

Dealing With Discouragement

Introduction. Nehemiah was a man who probably had no idea how complicated life could get. He took on a project that had all the appearance of being harmless, innocent and rather simple. After all, what could be difficult about building a wall around a city (Nehemiah 2:5)? It seemed that Nehemiah would be able to have that wall completed in just a few weeks; then he would go back to Persia and resume his life. Not so!

He looked over the shoulders of those workmen he knew he was dealing with a mess (Nehemiah 4:1-23)! In fact, the more he tried to alleviate the problem, the greater it became. First there was sarcasm. Then there was mockery, which led to opposition, criticism and finally conspiracy. The conspiracy was so great that before long the inevitable took place -- discouragement set in. No matter how hard he tried, Nehemiah was unable to correct the problems. They just got worse; they multiplied and magnified as time went on.

Discouragement is inevitable. Anyone who is serious about serving God and fighting discouragement should study the life of Paul. In 2 Corinthians 4:7-10, Paul said that we have a treasure in earthen vessels. He was describing the treasure of the gospel and how it is housed in our frail human bodies. There is no power or strength in a clay pot. It is fragile, ugly and it often leaks. The passing of time only makes the pot weaker. Paul was saying that the power does not come from the pot, but from what the pot contains.

Any class that is designed for teaching people how to sell will tell you that you cannot constantly hear negativism without having some of it rub off on you. When some here in the congregation are discouraged, it cannot help but rub off on us so we are going to examine discouragement and hopefully learn how to overcome discouragement.

I. ***The Causes Of Discouragement***

- A. There is nothing that takes the wind out of our sails as quickly as discouragement. It is difficult to cure. There were four causes for this discouragement:
 1. Fatigue (vs. 10).
 - a) The "newness" of the project had worn off. We are excited at first, but then the difficulties become real.
 - b) A loss of strength and even sickness can take an emotional toll on us, as it did with Elijah (1 Kings 19:1-4).
 2. Frustration (vs. 10).
 - a) There was much rubbish still left to the project. It is easy to lose sight of the end sometimes. The builders had lost the vision of the completed wall.

- b) Have you ever started a project and said, "Oh, maybe an hour or hour and a half at the most?" Five hours later, when you are halfway finished, you look back and say, "I think the Lord is leading me backward!" Sometimes we get frustrated when we do not progress quickly enough.
- 3. Failure (vs. 10.)
 - a) When you lose confidence, discouragement is winking at you from around the corner. When you lose your confidence, you lose heart. That produces an overwhelming, discouraging sense that you are never going to catch up.
 - b) How do you think Moses felt when he stood before Pharaoh and he rejected him (Exodus 5:1-2)?
 - c) In 1905, the University of Bern turned down a doctrinal dissertation as "irrelevant and fanciful." The writer of that paper was Albert Einstein. In 1984, an English teacher noted on a teenager's report card, "A conspicuous lack of success." The student was Winston Churchill. We think that failure will finish us!
- 4. Fear (vs. 14).
 - a) There are many areas of life that we hang onto for tangible security. Someone once said, "Possessions can either make one bitter or better."
 - (1) Job lost his family and his possessions (Job 1:13-22).
 - (2) Remember that one day you will have to leave it all behind (1 Timothy 6:7).
 - b) In the scriptures you find the saints being crippled by fear (Galatians 2:11-14; 2 Timothy 4:16). Francis Bacon said, "It is a miserable state of mind to have few things to desire, and many things to fear."

II. ***Principles In Overcoming Discouragement***

- A. Trying to build this wall was turning out to be no easy task! Sometimes when you have lost all these, you have a deep feeling that it is just not worth it. How can we handle discouragement? Nehemiah employed five techniques:
 - 1. Unify your efforts toward a goal (vs. 13).
 - a) Nehemiah turned their attention from themselves to the enemy, from the discouragement of self-pity to the goal of self-preservation.
 - b) He pulled them together. When brethren are unified toward a goal, there is no time to be worrying about trouble (Philippians 1:27; Colossians 1:29).

- c) You must have long-range goals to keep you from being frustrated by short-term failures.
 - 2. Direct your attention to the Lord (vs. 14).
 - a) They were looking at the rubbish when they needed to be looking at and putting their trust in the Lord (Philippians 4:4, 13).
 - b) People who are discouraged are mainly thinking about themselves. However, with God we are promised that everything will fall into place (1 Peter 5:7).
 - 3. Maintain a balance in your faith and actions (vss. 14-17).
 - a) We have got to stand, to contend for the faith, to be strong in the fight and to be good soldiers (James 1:22-24).
 - b) We must certainly put our trust in the Lord and pray fervently, but let's never forget to be wise to seize opportunities put before us (Isaiah 50:10).
 - 4. Determine a rallying point (vss. 19-20).
 - a) You are not alone. Look at all the people around you who want desperately to see the congregation grow and develop or who struggle with similar problems and challenges.
 - b) Just when you think you are down and out, you have a friend to pick you up and dust you off (2 Corinthians 4:16). The best rallying point we can look toward is heaven (1 Corinthians 15:58).
 - 5. Serve other people (vss. 21-22).
 - a) How much time will you spend helping other people? Everyone of us needs to take a long look at our short lives.
 - b) Serving others is a tremendous part of the gospel (John 13:1-17; Galatians 5:13; Hebrews 6:10).
- B. Nehemiah did not ignore discouragement. You cannot ignore discouragement. It is like ignoring a flat tire. Pray all you want; drive all you want; you will never get the air back into it. It must be fixed. That is the way it is with discouragement.

Conclusion. Discouragement starts with the germs of self-doubt. Through fear, the germs begin to grow and multiply. Soon we lose our way, we weaken and we run and hide. As it continues, we become virtually useless and downright defeated. We become easy prey for the enemy of our souls (1 Peter 5:8).

Life cannot be lived exclusively on an incline. It will have its valleys and peaks, its downs and ups, its lows and highs. I know that discouragement may be tough to handle, but it is certainly not impossible. Our greatest glory is not in never falling, but in rising each time we fall!