

PRACTICAL SOLUTIONS TO COMMON PROBLEMS

Lesson – 8

"The Problem of Discouragement"

INTRODUCTION:

- I. One of the most difficult problems to overcome, ESPECIALLY for those in a leadership capacity, is the problem of discouragement.
 - A. At one time or another, we've ALL had the wind knocked out of our sails.
 1. Our confidence was shattered and our hearts became discouraged because:
 - a. Someone said that what we wanted so badly to accomplish simply COULDN'T BE DONE – "We've tried that before, and it didn't work."
 - b. Some task set before us seemed BIGGER than we could handle all by ourselves.
 - c. Those who ONCE worked by our side in getting some important job done got discouraged THEMSELVES and quit.
 - B. The Scriptures give us several examples of those who faced periods of discouragement in their lives.

1. But ONE particular example not only shows us the ways discouragement can COMES ON US, it also gives us an example of how that discouragement was eventually CONQUERED.
2. THAT example is the story of Nehemiah.
 - a. Nehemiah was faced with a seemingly uncomplicated task that quickly turned into a SIZABLE problem.
 - (1). He set out to build a wall, but he found himself having to contend with sarcasm, mockery, criticism, and conspiracy.
 - (2). Now, THAT'S what I call discouraging!
 - b. Let's take a closer look at the problems he faced, learn what CAUSED the discouragement and see how Nehemiah DEALT with it.

BODY:

- I. The setting of our story begins years before Nehemiah was EVEN BORN.
 - A. The Babylonian Empire ruled the world at that time.
 1. In 586 BC their armies swept through the land of Israel, conquering city after city, until they came to the city of Jerusalem.
 - a. Since it was a strongly fortified city, with immense walls around it to protect it from invading armies, the conquest of the city took a while.

- b. But eventually, the walls of Jerusalem were breached by the Babylonians, and the city was taken.
 - c. Not only was the city set on fire and the great Temple completely destroyed, the Babylonians tore down the walls that had been the city's only defense.
 2. THOUSANDS upon THOUSANDS of Jewish hostages were taken from Jerusalem into the far regions of Babylon, where they stayed until the Babylonian Empire fell to the Meds and the Persians.
- B. Nearly 70 years later the great Babylonian empire fell to the Medo-Persian Empire. For political as well as strategic reasons, the leader of the Medo-Persian Empire, King Cyrus of Persia, allowed as many of the captive Jews in Babylon to return to their homeland in Israel, if they wished to do so.
 1. Many Jews chose to return to their homeland in Jerusalem, but they returned to a city that had been COMPLETELY destroyed, and had been lying in ruins for nearly 70 years.
 - a. Slowly, the people began to rebuild their HOMES near the city, but the city ITSELF was largely neglected.
 2. Years later, during the reign of the Persian king Artaxerxes, word of the Jerusalem's fate reached Nehemiah back in the capitol city of the Persian Empire – he was DEEPLY grieved.

- a. Nehemiah was a godly man who served the king as a cup bearer – a position that would be similar to that of Prime Minister.
 - b. When Nehemiah's distress over Jerusalem was noticed by the good king, he had compassion on his friend.
 - c. He allowed Nehemiah to return to Jerusalem with all the supplies and letters of authorization he needed to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem once again.
 - d. But when Nehemiah arrived in Jerusalem and surveyed the walls of the city at night, he found the walls lay in complete ruins and the entire city of Jerusalem was vulnerable to attack from her enemies.
- C. Nehemiah began by organizing the people of Jerusalem to join together and rebuild the walls of the city.
1. At first, everything seemed to be going well – but all that soon changed.
 2. While Nehemiah's workers were building up Jerusalem's walls a little each day, their confidence and faith was being torn down by the constant threats and criticism of their enemies.
 3. Finally, their discouragement brought the work to a complete STANDSTILL.

II. The reasons for their discouragement are found in Nehemiah chapter four.

Let's take a few minutes to look at each of these, and see how these same factors MAY be causing discouragement in our OWN lives.

A. The first thing we notice is that the people became discouraged because of a loss of strength.

1. In other words, they were burned out PHYSICALLY.

a. Judah said, "*the strength of the burden bearers is failing.*" (**v. 10a**)

b. Literally translated, it means they were "stumbling, tottering, staggering under the load."

2. One of the main reasons for rebuilding the wall around Jerusalem in the first place was for protection.

3. But in their haste to protect the city from without, they had neglected to protect THEMSELVES against an enemy from WITHIN – physical exhaustion that eventually leads to discouragement.

4. They had STARTED strong, but NOW they were too tired to finish the job.

5. Could YOU be experiencing discouragement because you're just simply exhausted from trying to carry the load of responsibility all

by yourself? That's one of the reasons the people of Israel became discouraged.

B. Second, they were discouraged because of a loss of vision.

1. The people were complaining, "*there is so much rubbish that we are not able to build the wall.*" (**v. 10b**)

a. The Hebrew word for "rubbish" means, "dry earth, debris."

b. In other words, all they could see – everywhere they looked – was "rubbish," piles and piles of broken mortar and brick.

2. Their grand vision of having a city surrounded by a strong, well-built wall was NOW evaporating into thin air.

a. They took their eyes off the WALL, and all they HAD accomplished, and began looking at all the debris, and all they STILL had to accomplish.

3. Could that also be a reason for YOUR discouragement – because you've taken your eyes off all you HAVE accomplished, but are now focusing on what seems like an NEVER ENDING task that still lays ahead of you?

C. Third, they were discouraged because of a loss of confidence.

1. The end of verse 10 shows that the people's physical exhaustion and their loss of vision had worn down their confidence.

a. As far as they were concerned, they simply couldn't rebuild the wall.

2. At the BEGINNING, the people *"had a mind to work."* **(v. 6)**
 3. But NOW, their motivation was gone, and in its place was an OVERWHELMING feeling that they would NEVER finish the task.
 4. Has YOUR confidence faltered – are you beginning to think that this task is simply TOO BIG for you?
- D. Finally, they were discouraged because of a loss of security.
1. The Jews had enemies who didn't want to see them succeed – and these enemies made their feelings perfectly clear.
 2. Judah told Nehemiah, *"And our adversaries said, 'They will neither know nor see anything, till we come into their midst and kill them and cause the work to cease.'"* **(v. 11)**
 3. Every step of the way, the Jews had to CONSTANTLY watch over their shoulders, not knowing from moment to moment when they might be attacked.
 4. Is there SOMEONE who is hoping you'll fail – someone who will be quick to point out how INADEQUATE you are to have even undertaken the task in the first place?
- E. Loss of strength, loss of vision, loss of confidence, and loss of security – any one of which would be enough to stop almost any task, but all combined together, brought the project to a screeching halt!

- III. Fortunately, Nehemiah wasn't the kind of person who stood around with his head in his hands – instead he began to put into action FIVE THINGS which would rebuild the people's confidence, not to mention the wall.
- A. First, he unified the people around a common goal.
1. Nehemiah said, *"Therefore I positioned men behind the lower parts of the wall, at the openings; and I set the people according to their families, with their swords, their spears, and their bows." (v. 13)*
 2. Nehemiah saw that the basic unit for encouragement was the family.
 - a. However, the strength of families working together toward a common goal had been broken up by having relatives working at different places on the wall.
 - b. He also saw that scattering the work around was REALLY counter-productive.
 3. So, Nehemiah REORGANIZED the work, and teamed up his people into family units that were all centered around a common goal.
 4. If you're discouraged, get your family behind you – tell them you need their support and encouragement – even if the only family you can depend on is your SPIRITUAL family (your brothers and sisters in Christ).

- B. Second, he directed their attention to the Lord.
1. Nehemiah went on to say, *"And I looked, and arose and said to the nobles, to the leaders, and to the rest of the people, 'Do not be afraid of them. Remember the Lord, great and awesome...'"* (**v. 14a**)
 2. Nehemiah saw that the people's attention had been diverted from the Lord into TWO separate directions.
 - a. First, their attention had been diverted toward their ENEMIES.
 - (1). They began to worry about what their enemies MIGHT do, and became afraid of what they COULD do.
 - b. Second, their attention had been diverted toward the piles of DEBRIS.
 3. Nehemiah had to get their eyes back on the Lord.
 - a. Until he could DO that, there would be no progress.
 4. So he reminded the people that the LORD is more powerful than even their GREATEST enemy.
 - a. God wanted the wall to be built.
 - b. So, since that's what GOD wanted, they didn't need to worry about their ENEMIES – God was quite capable of taking care of them.

5. If what you're doing is pleasing to the Lord, then remember that if the Lord is WITH you, who can possibly stand AGAINST you – so call on the Lord to help you through these periods of discouragement.
- C. Third, he encouraged them to maintain a balance.
1. **In verse 15** Nehemiah said, *"And it happened, when our enemies heard that it was known to us, and that God had brought their plot to nothing, that all of us returned to the wall, everyone to his work."* Then **in verse 17** he said, *"Those who built on the wall, and those who carried burdens, loaded themselves so that with one hand they worked at construction, and with the other held a weapon."*
 2. Like us, when we get discouraged, these people could ONLY see ONE THING AT A TIME – never the WHOLE picture.
 - a. As far as they were concerned, they either had to take time to BUILD or FIGHT.
 - (1). As long as they were FIGHTING, they couldn't take time to BUILD.
 - (2). And as long as they were BUILDING, they couldn't be successful at FIGHTING.
 - b. Nehemiah had people who either wanted to build or fight -- so he had to bring the two together.

3. Therefore, he urged the people to maintain balance in working to rebuild the wall while ALSO being prepared to fight.
 4. Maybe you need to step back and take a look at the big picture once again – remind yourself of why you're so devoted to doing the task before you. You began that task because it was the right thing to do, and it was worthy of your efforts – don't forget that.
- D. Fourth, he provided a rallying point.
1. *"Then I said to the nobles, the rulers, and the rest of the people, 'The work is great and extensive, and we are separated far from one another on the wall. Wherever you hear the sound of the trumpet, rally to us there. Our God will fight for us.'" (vs. 19-20)*
 2. Nehemiah knew that the enemy could attack at any TIME and at any PLACE along the wall.
 - a. The people working along one section needed to know if THEY were attacked, OTHERS would rally to fight along beside them.
 3. So, he organized a way in which those who under attack could summons help from others.
 - a. Not only would they be fighting at each other's side, but Nehemiah reminded them that God would be fighting beside them as well.

4. Too often, when Christians come under discouragement's attack, they don't have the friends they need who will come to their side.
 - a. But the idea of drawing together to fight the battle of discouragement is woven throughout the Scriptures.
 - (1). When David was pursued by King Saul, Jonathan was there to encourage him.
 - (2). When Elijah was depressed and feeling discouraged, God sent Elisha to encourage him.
 - b. We all need someone who will drop what they are doing and come running when we need help.
 - c. That means YOU may have to ASK for help – you need to let others know that the time may come when you are going to need their help, and that they need to be ready to jump in.
- E. Finally, Nehemiah occupied the people in a ministry of service to others.
 1. *"So we labored in the work, and half of the men held the spears from daybreak until the stars appeared. At the same time I also said to the people, 'Let each man and his servant stay at night in Jerusalem, that they may be our guard by night and a working party by day.'"* (vs. 21-22)
 2. Nehemiah created a protective buddy system.
 - a. He knew that if the people got involved in serving ONE ANOTHER, their confidence and morale would be increased,

and they would be MUCH better prepared to protect themselves from their enemies.

2. We need to rally around each other, and realize that we are ALL servants to one another.
 - a. That's how WE can overcome discouragement as well.

CONCLUSION:

- I. Many of us began our Christian lives with great confidence and faith.
 - A. We were probably all a little like the fellow Tim Hansel describes in his book "Eating Problems For Breakfast:"
 1. There he says, "he was the sort of man who would go after Moby Dick with a row boat, a harpoon, and a jar of tartar sauce!"
 - B. But, somewhere along the way, we started feeling discouraged – probably because of some of the same reasons Nehemiah's wall-builders became discouraged.
 1. Maybe you're overwhelmed by the tremendous task before you.
 2. Perhaps you're knee-deep in the rubble of a shattered relationship, or stumbling over the debris of past mistakes.
 3. Perhaps at one time, you "had a mind to work," but now you've lost your confidence.

4. Maybe someone is constantly sniping at your heels like some pesky little dog – constantly telling you you're going to fail, and hoping you don't succeed.
- C. Have the building up of the walls of your faith been left undone?
1. Then it's time to realize that God is standing ready to help you, and so are your brothers and sisters in Christ.
 - a. As the family of God, we need to close ranks and work TOGETHER on our common goal.
 - b. We need to realize that if God is FOR us, who can possibly be AGAINST us?
 - c. We need to maintain BALANCE, working at building the walls of our faith, while being prepared to respond to those who would attack us.
 - d. We need to rally to the support of ONE ANOTHER.
 - e. And, we need to stop putting US first in our lives, and realize we are here to serve ONE ANOTHER.
- II. No matter how discouraged you may become -- for whatever reason – always remember, the Lord stands ready to encourage the discouraged.
- A. He knows that discouragement is a powerful force that can pull the focus of our hearts and minds off Him and onto ourselves.
1. Discouragement is a DESTROYER of spiritual growth.

- B. That's why the Lord wants you to turn to the only power great enough to defeat discouragement – HIS POWER.
1. If you're not a child of God, then you need to begin by turning to the Lord in complete faith and obedience.
 2. If you're a discouraged child of God, then you need to quit trying to rely on your own strength, and turn back to the Lord and depend on His OMNIPOTENT STRENGTH!