

***Our Own Worst Enemy***  
**Building God's Way Series - Part 3**  
Internal Opposition & The Right Leadership for Victory  
2/20/21-2/21/21  
Nehemiah 5:1-7:3

**Introduction**

- **Why do some companies thrive and some don't?** – it could be the product. More likely it's the leadership.<sup>1</sup>
  - **21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership** – *"Everything rises and falls on leadership"* John Maxwell.

**The Right WORK Requires the Right LEADERSHIP**

- **What that means for us personally as we mature in our faith? - If we're going to build God's way we need to...Lead Ourselves Rightly.**
  - **Taking the reins of our life** – It seems odd to think that we aren't in control of ourselves all the time. If we aren't, then who is? Well, it's a bit more complicated than that. Most of us live pushed around by passions, cravings, habits, needs, wants, addictions, fears, and a thousand other internal factors.
  - **There's an easy test to discover this reality:** Ask yourself – are you currently living the life and operating fully as the person you wish to be? If the answer is no, you have to ask, why? If you remove all the external factors, you are still left with an internal mess of resistance, right? Why? If you are the main problem, why don't you fix yourself? Because it's difficult. Why is it difficult? And there lies our answer...It's difficult because we aren't fully in control of our own internal situation.
    - **Would it be difficult for you to fast** from food for 21 days? How about just giving up all sweets for three weeks? How about living a healthy life of proper diet and exercise? Why don't you do that? No one is forcing you to do otherwise, right? So, what's the resistance? Isn't the biggest resistance, 'Habit-Patterns'?
    - **Think through your motivations** on why you do what you and don't do what you don't do. Why don't you have that difficult conversation with your boss? Why don't you restore your marriage to vibrancy? Why don't you join that small group you know would be so helpful for you? Why is it so hard to get to church faithfully?
      - **How do I lead myself well?**
    - **Paul Talked about a reason he was frustrated: Dealing with Sin** – One of the key challenges we have is rooting out our sinful nature (habits) and empowering the Spirit in our lives. But it's tough. Our sin nature is resistant. It takes effort. It's one of those issues that's easy to solve in theory (by saying yes to the Holy Spirit every time, the sinful nature dies off), but difficult in practice.

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<sup>1</sup> There are some very low-quality products on the market that are HUGE because incredible leaders are leading the company behind it. If it was all based on product, we'd have a very different market. The greatest win is great product AND great leadership, but I would bet on a great leader with an inferior product getting more mileage than a great product with a bad leader.

- Rom 7:14-8:14 - *“For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am of the flesh, sold under sin. <sup>15</sup> For I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate...<sup>17</sup> So now it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me.<sup>18</sup> For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out.<sup>19</sup> For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing...<sup>22</sup> For I delight in the law of God, in my inner being,<sup>23</sup> but I see in my members another law waging war against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members.<sup>24</sup> Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?<sup>25</sup> Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself serve the law of God with my mind, but with my flesh I serve the law of sin. **8** There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. <sup>2</sup> For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death... <sup>5</sup> For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. <sup>6</sup> For to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. <sup>7</sup> For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God’s law; indeed, it cannot. <sup>8</sup> Those who are in the flesh cannot please God. <sup>9</sup> You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. <sup>10</sup> But if Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. <sup>11</sup> If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you. <sup>12</sup> So then, brothers, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. <sup>13</sup> For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. <sup>14</sup> For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.”*
  - **How do I root out sin?** How do I get my mind right? Influences (intentionality toward a Holy Spirit mindset)
  - **If we’re going to build God’s way we need to...Lead Ourselves Rightly**

## Lesson

- **A Panic Attack**
  - **A Famine Stirs up Selfishness in the Jewish People**
    - **Nehemiah 5:1-8** – *“Now there arose a great outcry of the people and of their wives against their Jewish brothers. <sup>2</sup> For there were those who said, “With our sons and our daughters, we are many. So let us get grain, that we may eat and keep alive.” <sup>3</sup> There were also those who said, “We are mortgaging our fields, our vineyards, and our houses to get grain because of the famine.” <sup>4</sup> And there were those who said, “We have borrowed money for the king’s tax on our fields and our vineyards. <sup>5</sup> Now our flesh is as the flesh of our brothers, our children are as their children. Yet we are forcing our sons and our daughters to be slaves, and some of our daughters have already been enslaved, but it is not in our power to help it, for other men have our fields and our vineyards.” <sup>6</sup> I was very angry when I heard their outcry and these words. <sup>7</sup> I took counsel with myself, and I brought charges against the nobles and the officials. I said to them, “You are exacting interest, each from his brother.” And I held*

*a great assembly against them*<sup>8</sup> and said to them, “We, as far as we are able, have bought back our Jewish brothers who have been sold to the nations, but you even sell your brothers that they may be sold to us!” *They were silent and could not find a word to say.*”

- **Theme: A huge problem erupted within the Jewish camp** – Whether it was the crew that came out with Nehemiah to actually do the building (who gave all they had, likely, to participate), or even more the Jews that were poor in the land already, the Jewish people were losing everything in the building project because, on top of high Persian taxes and a famine, their fellow Jews were extorting them. Warren Wiersbe stated it best. He said there were 4 groups in this scenario:
  1. Poor Jews who had nothing to buy food with and were in sheer desperation.
  2. Landowning Jews who mortgaged their fields to buy food<sup>2</sup>.
  3. General Jews who were getting so overtaxed<sup>3</sup> and in debt that they had to not just put their land up for sale but put their children up for collateral in servitude (nice form of slavery)<sup>4</sup>.
  4. The wealthy Jews who were benefitting from the scenario by lending money at exorbitant rates.
- **A Famine Opportunity (selfishness)** – Famines<sup>5</sup> happen when conditions cause there to be a loss of food production, which in an agricultural economy, means the whole economy goes into a recession or depression. Many of the Jews reacted to this situation by either desperation, or taking advantage of the situation.
  - **Let’s Make it Personal (Me First, Field Day)** - What is your natural instinct to do when the economic present and future starts a downturn? Lock down your stuff and start to gain money in any way you can so that your savings aren’t depleted, or your lifestyle isn’t diminished. Right? Well, economic struggle is a field day for our enemies (world, flesh, devil). All three gain traction when we get selfish. The insidiousness of selfishness during difficult times is that it can be justified and no one can hold you accountable. Your flesh gets full freedom to think ‘me first’, and since everyone else is thinking the same thing, they don’t question you either. But selfishness is selfishness whether it’s understandable or not.
- **A Critical Loss (unity)** – **Once selfishness takes hold, unity begins to break down.** To rebuild Jerusalem, it needed all of the Jewish people to unite together. It’s one thing to build a wall, it’s another to build community. Right here in the

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<sup>2</sup> Isa 5:8; Dt 23:19-20; 24:10-13; Ex 21:2; 22:25-27

<sup>3</sup> “It is estimated that the Persian King collected the equivalent of 20 million darics a year in taxes. Little was ever returned to benefit the provinces, because most of it was melted down and stored as bullion. Alexander the Great found at Susa alone 9,000 talents (about 340 tons) of coined gold and 40,000 talents (about 1,500 tons) of silver stored as bullion. As coined money was increasingly taken out of circulation by taxes, poverty increased dramatically. The acquisition of land by the Persians and its removal from production also helped produce a 50 percent rise in prices during the Persian period.” NIV Commentary

<sup>4</sup> Lev 25:39-43; Deut 15:12-18

<sup>5</sup> Famines were common in this part of the world due to weather conditions. Many times they were seen as judgment from God.

middle of building, economic crash happens and the Jews start to divide among themselves. What the external enemy tried to do (split them up), internal pressures now attempted.

- **Let's Make it Personal (kingdom shift)** - The minute we shift out of a God-kingdom building mode and into a self-preservation or internal kingdom building mode, unity becomes almost impossible. We will not share when we don't feel we have enough. We will not extend grace when we feel we are being taken advantage of or living in unfairness. We will not help another build when we feel our house is crumbling.
- **The Importance of an Abundant Mindset** – I want to repeat that truth: **As long as we feel we don't have enough, we won't bless others.** Let that soak in for a moment. If our generosity is dependent on our conditions, then how often will we be generous? Do we live easy lives? Yes, we are in one of the most prosperous nations in the world and yes, we live in a standard of living far beyond the majority of the world, but do you feel rich? I would venture to say that 95% of us don't. Since feel wealthy is relative (what is wealthy? Compared to what? Compared to whom?), it is also elusive. The more you have the more you see others have and your assessment adjusts. So, either our circumstances need to consistently abound OR, our mindset must recalibrate that that of continual abundance. Let me explain...
  - **The Truth in the Prosperity Gospel** – for a significant amount of my life I was a student of apologetics (researching facts to defend the faith) while being a student of theology (study of God) and obsessed with God's Word (hermeneutics). A popular subject in apologetics in the 80's and 90's was evaluation and criticism of the relatively new & popular movement called the *Prosperity Gospel* (what some called '*Health and Wealth*' or '*Name it and Claim It*' teaching). Countless leaders would show up on TV's and in books claiming that poverty was from the devil and that God wanted everyone to be rich. They said that the closer we got to God, the more wealth would show up in our wallets. They said that faith was a pathway to riches. Since I didn't see a lot of that in the life of Christ, I tore them apart in my mind and more gently in my teaching. But as the years wore on I began to see in my conservative brothers and sisters a dour spirit of complaining, grumbling, suffering and lack. I saw that the pendulum was so far to the other side there was a mindset, not of abundance but of scarcity. I saw that instead of thankful and grateful hearts, instead of praise being continually lifted up to the God who generously gives, I saw more prayer requests of problems. When I looked at the unity of churches, I saw that this scarcity mindset drove most churches I knew to circle the wagons and develop a competition with one another. I saw the effects of 'not enough' in most of the leaders around me. It was then that I developed an appreciation for one critical aspect of the Prosperity Gospel that had been thrown out with the proverbial bathwater: The Mindset of Abundance.

- **When you see God as desiring to bless you abundantly you loosen your hands on your money believing more will come.** It's in that camp that you learn that you can't out-give God.
  - **When you see God as abundant, you can partner with other churches because there's more than enough to go around.** It's in that camp that you learn high tide raises all ships (revival blesses everyone).
  - **When you see God as abundant, you forgive because of the lavish forgiveness and grace that's been poured into you.** It's in that camp that you see an expectation of release of hurts and pains.
  - **When you see God as abundant, you pray as if your prayers don't diminish the storehouse of God and you can ask as much as you want, because God always has more.** It's in that camp that you are reminded that your Heavenly Father has cattle on a thousand hills.
  - **Bottom Line** – The bottom line for me is that I don't believe the majority of the Prosperity Gospel is biblical and don't subscribe to it. But I do believe that it's founded on a very biblical principle that our God is abundant and He is abundantly generous and seeks to bless His children abundantly. How that blessing comes isn't always in monetary value, but the idea of a God of Scarcity is foreign to God's Word. May we receive the blessings of God and be in continual gratitude and praise.
  - **If we're going to build God's way we need to...Lead Ourselves Rightly**
- **Wait Till Your Father Comes Home**
  - **Nehemiah Brings Down the Hammer**
    - **Nehemiah 5:9-11** – *"So I said, "The thing that you are doing is not good. Ought you not to walk in the fear of our God to prevent the taunts of the nations our enemies?"<sup>10</sup> Moreover, I and my brothers and my servants are lending them money and grain. Let us abandon this exacting of interest.<sup>11</sup> Return to them this very day their fields, their vineyards, their olive orchards, and their houses, and the percentage of money, grain, wine, and oil that you have been exacting from them."*
      - **What Nehemiah Just said** – Let's recap. He said that after reviewing the situation, he understands what's going on now, and it's hurting their people. The extortion of exorbitant interest has to stop and you need to give back that money you've been making through this terrible famine time.
      - **Nehemiah's Wisdom and Leadership (big picture and collective vision)** – It's very unlikely that a bunch of evil Jews sat around and thought of a way to extort their brothers and sisters. It is far more likely that everyone was so caught up in their own thing that it was the most normal thing in the world to react to life around them and work on self-preservation and making what seemed like relatively wise business decisions at the time. But that's when we need a leader to lift their head up from the chaos of the moment and see the big picture.

That's when we need someone with vision to say, 'hey, individually I see why you did what you did. It's not great. But collectively we are actually really hurting our society that we are trying to build. So, I need everyone to quit doing what they are doing, and we need to holistically fix this problem.'" That's brilliant leadership.

- **Why I wish we were Catholic Sometimes** – One of my frustrations with the Protestant Church (mainstream Christianity as opposed to Catholic Christians) is the disunity and the lack of organized leadership. Instead of having a good leader who is reining in the weird churches and aligning us to make a difference, it's like a cat trying to herd other cats. We have no real semblance of accountability or leadership TOGETHER. We are all independent churches. I appreciate denominations, which tried to create this, but the disunity created by the denominations toward others really wrecked it. So, now we are all wandering around and disagreeing with each other. When there's something collectively wrong happening in the church in our region or nation, there's no one to stand up and call it out. It's the shadow side of democracy.
- **Personal Leadership Evaluations** – There are some of us in this church that are super organized and purposeful and you have yearly reviews for yourself and your family. You review your marriage and talk about planning for your children. I just need you to know that you are the extreme minority. The rest of us are living day to day and trying to keep our heads above water. So, to the majority of us I now speak: **If we're going to build God's way we need to...Lead Ourselves Rightly** – And that's going to mean that we plan and set periodic times to lift our heads up from the Tyranny of the Urgent, from the busyness of life, and take an evaluation of who we are becoming and what our lives are really like. If we have no direction we will spiral into waste. We need to observe our patterns of living, and make trajectory corrections where they need to happen. I encourage you to take one day a year to step away from the noise and reflect and plan<sup>6</sup>.
- **Nehemiah Called It as He Saw It** – This was a bold leadership move. He just publicly shamed a bunch of wealthy and influential people. At this point he only had relational capital and earned respect (he was a high-level Jew in the Persian realm, who was educated and wealthy, who put that aside to bless the Jewish people). He didn't have a title. But true leaders don't need a title. Leadership is influence. If you have it, you are a leader. He put that leadership on the line to make something right that was wrong. It could have gone very wrong. But he was willing to take that chance for the sake of the whole.

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<sup>6</sup> "Consultation (Neh. 5:7). "I consulted with myself" means literally "My heart consulted within me." A friend of mine calls this "putting my heads together." Actually, Nehemiah put his heart and his head together as he pondered the problem and sought God's direction. He got control of his feelings and his thoughts so that he could give constructive leadership to the people...Nehemiah decided to call a great assembly (Neh. 5:7) and publicly confront the people whose selfishness had created this difficult and painful situation. There's was a grievous public sin, involving the whole nation; and it demanded public rebuke and repentance." Wiersbe, W. W. (1996, c1992). Be determined. On cover: An Old Testament study-

- **Why So Many Christians and Christian Organizations are Dysfunctional<sup>7</sup>** – Why are so many Christians and Christian organizations so dysfunctional? I’m sure there’s a million answers to this, but I want to highlight one: Our culture has a high value on being nice. We learned it from our parents, our teachers and our Sunday Schools. Unfortunately, **nice isn’t always possible when trying to achieve health.** It is not nice to reset a broken bone, at least not at first. It is not nice to put your kid on timeout when they still want to play. It is not nice to turn your boss in for sexual harassment. But it’s right. Too often Christians avoid the tough conversations. I have seen more than one great Christian leader shrink in their leadership and become sidelined because they couldn’t handle conflict properly. Sometimes things need to be called out. I hate it. It goes against my natural personality I was born with. I want to avoid conflict, but my passion for Truth and Righteousness won’t let me and the minute I became a pastor, I was forced to build stronger and stronger to walk into conflict, but I had to learn it. **What about you?** Are you having the conversations you need to have with yourself and others that may be difficult but will ultimately set things right?

- **Peer Pressure**

- **Nehemiah Holds the Guilty Accountable**

- **Nehemiah 5:12-13** – *“Then they said, “We will restore these and require nothing from them. We will do as you say.” And I called the priests and made them swear to do as they had promised. <sup>13</sup> I also shook out the fold of my garment and said, “So may God shake out every man from his house and from his labor who does not keep this promise. So may he be shaken out and emptied.” And all the assembly said “Amen” and praised the LORD. And the people did as they had promised.”*

- **Thankfully the guilty relented** – This was an act of God. It is very rare that you bring correction to someone, especially publicly that embarrasses them, and they willfully and welcomingly change course. This is one of the benefits of the anointing of God, where He steps in and handles it Himself. What a beautiful turn of events. Can you imagine how this could have gone wrong and we have a mutiny?
      - **Accountability** – Notice how Nehemiah held people accountable.
        1. **He matched the public trespass with a public correction.** The only time you go public with a correction is when the trespass was seen by everyone and those that were hurt need to see justice, and the bad guys on the periphery need to be warned. Otherwise, you keep correction more private, behind closed doors. The point is not to shame someone as much as correction a situation and a wayward heart. You can do that much better personally and privately. Matthew 18 lays out this concept. Match the publicity of the correction to the publicity of the sin.

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<sup>7</sup> I love the Church and have given my whole life to serve the church and bless and build the church. So, when I criticize it, I’m challenging my own life. Part of loving something is seeking its best, so I bring challenge with the hope of a greater day tomorrow.



2. **He Brought in Community Accountability** – he involved the priests. They were still a relatively respected group of people and influential in the community. If they saw over something, they could continue to maintain the justice with their influence. This is making good use of peer pressure and societal guides.
  3. **He Ultimately Invoked God** – It was a moral and ethical violation which means that God has something to say about it. What the wealthy Jews were doing was not righteous. So, Nehemiah took it before the Lord and had the guilty acknowledge it before God. This is a critical part of Christian leading. If you have a rule or boundary that God set up (and it's not just your personal preference), remind your people who they are ultimately accountable too. It's not just you as the boss, it's God who sees everything in private. So they are never un-managed.
- **If we're going to build God's way we need to...Lead Ourselves Rightly** – That means that if we want to change behavior that is habitual, we need to get ourselves some accountability that's life-giving and valuable. Depending on your personality, some people like harsh accountability to snap them into shape, and others need encouragement and prayer accountability. Whatever version it is, we need it. We can't just be alone in our own heads or nothing is going to change.
  - **Extreme Generosity**
    - **Nehemiah is Made Governor and Leads Generously**
      - **Nehemiah 5:14-19** – *“Moreover, from the time that I was appointed to be their governor in the land of Judah, from the twentieth year to the thirty-second year of Artaxerxes the king, twelve years, neither I nor my brothers ate the food allowance of the governor.”<sup>15</sup> The former governors who were before me laid heavy burdens on the people and took from them for their daily ration forty shekels of silver. Even their servants lorded it over the people. But I did not do so, because of the fear of God.<sup>16</sup> I also persevered in the work on this wall, and we acquired no land, and all my servants were gathered there for the work.<sup>17</sup> Moreover, there were at my table 150 men, Jews and officials, besides those who came to us from the nations that were around us.<sup>18</sup> Now what was prepared at my expense for each day was one ox and six choice sheep and birds, and every ten days all kinds of wine in abundance. Yet for all this I did not demand the food allowance of the governor, because the service was too heavy on this people.<sup>19</sup> Remember for my good, O my God, all that I have done for this people.”*
      - **Recap: Nehemiah's Generosity is Epic Leadership** – Nehemiah is named as Governor over Jerusalem that they are rebuilding (now he has a title). That means he's the highest local leader (politically<sup>8</sup>) over the Jews. 12 years he and brothers didn't eat Governor's food allowance. He worked hard. Used his

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<sup>8</sup> We see in the Book of Ezra, that religiously, the priests had tremendous authority as well. So it depended on the sphere of society who was the senior leader.



servants as workers and acquired no land of his own. And he fed 150 leaders and men at his own table. Huge cost to lighten the burden for the people.

- **Nehemiah's Motivation** – Nehemiah laid out two primary reasons for doing this extraordinary generous move:
  1. **The Fear of God** – Nehemiah knows the secret to all Christian leadership: You are only a leader because God said so, and you are working for Him and He will hold you accountable for how you handle the leadership He gave you. Fear of God means intense respect and slight nervousness about the accountability of a Holy And Righteous God that is both omniscient and omnipresent. It is the heart of a great leaders accountability structure. If you rely on only people to hold you accountable, you can always live a secret life. But if God is your policeman, there's no hiding.
  2. **The "service was too heavy on this people"** – Nehemiah wasn't just being overly generous for a party. He was being overly generous because it was needed. There was a real situation here and he came through. It wasn't that everyone was living it up and drinking the night away. He was providing his best for his people to keep them strong, healthy and encouraged.
- **Let's Make it Personal**
  - **How Do You Use Your Influence?** – if leadership is influence, meaning that wherever people listen to what you have to say you are a leader (whether that a boss at work or a parent at home), then how are you using your influence? Do you use it to elevate yourself or elevate everyone? Great leaders make those around them better. I think we've all heard stories, read books, walked through history or seen movies and TV shows of bad kings who used their power to benefit only themselves while the rest of the people were poor and suffering. Imagine that picture and think about how you are operating as a leader. You may not be economically stealing from others, but you may not be sharing the blessings as much as you could in other areas. Let me give you a couple examples:
    - **Bad Leaders Hog Influence** – are you the type of leader who holds on to all the decision making in your group? Are you the only opinion that people need to hear? Or do you lift up those around you with their ideas and hand off authority? Does the vision of the organization or group that you influence, only have your stamp on it?
    - **Bad Leaders Hog Encouragement** – are you the type of leader who keeps all the praise to yourself? Do you share with others how their efforts brought about the situation that you just got praised for? Do you continually remind them that they are valuable and needed? Or are you just worried about keeping yourself encouraged?
    - **Bad Leaders Crush Spirits** – bad leaders are heavy handed and rude. Are the people around you thriving? Are they stronger with you, or demeaned by you? Do you take time to intentionally build them up emotionally or are they simply there to be used for your bidding?

- Harassment

- Nehemiah's Enemies Try to Dissuade and Lure Him

- **Nehemiah 6:1-9** – “Now when Sanballat and Tobiah and Geshem the Arab and the rest of our enemies heard that I had built the wall and that there was no breach left in it (although up to that time I had not set up the doors in the gates), <sup>2</sup> Sanballat and Geshem sent to me, saying, “Come and let us meet together at Hakkephirim in the plain of Ono.” But they intended to do me harm. <sup>3</sup> And I sent messengers to them, saying, “I am doing a great work and I cannot come down. Why should the work stop while I leave it and come down to you?” <sup>4</sup> And they sent to me four times in this way, and I answered them in the same manner. <sup>5</sup> In the same way Sanballat for the fifth time sent his servant to me with an open letter in his hand. <sup>6</sup> In it was written, “It is reported among the nations, and Geshem also says it, that you and the Jews intend to rebel; that is why you are building the wall. And according to these reports you wish to become their king. <sup>7</sup> And you have also set up prophets to proclaim concerning you in Jerusalem, ‘There is a king in Judah.’ And now the king will hear of these reports. So now come and let us take counsel together.” <sup>8</sup> Then I sent to him, saying, “No such things as you say have been done, for you are inventing them out of your own mind.” <sup>9</sup> For they all wanted to frighten us, thinking, “Their hands will drop from the work, and it will not be done.” But now, O God, strengthen my hands.”

- **Recap: Still Attacked** – no matter how good of a guy he was, doing the right things, he was still attacked. Enemies try to lure him down to a meeting to attack him but he refused saying he didn't have time to meet. 5<sup>th</sup> time enemy sent a letter accusing Nehemiah and his team of planning and leading a rebellion against the King. That's going to be a problem so let's talk about it. Nehemiah replied, 'you're making stuff up.'

- **Enemies Getting in our Heads** – This attack was what's called a psychological operation. It means that the enemy is trying to get into your head. Like a horse with reins, wherever the head turns, so turns the body. In the same way our enemy, Satan and his demons, as we said last week, are manipulators and bullies. They try to get you to believe their lies. I'm not going to re-do last weeks message, you can get that free online, but I do want to address one more small aspect of dealing with criticism...

- **What if you are your own worst critic/enemy?** - How do we identify and neutralize our own internal critic (sense of inadequacy, and insecurity)? **If we're going to build God's way we need to...Lead Ourselves Rightly** – and that means silencing the condemning voice in our own heads. Remember, our minds will regurgitate thoughts that we have received in the past.

- **Social Media Algorithms** – Did you watch the documentary “the Social Dilemma?” Parts of it were really good and powerful. But there was one piece that I found particularly interesting. It was demonstrating how the social media algorithms work on platforms like “Facebook”. The system is set up to generate interest and ‘clicks’ (the user clicks on an ad, or story, or whatever). It's not designed to make moral judgments on whether you should or should not click on that link. If it thinks there will be interest it's

going to present it to you. If you click on it once, it now has a history that you were interested and will give you more of that (obviously the problem is not just getting fed back content, but that it creates an 'echo-chamber' where you are only fed what you want to hear and reaffirming your current views, as if they are facts). Our minds are just like those algorithms. They collect stuff along the way from influences: a teacher taught you this, your parent told you that, your friends believe this, the Bible said that, a commercial suggested this, an experience made you feel that, etc. Those influential pieces come back to us if our brain marks them as significant (if we mentally clicked on it). Our brains are not necessarily trying to discern right and wrong as much as interest. So, when criticism comes and we validate it, we've clicked on it. It's bound to come up again, especially in a situation where it seems like it makes sense later (doubting yourself).

- **What Are We Validating?** – It's not possible to weed out all negative influences and lies. Sometimes we are just exposed to them (no one comes up to a stranger and asks them for a judgmental glance). So, we TRY to limit them, but really our attention should be primarily given to sifting and filtering them. We have to purposely decide what we will validate and what we won't. That requires some reflection time and will power to shut it down and replace it with truth. For example: let's say that you grew up in an emotionally abusive home where your parent said that you were *worthless*. Parents are power players in our lives, so it's almost impossible for a child to not validate those critiques initially. Over time we realize that our parent's dysfunction is spilling on us and that we aren't actually worthless, but those words were the vomiting of pain. We slowly start to deny our parents' opinions of us and replace them with other evidence and voices. But if we just try to move on and not address it with better and healthier voices, then it's going to creep up every time we doubt ourselves. This may require counseling, depending on how deep the influence mark is, but it will surely require actual work to replace it.
- **Christian Identity** – I'm going to bang this drum one more time (it's my obsession), I think that the majority of what we should be doing as Christians is recognizing who God is and what He has done for us, thereby learning who we are to become. We need to pour in TRUTH from God's Word that forces out the LIES from our enemies (world, flesh, devil).
- **Spiritual Abuse**
  - **Nehemiah's Enemies Hire False Prophets**
    - **Nehemiah 6:10-14** – *"Now when I went into the house of Shemaiah the son of Delaiah, son of Mehetabel, who was confined to his home, he said, "Let us meet together in the house of God, within the temple. Let us close the doors of the temple,*

*for they are coming to kill you. They are coming to kill you by night.”<sup>11</sup> But I said, “Should such a man as I run away? And what man such as I could go into the temple and live? I will not go in.”<sup>12</sup> And I understood and saw that God had not sent him, but he had pronounced the prophecy against me because Tobiah and Sanballat had hired him.<sup>13</sup> For this purpose he was hired, that I should be afraid and act in this way and sin, and so they could give me a bad name in order to taunt me.<sup>14</sup> Remember Tobiah and Sanballat, O my God, according to these things that they did, and also the prophetess Noadiah and the rest of the prophets who wanted to make me afraid.”*

- **Recap: False Prophet attempts to lure Nehemiah away** – a trusted priest/prophet was hired to lure Nehemiah into the temple (which he wasn't allowed to do) and try to scare him into giving up and hiding so that the enemies could discount his reputation and name. Other prophets/prophetesses joined in too. Thankfully it didn't work, but wow, when the religious leaders and prophets tell you something that's a low blow. The enemy is fighting dirty.
- **Spiritual Filters vs. Spiritual Walls** – No one fully understands the supernatural. They may seem like they do, but they don't. The very concept of interacting with another dimension, is too complicated for any human being. So, that means we are going to have spiritual influences that are positive (from God) and some that are negative (from Satan). How will we know which is which? We need some sort of filtering system. Remember - **If we're going to build God's way we need to...Lead Ourselves Rightly** – this means that we need to sift and sort spiritual influences in our lives and embrace the good and reject the bad. Unfortunately, because there's a learning curve to it, many people have not installed filter systems, they built fortress walls. They would rather live in a non-supernatural world distant from God, than in a messy spiritual world where Satan can get to them. But we are above all Christians. That means that we are spiritual beings. We have the supernatural indwelling Holy Spirit within us. We serve an invisible Almighty God. We believe a collection of books called the Bible is inspired, infallible and inerrant. We believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, who came to earth, lived a perfect life and died for our sins, then rose again on the third day and now sits at the Father's right hand. Whether we have to engage with the weird supernatural dimension is no longer a question. That ship has sailed my friend. It's only now a matter of filtering. You cannot wall off the supernatural and still connect with God. Resist the urge to live at the poles (Cessationist & Hyper-Charismatic) and live in the glorious middle where God dwells.
- **Otherworldly Work**
  - **Nehemiah's Enemies Back Off When They See the Hand of God**
    - **Nehemiah 6:15-19** – *“So the wall was finished on the twenty-fifth day of the month Elul, in fifty-two days.<sup>16</sup> And when all our enemies heard of it, all the nations around us were afraid and fell greatly in their own esteem, for they perceived that this work had been accomplished with the help of our God.<sup>17</sup> Moreover, in those days the nobles of Judah sent many letters to Tobiah, and Tobiah's letters came to*

them. <sup>18</sup> For many in Judah were bound by oath to him, because he was the son-in-law of Shecaniah the son of Arah: and his son Jehohanan had taken the daughter of Meshullam the son of Berechiah as his wife. <sup>19</sup> Also they spoke of his good deeds in my presence and reported my words to him. And Tobiah sent letters to make me afraid."

- **Recap: The Wall was completed** in 52 days and the enemies realized they had been beaten and that God had been involved in the process the whole time. But threats kept coming even afterward (Tobiah – who was using his personal connections into Nehemiah’s people/camp).
- **Enemies Can Shut Down Human Efforts, but not God-Efforts** – a wise enemy knows when they’ve been beat. As long as this whole building effort was Nehemiah’s personal vision, they had a shot to derail it. But once it became clearly evident that God was building and it wasn’t just people, they had to tap out. Now, they still hated it and still harassed. I don’t think we ever get to avoid enemy harassment while in this life, but I do think that where we are doing God-stuff we don’t need to fear defeat.
  - **Personal question: When is the last time you built something only God could build?** So much Christian ministry is founded today on human effort and strategy. We are always wondering if it’s the best way to do things. When it fails we feel like we failed because we came up with the idea. When it succeeds, we feel better than everyone else because we came up with the idea. But when was the last time you did something that only God could do? Isn’t about time we do that again? The benefits are amazing: when it succeeds you give Him glory. When it bombs, you know it was His idea. Our identities are not lost in it and we are able to serve with a more pure heart. We see things that encourage our faith. We witness the miraculous. And we don’t fear the enemy because that’s God’s battle to fight.
- **Change of Guard**
  - **Nehemiah Installs New Leadership**
    - **Nehemiah 7:1-3** – *“Now when the wall had been built and I had set up the doors, and the gatekeepers, the singers, and the Levites had been appointed, <sup>2</sup> I gave my brother Hanani and Hananiah the governor of the castle charge over Jerusalem, for he was a more faithful and God-fearing man than many. <sup>3</sup> And I said to them, “Let not the gates of Jerusalem be opened until the sun is hot. And while they are still standing guard, let them shut and bar the doors. Appoint guards from among the inhabitants of Jerusalem, some at their guard posts and some in front of their own homes.”*
      - **Recap: Nehemiah instills new leadership** over Jerusalem (his brother and another good guy) with clear orders of proper use and precaution.
      - **Let’s Make it Personal – What influences need to change out in your life today?** What influences are not life-giving to you? What circles do you run in that aren’t healthy? What voices do you need less of? What programs on TV and the radio do you need to let go? What talk shows and news programs do you need to

switch out? **If we're going to build God's way we need to...Lead Ourselves Rightly** – And that means changing some leadership now and then in our own lives. You are operating off the sum of your influences. Do you have the right ones?

- **Far From Over**
  - **Nehemiah Soberly Assesses the Rest**
    - **Nehemiah 7:4** – *“The city was wide and large, but the people within it were few, and no houses had been rebuilt.”*
      - **Recap: The work was far from over** – it was a big city with a few people and very fragile and vulnerable. We celebrate the wins but we also soberly assess reality.
      - **There's Always More To Do But That Doesn't Diminish the Drive** – When we are working on our spiritual lives it's tempting to give up thinking we will never be mature. But that's incorrect. Yes, it's a large territory to cover. Yes, it's a lot of work. Yes, it's daunting. But it's worth it. It's valuable work. What's your alternative? Giving up? Then what? Although it's impossible to be perfect and sinless, that doesn't mean we can't become mature. Maturity is not only possible, if we follow the Holy Spirit, it's probable. Spiritual Maturity means that we know who God is, know who we are, live out our Christian identity, advance the Kingdom of God, and serve to the glory of His name. That's pretty much it. We can do that.

### Conclusion

- **Don't Partner with Satan** – whether we use the name Devil or Satan, we have *false accuser* and *adversary*. Don't help him out. He's spewing enough lies toward a believer, we can't add to it or affirm it, or accept it. We cannot be our own worst enemy. We must not give him a foothold and the best way to do that is to be made into the image of Jesus Christ fully formed in who He has made us to be. Cling tightly to the truth of your Christian identity and resist the devil.
- **Pray Over Those with the Inner Critics and Negative Voices.**