'T HAVE MY BEST INTEREST AT HEART. HELP ME TO PUT YOUR PRIORITIES AHEAD OF EVEN MY OWN, SO THAT I CAN FINISH THE WORK YOU'VE CALLED ME TO DO. IN JESUS' NAME, AMEN.

Lesson 14

DON'T FALL FOR LIES

Scripture Reading: Nehemiah 6:5-14

The Broadway musical, *Wicked*, tells the “untold” story of the witches of Oz. Using some creative storytelling, the show’s writer convinces the audience that the Wicked Witch of the West was really just misunderstood, and that the supposedly “good” Wizard of Oz was really the one who was “wicked.”

By the end of the show, the audience is cheering for the green witch’s success, and hoping for the wizard’s defeat. It’s a compelling story that shows the power of words to sway people’s thoughts, portraying that which is evil as good, and that which is good as evil.

Satan knows the power of words, too. But when he speaks, he doesn’t just use “creative storytelling” to entertain an audience; he uses outright lies to destroy people’s lives. Satan is so adept at lying that Jesus called him both “a liar” and the “father of lies.” Jesus went on to say that lying is such an innate part of Satan’s

character that, “when he lies, he speaks his native language” (John 8:44b).

I think it’s critical that you’re aware of this, because Satan wants to lie to you, too, especially when you’re doing the work of God. Sometimes he’ll spread lies about you and your work, and sometimes he’ll lie to you directly to entice you to give up on your work and give in to his plan.

What can you do to defend yourself when Satan attacks you like this? What can you do to combat the lies he throws at you?

You can do what Nehemiah did: don’t fall for the lies; confront them with the truth.

When Nehemiah was nearly finished rebuilding the wall around Jerusalem, his opponents brought on their fiercest attack. They began to spread lies about Nehemiah to others, sending an “open” letter to Nehemiah that said:

“It is reported among the nations—and Geshem says it is true—that you and the Jews are plotting to revolt, and therefore you are building the wall. Moreover, according to these reports you are about to become their king and have even appointed prophets to make this proclamation about you in

Jerusalem: There is a king in Judah! Now this report will get back to the king; so come, let us confer together” (Nehemiah 6:6-7).

What could Nehemiah do? He could have panicked, even if it wasn’t true, and tried to meet with them so word didn’t get back to the king. But doing so would have sent him directly into the trap they were setting for him. So Nehemiah sent a reply back that said:

“Nothing like what you are saying is happening; you are just making it up out of your head” (Nehemiah 6:8).

Rather than being intimidated and giving up on the work, he prayed to the Lord,

“Now strengthen my hands” (Nehemiah 6:9b).

Nehemiah’s opponents even hired some prophets to speak lies directly to Nehemiah, telling him that people were coming to kill him, warning him to run and hide inside the temple walls, thus causing him to sin and discredit his name. But Nehemiah saw through those lies, too, saying:

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“Should a man like me run away? Or should one like me go into the temple to save his life? I will not go!” (Nehemiah 6:12-13).

Is Satan trying to lie to you today, whether in your head or by using someone else's words? If so, I want to encourage you: don't fall for the lies; confront them with the truth. Confront them with the Truth of God as spoken in His Word and the Truth of God as spoken by His Holy Spirit to your heart.

There's power in words, but there's even more power in God's Word. Don't let Satan call "wicked" that which God calls good. Keep reminding yourself of God's Word. He loves you (John 3:16). He's for you, not against you (Romans 8:31). He wants to give you a future and a hope (Jeremiah 29:11). Don't fall for lies! Confront them with the truth! As you'll find out in the next message, when the attack is fiercest, you may be closer to victory than you think!

**PRAYER: FATHER, HELP ME TO CONFRONT THE LIES
OF SATAN WITH THE TRUTH OF YOUR WORD.
REMIND ME OF THAT TRUTH WHEN I NEED IT, AND
HELP ME TO SPEAK THAT TRUTH, TO MYSELF AND TO**

Don't Fall For Lies

OTHERS, SO THAT I CAN SEE YOUR VICTORY IN THE
END. IN JESUS' NAME, AMEN.

Lesson 15

THE WALL IS COMPLETE!

Scripture Reading: Nehemiah 6:15-19

Just when Nehemiah's storm seemed the darkest, a ray of light broke through. In the face of death threats and lies, Nehemiah finally achieved what he had set out to do.

The description of it is tucked in the middle of the book of Nehemiah, in the middle of a chapter. But those two simple lines must have spoken volumes to Nehemiah, just as they did to the surrounding nations:

"So the wall was completed on the twenty-fifth of Elul, in fifty-two days. When all our enemies heard about this, all the surrounding nations were afraid and lost their self-confidence, because they realized that this work had been done with the help of our God" (Nehemiah 6:15-16).

After all his prayers, tears and hard work, Nehemiah finally saw the fruit of his labor.

The completion of the wall didn't mean that his life's work was over: he continued to serve as the governor over that region for an-

The Wall Is Complete!

other twelve years. And it didn't mean that his battles were over: he would still have to deal with his opponents from time to time.

But the completion of the wall did mean that Nehemiah, with God's help, was able to accomplish the monumental work that God had put on his heart. He was able to do what others thought was impossible. And he was able to take part in God's plan to continue His mission in the world: in this case, the restoration of the Israelites to the holy city of Jerusalem.

Now that the wall around the city was restored, Israelite families could begin moving back into Jerusalem, rebuilding their homes and rebuilding their lives. The rebuilding of the wall was an achievement in and of itself, but it was a means to an end for God's overarching plan.

When God calls you to work on a project, I think it's helpful to keep in mind both the project itself, and the future purpose for which God called you to it.

When God rebuilt the marriage of a couple whom I had been talking to and praying with for some time, I watched in amazement as God not only restored their

marriage, but went on to redirect the husband into ministry, becoming a pastor and building up a new church in his city that reached out to his ethnic group. He and the church then went on to begin a missions outreach back to their home country.

The restoration of their marriage was critical, and no small feat on its own. But it served as a launching pad for what God had in mind for their lives once their marriage was restored.

As for me, as I write this, I'm still working on my renovation project at our Clover Ranch retreat. It's taken way more than fifty-two days, and some days I wonder if it will ever be done. I was having that feeling this week again as I was putting a third coat of stain on some wood trim that will be used around the doorways and windows in the kitchen. I was starting to wear out, thinking that I still have two coats of varnish to put on after this third coat of stain finally dried.

But when I looked at the wood again, it crossed my mind of just how long it had taken for the tree to grow that I was now staining. I was thankful that I didn't have to grow the tree from scratch as well!

The Wall Is Complete!

In view of how long God has been at work trying to reach the people I'm hoping to reach through this retreat center, I realized that my little time spent on it is just a drop in the bucket. It's an important project, but it's just one more step in the series of steps that God has been taking all along to see His work complete.

Don't be discouraged if it takes longer than fifty-two days to complete your project. Rather, be encouraged by the story of Nehemiah and by what God can do once your project is finished. Also, be encouraged by the Word of God, which says in the book of Galatians:

“Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up” (Galatians 6:9).

Before I close for today, I'd like to say a word to those of you who have worked your hardest at something and yet, for various reasons aren't able to see the work finished. In the words of one wife who was trying her best to restore her relationship with her husband, she said:

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“...even if there is no happy ending for our marriage, I will not regret the stand I have taken. I will know that I made the right decision and followed the only course possible for me. I will have done all that I could.”

God knows your heart, and He'll honor your heart as you honor His. Don't give up. Don't give in. Keep pressing on with what God has called you to do. Whatever the outcome, you *will* reap a harvest at the proper time, if you do not give up.

PRAYER: FATHER, THANK YOU FOR NEHEMIAH'S EXAMPLE OF WHAT IT MEANS TO KEEP PRESSING ON, AND THANK YOU FOR HELPING HIM TO ACCOMPLISH THAT WHICH YOU PUT ON HIS HEART TO DO.

FATHER, HELP ME TO DO THE SAME, FOR YOUR SAKE, AND FOR THE SAKE OF THOSE WHO WILL BE AFFECTED BY MY WORK BOTH NOW AND IN THE GENERATIONS TO COME. IN JESUS' NAME, AMEN.

Conclusion

MAINTAINING WHAT YOU'VE BUILT

Scripture Reading: Nehemiah 7-13

I was working on a project one day and called a friend for help. I told him I was reading the directions and he said, “The first thing to do is to throw away the directions!” He offered to come and help me himself.

I appreciated his offer, but I soon found out he had only done this once before and the project was bigger than he thought. I decided it was time to pull out the directions again!

Perhaps the best advice I can give you for how to maintain what you’ve worked so hard to build is this: Read the directions! Pull out a copy of God’s Word and do what it says. The same directions that helped you to rebuild what’s broken in your life can help you maintain what you’ve built.

This is exactly what Nehemiah did when they finished rebuilding the wall around Jerusalem. Nehemiah assembled all the people in

one place and had Ezra the scribe, along with the Levites, read and explain God's Word to the people. Nehemiah says:

"They read from the Book of the Law of God, making it clear and giving the meaning so that the people could understand what was being read" (Nehemiah 8:8).

The rest of the book of Nehemiah describes the effects God's Word had on the people—the same effects it can have on you:

1) It caused them to weep for what they had lost, due to their own sins and the sins of their fathers. Nehemiah says,

"For all the people had been weeping as they listened to the words of the Law" (Nehemiah 8:9b).

God knew how the wall fell into disrepair in the first place, and he knew how to put it together again.

2) It caused them to praise God for what He had done. Nehemiah knew they were

heartbroken over what had been lost, but he lifted their spirits by telling them,

“Go and enjoy choice food and sweet drinks, and send some to those who have nothing prepared. This day is sacred to our Lord. Do not grieve, for the joy of the LORD is your strength” (Nehemiah 8:10).

God wanted them to know what had gone wrong, but He also wanted them to get up and move on.

3) It caused them to recommit their future to God. The people said,

“In view of all this, we are making a binding agreement, putting it in writing, and our leaders, our Levites and our priests are affixing their seals to it” (Nehemiah 9:38).

After rebuilding the wall, they wanted to rebuild their lives in a way that honored God.

4) It caused them to dedicate the work to God. The party they held to dedicate the wall was so exuberant that Nehemiah said,

“The sound of rejoicing in Jerusalem could be heard far away” (Nehemiah 12:43b).

They marked the occasion with an all-out celebration, dedicating the work of their hands into God’s hands.

Nehemiah did it, and so can you. He set out to achieve what God had put on his heart, then he followed through with the hard work to get it done. Even though the project seemed imposing, impractical and nearly impossible, God helped Nehemiah all along the way. God provided Nehemiah with the wisdom, resources, strength and people to pull it off, just like God will do for you when He gives you the green light to do something for Him.

The same God who helped Nehemiah will help you, too. God loves you. He is *for* you. And He wants you to succeed, not only for Your sake, but for His sake, and for the sake of all those who will be touched by the work of your hands in the future.

Just because our study of the book of Nehemiah is finished, it doesn’t mean that your study of God’s Word has to stop here. Don’t

throw out the directions just because the project is finished! Keep reading and rereading God's Word every day for the rest of your life!

I pray that as you read it, like Nehemiah, you'll find that the joy of the Lord is *your* strength as well.

PRAYER: FATHER, THANK YOU FOR GIVING ME YOUR WORD TO HELP ME REBUILD MY LIFE AND MAINTAIN WHAT I'VE REBUILT. LORD, HELP ME TO KEEP READING AND REREADING YOUR WORD, AND IN SO DOING, HELP ME TO FIND THAT YOUR JOY IS MY STRENGTH. IN JESUS' NAME, AMEN.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Described by *USA Today* as “a new breed of evangelist,” Eric Elder is an ordained pastor, songwriter and the creator of *The Ranch*, a faith-boosting website that attracts thousands of visitors each month at www.THERANCH.ORG.

Eric is also an inspirational writer and speaker, having written about spiritual issues for publications like Billy Graham’s *Decision Magazine*, and spoken about faith at national conferences like the Exodus International *Freedom Conference*.

If you enjoyed this book, you may enjoy some of Eric’s other writings in books like *Two Weeks With God*, *Exodus: Lessons In Freedom*, *Jesus: Lessons In Love*, *Ephesians: Lessons In Grace*, *Acts: Lessons In Faith*, *Israel: Lessons From The Holy Land*, *The Top 20 Passages In The Bible* and *What God Says About Sex*.

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