

But he said to me,
“My grace is sufficient
for you, for my power is
made perfect in weakness.”

Therefore I will
boast all the more
gladly about my
weaknesses, so that
Christ’s power may
rest on me.

2 Corinthians 12:9

Chapter Ten

GETTING PAST THE "BUT"

Read: Nehemiah 1-3



We've all had a feeling of uncertainty at times. Wondering what we'll do next. Wondering where God will lead. Wondering how things could possibly change when all we've been given are the two hands that we've got. Longing to succeed, yet not having the courage or the power to do so.

Opening our Bibles to Nehemiah, we find a man with nothing but passion and prayer. A man whose desire for change ran so deep that he wept and mourned and fasted for days.

The Bible tells us that he was a cupbearer to the King. He wasn't a king himself; he wasn't the captain of a large army, he didn't have the necessary resources at his disposal to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem, but he had faith in a God Who makes the impossible possible.

That kind of faith unlocks the door to our courage. It reminds us that the power within us is far greater than anything that could potentially stand in our way.

HE WAS AFRAID, BUT...

Notice the words that Nehemiah uses in Chapter 2:

“I was very much afraid, but...”

He wasn't just afraid—he was very terrified. Nehemiah knew that his attitude in the king's presence was a serious matter, and that disappointing the king could result in negative consequences.



DID YOU KNOW

A PERSIAN SUBJECT WAS EXPECTED TO BE PERFECTLY CONTENT SO LONG AS HE HAD THE HAPPINESS OF BEING WITH HIS KING. A REQUEST TO QUIT THE COURT WAS THUS A SERIOUS MATTER.
—BARNES NOTES ON THE BIBLE

When the king asked Nehemiah why he looked unhappy, a window of opportunity opened for him to either plead his case, or step back and let someone else fulfill his mission.

Once again, I'm reminded of the verse from the story of Esther that we discussed in Chapter 3,

For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place, but you and your father's

family will perish. And who knows but that you have come to your royal position for such a time as this? (Esther 4:14)

Like Esther, Nehemiah was in the king's palace, and like her he had an opportunity to use his position to glorify God.

"But" is a powerful word, and depending on how we use it, we can either step forward in faith, or step back in fear. Nehemiah was terrified, but despite his fear he spoke to the king.

Like Nehemiah, we need to start using that word when it comes to the things we fear most:

I'm afraid, but I'll follow God's will.

I'm standing alone, but I'll keep standing strong.

I can't do this, but God can.

They might ridicule me, but I'm choosing to follow the Lord.

I don't know where my next paycheck will come from, but I am trusting that God will provide.

I'm afraid to speak to my boss, but I know God is with me.

I'm worried about my kids, but I'll leave them in God's capable hands.

My problem is big, but my God is bigger.

I've lost someone dear, but I'll see them again.

DID YOU KNOW

MANY SCHOLARS BELIEVE THAT NEHEMIAH WAS IN THE PALACE AT SUSAN AT THE SAME TIME IN HISTORY AS ESTHER, WHICH MEANS THAT THEIR PATHS MAY HAVE CROSSED.

We need to remind ourselves, and then keep reminding ourselves that we are not in control. Nehemiah wasn't *lucky* that the king was favorable to his request, he was graciously blessed by God Who was working to pave the way.

And because the gracious hand of my God was on me, the king granted my requests. (Nehemiah 2:8b)

A PARALLEL TO OUR FAITH

As we get into Chapter 3 of Nehemiah, we see that they've started building the walls. What's interesting to note here is that the book of Nehemiah is a parallel of sorts to the work of the Holy Spirit in purifying our heart, renewing our mind, and leading us through spiritual warfare. In the same way that the walls of Jerusalem protected the temple from the enemy, self-control is a way of protecting our hearts and our minds from the enemy. When we come to Christ, we start rebuilding those walls. We examine our hearts in the same way that Nehemiah examined the walls in Chapter 2, and we strengthen them in the same way that Hezekiah did in the previous chapter.

The Bible draws a comparison between self-control (governing our passions) and the walls of a city when it says,

He that hath no rule over his own spirit is like a city that is broken down, and without walls. (Proverbs 25:28)

In MacLaren's Expositions we read,

“He who submits himself to Christ is lord of himself as none else are. He has a light within which teaches him what is sin. He has a love within which puts out the flame of temptation, as the sun does a coal fire. He has a motive to resist; he has power for

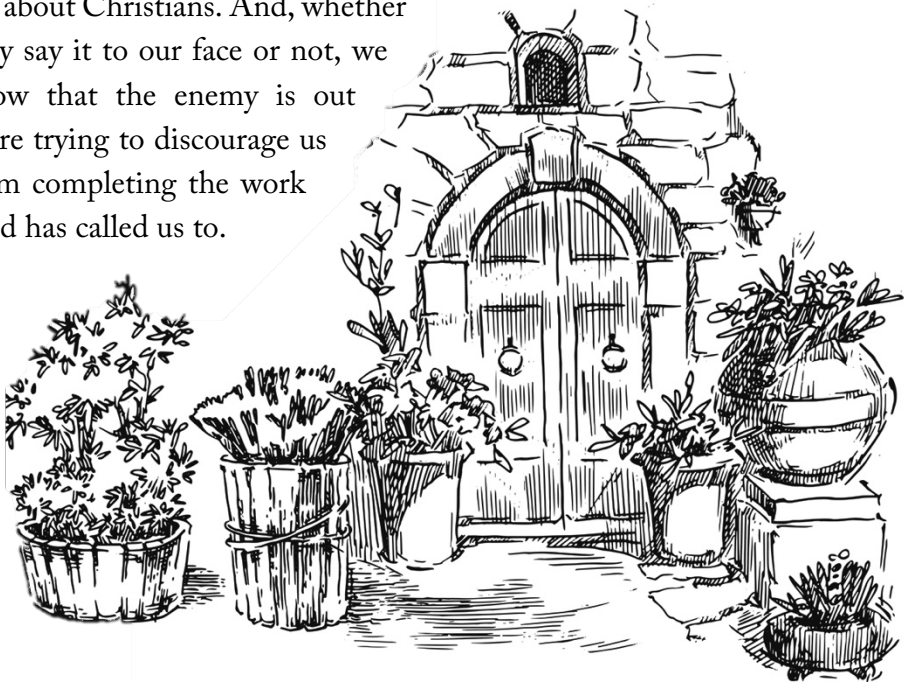
resistance; he has hope in resisting. Only thus are the walls broken down rebuilt.”

In Nehemiah 4:2, we see the enemy trying everything he can to stop their work. Hurling insults as he questions their ability.

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?

SATAN IS USING THE SAME TACTICS

When we submit ourselves to Christ, and as we're building that wall around the temple to protect us from the enemy, we're going to face opposition. We've all been there. We've heard the things that people say about Christians. And, whether they say it to our face or not, we know that the enemy is out there trying to discourage us from completing the work God has called us to.



To discourage someone is to take their courage away. That's exactly what the enemy is trying to do when we are mocked, insulted, and attacked. And, while the discouragement often comes from those outside our faith, some days that voice can be heard from within.

I can't do it.

I'm afraid.

I'm not good enough.

I don't measure up.

I'm going to fail.

I'm too old.

I don't have the resources.

This is too hard for someone like me.

Compare these discouraging thoughts to the attack from the enemies in Nehemiah Chapter 4, and you will see that Satan is using the same tactics of intimidation today that he used back then.

Notice the first thing that Nehemiah does when he is faced with opposition—he prays, and he posts a guard. This is exactly what Jesus told His disciples to do on the night He was betrayed.

Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak. (Mark 14:38)

Jesus knew that they would be standing against the enemy that very night, and He also knew that prayer was the best source of protection for them.

Whether we realize it or not, there's a war taking place in the spiritual realm. While God is at work in our lives, there's an enemy with a bow in his hand, and he's aiming straight for our hearts. And so, our first thought should always be prayer. Whether we're folding

laundry, standing at the kitchen sink washing dishes, or driving in our cars, we must be armed and ready for battle.



Likewise, in Ephesians 6, after Paul encourages the church to put on the full armor of God, he reminds them to watch and pray,

Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints. (Ephesians 6:18)

There are going to be days when the enemy is attacking us from all sides. Situations that try our patience and test our will. Days when we're afraid to step out in faith. Times when we question our worth and doubt our ability.

On days like that remember Nehemiah, who courageously spoke to the king despite his fear. Remember how he ignored the enemies that desperately tried to discourage him. Finally, following Nehemiah's example, take your eyes off the world, and take your burdens to prayer.

THE DEVIL WILL TRY YOU, BUT HE WON'T
BE TRIUMPHANT. NOT AS LONG AS
YOU'RE STANDING WITH GOD AND
STANDING IN FAITH.

—DARLENE SCHACHT

PAUSE REFLECT

What are some of the "buts" that have held you back the past?

What did Nehemiah do first when he heard that his people were in trouble, and their city broken down?

What two things did Nehemiah do when he was faced with opposition?

What does Matthew 6:34 say? Write the verse out here:

What advice does James 4:7 give us regarding the enemy?

Looking back on this study, what are some important things you learned about courage?