

Trust and Obey: Prayerfully Relying on the Lord

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[0 : 00] Thank you, Ben. I tell you what's, at least to me, what's more nerve-wracking than a little nervous getting up here,! Hand on the Word of God for an hour, stand up here and singing.

So, thank you, good sir. Thank you, good sir. So, some of you have noticed, I'm not Jeff, I'm not Greg, and a few people knew something was up because I tucked my shirt in this morning and wore some slack.

So, something is indeed up. Jeff and Greg are out of town. Greg's got some work and some family going on. Jeff's up in Vermont teaching at church there.

He sends his love and prayers. Hopefully, if the FAA works out appropriately, he should be back here in a day or two. Let's pray real quick, and then we'll move into Nehemiah.

Dear Lord, thank you for this day. Thank you for blessing us all with this opportunity to be here, to hear your Word. Lord, pray, God, that my thoughts, my words would just glorify you and just highlight what you have to tell us in your Scripture.

[1 : 04] Pray that our hearts and minds will be open to receive what this is. Internalize it. Take it with us this week. As we face the world, the attacks of the enemy. And everyone against us as we go do your will and do what you've put before us, Lord.

We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. So last time I was up here, I don't know, maybe a year ago or so, I was in James. I started out in James.

I said, next time you see me, much like Greg in Corinthians, next time you see me, we'll be in James again. So we're not in James again. We're switching. We're in Nehemiah. Somebody convinced me that a section of Nehemiah would be the way to go.

And I wholeheartedly agreed. My wife and I were studying here, I don't know, earlier this year, and something that kind of stuck out to us was this passage of Scripture.

And it kind of stuck with us and was on my heart. In the military, we have long, drawn-out briefings, emails, PowerPoints for any of you who work for the government.

[2 : 03] Well, work, maybe not paid, but work. You know that those things turn out for a while. Like, those things go on forever. So usually, by the time you get to the end of the briefing, in this case, the sermon, by the time you get to the end, you forgot what the whole thing was about.

You don't even know why they started the whole thing. So I'm adopting a technique that we use. It's called the bottom line up front. And I'm going to tell you what this is all about right from the beginning. You still have to listen.

You still got to pay attention. I'm going to put some key points here you're going to need to know. But I'm going to try to highlight this right from the beginning. And I need this. I'm going to struggle with this today.

Don't judge me. We can predict what will be put before us today. I'm sorry. We can't predict what we put before us today or this week or year.

But we can know where our help comes from. This story, Nehemiah, shows that the purposeful dedication to prayer and seeking the Lord in all things is where our hearts should be focused. Not on what the world says we need to do to fix our lives or the fear and anxiety that drown us, but God's perfect plan and the peace that comes with resting in his control.

[3 : 11] Let's read through this section of scripture real quick. And then we'll start working through it. This is Nehemiah chapter 4, 4 through 15. Hear, O God, how we are despised.

Return their reproach on their own heads and give them up for plunder in a land of captivity. Do not forgive their iniquity and let not their sin be blotted out before you, for they have demoralized the builders.

So we built the wall, and the whole wall was joined together to half its height, for the people had a mind to work. Now when Sambalat, Tobiah, the Arabs, the Ammonites, the Ashdodites heard that the repair of the walls of Jerusalem went on, and that the breaches began to close, they were very angry.

All of them conspired together to come and fight against Jerusalem and to cause a disturbance in it. But we prayed to our God, and because of them, we set up a guard against them day and night. Thus in Judah it was said, the strength of the burden bearers is failing. Yet there is much rubbish, and we ourselves are unable to rebuild the wall. Our enemies said, they will not know or see until we come among them, kill them, and put a stop to the work.

[4 : 24] When the Jews who live near them came and told us ten times, they will come up against us from every place where you may turn. Then I stationed men in the lowest parts of the space behind the wall, and exposed places, and I stationed the people and families with their swords, spears, and bows.

When I saw their fear, I rose and spoke to the nobles, the officials, and the rest of the people. Do not be afraid of them. Remember the Lord who is great and awesome, and fight for your brothers, your sons, your daughters, your wives, and your houses.

When our enemies heard that it was known to us, and that God had frustrated their plans, then all of us returned to the wall, each one to his own work. I want everyone to do a little mental exercise here.

So think back. Hold this with you. Think about this as we journey through this section of Scripture. Think about a time, a season of change, a life event, a family event, a work event, whatever that may be.

Something you knew was on the horizon, or something you felt led to do, or a situation you were in the middle of, something that's sort of, you get it, I won't belabor it. But how did you handle it? It could have been sudden.

[5 : 37] It could have been something you knew. It could have been something you were called to do. You know, I'm called to do this thing. I know God's called me to do this. I need to step out in faith. Maybe something to that nature, or something that fell upon you. What'd you do?

How'd you handle it? What was the first thing you did? Think about that. Chew on it for a little bit. Hold that thought with you as we work through this. We are called to trust and obey God.

What does that look like? God's called us to do something. We need to trust Him. Does that mean we just sit around, and we just wait for it to happen? Fix it ourself?

I won't tell the joke. I'll kind of paraphrase through this, but my wife and I occasionally, not occasionally, probably daily, we'll listen to sermons at night. We fall asleep, so we pick the boring ones to really help us move along.

But no less than five times I've heard this joke in a sermon, so I don't want to tell it. It's about the guy in the flood on the roof. Has everyone heard this one? Any nods? No. A couple people have.

[6 : 32] It's pretty silly. The guy in the flood, he prays for God to save him. The floodwaters come. He climbs to his roof. He's like, God save me. Goes to his roof. A guy comes by in a truck. Says, hey man, get on, dude. The water's coming, man.

He's like, nope, God's going to save me. You see where this is going, right? A boat comes by. Hey man, get on the boat. You're up to the eaves, pal. Like, this is happening. Nope, God's going to save me.

A helicopter comes by. Does a beautiful pitch landing right on the roof. Says, get on board. No, man, I got this. Obviously, he dies, right? He goes to heaven. God, I prayed for you to save me. I sent you a truck, a boat, and a helicopter. There's that dichotomy between how much do we trust in God?

How much do we know what we're supposed to do? There's something that didn't happen in this joke. There's something that didn't happen there. And I'm sure you'll pick this out as we move forward. Are we relying on God?

[7 : 26] Or are we just waiting for things to happen? Scripture is going to help us with this. Rest assured. Many come to Nehemiah for its practical lessons in leadership.

I know I've talked to a lot of people about Nehemiah. It's one of the first places they go. Administration, organization. It is an excellent book in the Bible for that. Start Ezra. Go through Esther and Nehemiah.

You see a lot of government management, leadership. Leadership, all very valuable and all here for certain. I would definitely encourage you. There's tons of books out there on it.

My wife and I studied through this, like I mentioned, several months back. Leadership, management, administration stuff was very good to learn. That's one thing that I grasp onto immediately, being a government employee in that realm.

It kind of seemed natural. But after we went through it, we talked about it more. However, we kind of realized that there was a theme through there that we had missed most of the time by looking at some of these other things.

[8 : 28] We started to notice how he never goes out and does stuff. Nehemiah never just went out and fixed it or solved the problem. Something was put before him. And we'll get into the background of it.

But something was put before him. A thing happened. He had opposition in life. Troubles fell upon him. He didn't just handle it. It's like, I'm going to handle this. I'm going to go out. I know what to do about those guys harassing me about this wall.

I'm going to solve this right now. He didn't do that. He did not go straight in his own ways and do his own thing. He approached the big issues very differently than the world tells us.

What does the world tell us to do when these things come upon us? Seven steps. Find the book. Counselors. Psychology will fix it.

Something of the sort. Not that all those things in and of themselves, there are some things that can be good. Not the point. Without further ado, we'll start into Nehemiah. So how did we get to chapter 4?

[9 : 27] That's smaller than I thought it would be. I'm sorry for those of you in the back row. So we'll start a quick tour through history. We won't spend too long on here, but we want to kind of set the framework up of where we're at right now.

So the Jewish nation coming out of the Exodus in about 1445 B.C., culminating in Moses reading the law on Mount Sinai. Remember when he read that law, that was the Mosaic Covenant.

God told them not to break the covenant with the Lord. Leviticus 26, 14 through 29. We will not go do a deep dive in Leviticus today.

You're welcome. But I encourage you for the note takers in there. It's very interesting to see. None of this stuff is secret in the Bible. God tells his people what he wants from them.

He tells them what to do. He tells them how to live. He tells them how to act. This isn't secret. It isn't like, ooh, did I miss something here? It's very explicit. God brought them out of Egypt in his grace.

[10 : 25] Remember, when he brought them out of Egypt, there was no covenant yet. So before he made this covenant with them, before these promises were made, before he demanded the system from them, he brought them out in his saving grace.

He acted on us. They were to be set apart. Come one back. So from then forward, they were largely, after the Mosaic covenant, they were largely led by prophets sent from God.

They rejected his prophets, demanded a king. I'm a couple back. Sorry. I told you this was going to be a thing today. They demanded a king. I won't go too deep into it, belabor the point too long.

But they rejected God's prophets. They demanded a king. First Saul. King David came after that.

King David united a lot of the tribes at this point. They were fractitious and not entirely together around 1010 B.C.

After King David, Solomon came into power. The kingdom split. Does anyone ever remember that? The kingdom split at this point into the northern and the southern kingdom.

[11 : 33] Some called the northern kingdom refer to themselves as Israel. The southern kingdom being Judah was composed of the tribe of Judah and Benjamin. The northern kingdom was the ten northern tribes.

The Judah remained in control of Jerusalem and the temple. The ten northern tribes eventually fell. Did I miss it?

Yep, here we go. They eventually fell to the Babylonians and were deported. Around 722 to 686, those ten northern tribes started to get deported.

They got spread out among Babylon and Assyria, you know, between Nineveh and Baghdad or Mosul and Baghdad today. And then even farther into Persia, they were dispersed, spread out. And they were never really reconstituted.

Remember, God promised that remnant coming from David's line. So the people group known as the Samaritans, they came from these northern tribes. They're a mix of foreigners and those northern tribes.

[12 : 35] They adopted a form of Judaism, not really in line with what Scripture says it's supposed to be. It's not really keeping with the law. There's still a small group of them left, maybe a few hundred by some accounts in Israel.

They still sacrifice on Mount Gerizim, I believe. They live in that Israeli-Palestine region. So fast forward 40 years. Jeremiah.

Jeremiah prophesied to Judah from 626 B.C. up until the final destruction of Jerusalem, which enters our current time frame in 586.

So Jeremiah was often called the weeping prophet over the sadness in the message he was delivering. He was called to declare the coming judgment of Judah. He was not well-received, if anyone knows the story of Jeremiah.

He was beaten. He was imprisoned. At one point, he was thrown in a well. They thought he was going to die. He was stuck up to his waist by some accounts and stuck in the mud and the sand.

[13 : 34] He didn't die. God's sovereignty kept him speaking to the nation of Judah. He speaks of a time when the law is written on our hearts and will remember sin no more.

He talks about God's concern for repentance and righteousness and speaks of the coming Messiah. Jeremiah is prophesying what's ahead following what's going to happen to Judah, begging for the nation to repent.

We are going to venture out into Jeremiah briefly. Jeremiah 2, 14 through 25, if you want to follow me there. Jeremiah 2, starting in verse 14, 14 through 25.

Is Israel a slave or see a home-born servant? Why has he become a prey? The young lions have roared at him. They have roared loudly. They have made his land a waste.

His cities have been destroyed without inhabitant. All the men of Memphis and Taffines have shaved the crown of your head. Have you not done this to yourself by forsaking the Lord your God when he led you in the way?

[14 : 45] But now what are you doing on the road to Egypt to drink the waters of the Nile? Or what are you doing on the road to Assyria to drink the waters of the Euphrates? Your own wickedness will correct you.

And your apostasies will reprove you. Know, therefore, and see that it is evil and bitter for you to forsake the Lord your God. And the dread of me is not in you, declares the Lord God of hosts. For long ago I broke your yoke and tore off your bonds. But you said, I will not serve. For on every high hill and under every green tree you have lain down as a harlot.

Yet I have planted you a choice vine, a completely faithful seed. How then have you turned yourself before me into degenerate shoots of a foreign vine?

Although you wash yourself with lye and use much soap, the stain of your iniquity is before me, declares the Lord God. How can you say I am not defiled? I have not gone after the balls.

[15 : 44] Look at your way in the valley. Know what you have done. You are a swift young camel, entangling her ways, a wild donkey accustomed to the wilderness. Sniffs in the wind in her passion.

In a time of her heat, who can turn her away? All who seek her will not become weary. In her month they will find her. Keep your feet from being unshod and your throat from thirst.

But you said it is hopeless. No, for I have loved strangers. After them I will walk. Jeremiah does not mince words. They know what's coming.

They know what's happening if they don't turn from their ways. Judah was told what the price was for disobedience. Judah finally came under siege following the northern kingdom.

Started in 605 BC. Nebuchadnezzar, the Babylonian Empire. Started the siege of Jerusalem 605.

There were several battles between them. There's a lot of interesting history there for those history buffs that want to dive into it.

[16 : 49] But for our point, about 20 years later in 586 was when they finally completely destroyed the city of Jerusalem. Burned the temple to the ground. Ripped down all the walls.

Destroyed everything. Burned it completely. That's kind of where we start off. This is the last time the original ethnic Jewish nation would have autonomy and complete self-rule.

Many were taken off to Babylon. This includes all the leaders, craftsmen, artisans. It was common at that time when you plundered another nation or destroyed a city. You're taking their best and

your brightest.

You're not taking the day labors and those who aren't really doing much for your society because they wanted to build up what they had. So they took their craftsmen, those who work with metal. Everyone, singers, dancers, everyone that held some kind of prominent role in society. Carted them off to a foreign land. A lot of the poor were still left there. Some people don't realize that. It's like the entire nation was rounded up and completely moved away and there was no one there. There was still a remnant there.

[17:50] Most of it was the poor, the farmers, day laborers. So one year later is where we start getting into our story.

538 BC. I'm sorry. 539 BC is when the Babylonians, I missed that part. 539 BC, Babylonians were conquered by the Assyrians.

Cyrus, the ruler of the Persians, conquered them in 539. From that point forward, as far as we're concerned, the Persians ruled this region. They ruled throughout the land at this time.

They were the powerhouse at the time. 538 is now when Cyrus, moved by the Lord, decreed that he wanted the temple rebuilt. So Judah was enslaved, but they had a stable life up in Persia, spread out between the Persian Empire.

Much reminiscent of Egypt prior to the Exodus. Under these Persian rules, what remained of the Jewish nation was living an okay life comparatively. They were fed. They were still able to practice a form of Judaism.

[19:00] Some people attribute this period to the establishment of modern Judaism. You see, modern Judaism does not follow exactly according to the law in the Old Testament. It's different. It doesn't hold the same thing.

Some historians say this is where it kind of all started, because they didn't have a temple. They weren't practicing regular sacrifices. And it morphed a little bit. So enter Ezra on the scene, or rather the book of Ezra.

Ezra was a scribe under the Persian ruler, King Artaxerxes. And this one. Nope. So he was a scribe under Artaxerxes.

He had access to all the world records. He was also a priest and a prophet to the nation, to the Jewish nation. He had access to all the world records. This position is absolutely invaluable. Think about this. He has access to Babylonian records.

He has access to Persian records. He knows the history. He knows everything going on. He knows what rulers have decreed. God puts his people where he wants them. And there's kind of a point out of this.

[20:02] Just because we don't see the end of God's plan, Ezra may not have seen what was going to happen. He didn't see the end of this. It didn't mean that God is not in charge. God knew what was happening.

He set these rulers up all through time. We have Ezra. We have Esther, the queen. And enter Nehemiah here momentarily. We must be obedient to what he's put before us.

Regardless of whether we think we know the plan or not, God's plan is still there. It hasn't changed whether we think we want to follow it. It's there. So being obedient and paying attention to what that is, is critical.

Whether you're a position of great responsibility, you're an average day laborer. Or taking care of the house, taking care of the kids at home. Much like Nehemiah, society wants to minimize you and beat you down.

The task before you may be draining, may be exhausting. It is not fun doing the things we do sometimes. Faithfully going to work. Faithfully serving your family. Faithfully serving at a job maybe you don't enjoy.

[21:01] Kids at home. I have kids at home. They can be hard. And it can be thankless. And on top of that, what does society tell us when we follow God's ways? Society tells us something entirely different.

They come after us. Why are you staying home with your kids? Why do you work and come home and hang out with your family? Hey man, let's go hang out. Let's go golfing. Let's go do the things we do. Why are you helping out at the church? What are you doing on Saturday at the church for a men's study?

Let's go hit the river, man. Society does things differently. And they want us to join in it. Romans 8:28 says, And we know that for those who love God, all things work together for good, for those who are called according to His purpose.

God's hand is at work. Look at God's hand restoring His people through His perfect sovereignty. Ezra, Esther, Nehemiah, the royal cupbearer. So Cyrus decreed in 538, The temple shall be rebuilt. Gold and silver articles returned and material support be given. You don't need to turn there, but Ezra 1, 1-4. Now in the first year of Cyrus, king of Persia, in order to fulfill the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah, the Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus, king of Persia, so that he sent a proclamation throughout his kingdom and also put it in writing, saying, This is what Cyrus, king of Persia, says.

[22 : 23] The Lord, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth, and He has appointed me to rebuild for Him a house in Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Whoever there is among you, of all His people, may His God be with Him.

Go up to Jerusalem, which is in Judah, and rebuild the house of the Lord, the God of Israel. He is the God who is in Jerusalem. And every survivor, at whatever place He may live, the people of that place are to support Him with silver and gold, with equipment and cattle, together with a voluntary offering for the house of God, which is in Jerusalem.

Now there's no indication that any of these succession of three kings that ruled through this period were believers. There's no indication that they served the Lord, that they served God. This is more likely a, Hey, if your God's on my side, that's good for my side.

So this is more, I'll take all the help I can get. Yeah, go rebuild that temple thing. Tell your God to bless me so I can reign forever. This was more in line with where this was at. But God used these rulers, much how He used Pharaoh when He needed to use Pharaoh for the Exodus.

He used these rulers for His good purpose. Although the enemy attempted to thwart this throughout history, God has a plan. He uses even what we deem as bad for His good.

[23 : 40] Three main groups return to Jerusalem. Starting with Zerubbabel in 538, then Zerubbabel was charged with rebuilding the temple. Ezra, 458 BC, was there to reinforce the law, rebuild some of the people, and establish the sacrificial system.

And then Nehemiah, where we'll end up in, I promise we'll get there, in 445, he was there to rebuild walls and restore the people, restore the city. Zerubbabel led that first group of exiles about 70 years after the first exile of Judah.

After opposition and ultimately decree to stop working, temple work is resumed in 516, and after confirming the royal archives that support the claim that King Cyrus did indeed decree that the temple should be rebuilt, King Darius decreed the work should continue and additional support be given beyond what the original support was.

So the prophets Haggai and Zechariah were also active during this time to stir the people to work and ultimately turn back to God as they once did. Apologize, it is kind of small, but you can see where the timeline is that they fit, that God sent these prophets to teach and encourage the people. So Ezra, under approval from Artaxerxes, returned in 458 with about 7,000. So the first return, some historians estimate about 50,000. Ezra came with about 7,000, mainly to reinforce adherence to the law there.

[25 : 07] All right, enter Nehemiah. We made it. We're here. He was a cupbearer to King Artaxerxes. So a cupbearer, although I think oftentimes in modern spin it gets spun up, and I think we're so used to the TV and media.

He's the guy, the humble servant that carries the cup to the king, and he tests it first, and everybody's patiently watching and waiting. You know, is he going to drop dead? That was eventually a part of that role, but the cupbearer also held many more important roles.

Maybe to the king that probably was the most important role, but he was also essentially the CFO, the chief financial officer. He managed the king's food supply. He managed the court.

He managed the people. This was a very high-level position. This was like the president's chief of staff. So highest politician in the land, his chief of staff.

Look who God put in that spot to use for his purpose. Additionally, Nehemiah had the added opportunity of being around the king constantly.

[26 : 17] He ended up being a confidant of the king. You can't not gain the king's trust. You're not going to not have a relationship with the king as you're there serving him, taking care of his most personal matters right up front all the time.

There's examples of this also in Esther. Word is brought to Nehemiah eventually. So starting in Nehemiah 1, verse 3, Remember, there's still people there.

There's still people living and farming and working in the land. This is where the pattern of Nehemiah's responses to turmoil begins. So the very next verse, this is where we start to see this come together.

This is the first recorded instance that we have in Nehemiah. In verse 4, chapter 1, he says, His response to bad news?

He immediately went to God in prayer. First thing he did. This was put in front of him and clearly something that moved him and God laid on his heart to be passionate about, not knowing how to deal with the situation or how to proceed.

[27 : 38] He immediately sought the Lord. We're not all super passionate about politics or something like that. If some changes in the government, I don't know if I would immediately, not to bring politics into this, but we are all passionate about different things and certain things in life.

God clearly put this on his heart. He was clearly passionate about this. This was something, he cared about the remnant of his people. Presumably, he knew scripture. He had heard the words of Jeremiah.

He had heard the words of previous prophets. He knew what was going on and this weighed heavily on his hearts. You've got to ask yourself, of all the people here, was he the first one? Was he the first one that was passionate about this and that God called to act on this?

So, he immediately went to God in prayer. He was passionate about it. He didn't know how to deal with this. He didn't know how to proceed with this. It doesn't say exactly that he knew what to do or he immediately had a thought, but what's important to note here is the time reference.

As you read through this, it shows the months in here. There's nothing immediately changed once this happened. It didn't immediately switch. It was not, oh, he had a problem, he prayed, and God brought something to him.

[28 : 50] Not saying that that can't happen or it doesn't happen in scripture, but in this instant, he prayed and he patiently waited. So, a time frame of about three months went by before anything happened.

And I don't know, scripture doesn't say, if he planned this or this was a target of opportunity or something that came up, but there was a period of time that went by about three months now. So, oftentimes, something comes upon us. My first response, at least speaking personally, is not to patiently wait on the Lord. I have a problem come up, but I'll be a little frank.

I had some weird health stuff come up. My first response was, I need to figure out what's going on. I consulted Dr. Google, because, well, that knows everything. That's a bad idea, by the way.

Consulted everyone I could, called everyone I could, tried to rush my appointments, tried to rush, get everything done as fast as I could, because I need to know right now what's going on.

How do I fix this problem right now? I need to know. Now, that did me any good, if you're wondering. I had to wait patiently. I didn't choose to wait patiently. God forced me to wait patiently.

[29 : 59] So, about three months later, chapter 2, in verses 1 through 8, is where this is for our note takers. When he was before the king, he let his countenance slip.

This is enter his second, our second example of his reliance on the Lord. So, the cupbearer, anyone in the court, was not allowed to look sad. They couldn't go before the king.

They couldn't be slumpy. They couldn't be just sad-faced. That was not a thing. You had to have a positive attitude, a positive face. Why wouldn't you? Why wouldn't you?

Think of the pride and the arrogance of most world leaders in this regard. Why would you be sad in front of me? I'm clearly granting you the food and chance to live and do whatever it is that you do.

Worship me. You should be happy in front of me. That's kind of the sense, historically, around this time. So, he let his countenance slip. And I don't think this was planned.

[30 : 55] I don't think he did have this in his mind. Because if he had in his mind, I don't know if it would say what it says next was in verse 2, verse 2 of chapter 2, I was very much afraid.

I think he messed up. I think he messed up. And this was bearing on him so heavily, he went in sad-faced and was serving the king in whatever regard that may have been.

And he got caught. He got caught in his situation. The fear in that moment must have been unbearable. So, imagine being a servant before a foreign ruler whose society doesn't match your own.

I won't name any names, but imagine a fearsome foreign ruler today who maybe does not hold great public light. We don't know. I don't know God how we'll use these people. I won't disparage any of them.

But imagine that your society or whatever is conquered. Right now, think of that guy in your head. And for some reason, you're in his palace, White House equivalent, and you're there.

[31 : 56] God puts you there for a reason. And you're there helping this guy out. Maybe you're his secretary or maybe you're just a janitor there. And you're there in front of this guy and he catches you doing something you're not supposed to do.

Hey, what are you doing? I thought those papers are supposed to be over there. And you know he just eradicated a good portion of your society or his predecessors did.

Think of the fear in that moment. The king says, why is your face sad though you are not ill? This is nothing but sadness of heart.

The king knows what's going on here. He caught him. He caught him outright. You're not supposed to be sad. You're not sick is what he's saying. Why is your face sad even though you're not ill? This is nothing but sadness of heart.

So he is telling him outright, you're sad and I see that you're sad. You're not sick. You're not coughing. You don't appear to have any kind of illness that would have been prevalent at the time. Nehemiah doesn't shy away.

[32 : 57] He confesses the truth in verse 3. Despite what looks like failure in a fearful situation to us, God uses for his good purpose and begins to open a door for Nehemiah.

And you see where this door is opened and you see where God sovereignly works in Nehemiah's life and Nehemiah goes through the door. He takes hold and walks through the door. He's caught. He knows it.

Unbearable amount of fear in the moment. What does he do once he gets caught? First, he admits his fault. He confesses the truth in verse 3.

Chapter 2, verse 3. Despite what looked like failure, with his honest reproach, God uses this. And before, he answers the king and tells him why he is so sad.

Or the king offers, the king, God opens the door and the king asks, well, what shall you have me do for you? Before Nehemiah says anything, in verse 2, it says, so I prayed to the God of heaven.

[34 : 00] Then I said, Nehemiah paused. This may have been brief in this moment. There's another example. This is not a longer system of time. It may have been brief in that moment, but his heart posture right off the bat was seeking after God.

That is right where he went. He went to seek after the Lord, immediately seek after the Lord. This might have been a, you know, Lord help me. This is off the back of the ramp. I'm getting ready to jump out. Like, help me, Lord. Here we go.

So, it may have been, it may have been as simple as that. So, he prayed to the God of heaven and then he asked, he told the king what was going on. He asked the king for provisions.

Depending on the day, this can be a constant action in our minds. So, you see in this small, quick moment, he was fearful, he was scared, then he acted.

Depending on the day, this might be constant. So, I want to get that point across. This might be, this might be every, every minute. Has anyone ever had a day like that? It's every minute you're relying on the Lord. There's just one thing after another, after another.

[35 : 02] It seems like the septic, the yard, the car, the, who knows, something, something, the neighbor, something happened, something came in. It's constant. This may be a constant. This is all that's recorded here in Nehemiah.

I'm certain as this progressed, this, as we can see, this was his, his heart attitude from the beginning. So, in chapter 2, verse 7 and 8, Nehemiah asked for it all.

So, he holds nothing back. He asked for it all. Hey, I want the king's stamp. I want his royal seal approving me to go do this. I want to go back and read the temple. By the way, I need resources. Will you also give me a letter saying I need wood from the king's forest? Wood was scarce at that time. They had particular forests that are no longer there. These cedar forests, they had to import some of them. That was a big deal.

That was like asking for rare earth metals to build supercomputers. Some of these things that are extremely rare we can't get a hold of. That's what Nehemiah was asking. I want money.

[35 : 58] I want time off to do it. I want your approval. I want your blessing. And I need more stuff. Oh, and can I have some guards? And he got it all.

And he says, for the hand of my God was upon me. This wasn't Nehemiah. This wasn't the Persian rulers. This was God's plan. Nehemiah's job was to obey and trust God.

Fast forward, a three-month journey to Jerusalem, which in itself is no small undertaking. We could probably spend a lot of time there. But if you imagine where Baghdad is today on the map, follow the, everyone's a geography major, I'm sure, follow the Euphrates River up, Euphrates splinters into the Tigris, follow that up through kind of Syria as it splits off.

The Harbor River goes up into Turkey. So this was a huge journey because they couldn't just cut across. I've spent, unfortunately, more time than I want to mention there. If you cut from Baghdad to Israel, it's a wasteland.

There was some more water at the time, but it's a desolate wasteland. This was a big undertaking. So I don't want to, I don't want to undersell what Nehemiah took on in this. But we'll move forward.

[37 : 14] So he shows up now. Imagine he shows up to Jerusalem, the surrounding region, with letters from, letters from the king to the local governors. Remember we talked about the Samaritans?

They're coming back in. So Sambalat, the governor of Samaria, is there. So Nehemiah shows up stating he is authorized to rebuild the walls and gates, which as the Bible says in verse 9 of chapter 2, it was very displeasing to them that someone had come to seek the welfare of the sons of Israel. Very displeasing. Just the English rendering of this word doesn't do it, doesn't do it enough depth maybe. Very displeasing is like when I come home and my old dog has gone to the bathroom all over the floor again.

That's displeasing. I'm not happy. I am displeased. This dog, he's still here. He's still in my life, probably teaching me patience and everything else I need. That's displeasing. You dive into the word a little bit and it comes from a few roots.

There's a deep-rooted, evil sense of anger in that word. It is like an evil, angry displeasure. How dare somebody come in and seek the wealth of these people.

[38 : 26] Hopefully that sentiment communicates some of that. Why would somebody come in and save, take care of this, these Jews? We don't like this. So that was the sense of this.

You'll see as it escalates. The Samaritans and the returning remnant were not exactly on good terms, right? As we know, this was remnants of the northern ten tribes. If you guys can go back through Kings and Chronicles and Samuel, you can read on some of the tension that ensued there and remnants of Judah.

They were practicing something that was not in line with biblical Judaism or Judaism in the Torah at the time. Many of the remaining cities surrounding them, they were also remnants of Philistine cities that weren't completely destroyed.

They had traded hands throughout the past through several centuries of power struggle, but they were surrounding Jerusalem on most sides. Simply put, there was a lot of opposition rebuilding the walls. Nobody wants their longtime enemy rebuilding in their backyard.

Much like if one of our national enemies right now came and said, somehow they were able to, don't ask me how, but somehow they get it through and they go to Fredericksburg and they want to build a military complex in Fredericksburg and reinforce the walls around it.

[39 : 46] You'd be mind blown. You'd be like, wait, wait, wait, what? Who's doing what and where? That's kind of the sense of what's going on. They're not happy with this. So the opposition, I don't know if I can do the intensity of the opposition enough justice.

So Nehemiah, knowing he has this opposition, knowing he's going to be confronted constantly through this, he secretly surveys the condition of the wall. He then organizes and motivates the people and work begins.

Remember, there is a lot of leadership and administration here. Very good lessons we can learn. People are organizing the family groups. Gates are restored. Rubble is cleaned up.

Things are moving. They are making progress, significant progress. In chapter 4, we're now in chapter 4. We've made it. Sambalet hears of the rebuilding and is enraged.

Enraged is exactly what it is. He is enraged. He is furious. He is angry that this is even happening. He's speaking to his immediate company and his military initially.

[40 : 48] Although he may have some military might here, he does have some power. He does have influence in the region. He is able to affect this, but he has to be very careful if Sambalet runs the risk of involving the Persians deeper into their daily affairs.

They are appointed governors and there is a Persian contingent. History doesn't say, and it's hard to determine if it is a appointed Persian military or it's a local militia that Sambalet and local governors control.

It's tough to say. Most historians say it is a local militia that Persia authorizes them to hold and have. But he is not pleased with this. Right now, he's largely posturing.

He does not want to involve his Persian overlords into his nice, cushy, comfy life. So he's bringing threats. He's bringing insults. Much like the legal recourse that was on the first rebuilding of the temple when they came down, the local governors came and said, oh, you can't rebuild that. Remember, I'm sending a letter to the king telling you to stop your work. And it turns out they could do their work. So it took 20, 30 years to get that temple rebuilt. He is now taking a verbal path to try to disparage Israel or Judah and everyone here from working.

[42 : 03] This is often how persecution works. It might not be outright physically or legally burdening. You might not have lawyers coming after you for homeschooling your kids.

You might not have your neighbors picketing and burning in your yard or something of the sort. It may not be that aggressive. Maybe at times it is. We see this, maybe more and more in the news. This is a thing.

Sometimes it's just verbally. Sometimes it's just shunning. Sometimes it is to be a Christian, to step away from the world. I can't look like the world, but man, that's not fun.

I can't do the same things. I can't watch the same shows. I shouldn't listen to the same music.

That's often how it starts. And it's hard because it's constant. It is a day and day in and day out.

No one wants you to do what God's called you to do. Nobody wants, the devil does not want you to do what God's called you to do. You get the side eyes, the weird looks, but you do what? You homeschool your kids.

[43 : 01] Wait, you go to church on Sunday? I go golfing on Sunday. Fishing, whatever, insert thing here. That's still persecution and that wears on our hearts. Now imagine that's constant and it's everywhere.

It's all around Judah. It is all around them. They're trying to rebuild. They're getting permanently pressed down from everything around them. In Nehemiah 4, chapter 4, 2 and 3, it says, Now Tobiah the Ammonite was near him and he said, Even what they are building, if a fox were to jump on it, it would break the stone walls down.

You can hear the malice, the disgust in their word, feeble Jews, heaps of rubbish. Some of the language in here indicates dust. Some of the portions of the wall were smashed so significantly that they were just dirt.

They were piles of dirt. So they couldn't even reuse all the stones that they needed to rebuild these. This taunting makes it to Nehemiah and those doing the rebuilding. But in the same manner as he started from the beginning, he continues in it in these few verses, starting in chapter 4, verse 4. Hear, O God, for we are despised. Turn back their taunt on their own heads. Give them up to be plundered in a land where they are captives. Do not cover their guilt.

[44 : 45] And let not their sin be blotted out from your sight. For they have provoked you to anger in the presence of the builders. First thing he does, he cries out to the Lord.

He's crying out in despair. But the first thing he does before he acts, before he goes, before he does, before he controls or figures it out, he goes to the Lord.

Even if it's in his despair, he cries out to the Lord in despair. He's not the first in Scripture to do this. We know our Bibles. We know Psalm 55 through 61, Psalm 88, for example.

Often times, the psalmist and others in Scripture cry out to God in despair. We should cast our fears, our worries on the Lord. We should do this. We should go to him in this way. At first, this prayer seems retaliatory.

When you read it, it looks, that's kind of vindictive. What is he doing here? It isn't a cry of resentment toward them, but asking for God to intervene and uphold his good name and uphold his promise.

[45 : 47] He first brings his concerns to the Lord, then asks him to uphold his promise. And this is kind of reminiscent of Jeremiah 18.23. Remember, Jeremiah was speaking to Judah prior to their

fall in 586.

Jeremiah was in the streets. Hey guys, it's coming. It's coming. It's coming. You need to change. Jeremiah says, But you, Lord, know all their deadly schemes against me.

Do not forgive their wrongdoing or wipe out their sin from your sight. But may they be overthrown before you. Deal with them in the time of your anger. He is asking God to be sovereign.

Be sovereign and deal with them in the way that you said you were going to deal with my enemies.

So moving into verse 6, I love the transition here. So we built the wall.

It was up to half its height now, joined completely around the city. I didn't get a, put it in the slide, but I looked online, looked at a couple pictures. So this wall, you think of, I think of like medieval movies and castle, castle aid, you know, where they have these like walls, yay thick, you know, and yay high.

[46 : 49] They can't quite climb over it. Monty Python comes to mind a little bit. But these walls were 6 feet thick. Actually, there's parts of them that are still there from the first destruction.

You can see they were 6 feet thick. So these weren't something that they could go chip away, peel apart, get rid of. These were massive. So Judah's enemies were right to be fearful. This was about to be a formidable city as it was before.

So this is the third example now. He prayed, he brought his troubles before the Lord. Moving into the fourth example. So we move beyond threats now and posturing into a threat of attack.

So the fear intensity of our building, you've seen, you've seen the persecution grow. It started out at displeasure and grumbling. It started out as constant threats. Now it grows into the actual fear of attack and many historians believe that they were postured to do this by some extra biblical sources.

They were actually to the point where they thought, you know what, we're actually going to do this. We're going to risk our Persian overlords coming down. Maybe they won't know. Maybe they won't notice, but we're going to go ahead and do it. So verses 7 and 8, when Samblet, Tobiah, and the Arabs, and the Ammonites, and Ashdodites heard that the repairing of the walls of Jerusalem was going forward and that the breaches were beginning to be closed, they were very angry.

[48 : 15] And they all plotted together to come and fight against Jerusalem and to cause confusion in it. Samblet's taking a big risk here. The situation has escalated quite a bit.

Nehemiah knows this. The things are changing. So, between the former Philistine cities, composed of Arabs, Ammonites, and the Ashdodites, and now Samblet of Samaria, if you look on a map and kind of put those together, they're surrounded.

So they could muster armies on all sides to come to attack them. So there wasn't a safe retreat.

There wasn't tactically a way they could shift or move or guard against one flank to hold the enemy off while they did their work.

They were completely surrounded in this regard. And they've made significant progress. Like we mentioned, the enemy should be getting nervous. They are about to rebuild this stronghold. We know Nehemiah 6.15, it only took 52 days to complete the rebuilding of the wall.

You think about it, it's absolutely incredible. So up to this point, maybe a few weeks to where they've done, they've made this work. So they've been working hard. They are tired.

[49 : 21] They're exhausted. Resources are probably exhausted. Once the walls are completed, it will make any further physical harassment much more difficult, if not impossible.

Anytime we are doing what God has called us to do, maybe there's a big church project, maybe you're setting up, like Mark, he's getting the men's conference set up. Maybe you're doing this big thing.

Maybe it's something at work. Maybe it's a big project you got at work that you've been handed, you've been given. And it's righteous. Maybe it's something at home. Maybe it's family. We can count on opposition from Satan and the world.

Satan uses his agents to work against us to make us feel hopeless. Like nothing we do is right. We can't succeed and everything always falls on us and bad stuff constantly happens.

Every time we think we get a little win, we're immediately crushed back down. It's an overwhelming weight of despair, just like in the story here.

[50 : 25] We'll see this in their words in Scripture. Nehemiah steps out in faith. He's tried. He's ridiculed. Now he's physically threatened. The people are losing hope and falling into despair.

They make good progress, but then return to the state. Despair is a trap. It is a trap that wants to hold us down. The devil wants us in despair.

We need to be in despair for his plans to succeed. Because when I'm in despair, I'm not seeking after the Lord. I'm trying to fix it. I'm so not focused on anything that God wants me to do. I'm focused on my sadness.

I'm focused on my circumstances. I'm focused on every, all I see is every little bad thing that happens to me because I'm so trapped in this despair. I can't get out of it. You can see, this is where Judah is falling into at this point.

You can hear this in their lament in verses 10 and 11 of chapter 4. In Judah, it was said, you'll skip ahead, we'll skip ahead a few. In Judah, it was said, the strength of those who bear the burdens is failing.

[51 : 24] There is too much rubble. By ourselves, we will not be able to rebuild the wall. And our enemies said, they will not know or see till we come among them and kill them and stop the work.

They're tired. They should be exhausted. You look at the pace at which they did this in that matter of work. Remember, they didn't have excavators and machines. They were hand carrying and stacking and mortaring and putting things together.

This was massive undertaking. The task is too big. There's too much to do. There's not enough people. Oh, by the way, the enemy wants to sneak attack us at any moment.

So not only is the enemy coming after me verbally, I'm crushed, I'm tired, I'm in despair. At any moment, whenever I walk around the corner, the enemy wants to kill me. The threat is real.

Has anyone ever had a week like that? Or a month like that? Or a year like that? Anyone ever just had a year? Man, the despair is real.

[52 : 27] The feeling is real. We're starting to see, though, what the right answer is for this. We know where we need to go. We know where we need to turn. How about being stuck in that cycle of despair?

Just like Judah. They're stuck. They do well. They build the temple. Oh, it's hard. We can't build the temple. We're not going to do it. We're not going to quit. It takes a prophet to come down there.

Rebuild the temple. Finish the temple.

Okay, we got it. We got it. We trust in God. We trust in God. All right, we're good. Let's leave the city alone. I think the temple's good. We'll come back down. Okay, years later. Okay, we're going to do this. We're going to rebuild the wall. We're going to rebuild the wall. Oh, the opposition is too great.

They want to kill me. I got no food. I'm tired. Change those with your circumstances. Modern circumstances. The car's broke. I'm sad. Everyone's against me. My job is frustrating.

Marriage is hard. Kids are tough. When we are here, we are not worshiping God. And we are certainly not rebuilding, nor doing the work that he put before us.

[53 : 27] Most certainly, Nehemiah is in the thick of this. I'll take a quick pause so this isn't entirely gloomy. Jumping over to Psalms. You don't need to jump there. I'll just read it. Psalms 42, verse 5 and 6.

Why are you cast down, O my soul? And why are you in turmoil within me? Hope in God, for I shall again praise him, my salvation and my God. Skipping ahead one chapter in Psalms 43, verse 3 and 4.

Send out your light and your truth. Let them lead me. Let them bring me to your holy hill and to your dwelling. Then I will go to the altar of God, to God my exceeding joy, and I will praise you with a lyre.

Hope in the Lord. Praise him. Even in turmoil. Look what it says, Paul says in 2 Corinthians 4, 8 and 9.

We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed. Perplexed, but not driven to despair. Persecuted, but not forsaken. Struck down, but not destroyed. How is he perplexed, but not driven to despair?

[54 : 36] His steadfast faith in God's sovereignty and his eternal salvation. He knows that troubles on this earth are momentary. From the psalmist to Paul, hope in the Lord leads to praise.

Steadfast faith in God leading to thanksgiving are what we need in these times. We must remember who's in control. We can't control everything. I can't fix it. I can't figure it all out. There's a time to act.

We're going to get there. But sometimes we must just need to rest in God and rest in his control. Back to the task at hand. Jump back a few verses into Nehemiah 4, verse 9 for our final example.

And we prayed to our God and set a guard as protection against them day and night. What was his first response? Again, to seek the Lord.

Why? Because he trusts in God. His first response was, they're coming to get me. Things are bad. I've got... Nehemiah's ruling over managing tens of thousands of people, several family groups.

[55 : 49] Imagine the conflict in working hard and doing this. Resources are probably tough and scarce. There's conflict, I'm certain, within his own group. They would try to lead a group of people. We have certain groups of people in the military.

We call it herding cats. I imagine this was on a scale that we can't even understand with all this going on. And now he's got this going on. His first response, not, hey, you go there.

You go there. You go there. You stop. You hold. You quit complaining. You come over here. His first response. And we prayed to our God. He needed to take action as a leader.

And this was indeed a time for it. But again, he starts with seeking the Lord. There's a time for action. This isn't the guy on the roof in the flood. Back to the terrible joke. This is the balance between trusting the Lord and acting on what is before us.

We now have four examples how Nehemiah prayed in each circumstance. And each one was slightly different. He prayed. He waited on the Lord. He prayed and stepped out in faith despite his fear.

[57 : 00] He prayed, brought his troubles before the Lord, and trusted in God's plan. He prayed. Then he acted. The threat begins to take shape.

He prays and acts. I like this quote from D.A. Carson. It says, Prayer is the link between balancing God's sovereignty and the need for action. I like how it says the need for action.

There may not be the need for action. Maybe we're meant to rest in the medical thing, in the job thing, in the marriage thing. Maybe we're meant to rest. Pause. Take a deep breath.

Pray to the Lord. Seek after God and wait on Him. Nehemiah is the only place in Scripture we see this pattern. Acts, among others, is another book that follows the same pattern.

If you study through Acts, you'll see how the church started out of prayer in Acts 1 and 4. And much like Nehemiah, during times of danger and opposition, the church prays in danger and opposition in chapters 4, 12, and 16.

[58 : 02] I'm sorry for my note takers. I didn't get that on the slide. They pray for God's direction. In chapter 1, chapter 9, 22, prayer is constant, and they lead with prayer every time.

There's much more than that in Acts than the rest of the Bible. The point is that seeking God first, in all circumstances, it has no small representation in Scripture. It's all throughout. It's reliance on the Lord is constant.

Back into Nehemiah. In verses 11 and 12, Nehemiah began to receive reports of the enemy's plan. It says, they came and told him 10 times. So the Judah, the surrounding people around him, they were coming to him constantly.

That's why he uses that number there. In Hebrew, that's important. They use that number. They're saying he constantly were coming to him to tell him, hey man, they're coming. They're coming.

They're going to attack us. They're coming up behind the walls. They're going to get us.

He began to receive these reports, and he plans and acts rationally and proportionally. Some of the actions he took just prior to that section in chapter four, he organized his workforce into appropriate groups.

[59 : 08] He assigned sectors for workmen. He maintained a constant guard rotation. Nothing he did here was erratic and panicked. He never hurried just to get through a circumstance.

Pause on that for a minute. That's me. I'll admit that. I want it done. I want to be over this. I want to be over the thing. I want to be over the season.

I want to be over the job problem. Whatever it may be. I want it gone. I hate waiting in that despair and that fear. I was convicted often coming through this because I was like, oh yeah, we need to wait on the Lord.

I need to pray first. I kept thinking through this. I'm like, I don't think I've done half this. He trusted in the Lord, often waiting long periods before doing anything.

He prays diligently before moving. He paused and he prayed. The final thing he did, he encouraged the people. Look at his encouragement here in verse 14.

[60 : 11] Do not be afraid of them. Remember the Lord who is great and awesome and fight for your brothers, your sons, your daughters, your wives, and your homes.

Do not be afraid of them. Why? Remember the Lord who is great and awesome. Do not be afraid of the world. They're going to beat you down.

They're coming after you. Satan wants nothing more than for you to be in despair and tired and angry and frustrated and over it because when you're there, you're not praising God.

If you're not praising God, I bet you a dollar you're not witnessing. I don't think you can bet from the pulpit, but you're not out there showing the light of the Lord. You're not out there showing your family, your kids, your marriage, talking to your neighbors because you're so crushed down in despair that you're not doing those things you're supposed to be doing.

I know this. I know it. I can think of times in my head specifically where I was so gloomy and just in the dumps. Nothing I did glorified God.

[61 : 19] As we come to a close, think back to the beginning. What was that one event or situation? What was that time? You think of that time? You can have more than one if you want. I do. Think about that time.

How would it have been different? Would it have changed? Maybe not. How would your heart been different? How could you have acted? Hopefully, the story of Nehemiah is an encouragement.

If we're seeking him first, you are going to him to prayer in constant prayer and devotion to the Lord. Excellent. Hopefully, you are encouraged by this. Hopefully, it's a conviction, often in my case, when we're just trying to figure it out.

I just want to figure it out. I want to get it done. I want to knock it out. Move on to the next thing. Get out of it. I want out of this thing. God frustrated the enemy's plans and took care of his people.

And they remembered the Lord and trusted his goodness and then completed their work. Let me close with the last verse. When our enemies heard that it was known to us and that God had frustrated their plan, we all returned to the wall, each to his own work.

[62 : 29] Do not let the tricks from the enemy discourage you and get you off task. Seek God first. Trust in his good plan, not our own.

Church family, don't let the world bring you down. The attacks are going to keep coming. Life is hard. Sometimes it's really hard. The Lord is there. He has a plan for you.

He has a plan for us. Seek him first. Let's pray. Dear Lord, thank you for this time together. Thank you for Scripture.

Thank you for being able to get into your word and study and know what you have, know what you've taught us, know what you've taught those in the past that we can learn from. Thank you for the stories of those who've come before us, have faced hardship and trial, and faced the world in all its challenge, and stood up against attacks from the enemy, and they've succeeded, Lord.

And thank you for the plan to show us how to do that, the plan and the way and the path forward to rely on you. Pray, God, as we go forth this week that we shine your light. We put away the depression.

[63 : 33] We put away the despair. We put away the sadness. And we rest in your good grace. And we rest in your good control. And we handle the things before us diligently, faithfully, as we trust in you, God.

We pray, watch over this church family this week. As the world is in turmoil, we move back to our jobs. You watch over this church family. Just bless them, God. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.