

## **What to do when the work gets hard! The opposition to the workers ch. 4**

**Few things in life are certain. But criticism and rejection are certain.** "No person is exempt from criticism, and one's humility will never be seen more clearly than in the manner in which one accepts criticism and how one reacts to it." **Though people-pleasers try hard, no one totally avoids criticism or rejection ..Even people pleasers if they do not receive the reward they expect from pleasing people...they criticize and reject the same people they work so hard to please..**

- **Doing what is right would seem to be the antidote to criticism.....But how many of us get criticized for doing the right thing....**
- **Neither does loving everyone, or being perfect....The world crucified the only One with that quality.**
- **In fact Everything Jesus did upset someone. He was criticized even by friends, family and religious leaders.**

**And we cannot avoid rejection... because we cannot control the way people feel about us. Some will like us automatically; others may reject us without reason. When we fail to accept ourselves, rejection has an open door to our emotions.**

**Many times when a person rejects you, they want you to perform a certain way. By using rejection, they manipulate you until your actions line up with their desires.**

- **The only way to combat rejection is to gain a strong understanding of your position in Jesus Christ. Your worth and personhood are not determined by those around you. Anytime you base your self-worth on what other people say about you, you set yourself up for possible rejection.**

**Unfortunately, we cannot shield ourselves from rejection. Rejection is only destructive when we internalize it and allow it to creep into our own belief system. Satan loves to fuel the fires of low self-esteem with intermittent forms of rejection—a boss you can never please, a parent**

who only praises straight A's on the report card, or a friend who ignores you at a party.

When we fail to internalize the Lord's acceptance of us and accept ourselves, rejection has an open door to our emotions. The results are disastrous, a sense of unworthiness, a lack of self-acceptance, and an inability to build healthy relationships.

We feel unworthy and likewise think others view us as being unworthy. If left unchecked, rejection will control our attitudes, actions, and even our relationship with God.

No one is immune from criticism and Rejection...and if you endeavor to follow Jesus you will certainly endure criticism and rejection...

*JN 15: 20 Remember the words I spoke to you: 'No servant is greater than his master.' If they **persecuted** me, they will persecute you also. If they obeyed my teaching, they will obey yours also.....* **The antidote to criticism and rejection is to keep moving forward!**

God's will for Nehemiah was to build the wall. He appointed people to various tasks to accomplish that great project. Everyone had a job to do. Criticism started before the building began. and as the building started the opposition to the work intensified.

**Now God could have removed the opposition, but he did not...so it was also God's will that he didn't allow the wall to be built without opposition .. Why? Criticism and opposition are building tools. They present a challenge to building, and when the challenge is met by digging deeper and discovering an inner strength and stronger mental resolve...we gain a confidence that is realized by accomplishing something that once appeared impossible or that we thought or were told is impossible!.**

So ..These obstacles disguised as criticisms are well and carefully placed in our lives to build and strengthen us.

**Enter - the critics!**

*Neh 4:1 When Sanballat heard that we were rebuilding the wall, he became angry and was greatly incensed. He ridiculed the Jews, <sup>2</sup> and in the presence of his associates and the army of Samaria, he said, "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?" <sup>3</sup> Tobiah the Ammonite, who was at his side, said, "What they are building—even a fox climbing up on it would break down their wall of stones!"*

- Sanballat was criticizing God's work! Who was the fool?

Tobiah was mocking the God inspired work and continued the same hateful ridicule by say, "What they are building, even a fox climbing on it would break down their stone wall." Very well: All right Tobiah you fox: try to break down the wall!

Critics often look at situations from a human point of view, and self interest... they don't stop to think that they may be opposing God's directive will.

**Criticism is never a good reason to stop the work**, criticisms goal is to discourage...

what makes criticism powerful is that **there is a trace of truth in the words of the enemy.** As builders, the Jews were **feeble**. 90 years of history of not completing a wall.. and the truth is they They would not **complete it in a day**. They didn't have the best materials to work with. A lying, discouraging, critical will often have *some* truth in it, but it will neglect the great truth: *God was with them and has promised to see them through.*

- Critics like to gather forces... **there were many of them together doing the sarcastic, mocking criticism – and observes "critics run with critics."** iv. Discouragement is such a powerful weapon because it is somewhat the opposite of faith.
- Where faith believes God and His love and promises, discouragement looks for and believes the worst – and tends to pretty much forget about who God is and what He has promised to do.
- **He will break down their stone wall:** Tobiah made a huge mistake. He called the wall **their stone wall**; it wasn't **their wall at all**, but God's – he was criticizing God's wall, God's work. One should always be careful about the way you talk about God's kids.
- Because Nehemiah and the workers did in fact have legal protection from the king (proven by the *letters* mentioned

in [Nehemiah 2:7](#)), Sanballat and Tobiah had no authority to actually stop the work. All they could do was to discourage the Jews into stopping.

- The exact same attack comes into the life of the believer who is legally set free by his King. Yet they can be discouraged into drawing back from what God has set before them.
- We work differently under faith or under discouragement. We pray differently under faith or under discouragement. We read and hear the word differently under faith or under discouragement. It is no wonder that Satan works so hard to keep us from faith and keep us in discouragement.

we can allow ourselves to be run down by the critical, or we can run to God and keep on keeping on...that is what Nehemiah did...

Neh 4:4 Hear us, our God, for we are despised. Turn their insults back on their own heads. Give them over as plunder in a land of captivity. <sup>5</sup> Do not cover up their guilt or blot out their sins from your sight, for they have thrown insults in the face of the builders. <sup>6</sup> So we rebuilt the wall till all of it reached half its height, for the people worked with all their heart.

- **Hear us, our God:** Nehemiah's response was a great example. For Nehemiah, prayer was a first resource, not a last resort.
- He didn't debate, he didn't form a committee, he didn't even deal with the two enemies directly. Instead, he took it to God in prayer.
- You are never more successful than when you are on your knees in prayer. Nehemiah not only prayed but he stayed with the task at hand, good old fashioned persistence!

When times of opposition come, God wants us to rely on Him – **If we are angry at someone or have a real enemy, then we can go at them in prayer.** Never in the sense of praying evil upon them, but in turning them over to a good and just God because He knows exactly what to do with them.

- Nehemiah was asking God to take vengeance, which is His work, not the work of Nehemiah or other believers ...they had a job to do!
- **interestingly.....God's answer to this short prayer is seen in verse 6, "So we rebuilt the wall." He did not extinguish the Opposition but touched the hearts of the people... "the people had a renewed heart to work."**
- **The result after the attack the work continues on with greater and greater strength.**

This is exactly what Satan wants to destroy with his attacks – the **mind to work**. He wants to make us feel defeated, or passive, or self-focused, or discouraged.

*NE 4: 7* But when Sanballat, Tobiah, the Arabs, the Ammonites and the people of Ashdod heard that the repairs to Jerusalem's walls had gone ahead and that the gaps were being closed, they were very angry. <sup>8</sup> They all plotted together to come and fight against Jerusalem and stir up trouble against it.

- **The gaps were beginning to be closed:** The wall was only half as high as it should be, but it was almost continuous now. Therefore, the enemies of the work **became very angry**.
- the work of God often makes the enemy of our soul angry. He must often rage against the progress being made by God's people in touching a lost world for Jesus Christ. It's not bad to make the devil angry.
- **All of them conspired together to come and attack:** As the work progressed the enemies became more serious. Now they didn't simply complain or mock, they threatened and planned for violence.
- On the one hand, this was serious: the wall was built to protect against the attacks of violence, and now it seemed that the very building of the wall may prompt an attack to come. It would have been easy for the people to fear and to think perhaps all their work would be made useless.
- On the other hand, this wasn't serious at all. We notice that they *didn't attack* – they just talked about it. Sanballat and Tobiah were hoping that the *threat* of attack would be enough. Satan uses the same strategy of fear against us, and if we are paralyzed by a threat the threat has worked – even when nothing actually happens against us.
- **His desire is to create confusion:** This is an important strategy of Satan – to create confusion among the people of God. A confused people will never move forward effectively. **They are usually confused because they are distracted by the tricks of their enemies instead of focusing on God and His promises and the goal.**

<sup>9</sup> *But we prayed to our God and posted a guard day and night to meet this threat.*

**We set a watch:** They also knew that prayer didn't mean they were to do *nothing*. **Our prayers do not replace our actions; they make our actions effective for God's work.**

- They used common sense to do what they should have, protecting against attack, using willing servants of God to *be* the wall until the wall was built.
- It isn't hard to imagine some super-spiritual among them saying, "Now Nehemiah, we don't need to **set a watch**. We have prayed, and God will protect us." Nehemiah would likely respond, "Yes, God will protect us, and He will as He finds us doing our duty before Him. Set the guard."
- **When we see an area of our Christian life that needs particular attention, it isn't enough to pray. You need to set a watch as well – give special attention and accountability to that area of your life until you are walking in consistent victory.**
- **Day and night:** This shows that Nehemiah was determined. He wouldn't let the security of daylight or the sleepiness of night keep him from the work. This sent a powerful message.

i. It sent a message to the people of God saying, "We are committed. This is going to succeed, because God is with us, and will enable us to overcome every obstacle."

ii. It sent a message to the enemies saying, "You will not succeed. God's work is going on and will not be stopped. We will make whatever sacrifices necessary to see it done – weary days, sleepless nights, it doesn't matter."

iii. It sent a message to God: "We trust in You, and our faith is a living faith – a faith of actions, not just words. We love and trust You, LORD."

\*\*\*\*\*Nehemiah and the Jews rebuilding Jerusalem have been standing strong in the face of attack; but now that the rebuilding work is at the half-way point, and wall is almost continuous, special challenges arise.

*NE 4: 10* Meanwhile, the people in Judah said, "The strength of the laborers is giving out, and there is so much rubble that we cannot rebuild the wall."

**a new challenge from the inside: discouragement among the people because the work seemed too big. *Discouragement...Discouragement is a very dangerous attitude...Why? because it is universal...we***

*have all wrestled with it...because it recurring..we will all wrestle with it again....because it is highly contagious....because when given into... it kills potential*

Look at the word... discourage. Webster says courage is, "that quality of mind which enables one to encounter danger and" difficulties with firmness, or without fear, or fainting of heart; valor; boldness; resolution.

Discouragement says, "Is it really worth it?" or "Why should I go any further?" or "I can't do it" or "It's hopeless." Desire is blunted. Notice that the discouragement comes from within the tribe of Judah. In (Gen. 49), Judah was prophesied to be the leader.

Those that got discouraged first were those that lived closest to the enemy. Day after day they heard their threats. You cannot constantly hear negative talk without being affected by it. If you are prone to discouragement you cannot afford to run the risk of fellowshipping with those who traffic in criticism

The newness of the challenge had worn off and it had become just plain work. and there was so much more...so much rubble..we are overwhelmed ...

- **Then Judah said:** Judah was supposed to be the strongest, bravest tribe. It was the tribe of great kings and ultimately, the Messiah Himself. It was a special challenge and a discouragement to have this word come from the tribe of Judah.
- Nehemiah and the Jews rebuilding Jerusalem have been standing strong in the face of attack; but now that the rebuilding work is at the half-way point, and wall is almost continuous, Yet Much remains to be done, **but fatigue sets in because much has already been done.**
- **Half way there is a dangerous place!...It isn't enough to just begin well. Many a team has had a great first half – only to lose in the final minutes. The rebuilding work has gone very well and many obstacles have been overcome – but the job isn't done yet, the game isn't over yet, there is still time to lose.**

- when you have given all...and you are only partially there...you are ripe for discouragement...because now...you see there is even more work...the Rubbish! they reached a stuck point...

c. The work of rebuilding the walls was not only construction, but cleaning and hauling away the rubbish. The ruins of the walls, lying in waste for 90 years had become a collecting point for all kinds of rubbish.

i. Clearing away the rubbish was not an option – it had to be done. The destroyed parts of the wall and the accumulated rubbish had to be cleared away so the walls could be rebuilt upon their foundations. If they didn't do this, the walls wouldn't stand at all.

So apparently at this point they had been moving the rubbish around, but with the gaps filled there was not more places to move it away from where they were building...they had to move it out! this made the second half of the job much more labor intensive and time consuming...which would slow down the building! and they are already so tired!

- the work of building is a lot easier – or more fun – than clearing away the rubbish.

iv. The heart of the people as shown in verse 10 must have been a discouragement for Nehemiah; it's easy to lead when your followers are full of enthusiasm and have a heart to work. But what do you do when that begins to fade?

and boom here come the opportunistic enemy...

*NE 4:11 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."*

- Verse ten may mark the lowest point in the spirits of those doing the work. Things were already in a bad state, and the discouraged workers felt like giving up.
- Now, the enemy throws in his greatest threat...we are going to kill you! it is all for nothing!
- The attacks we suffer from spiritual forces of darkness are just as strategically timed. Our spiritual enemies know when we are discouraged, tired, angry, or proud in self-confidence. The enemies of God's people paid a back-handed compliment by saying this. They



knew by now the only way to get them to stop serving God and doing His work was to **kill them**.

- For many, the devil does not have to literally kill them because discouragement, compromise, money, relationships, frustration, or trouble get them to stop . and in a sense kill them
- **Before they know it or see us:** Often, attacks from the adversary are successful only if they come as a surprise. When God's people are on guard, the enemy sees little victory.

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*NE 4:12 Then the Jews who lived near them came and told us ten times over, "Wherever you turn, they will attack us."*

- Those that got discouraged first were those that lived closest to the enemy. Day after day they heard their threats. You cannot constantly hear negative talk without being affected by it. If you are prone to discouragement you cannot afford to run the risk of fellowshipping with those who traffic in discouraging information.
- But there was a plus in that...the enemies plans were being disclosed...without them even knowing it.. **So it was, when the Jews who dwelt near them came, that they told us ten times, "From whatever place you turn, they will be upon us."**
- **The Jews who lived near them told us ten times over..:** This is a wonderful example of the power and goodness of God. The enemies of God and His people did their best, but God was always in control. The enemies did not know there were faithful Jews listening to their plotting.
- **They told us ten times:** It is easy to picture this scene, and see the informants repeating over and over again, "An attack is coming! It's for real! they are planning to surround us and attack everywhere!"
- i. These who overheard the plan didn't have the wisdom to know what to do in response. They were in a panic, "They will defeat us!"
- **Thank God for people who are wise enough to not join in our panic!**
- and they were probably troubled that Nehemiah didn't also panic.
- **this is now a life and death situation! we are dealing with self preservation...**

*NE 4:13 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, spears and bows. <sup>14</sup> After I looked things over, I stood up and said to the nobles, the officials and the rest of the people, "Don't be afraid of them. Remember the Lord, who is great and awesome, and fight for your brothers, your sons and your daughters, your wives and your homes."*

#### *A new threat*

a. **Therefore:** These verses tell us what Nehemiah did, but we can also think of what Nehemiah *could* have done in this situation.

i. **He could have done *nothing* – and even been spiritual about it.** “Well brother, we’re just trusting in the Lord. We prayed about it and believe the Lord will deliver us somehow.”

ii. **He could have *panicked*** – and started thinking it was his job alone to defend against the attack.

iii. **What he did was to *wisely and calmly trust God* in the midst of the storm, and to do the concrete things God would have him do to obtain the victory.**

b. **Their swords, their spears, and their bows:** Nehemiah commanded them to bring out their armor. It was time to get serious, to put on the full armor, and to get ready to fight with every resource they had.

c. **Do not be afraid of them. Remember the Lord, great and awesome:** **Nehemiah put their mind in the right perspective.** The challenge was great but there was no reason for fear. He who was *in them* was greater than he who was in the world.

d. **Fight for your brethren, your sons, your daughters, your wives, and your houses:** **Nehemiah reminded them what they were fighting for. We fight most effectively for the Lord when we keep in mind how much there is to lose.**

there was a new level of building that had to take place...

*NE 4:15 When our enemies heard that we were aware of their plot and that God had frustrated it, we all returned to the wall, each to his own work.*

- **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.**
- **When our enemies heard that it was known to us, and that God had brought their plot to nothing:** Once they saw the defenses of the people of God, the enemies shrunk back. They didn’t want a battle because they knew they would lose. What the enemies wanted was for the people of God to hand them the victory on a silver platter through failing to watch and be ready.

- **All of us returned to the wall, everyone to his work:** *This was the victory. Defending against the attack was not the victory; the people of God would not be at peace and security until the wall was rebuilt. Getting on with the work was the victory.*
- When we are under spiritual attack it is easy to feel that just enduring the storm is the victory. It isn't. The attack often comes to prevent your *progress and work* for the LORD. Victory is enduring the attack *and* continuing the progress and work for the LORD.

*NE 4:16 From that day on, half of my men did the work, while the other half were equipped with spears, shields, bows and armor. The officers posted themselves behind all the people of Judah <sup>17</sup> who were building the wall. Those who carried materials did their work with one hand and held a weapon in the other, <sup>18</sup> and each of the builders wore his sword at his side as he worked. But the man who sounded the trumpet stayed with me.*

**. So that with one hand they worked at construction, and with the other held a weapon:** Some of the servants did the work of defending and some did the work of building. **lighten the load**.... The workers had a sword at their side and a trowel in their hands to get the work done.

The kingdom of God is built with both a sword and a trowel, a sword to come against every spiritual force of wickedness in high places, and trowel to do the work of building up the people of God.

- Nehemiah briefly stopped the work to survey the situation and regroup. Oftentimes one must back off from a situation to take a good look and be more objective in your evaluation.

*NE 4:19 Then I said to the nobles, the officials and the rest of the people, "The work is extensive and spread out, and we are widely separated from each other along the wall. <sup>20</sup> Wherever you hear the sound of the trumpet, join us there. **Our God will fight for us!**"*

- Nehemiah observed the new dynamic ...we are tired because we are spread thin...we must help each other.....where we are vulnerable...
- We will stand together and resist wherever we hear the trumpet...wherever the fight is...we will band together to fight!

- Helping others with their problems has a tendency to minimize one's own. Most people need to have cause before they'll really get to work. The Jews had one.

*NE 4:21 So we continued the work with half the men holding spears, from the first light of dawn till the stars came out. <sup>22</sup> At that time I also said to the people, "Have every man and his helper stay inside Jerusalem at night, so they can serve us as guards by night and workmen by day." <sup>23</sup> Neither I nor my brothers nor my men nor the guards with me took off our clothes; each had his weapon, even when he went for water.*

- Obedience So we continued the work... enabled them to win...without actually fighting... for God fought for them... *Our God will fight for us!*
- *Do what you know to do...victory is assured*
- *DON'T QUIT...commitment is key...*

***Your level of commitment to accomplish a goal is determined by that which would make you quit! Any reservation in your mind concerning the rightness of a plan will become a roadblock to you.***

*GAL 6: <sup>9</sup> Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will **reap a harvest** if we do not give up.*

*HEB 13:6 So we say with confidence,  
"The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?"*

end