

“Handling Discouragement in the 21st Century!”

Nehemiah 4:1-6

Intro. – Larry Dean Olsen wrote a book entitled: *Outdoor Survival Skills*. In this he describes a man lost in the desert: “He has been out of food/water for days. His lips/tongue are swollen, he’s all beat up/bloody. Some of his bones are almost peeking through. He has been scraped/beat up by the cactus, sand and sun. He’s blistered. As he’s crawling over this little hill he comes across this little plant and props himself up on one bloody elbow, looks down at this plant and says, ‘You know, if things keep going like this I might get discouraged.’”

You ever get discouraged? Isn’t this a matter with which we all are familiar? Satan is the master at discouraging the heart. He knows exactly how to take a word here, an incident there, and pull down the window shades of our hearts until we can no longer see the sun. That’s Satan’s trademark. His message is the exact opposite of Philippians 4:8. His word could be translated as follows: “*Finally, my friends, whatsoever things are disheartening, whatsoever things are depressing, whatsoever things are distressing; if there be any fear, if there be any frustration, if there be any fruitlessness, think on these things.*” And think on these things, we do. At the slightest annoyance our hearts tend to see the half full glass as half empty; the impending trial, not as a test, but as a trauma; not as an opportunity to grow, but as another proof of how unfair life really is.

Paul, do you ever get discouraged? What a question. Of course I get discouraged. Some days I feel like the dog I heard about years ago in the Dayton Daily News: “Lost: dog with a torn ear, has one eye out, is missing two front teeth, walks on three legs and answers to the name *Lucky*.” We all get discouraged. Living in the 21st century we are confronted with so many ways of the world that we begin to think Satan and wrong are going to triumph. Brethren, hear me good on this – don’t you believe it, it’s not true! We must realize all of us in dealing with this matter are none different than great men and women of the faith in the past.

Nehemiah is one of the best examples of what I speak. He was a great leader who had become the governor of Judah and who led in rebuilding of the walls around Jerusalem... (tremendous book on leadership...) Read through this book of the Bible and you will find everything didn’t go smoothly. God’s work never goes forward without opposition. Satan will see to that. In chapter four, the primary focus is the center of opposition. His name was Sanballat, the governor of Samaria.

Purpose: to learn from the life of Nehemiah how to better handle discouragement

I SANBALLAT’S Attack (vv 1-3)

- history was on Sanballat’s side – the Jews had miserably failed... (again)...
- psychological warfare – he sought to remind the Jews of their past failures...

A. Limited Understanding

1. Didn’t understand God’s personal interest/investment in the Jews... in captivity because of their sin against God, but when they repented and renewed their commitment to God He restored them.
2. Sanballat’s reaction to Nehemiah’s coming is predictable – he was most angry exposing his fear...

B. Defense Mechanism

1. Speaks to brothers and wealthy Samaritans – v 2
2. Does this sound like a secure man? Sounds like trying convince himself wasn’t threat i.e. intensely worried – outside looked tough inside worried.
 - a. Illus. – Glen Dolan – gruff, rough Colonel Air Force (flew B-17 in WW II)... Psychologists call this *Reaction Formation* = tough guy image – deep anxiety reflects opposite what they actually portray.
 - b. note: had Sanballat been honest... “Nehemiah is one to be reckoned with and the Jews under his leadership are a serious threat...”
3. His associate, Tobiah, reinforced this mess:
 - a. v 3 – “Right on Sanballat...”
 - b. another defense mechanism = said not because truth, said to bolster position with Sanballat
 - c. had Tobiah been a true friend, he would have responded differently...
4. If both had responded maturely, might have been converted instead of having hearts of stone.

II NEHEMIAH'S Response (vv 4-5)

A. He Prays According to God's Will

1. There is a distinct and obvious power behind Nehemiah's "success"...
2. When he first hears of Jerusalem's state (walls down, people distressed) he prays...
3. When Sanballat attacks psychologically – Nehemiah prays...

Not just prays – Nehemiah prays according to God's will, seeking His strength, wisdom/presence...

B. Prays Concerning the Ones Causing the Trouble

1. Imprecatory prayer = asking God to deal with enemies...
2. Content of the prayer = God has already condemned the enemy...
3. Nehemiah simply praying according to God's will...

C. He Continued with the Work

1. Some pray and wait for things to happen – Nehemiah blended divine with human = feet on prayers
2. Significant to note Nehemiah faced Sanballat's attacks/warfare with prayer AND hard work.
3. Trusted God to help them achieve their goal = note: *people had a mind (heart) to work*
4. Nehemiah's own enthusiasm and confidence in God enabled people to keep "high spirits" and the process then became reciprocal i.e. they were encouraging each other...

III APPLICATION for Us (v 6)

- one of Satan's most effective tools to hinder the progress of God's work is discouragement. Seen it in my life and observed it in your lives. Nothing affects Christ's work like low morale.
- Nehemiah's formula for dealing with discouragement needs our emulation:

A. We Must Pray About Our Discouragement

1. Christ is vitally involved with every detail of our lives – especially that which makes us anxious – Philippians 4:6 *"Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your request be made known to God."*
2. Have you ever experienced answered prayer along these lines?
 - Illus. – personally learned when I pray for encouragement, God takes care of things... on His time line not mine! E.g. – I continue to pray about this land matter behind us... God will open this up in due time so the work here can move forward.
3. Have any discouragements? Voice them to God now!

B. We Must Pray in the Will of God

1. Understanding how and what to pray as a 21st century Christian we must have a grasp of Bible!
2. Be assured every message, class, lesson, Bible School class presented here has one goal = to get God's people better acquainted with the Word!...
3. We are called upon to pray in God's will
 - Romans 12:18-21 *"If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men. Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, 'Vengeance is Mine,, I will repay,' says the Lord. But if your enemy is hungry, feed him, and if he is thirsty, give him a drink; for in so doing you will heap burning coals upon his head. Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good."*

C. We Must Pray and Work

1. Prayer alone is seldom God's plan for Christian when facing difficult, challenging times.
 - the Lord grants us the privilege to pray about everything, also expects us to do everything we can to resolve it.
2. When discouragement comes there are some practical things we can do:
 - a. check your physical/emotional energy level – exhaustion lowers ability to cope/discouragmt.
 - Illus. – 1 Kings 19:4ff – Elijah after show down with the prophets of Baal... God had him seek rest... Most Christian thing to do at times is to seek rest...
 - b. get proper physical exercise...

- c. spend time with those who are not discouraged...
- d. do something for someone else = more blessed to give than receive!
- e. learn from difficult/disappointing situations:

Only our God can bring meaning to difficult and challenging times.

Conclusion: In summary and conclusion, let us make clear that all Christians will face discouraging, challenging, and depressing times. Yes, Christians will be down at times, but not for the count. In other words, we'll get depressed, but we can learn to handle it God's way:

- 1) Pray specifically for encouragement
- 2) Pray for God's will to be done
- 3) Pray and work

Let's learn to handle discouragement in the manner God's man, Nehemiah handled it!