

Introduction: You think you've got it bad?

- Read Hebrews 10:32-35 . . .
- Listen to God's instruction to this faltering group of Christians:

*For you have **need of endurance** so that when you have done the will of God, you may receive what was promised.*

Hebrews 10:36

*Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And **let us run with perseverance** the race marked out for us.*

Hebrews 12:1

Don't give up! Don't give in! Don't opt out!

Why? You will receive an unspeakable reward (now & later)

In 3 words: **KEEP PRESSING AHEAD!**

No Matter What!

How can I “Keep Pressing Ahead” in MY impossible situation?

Step #1 – Understand the basics

- You **CAN'T**; but Christ can. Philippians 4:13
- **BELIEVE** God wants to help you. Psalm 34:19
- **ACKNOWLEDGE** you need His help. Psalm 34:18
- **CRY** out for His help. Psalm 34:17

Step #2 – Stop believing the lies about adversity

- It's normal. John 16:33, 2 Timothy 3:12
- It's expected. 1 Peter 4:12
- It's purposeful. Romans 5:1-5
- It's powerful. 1 Peter 5:10
- It's temporary. 2 Corinthians 4:16-18

Adversity is an uninvited, unwanted friend in the hands of an all-knowing God whose purpose is to wean us of our self-dependency and pride, usher us into deeper intimacy with Jesus, and redirect our paths to insure our greatest good and His greatest glory.

Resource: The 9 to 5 Window – *How Faith Can Transform the Workplace* by Oz Hillman

Step #3 – Learn to handle adversity like Nehemiah

Our Model - Nehemiah

Chapter	4	5	6	7	8
Cause of Adversity	Obedience	Disobedience	Personal Attack	Circumstances	God's Discipline
N.T. Parallel	1 Peter 4:12-19	Galatians 6:7-8	Ephesians 6:10-12	Luke 13:1-5	Hebrews 12:5-11
Typical Response	Give up	Conform	Fear	Lose Heart	Ignore
Nehemiah's Response	Pray/Prepare	Confront	Fight	Look for Plan B	Submit
God's Deliverance	Enemies Thwarted	Repentance & Unity	Protection	A New Game-plan	Revival
Timeless Truth	"I can do all things through Christ who gives me strength." Philippians 4:13				
Motto	"I can't, He never said I could; He can, He always said He would."				

Step #4 – Discern the source of your adversity

- Physical exhaustion → **REST** 1 Kings 19
- Consequence of sin → **REPENT** Galatians 6:7-8
- Spiritual warfare → **FIGHT** Ephesians 6:10-12
- God's discipline → **SUBMIT** Hebrews 12:5-11
- Negative circumstances → **ENDURE** James 1:2-4

Application / Discussion Questions:

1. Read Nehemiah chapters 4-8 this week.
2. Identify the most “ad-verse” situation, problem in your life.
3. Attempt to discern the source(s) of your adversity.
4. Identify the Biblical response that ushers in “God’s strength” and grace to your situation. (see chart of page 3)
5. Process your answers/conclusion to assignments with a trusted friend, mentor and/or your small group.
6. Develop and verbalize a specific game-plan to put into action your response of faith and obedience to experience God’s strength and provision in your life.

Introduction: Why must I “Keep Pressing Ahead”?

Adversity is an uninvited, unwanted friend in the hands of an all-knowing God whose purpose is to wean us of our self-dependency and pride, usher us into deeper intimacy with Jesus, and redirect our paths to insure our greatest good and His greatest glory.

Review: Stop believing the lies about adversity

- It's NORMAL. John 16:33, 2 Timothy 3:12
- It's EXPECTED. 1 Peter 4:12
- It's PURPOSEFUL. Romans 5:1-5
- It's POWERFUL. 1 Peter 5:10
- It's TEMPORARY. 2 Corinthians 4:16-18

My response:

“I can’t, He never said I could; He can, He always said He would.”

God’s promise for you:

*“For you have **need of endurance** so that when you have done the will of God, you may receive what was promised.”*

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Lessons from Nehemiah Chapter 4 – “Facing Discouragement”

1. God ordained steps of faith are almost always followed by significant

OPPOSITION and adversity.

Nehemiah 4:1-3

Attack #1:

Nehemiah 4:2-3

Words that cause us to question our **WORTH** our work, and our probability of **SUCCESS**.

➤ **Nehemiah's Response: Our example**

Nehemiah 4:4-6

- He **PRAYS!**
- He **KEEPS PRESSING AHEAD!**

2. The most formidable enemy every Christ-follower faces in fulfilling God's will for their lives is **DISCOURAGEMENT**. Nehemiah 4:7-12

Attack #2: 4 causes of discouragement

1. Loss of **STRENGTH – FATIGUE**.
2. Loss of **VISION – FOCUS**.
3. Loss of **CONFIDENCE – FAITH**.
4. Loss of **SECURITY – FEAR**.

➤ **Nehemiah's response – our example**

Nehemiah 4:13-23

Four resources to overcome discouragement:

1. Be **PROACTIVE – GET MOVING!** James 2:17
2. Remember **WHO** is for **YOU**. Luke 1:37
3. Fight! **FIGHT! FIGHT!** 2 Timothy 4:7-8
4. Never fight **ALONE!** Hebrews 3:13

"In a mysterious way, our troubles allow us to discover and develop reservoirs of strength and perseverance that most of us don't realize we have. When we lean on the Lord, He actually uses our struggles to expand our ability to deal with them. It's a process that leads us to greater hope and a deeper faith."

Getting Back Up When Life Knocks You Down
by Jeremy Kingsley

“Every great work, every big accomplishment, has been brought into manifestation through holding to the vision, and often just before the big achievement, comes apparent failure and discouragement.

- Florence Scovel Shinn

“The Christian life is not a constant high. I have my moments of deep discouragement. I have to go to God in prayer with tears in my eyes, and say, ‘O God, forgive me,’ or “Help me.”

- Billy Graham

“Permanence, perseverance and persistence in spite of all obstacles, discouragements, and impossibilities: It is this, that in all things distinguishes the strong soul from the weak”

- Thomas Carlyle

Application / Discussion Questions:

1. “God’s work is always carried out in a hostile environment.” How does remembering this phrase encourage you?
2. In what ways are you experiencing discouragement with regard to living out God’s agenda in your life and relationships?
3. Which of Nehemiah’s examples of facing discouragement were most helpful to you? Why?
4. What specific application do you need to use to deal with the discouragement you may be facing in your life? Who could help you?

Introduction: When external opposition fails to thwart God’s work, you can almost predict an “attack from within.”

- It happened to Christ
- It happened to the apostles
- It will happen to us

***STRIFE**— ⁽¹⁾ Angry or bitter disagreement over fundamental issues; ⁽²⁾ vigorous or bitter conflict, discord, quarrels, struggle, competition or rivalry.

Lessons from Nehemiah 5

Internal strife occurs...

... when the “me” principle overrides the “us” principle.

Nehemiah 5:1-5

- The problem: FOOD SHORTAGE

DEBT CEILING IS ECLIPSED

HIGH TAXES

- The opportunist: LOAN SHARKING
- The negative impact: DISUNITY

Nehemiah shows us how to deal with strife.

Nehemiah 5:6-13

- His emotional response – ANGER UNDER CONTROL

Ephesians 4:26

- His appropriate action – THOUGHTFUL CONFRONTATION

Matthew 18:15-17

- His follow-through – PUBLIC ACCOUNTABILITY

1Timothy 5:19

Resolving internal conflicts takes more than “know how” and skill.

Nehemiah 5:14-19

Why was Nehemiah so effective?

- HIS EXAMPLE - he walked his talk.
- HIS COURAGE - he cared enough to confront.
- HIS LOVE - the people mattered to him.
- HIS INTEGRITY - he feared God.

Summary:

The leverage of your LIFE, is what gives weight to your WORDS.

Why unity matters so much!

²⁰"My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in Me through their message, ²¹that all of them may be one, Father, just as You are in Me and I am in You. May they also be in Us so that the world may believe that You have sent Me."

John 17:20-21
Jesus' last recorded prayer on Earth

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Application / Discussion Questions:

1. Why do you think internal strife is so devastating in a family, church, or work place?
2. What is at the root of most internal strife?
3. What specifically did you learn about how to deal with internal strife?
4. Which aspect of Nehemiah's example is most difficult for you to follow? Why?
5. Is there a situation where God wants you to be a "change agent" where internal strife is occurring? What might that look like? Who can help you confront this situation wisely? When will you do it?

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- When do personal attacks occur? Why?
- Who is behind these attacks? Ephesians 6:10-12
- How do we win spiritual battles? Ephesians 6:13-18

Satan's strategy: Destroy the difference maker and you stop the project

Plan A: Deception – “He is the father of lies”

John 8:44

¹Now it came about when it was reported to Sanballat, Tobiah, to Geshem the Arab and to the rest of our enemies that I had rebuilt the wall, and that no breach remained in it, although at that time I had not set up the doors in the gates, ²then Sanballat and Geshem sent a message to me, saying, “Come, let us meet together at Chephirim in the plain of Ono.” But they were planning to harm me. ³So I sent messengers to them, saying, “I am doing a great work and I cannot come down. Why should the work stop while I leave it and come down to you?” ⁴They sent messages to me four times in this manner, and I answered them in the same way.

Nehemiah 6:1-4

- The temptation - Get **DISTRACTED**.
- New Testament command - “Put on the belt of truth.”
- Nehemiah's response - Discernment and **PERSEVERANCE**.

Plan B: Condemnation – “He accuses the brethren”

Revelation 12:10

⁵Then Sanballat sent his servant to me in the same manner a fifth time with an open letter in his hand. ⁶In it was written, “It is reported among the nations, and Gashmu says, that you and the Jews are planning to rebel; therefore you are rebuilding the wall. And you are to be their king, according to these reports. ⁷You have also appointed prophets to proclaim in Jerusalem concerning you, ‘A king is in Judah!’ And now it will be reported to the king according to these reports. So come now, let us take counsel together.” ⁸Then I sent a message to him saying, “Such things as you are saying have not been done, but you are inventing them in your own mind.” ⁹For all of them were trying to frighten us, thinking, “They will become discouraged with the work and it will not be done.” But now, O God, strengthen my hands.

Nehemiah 6:5-9

- The temptation - **DEFEND YOURSELF**
- New Testament command - “Put on the breastplate of righteousness.”
- Nehemiah's response - Discernment, declaring the truth, praying for strength.

Plan C: Doubt – “Did God really say . . .”

Genesis 3:1

¹⁰When I entered the house of Shemaiah the son of Delaiah, son of Mehetabel, who was confined at home, he said, “Let us meet together in the house of God, within the temple, and let us close the doors of the temple, for they are coming to kill you, and they are coming to kill you at night.” ¹¹But I said, “Should a man like me flee? And could one such as I go into the temple to save his life? I will not go in.” ¹²Then I perceived that surely God had not sent him, but he uttered his prophecy against me because Tobiah and Sanballat had hired him. ¹³He was hired for this reason, that I might become frightened and act accordingly and sin, so that they might have an evil report in order that they could reproach me. ¹⁴Remember, O my God, Tobiah and Sanballat according to these works of theirs, and also Noadiah the prophetess and the rest of the prophets who were trying to frighten me. ¹⁵***So the wall was completed on the twenty-fifth of the month Elul, in fifty-two days.*** ¹⁶When all our enemies heard of it, and all the nations surrounding us saw it, they lost their confidence; for they recognized that this work had been accomplished with the help of our God.

Nehemiah 6:10-16

- The temptation - Question your **CALLING/DOUBT**.
- New Testament command - “...feet shod with the gospel,”
- Nehemiah’s response - Discernment, offensive prayer, perseverance.

Plan D: Fear – “He is like a roaming lion.”

1 Peter 5:8

¹⁷Also in those days many letters went from the nobles of Judah to Tobiah, and Tobiah's letters came to them. ¹⁸For many in Judah were bound by oath to him because he was the son-in-law of Shecaniah the son of Arah, and his son Jehohanan had married the daughter of Meshullam the son of Berechiah. ¹⁹Moreover, they were speaking about his good deeds in my presence and reported my words to him. Then Tobiah sent letters to frighten me.

Nehemiah 6:17-19

- The temptation - Lose **HEART**.
- New Testament command - “...taking up the shield of faith.”
- Nehemiah’s response - Discernment, perseverance

Lessons from Nehemiah 6

3 Principles to follow when personally attacked:

1. Recognize the **SOURCE** of the opposition.
(Your battle is not against flesh and blood)
2. Remember:
*"He who is **IN** you is greater than he who is in the world."*
(Put on the full armor of God)
3. The only way to lose is to **GIVE UP!**
(Keep Pressing Ahead)

1 John 4:4

*For those who need help in understanding spiritual warfare, see "The Invisible War" in book, CD, or DVD format – available at LivingontheEdge.org

Discussion Questions:

1. Share your initial response to this message.
2. Why is it critical for us to define the source of personal attacks?
3. Which tactic (A, B, C, D) are you currently experiencing?
4. What helped you most from this passage? Why?
5. Who would pray with you and support you in your personal struggle? Who might need your help?

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Understanding Nehemiah's difficult circumstances:

- Jewish History – 70 years in exile for idolatry
- Zerubbabel returns and rebuilds the Temple – 538 BC
- Ezra returns to rebuild the people – 457 BC
- Nehemiah returns to rebuild the wall – 445 BC
- The wall is done . . . Now what?

Six difficult circumstances Nehemiah faced

Nehemiah 7:1-4

1. Security issues – An unsafe environment
2. People issues – Not enough to fill the city
3. Housing issues – None available
4. Financial issues – Lack of funds for the work
5. Momentum issues – Almost 100 years of futility

How did Nehemiah respond to his circumstances?

- He **IMPROVISED**. Nehemiah 7:1
- He **DELEGATES**. Nehemiah 7:2-3
- He **LISTENED** to God. Nehemiah 7:4-5
- He **ASKS** the right questions. Nehemiah 7:6-69
 - Who are we?
 - How did we get here?
 - What do we have, not what do we lack?
 - What are we called to do?
- He **MODELED** commitment through generosity. Nehemiah 7:70-72

What can we learn from Nehemiah as we face our difficult circumstances?

Rebuilding The Wall	Pivot	Rebuilding The People
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Walls• Work• Physical• External	GENEALOGY	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Word• Worship• Spiritual• Internal
16	7	813

1. The Principle of Perspective: *Like Nehemiah*, we must not confuse our **MEANS** (activities and projects) with our “goals” (desired end results).
2. The Principle of Priority: *Like Nehemiah*, we must make **PEOPLE** our passion.
3. The Principle of Evaluation: *Like Nehemiah*, we must make “faithfulness to our **CALLING**” the measure of our success.

Discussion Questions:

1. What is the most difficult circumstance you (or someone you love) is facing?
2. What practical things from Nehemiah's example might help you/them deal positively with this challenge?
3. Which of the "3 Timeless Principles" most apply to your difficult circumstance?
4. How does God use difficult circumstances to renew our dependency on Him and/or redirect our lives and relationships?

Introduction:

The Pain of personal failure:

³“When I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. ⁴For day and night Your hand was heavy on me; my strength was sapped as in the heat of summer. ⁵Then I acknowledged my sin to You and did not cover up my iniquity. I said, “I will confess my transgressions to the LORD.” And You forgave the guilt of my sin.”

Psalm 32:3-5

The Pathway to restoration:

⁶“Therefore let all the faithful pray to You while You may be found; surely the rising of the mighty waters will not reach them. ⁷You are my hiding place; You will protect me from trouble and surround me with songs of deliverance.”

Psalm 32:6-7

The Promise of God’s deliverance:

⁸“I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you with my loving eye on you. ⁹Do not be like the horse or the mule, which have no understanding but must be controlled by bit and bridle or they will not come to you. ¹⁰Many are the woes of the wicked, but the LORD’s unfailing love surrounds the one who trusts in Him.”

Psalm 32:8-10

The Problem: How does it actually work?

Our Model – Nehemiah 8
3 Conditions for Spiritual Restoration

1. We must return to the **WORD**.

Nehemiah 8:1-8

- **What did they do?**
 - They took **INITIATIVE**.
 - They invested **TIME**.
 - They listened **INTENTLY**.
- **How did they do it?**
 - They came before God in **FAMILIES**.
 - They read the Word **PUBLICLY**.
 - They explained the Word **PRIVATELY**.
 - They worshipped God **REVERENTLY**.
- **What about us? You?**

2. We must respond to the TRUTH.

Nehemiah 8:9-12

- What did they do?

- They WEPT over their sin.
- They received a word of GRACE.
- They experienced the JOY of obedience.

- How did they do it?

- They responded from the HEART.
- They focused on God's great MERCY rather than their FAILURE.
- They OBEYED God's Word for today.

- What about us? You?

3. We must **APPLY** it to our lives.

Nehemiah 8:13-18

- **What did they do?**
 - Fathers and leaders came to be **EQUIPPED**.
 - They discovered a command to **OBEY**.
 - They “went out” and obeyed **IMMEDIATELY**.
- **How did they do it?**
 - They recognized their need for spiritual **INSIGHT**.
 - They focused on present obedience instead of past **FAILURE**.
 - They developed a new **PATTERN** of intake and obedience to God’s Word.
- **What about us? You?**

Discussion Questions:

1. What impressed you most about Nehemiah 8? Why?
2. Share a passage from the Bible with the group that reinforces the power of God’s Word in our lives. (i.e. Psalm 19, Hebrews 4:12, Matthew 4:4, 2 Timothy 3:16-17)
3. Which of the three conditions for spiritual restoration most applies to your life right now? Why?
4. How has God used His Word in your life in the past?
5. What specific step or direction do you sense God would have you take to prepare you for a deeper work of the Spirit in and through your life? What might that look like this week?