



Stand Guard and Pray



Something to Plant

Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.

—1 Peter 5:8

Read: Nehemiah 4:1-6

The Enemies Tactics Haven't Changed

Turning the page to chapter 4, we see Sanballat and Tobiah at work once again. Their tactics haven't changed—they stand against the work of God's people, using mockery, ridicule, and intimidation to discourage them. Their words are laced with contempt, questioning the strength, ability, and resolve of those rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem.

In many ways, Sanballat and Tobiah reflect the very nature of the devil himself. The word devil comes from the Greek word 'diabolos', which means slanderer or accuser. And that is exactly what the enemy does—he stands against the people of God, whispering lies, casting doubt, and belittling their work. Sometimes the whispers come from within, and other times they come from the people around us. He has used the same strategies, and his tactics have remained unchanged throughout history.

We see this pattern clearly in Scripture.

- **Goliath mocked Israel** when he stood before them, taunting their armies and defying the living God (1 Samuel 17:43-44). He ridiculed David, dismissing him as nothing more than a boy with a stick, but David knew that Goliath's insults were ultimately against God Himself.
- **Sennacherib, King of Assyria** mocked the God of Israel, arrogantly declaring that no god could save Jerusalem from his hand (2 Kings 18:28-35). Yet, the Lord demonstrated His power and faithfulness by sending an angel who struck down 185,000 of Sennacherib's soldiers, delivering His people and proving that no one can stand against Him.
- **Job's wife** ridiculed Job's unwavering faithfulness to God in the midst of his great suffering, saying, "Are you still maintaining your integrity? Curse God and die!" (Job 2:9) Despite her words, Job stood firm in his trust, and God ultimately restored his fortunes, blessing him even more than before.
- **Pharaoh ridiculed the authority of God**, scoffing at Moses when he demanded that Israel be set free. "*Who is the Lord, that I should obey him and let Israel go?*" (Exodus 5:2). His arrogance led to his downfall, as God demonstrated His power through the plagues.
- **The Roman soldiers mocked Jesus** before His crucifixion, twisting a crown of thorns onto His head and draping Him in a purple robe. They jeered at Him, saying, "*Hail, king of the Jews!*" (Matthew 27:29). They didn't realize they were mocking the very King of Kings.

Not only did these enemies mock God's people, but they also tried to create doubt. They belittled the work, calling it weak and useless. Sanballat scorned the builders, saying, "What are those feeble Jews doing? Will they restore their wall? ... Can they bring the stones back to life from those heaps of rubble—burned as they are?" (Nehemiah 4:2). Their goal was clear: to

make the people question God’s calling and to break their spirits before the work was even completed.



What perspective shift does Paul encourage us to make in seasons of discouragement? See 2 Corinthians 4:16-18.

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God Resists the Proud

When Sanballat, Tobiah, the Arabs, the Ammonites, and the people of Ashdod heard that the gaps in Jerusalem’s wall were being closed and the work was making real progress, they were furious. It’s the same today. When we begin closing the gaps in our lives—when we leave behind old habits, walk away from unhealthy influences, or commit ourselves to prayer and time in God’s Word—the enemy is stirred up. Opposition often follows.

The enemy doesn’t want to see us grow stronger, because every step toward holiness reflects God’s glory and reminds him of his defeat. Pride was at the root of Satan’s fall, and it remains at the core of his rebellion against God. When we walk humbly with the Lord, relying on His strength and submitting to His Word, we stand as living testimonies against that pride. Proverbs 3:34 says, “He mocks proud mockers but shows favor to the humble and oppressed.”

This passage highlights how God actively resists the proud but pours out His grace on those who walk in humility. If we want to close the gaps in our lives and stand strong against the enemy’s attacks, cultivating humility is key.

Here are some practical ways we can walk humbly with God each day:

- Practice gratitude: Pride often grows when we forget the source of our blessings. Spend time daily thanking God for His provision, protection, and grace. This reminds us of our dependence on Him.
- Seek accountability: Surround yourself with godly friends who encourage humility and call out pride when they see it.
- Serve others: Actively look for ways to put others' needs before your own, whether through acts of kindness, encouraging words, or prayer. Jesus demonstrated this kind of humility when He washed His disciples' feet (John 13:14-15).
- Stay rooted in God's Word: Meditate on passages that highlight God's sovereignty and our dependence on Him, such as Philippians 2:3-4, which says, "Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others."

Despite opposition, Nehemiah and the people persevered. They refused to be discouraged by the enemy's tactics. Instead, they worked with all their hearts, committed to the mission God had given them. They remained steadfast, knowing that their strength came not from themselves, but from the Lord.

Nehemiah didn't let the mockery pull him off course. He didn't argue or chase approval from those who stood against him. Instead, he turned to God in prayer, laid his concerns at His feet, and kept going. His strength wasn't loud or defensive—it was the quiet strength that comes from trusting God to fight for him. When we face discouragement or criticism, we have the same choice. We can let it distract and defeat us, or we can turn to God, asking Him to protect our hearts and steady our hands for the work ahead. True humility means letting God be our defender while we stay faithful to the path He's called us to walk.

He mocks
PROUD MOCKERS
BUT SHOWS
FAVOR
— TO THE
humble
AND —
oppressed
PROVERBS 3:34



Can you think of a time when you gave up on something good because opposition or discouragement got in the way? What discouraged you, and how might you respond differently if you faced a similar challenge in the future?

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 *Something to Ponder*

The enemy's tactics may be persistent, but God's power is unchanging and victorious. Just as Nehemiah and his people refused to be intimidated, we too can stand firm in faith, knowing that our strength comes from the Lord.

Read: Nehemiah 4:7-23

Our Struggle and Weapons are Different

The enemy is still at work today, opposing us at every turn. But here’s the difference: our struggle and weapons are different. Paul writes, “For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.” (Ephesians 6:12, NIV).

That disagreement with your husband, the tension in your family, the doubts creeping into your faith, the anger from betrayal, the temptation that caught you off guard—these are not just human struggles. The real enemy is not your spouse, your family, your church, or your friends. The real enemy is Satan and his army of fallen angels, working behind the scenes to sow division, doubt, and destruction.

So what does Paul tell us to do? The same thing that Nehemiah and his fellow workers did: stand firm and equip ourselves with the right weapons. The Jews in Nehemiah’s time worked with one hand and held their weapons in the other (Nehemiah 4:17). They stood guard, prepared for attack, and continued pressing forward. Likewise, Paul commands us: “Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand.” (Ephesians 6:13, NIV)



According to 2 Corinthians 10:4-5, what three things do our spiritual weapons give us the power to do?

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Paul doesn't stop there, and neither did Nehemiah. Standing firm and being prepared is critical, but Nehemiah reminds us that the people did more than post a guard and carry a sword—they prayed. Their reliance on God was just as essential as their physical preparation. They knew that without God's help, all their efforts would be in vain. And so, after listing the armor of God, Paul emphasizes the importance of prayer, saying: "And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord's people." (Ephesians 6:18, NIV)

Like Nehemiah, Paul knew that our best defense is God working in us and through us. The armor of God is powerful because of the Spirit of God working through it. The belt of truth holds everything together, but where would we be without God's truth guiding us. The sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God, is only effective when we wield it through faith and the Spirit's guidance. The shield of faith can extinguish flaming arrows, but without a deep trust in God, it's ineffective. Every piece of armor depends on our reliance on Him, which is why prayer is vital to our defense.

Do you remember when Jesus was tempted in the wilderness? And, do you remember how effective He was in His defense against Satan? His ability to wield the sword of the Spirit, was about more than simply knowing the scriptures—He was using it wisely and effectively. How? By fasting for 40 days and 40 nights. You see, any of us can Google the scriptures to win an argument or make a point, but when we spend time with God, immersing ourselves in His presence through prayer, fasting, and obedience, we gain the wisdom and discernment needed to wield His Word effectively. Jesus didn't just quote Scripture to Satan; He lived in complete dependence on the Father, and that connection gave power to His words.

The same is true for us. Knowing the Word isn't enough—we need to abide in Christ and allow the Holy Spirit to guide us as we apply it. When our hearts are aligned with God's will, our use of the Word becomes a weapon that the enemy cannot stand against. This is why a relationship with God is essential to our defense.



What role does prayer play in helping us stand firm against spiritual battles?

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Two Guards: Praying and Watching

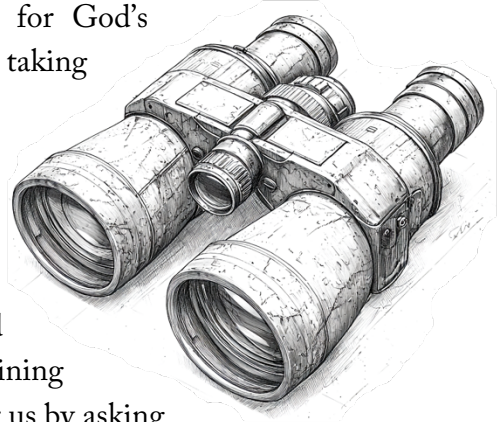
In verse 11, we read, “Also our enemies said, ‘Before they know it or see us, we will be right there among them and will kill them and put an end to the work.’” The enemy is subtle, isn’t he? He has a way of slipping in when we least expect it. And before we know it, we’re feeling discouraged, uncertain, and afraid to step out in faith. This aligns perfectly with Peter’s warning in 1 Peter 5:8: “Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.”

The question is, how many of us are truly on guard? Are we prepared for an attack? Are we cautiously observing the way we live, what we listen to, and what we allow into our minds? The truth is, if we’re not watchful, we leave ourselves open to the enemy’s schemes.

Charles Spurgeon, in his sermon on Nehemiah 4:9, spoke of two guards: praying and watching. He pointed out that the people didn’t just pray—they also acted. They set guards over the exposed areas of the city while committing their situation to God.

In the same way, we must pray for God's protection and guidance while also taking practical steps to guard our lives.

Let's pause and think about this: Where are the vulnerable areas in our lives? What are the gaps in our spiritual walls that the enemy might try to exploit? If we hope to guard and protect our hearts, the first step is examining them. David set a powerful example for us by asking God to search his heart and reveal any hidden sin. His prayer in Psalm 139 reminds us that real protection begins with honest self-examination.



*Search me, God, and know my heart;
test me and know my anxious thoughts.
See if there is any offensive way in me,
and lead me in the way everlasting.*
— Psalm 139:23-24

Once we recognize our weaknesses, we can take intentional steps to protect those areas. Maybe it's a temptation to gossip, an unhealthy relationship, an uncontrolled temper, or a struggle with addiction. If alcohol is a temptation, it means avoiding bars or situations where you'll be tempted to compromise. If you're prone to comparison, it might mean stepping back from social media. If you have a problem with anger, perhaps an accountability partner can help you work through your frustration by praying with you and encouraging you.

While God is our ultimate protector, we have a role to play in staying vigilant and discerning, and so Proverbs 4:23 tells us, "Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it." Setting a guard isn't about living in fear—it's about living wisely.

Praying and watching go hand in hand. Prayer connects us to God's power, wisdom, and guidance, while watchfulness helps us to see potential dangers

before they overtake us. Together, they form a strong defense against the enemy's schemes. Are we willing to take both seriously? Are we ready to guard the vulnerable areas of our lives and entrust everything to God through prayer? Let's ask ourselves: where do I need to set a watch today?

Just as Nehemiah and his men never took off their armor, even for something as simple as getting water, we too must remain spiritually equipped at all times. The enemy doesn't wait for convenient moments to attack—he strikes when we least expect it. That's why we can't afford to let our guard down. Keeping the armor of God on means consistently living in truth, faith, and righteousness, and continually staying grounded in God's Word and prayer.





What is one truth you want to carry with you this week? As you went through this chapter, did the Holy Spirit impress anything upon your heart?

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 *Something to Practice*

Take time to identify one area where you might be vulnerable to discouragement or distraction. Write it down, pray over it, and put a practical guard in place—whether it’s limiting your time on social media, setting aside focused time in the Word, or reaching out to a godly friend for accountability. Stay alert, keep praying, and trust that God is faithfully strengthening and equipping you for the work ahead.

A Timeline of Jerusalem's Walls and Worship

- c. 1446 BC – **The Tabernacle is built under Moses** as the portable dwelling place of God's presence during Israel's wilderness journey (Exodus 25–27)
- c. 1400 BC – **Israel enters the Promised Land** under Joshua (Joshua 3) Jerusalem (called Jebus) remains under Canaanite control
- c. 1000 BC – **David conquers Jerusalem from the Jebusites** and makes it his capital (2 Samuel 5:6-9)
- c. 970 BC – **David purchases the threshing floor of Araunah** to prepare for the future temple site (2 Samuel 24:24-25)
- c. 960 BC – **Solomon builds the First Temple** and fortifies the city's walls (1 Kings 6)
- c. 920 BC – **Pharaoh Shishak attacks Jerusalem; city's defenses are breached** (1 Kings 14:25-26)
- c. 700 BC – **Hezekiah strengthens Jerusalem's walls and builds Hezekiah's Tunnel** to secure the city's water supply against Assyrian siege (2 Chronicles 32:2-5)
- 586 BC – **Babylonians destroy Jerusalem's walls and the Temple** (2 Kings 25:8-10)
- 538 BC – **Return from exile under Zerubbabel; the Temple is rebuilt but the walls remain broken** (Ezra 1–6)
- 445 BC – **Nehemiah rebuilds Jerusalem's walls in 52 days** despite opposition (Nehemiah 6:15)
- 70 AD – **The Romans destroy Jerusalem and the Second Temple** under Titus

Answer Key

CHAPTER FOUR

What perspective shift does Paul encourage us to make in seasons of discouragement? (See 2 Corinthians 4:16–18)

Paul encourages us to focus on the eternal rather than the temporary. Though outwardly we may be wasting away, inwardly we are being renewed. Our present troubles are light and momentary compared to the eternal glory that far outweighs them.

Can you think of a time when you gave up on something good because opposition or discouragement got in the way? What discouraged you, and how might you respond differently if you faced a similar challenge in the future?

This answer will be different for everyone.

Read Isaiah 41:10. What are the three specific promises God gives in this verse to those who face fear or opposition? How can these promises strengthen your faith as you work through challenges?

God promises to:

1. Be with you
2. Strengthen you
3. Uphold you with His righteous right hand

These promises remind us we're not alone—God gives us strength and support in every battle we face.

According to 2 Corinthians 10:4–5, what three things do our spiritual weapons give us the power to do?

1. Demolish strongholds
2. Refute arguments
3. Take every thought captive to make it obedient to Christ

What role does prayer play in helping us stand firm against spiritual battles?

Prayer connects us to God's strength, aligns our hearts with His truth, and equips us to stand firm with faith and discernment.

Are there any gaps in your life that the Lord is calling you to repair—areas where old habits, influences, or pride might be standing in the way of your spiritual growth? If so, what steps can you take to close and rebuild them?

This answer will be different for everyone.