

## Inspire # 2

### Nehemiah: How to Overcome Discouragement.

From time to time, we suffer challenges to our spiritual health. When God asks something of us or gives us a task. Particularly if we feel that the ask or task is too big for us. Maybe its going to require sacrifice or stretch us in ways we are not sure if we can cope. Nehemiah was given a major project. He had to deal with real opposition in the form of discouragement. But he found a way to overcome all this. His story can help us and speak to us today.

Nehemiah led a group of Jews from Babylon back to Israel. The king of Babylon who had captured them at that time said, "You can build a wall in Jerusalem to protect yourselves." It was a big project. At first everything was going great. But after a while, all those involved got discouraged. In this passage we see three stresses that cause discouragement in our lives. Then we see the solutions that Nehemiah took in order to overcome that discouragement.

#### THE CAUSES OF DISCOURAGEMENT

**1. Fatigue** - 4:10 says "*Meanwhile the people in Judah said, 'The strength of the laborers is giving out.'*" Have you ever felt like that? "My strength is giving out. I've run out of energy. I don't have any more to give." The very first cause of discouragement is **Fatigue**. It's universal.

The people had worked a long time. They got physically exhausted. They were weary, worn down. When you get tired and weary and worn down, you're going to get discouraged. That's the number one cause of discouragement -- physical exhaustion.

Sometimes the reason you are discouraged is fatigue. Sometimes the most spiritual thing you can do is rest. I believe that's true! A pastor once said, "It's hard to preach when you've got a toothache." And it's hard to be spiritually high when you're physically low, worn out, out of energy, tired. Isn't it amazing how much better things look after a good night's sleep? The strength of the laborers is giving out." Maybe you don't need to change anything, you just need some rest. Rest is biblical, even God rested.

Have you ever climbed a mountain? Or gone on a really long walk or had a big project to complete in your life. You get halfway and look back and think I still have so much more to go. All of a sudden you start saying, maybe it isn't God's will that we go all the way to the top. Maybe we ought to turn around and go back down.

Those following Nehemiah's leadership faced this. Fatigue at the midpoint of any project is so common that it's the number one cause of discouragement. They struggled and then "*...the strength of the laborers gave out.*"

**2. Frustration.** Frustration can cause discouragement in your life. In the second part of verse 10 it says "*... and there is so much rubble.*" Litter, trash. They had been building the wall and there were broken bricks and piles of mortar laying around. In any project you get rubble.

This whole concept of frustration because of rubble affects your spiritual life as well. Sometimes it can be so large that you don't even know where to start. However, it must be taken care of. You can't avoid the rubble in life, but you have to recognize it for what it is and periodically eliminate it out of your life.

Discouragement is caused by fatigue. Discouragement is caused by frustration.

**3. Fear v. 11** *"Also [in addition to these other three things] our enemies said, 'Before they see us, we'll be right there among them and we'll kill them and put an end to their work.'" I guess so! If you get killed, it usually puts an end to your work.*

There were enemies who did not want the wall built around Jerusalem because then Jerusalem would be a fortified city and they would be protected. So, the enemies who lived out around the edge of Jerusalem, were doing everything they could to discourage the Jews from building that wall.

First, they criticized them and said, "You don't need to build it." The first four chapters of Nehemiah -- they criticized. Then they ridiculed and made fun of them. They laughed at them as they tried to rebuild the wall. Finally, they threatened them. They said, "We're going to kill you if you don't stop building the wall." They became afraid of their enemies. The moment fear gets into your life, you're going to get discouraged.

Fear causes discouragement. Fear is real. It is designed to be a protective mechanism in our lives. So, you don't touch the hot element on the stove because your hand will get badly burnt. It's about safety. However, when it becomes such a driving force in your life it is no longer operating in that way. When it is causing you daily anxiety and worry you have to make a stand.

Remember that well known saying. ***"People who wait for all the circumstances to be just right, never actually do anything"***. Take a risk, trust God and step out. God answers your fear today and says this: *"I can do everything God asks me to do with the help of Christ who gives me strength and power."* *Philippians 4.13 (LB)*. Notice the word everything. Not just some things, not just the important thing. Not just the enjoyable things but everything.

What about fear of losing your security. *God's Answer: "My God will supply all your needs...."* *Philippians 4.19 (LB)*. Remember God will provide for your needs. Not your world travel. Not for your Auckland Blues tickets. Not for sky TV, but as the verse says your needs.

I saw a bumper sticker this week. *I was made to shop; I was made to buy and it's in a shop I'm going to die*. We know that people are way more important to God than things. You can get things repaired but people are a lot more complicated. So as Christians we often have to sacrifice for one another.

What's the antidote? If anybody had the right to be discouraged, it was Nehemiah. He was assigned one of the major projects of the world -- build a wall around an entire city. And everybody got discouraged. How would you motivate them? What would you do? If you were

Nehemiah, what would you do? Give up? He didn't do that. He did three things, the same three things that apply today us at Ranui. Reorganize, Remember, Resist.

## 1. REORGANISE

Firstly, he reorganized. v. 13 *"Therefore I [Nehemiah] stationed..."* Whenever you see a "therefore" in the Bible you find out what it's there for. Nehemiah is saying "In light of everything I've just said in the previous verses, in light of the fact that everybody was dead tired, frustrated from all the rubble, they felt like failures because we didn't finish on time, and they were afraid they were going to be killed in the meanwhile. In light of all of those four sources of stress which cause discouragement, he says *"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 and their spears and their bows."*

He says, "What we're going to do is get this thing reorganized and I want you guys to go over here and you guys to go over there and this family to go over there..." He delegated it all out and reorganized it and said, "We're going to do it by families." Nehemiah knew they needed a support system. They didn't want to do it just by themselves, they needed encouragement. That's one of the things we try to do at church. We try to provide encouragement, as a support system for the stresses people experience in life.

He said, "We're going to get this organized and you go there and while you work on it, some of you carry weapons and some of you work and then we'll switch shifts." Everybody would be protected at the time they're working. He simply reorganized the problem. They didn't give up on their goal. They simply devised a new strategy. Sometimes discouragement can be overcome by trying a new approach.

## 2. REMEMBER

Remember the Lord. v. 14 *"And I looked things over and I stood up and said to the nobles and the officials and the rest of the people, 'Don't be afraid of them. Instead remember the Lord who is great and awesome.'" We get unplugged from the source of power and then wonder why we run out of energy. He says, draw on the spiritual resources, recommit yourself to Christ, remember the Lord. David, in the Psalms, when he got discouraged and was hiding out in the cave it says, "He encouraged himself in the Lord."* That's where you find your encouragement.

What do you remember? Three things:

**1. Remember God's goodness to you in the past.** That will help you overcome the blues. Start thinking about all the good things that God has done in your life. Focus on those. Remember what God has done for you in the past, His goodness.

**2. Remember God's closeness to you in the present.** What is He doing in my life right now? Even when I don't feel Him, the Bible says He's here. He's nearby. *"I will never leave you... I will never forsake you."* Remember His closeness in the present.

**3. Remember His power for the future.** *"I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me."* Look at the fact that you don't have to face the future on your own, thank God! There are additional resources that you can draw on to help you.

Remember the Lord and get your mind off the discouraging circumstances. Remember that your thoughts determine your feelings. So, you think about the Lord. Reorganize. Remember.

### **3. RESIST**

Resist the discouragement. V. 14 *"Remember the Lord who is great and awesome and fight [circle "fight"] for your brothers and your sons and your daughters and your wives and your homes."* Fight back. Don't give up without a fight. Resist it. Don't give in to discouragement.

Nehemiah is saying this, if you give in to discouragement it's because you've chosen to give in to it. You don't have to give in to it. It's your choice. You can resist it. Fight it. The bible says clearly that Christians are in a spiritual warfare. We are in a battle. There are all kinds of forces trying to discourage us. We are in a battle.

Romans 8: 1. God doesn't condemn you. *"There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."* Its so easy to forget the graciousness and forgiveness of God. Remember His grace and remember there's no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. God would say to you, "Resist. Resist the devil and he'll flee from you." He's the father of fear. The Bible says *"There is no fear in love because perfect love casts out all fear."*

God is love and when you're filled with God, you're filled with His love. That replaces the fear. Resist the devil. We must take seriously Ephesians 6; 10-18 and put on the whole of the Armour of God.

There is a story of a man who went to work in what was referred to as "the house of the dying" in Calcutta. He wanted a clear answer on how to spend the rest of his life. On his visit he met with mother Theresa. She asked him, "what do you want me to pray for?" I need clarity he said. I don't know which way to go with my life. She said rather firmly, "I will not pray for that". The man asked her why? She replied, you need to give up you're seeking for clarity. It's the last thing you are clinging onto. The man commented that she seemed to have the kind of clarity that he sought. Mother Theresa replied, I have never had clarity; what I have always had is trust. So, I will pray that you trust God".