

How Can You Build Your Life & Protect it From Your Enemies?

- [Narrator] Nehemiah 4. Now, when Sanballat heard that we were building the wall, he was angry and greatly enraged that he cheered at the Jews, and he said in the presence of his brothers and of the army of Samaria, "What are these feeble Jews doing? "Will they restore it for themselves? "Will they sacrifice? "Will they finish up in a day? "Will they revive the stones out of the heaps of rubbish "and burned ones at that?" Tobiah the Ammonite was beside him and he said, "Yes, what they are building, if a fox goes up on it, "he will break down their stone wall." Hear, O' our God, for we are despised. Turn back their taunt on their own heads and give them up to be plundered in a land where they are captives, do not cover their guilt, and let not their sin be blotted out from your sight, for they have provoked you to anger in the presence of the builders. So, we built the wall, and all the wall was joined together to half its height, for the people had a mind to work. But when Sanballat, and Tobiah, and the Arabs, and the Ammonites, and the 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, and they all plotted together to come and fight against Jerusalem, and to cause confusion in it. We pray to our God and set a guard as a protection against them day and night. In Judah, it was said, "The strength of those who bear the burdens is failing. "There is too much rubble. "By ourselves, we will not be able to rebuild the wall." And our enemy said, "They will not know or see until we come among them, "and kill them, and stop the work." At that time, the Jews who live near them came from all directions, and said to us, 10 times, you must return to us. So, in the lowest parts of the space behind the wall, in open places, I stationed the people by their clans, with their swords, their spears, and their bows, and I looked and arose, and said to the nobles, and to the officials, and to 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 homes." 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 work. From that day on, half of my servants worked on construction, and half held the spears, shields, bows, and coats of mail. And the leaders stood behind the whole House of Judah, who were building on the wall. Those who carried burdens were loaded in such a way that each labored on the work with one hand and held his weapon with the other, and each of the builders had his sword strapped at his side while he built. The man who sounded the trumpet was beside me, and I said to the nobles, and to the officials, and to the rest of the people, "The work is great and widely spread, "and we are separated on the wall far from one another "in the place where you hear the sound of the trumpet "rally to us there our God will fight for us." So we labored at the work, and half of them held their spears from the break of dawn until the stars came out. I also said to the people at that time, "Let every man and his servant "pass the night with Jerusalem, "that they may be a guard for us by night "and may labor by day." So neither I nor my brothers, nor my servants, nor the men of the guard who followed me, none of us took off our clothes, each kept his weapon at his right hand.

- All right, we find ourselves in Nehemiah 4. It's a great book of the Old Testament. If you got a Bible, go to Nehemiah 4. And here's where we find ourselves in the story, we like to go through the scriptures, and this week the question is how can you build your life and protect it from your

enemies? Amen. So, I wore my special T-shirt just to memorialize this moment: I'm not for everyone. I was thinking about it this week as I was preparing the sermon, and I got an email, and it went to my junk file, but I saw it, so, I clicked on it, and it showed the Google reviews that I tend to get, and what I noticed was interesting: all one and five stars, that's all I get. So, you're welcome, at least we're clear here. Amen. So, the point is some people are gonna love you, some people are gonna hate you. What do you do with the ones who wanna stop you? That's where we find ourselves in Nehemiah 4. God called this man Nehemiah to lead this special ministry, to rebuild the walls, to rehang the gates, and to reopen the church so that God could be worshiped, and then, the nations could hear about the coming of Jesus from this great City of Jerusalem. Well, as soon as he rose up to serve God, people arose to stop him. And what we see here is really spiritual warfare. It really is the enemies of God trying to stop the work of God. I was talking to a pastor friend of mine, some years ago we were driving in his truck, I won't name-drop, he's well-known and he gets criticized a lot more than me, but he looked at me, I was quite a bit younger back when I had bangs and hope, it was many years ago, and he said, "You seem to get criticized a lot and attacked a lot." Said, "Yeah, I do." And he said, "Would you like to know how to make that stop?" I was like, "Absolutely, do tell." "Let me know the secret of the wise ways." And he said, "It's easy: "don't say anything; "do anything; "or have anything." I was like, "Well, I mean, don't say anything. "I'm already discounted. "I can't, that's impossible." Say nothing, do nothing, have nothing, then, no one comes against you because there's nothing to take from you, and there's nothing to require stopping you because you're not starting anything, you're not doing anything. I said, "Well, it looks like I'm gonna have a long hard life." 'Cause, I wanna say some things, I wanna do some things, and when it's all said and done, I wanna have some things and to leave some things. And this is what we're seeing in Nehemiah 4 is that ministries have enemies, ministries have enemies. And if you're a Christian and you're here that you may be shocked, and you may live under this notion, well, if we just love God, everybody's gonna love us. No, the worship of Jesus includes the worship of a guy who was murdered, you're on the team of the hated, just accept it, embrace it, it doesn't mean we love it, but we have to manage it. And Jesus told us, he said, "They're gonna treat you like they treat me." And he gets treated well, and we're not gonna get treated well. Well, we see a Nehemiah 4, as soon as God puts his hand on you, somebody's gonna raise their hand against you. As soon as somebody is told by God, it's time to start, somebody else is gonna tell them no, it's time to stop. And this is spiritual warfare because if God is for you, Satan is against you. And if people are going to follow you, people are going to follow your enemies as they seek to oppose and to stop you. I've been a senior pastor 26 years, and I'll just tell you this, ministries have enemies, they just do. And here you're gonna see their enemies are led by a guy named Sanballat, and then he recruits with him another guy named Tobiah, we'll deal with them, they're present throughout the whole book, they don't go away, they don't get saved, they don't apologize, they don't give up or give in, in fact, they escalate through the totality of the book. They recruit into the fight an additional number of leaders and people, and it goes from a minority to a mob. And they have legal battles, what happens here, Sanballat and Tobiah, it also mentions in chapter 4: the Arabs, the Ammonites, and the Ashdodites. Now, we don't understand this 'cause this was many years ago, but just to simplify it, so, here's God's people, and these four enemies were north, south, east, and west, literally, surrounded them, and it was

ancient Jerusalem, unlike today where true or false, if you're in the Nation of Israel, you've got foes all around you. Everybody around you holds one thing in common: we want you to cease to exist as a people and as a nation. There's this real demonic hatred for the Jewish people, and here they are surrounded, and this is an unholy alliance. Previously, these four military leaders, these governors, these political kings with PR firms, and with deep pockets, and lawyers, and soldiers, they were a real credible threat. And God's people here just getting started. So, they're in their infancy days, and the attack often comes on a ministry early, in the same way, when Jesus is born, King Herod murders all the Jewish boys trying to eliminate Jesus and those who might follow him. The same thing happened in the days of Pharaoh in the Old Testament in Egypt, he sought to murder all the boys when they were little, 'cause if they grow up, they're gonna be strong. Here, God's people are in the infancy of their ministry, it's at the beginning, and Satan knows and demons know and evil-doers working with them know if they grow up and succeed and get strong, they're going to be able to fulfill the things that God has called for them, and since we're against God, we're against them. We need to strike them early before they mature and get too strong. This is an unholy alliance. Same thing that happens in organizations, happens in individual lives. People who don't have anything in common, all of a sudden, form an alliance when they have a common enemy. Don't raise your hand, but how many of you, you're like, "They hated me, and they hated me, "and they didn't even know each other, "and now, they're friends." This is the primary function, by the way, of social media, for evil, bitter demon-possessed people to meet each other and plot, that's what it's there for. And so these people now more easily and readily than ever, they can find each other and they do. So, it starts with Sanballat and Tobiah, and then, they add these additional men. In this as well, the issue here is religious freedom, God's people simply say this, we wanna rebuild the wall so that we can secure our borders. I keep thinking about what a crazy idea in this old-fashioned world where you needed a wall to secure your border. Glad we've moved on from those days. Nonetheless, they need a wall to secure their border, they need to hang the gates so that they can control who comes in and out of their city. The entire golden is to get the temple open so that God could be worshiped, and they don't want the church open. These four governors, these political leaders are seeking to guarantee that there isn't religious freedom for God's people. It's the same spirit in every age, the leaders come and go, but the demons are always the same. Like, well, we don't want the church open, we don't want religious freedom, we don't want believers to decide how to educate their own children. We don't want pastors to determine whether or not a marriage should be in a church and what qualifies as a marriage. In every generation, there are religious freedoms that are at stake, and sometimes naive people, well-intended but naive, say, "Well, we just need to stay out of politics." Well, if you let people who hate you make all the rules, it's not going to go better for you. If their goal is to stop your religious freedom and your faith and your family, then you need to be politically activated, and that's exactly what Nehemiah is demonstrating. And there's one guy here who's particularly interesting, it's Sanballat, he's the senior leader, and then, Tobiah, he's the second barrel on the gun, and he likely married into a believing family. You're gonna see this when we get later in the book, he's a non-believer, but he marries a believer. Now, he has a foot into the community of God's people. Satan is always trying to get someone inside, this is where most of the threats to health and freedom come, from the inside. So, Satan got Judas into the inside of Jesus'

ministry. Here, we see that Tobiah gets inside God's people, he now marries a believer and he is now invited in. If someone is close to you and they are working against you, they're the most dangerous, the most dangerous people for God's mission and ministry are not the people that we don't know, but the people that we do know. Paul says this in his farewell address to the elders in the Church of Ephesus, he says, "After I arise, men will arise from your own number, "distort the truth, and lead many astray." The point is, if Satan can just get one person in the leadership team, one person relationally connected, one person who is trusted, then, that begins his entire work of undoing everything God has been doing. In the same way, you have a real crisis in your family when a member of your family is your enemy. I hate to say this, but some of you, the most dangerous people are related to you. And this is the case here that Tobiah hates God's people, but he marries one of the women who is a believer, and now the enemy is part of the family. In addition to their legal problems, they have PR problems, there is slander, there has already been the false charge that Nehemiah: he is a terrorist; guilty of treason; that he's against the king; he's a criminal; he's breaking the law. All of these false allegations, today, we call it liable, slander, defamation, the internet, that's what it's for. And so there is this negative narrative that is said, and he's got some very serious PR battles. So, it says in chapter 4:1-3: Sanballat jeered. This is mocking, making fun of. He's doing "The Late Night Show" routine, he's on with Jimmy Kimmel, he's on "Saturday Night Live," he's got his YouTube channel fired up, he's got anti-hashtag, I hate Nehemiah. That's just how he is rolling. It's now a PR problem in the presence of his brothers, so he's inviting other people and the army of Samaria, he's like, "If I can get people to believe that Nehemiah is the bad guy "and I'm the good guy, "that's a win for me. "And if I can get armed military soldiers "to align with me against him, "we could really do some damage." What are these feeble Jews doing? Will they restore it for themselves? Will they sacrifice? It's all about worship and religious freedom. Will they finish in a day? Will they revive the stones out of the heaps of the rubbish and the burned ones at that? Tobiah the Ammonite was beside him, and he's the wingman, there's always a tough guy, and then, the other guy, he's the other guy, he's like, "Yeah, get him. "Yeah, yeah." He's the hype man. He's that guy. So, Ammonite is putting out the negative PR, and then, Tobiah, the Ammonite was beside him and said, "Yeah, what they're building, if a fox goes up on it, "it'll break down their stonewall." He's not a tough guy, he's with the tough guy, he's the other guy. But now, it goes from one loud leader to where he is assembling supporters. The problem's getting bigger, it's getting worse. And now it's a PR battle, now it's public. At this point, they haven't asked to meet with Nehemiah, they have not sought in any way to work things out with Nehemiah, they start publicly, and here's what evil-doers do: they start publicly, put in a lot of pressure, and then, demand that you meet privately. They're gonna demand to meet with 'em a little later in the book, and Nehemiah is like, "No way, we've never met, we don't have a relationship. "This is not personal. "If you're gonna start public, "we're never gonna make it private ""cause I can't trust you." Number three, they also have genuine security threats. Chapter 4:11, they said, "We're going to, quote-unquote, kill them." We're gonna kill them. Why? Because they wanna get the church open, and we want the church closed. So, we're gonna kill them. Can you imagine being these people? how many of you, you're like, "That's a bit much. "I don't mind going to church, "but I don't wanna get killed to worship God." God's people here are gonna have to pay a very high price. They're having to lose some of their reputation and some

of their relationships, and now, there is the risk that they could even lose their own life. So, this puts fear in people and concern, and oftentimes, people will say, well, wherever the church is opposed, wherever there is martyrdom, or there is opposition or persecution, the church grows. Actually, it doesn't. Historically, statistically, when a certain threat that is credible comes to God's people, the husbands and fathers move their families. And what the men decide is, yeah, I'm willing to die, but I'm not gonna let them take my wife, do the unspeakable to my daughter and slaughter my sons: therefore, we have to move. Now, this is what we see many times, for example, in Iraq, there's no Christians generally left, it's a very small number because, all of a sudden, an evil government falls, but then, more evil governance comes in, and God's people are getting killed, and the girls are having unspeakable things done to them, so, the church scatters and flees: God's people are gone. We're seeing a little forte to this in some of the most ungovernable cities in our own country. There are certain urban centers where certain believing families are saying, "We can't do this anymore. "I can't send my kids to that school, "it's going to destroy them. "I can't allow my children to get brainwashed "and gender mutilated in elementary school." I can no longer pay the amount of taxes to fund my enemies that living here requires.

- [Attendee] Amen.

- Okay, and so there are certain times when God's people just say, this doesn't work, we need to move and go somewhere else. And what they're trying to do in Jerusalem, they're trying to create a place for God's people. The rest of the world doesn't know God, but we do. The rest of the world doesn't worship God, but we will. The rest of the world doesn't consider God, but we are. And their enemies are saying, "No, we'll kill you. "You will die and pay a steep price to worship God freely." And so number four, it ultimately comes down to a governance battle. Who's gonna lead the charge? Nehemiah has got a God-given vision and his enemies have got a different vision. Division literally means two visions, Nehemiah and Sanballat are the leaders for and against God's mission: Nehemiah has a vision; Sanballat has an opposing vision. This is division. This is the way that it always works. There can't be a compromise in the middle because if it's a compromise, it's not going to be God's vision. There's nothing to reconcile or negotiate or talk about. We fundamentally disagree, doesn't mean I hate you, it doesn't mean I can't love you, it doesn't mean I can't pray for you, but it does mean I can't work with you 'cause I can't trust you and I don't agree with you. That's where they find themselves. And so the governance war is: is Nehemiah gonna lead God's people or is Sanballat? That's the question. Governance war started in heaven. The first time there was a coup attempt it was against God and it was by Satan and demons. Places like Revelation 17 tell this story: God was in charge, angels served him, Satan decided he wanted to dethrone God, sit in God's seat and rule in reign. So, there was a war in heaven. Satan was then cast down to the earth, and he declared war on our first father Adam and our first mother Eve, and he won. And here, what you have is you have a battle for who is going to lead God's people. It's a governance war. This is why I like to say if you're gonna lead an organization, a ministry, a business, or even a family, if you're gonna call the shots, you're gonna take the shots, that if you're trying to lead, someone is trying to replace you as the new leader. They're trying to remove you from the position that God has assigned to you. And we use the language in our day of a platform. You've probably all heard

this language for social media outlets or digital media outlets, or traditional media outlets, like film, or newspaper, or television, we call them platforms. And a platform is a word that was originally introduced in the English language in the 1500s. And it was when someone had a message that they wanted to communicate to the masses, they would create a little platform, literally a small stage, and they would stand on it so that people could see them and hear them in a crowd, if you didn't have a platform, you would literally take a soapbox, it was a box that you would carry soap in, you would flip it over and stand on it, we still use this language, oh, that person's on their soapbox. Just so you know this is my soapbox. So, the way this works, this is my platform. And so the way it worked is the person would be elevated, and then, they would speak so people could see them and hear them, and then, a crowd would gather, and then, followers would decide, I like what they're saying, and I think I could trust them, I'm going to follow their leadership. A platform was primarily utilized by politicians and preachers. Today, there's lots of platforms: social media; traditional media; digital media; lots of platforms. And there's two ways to build a platform. It was true in the 1500s, and it's true today. You can have a positive platform or a negative platform: a positive platform, you're communicating the message of who or what you're for; negative platform, you're communicating who or what you're against. Now, every platform has a combination of the two 'cause you can't be for one thing without being against something else. So, I'm pro-life, I'm against abortion, and sorry, I wrote a book called "Abort Abortion." No platform would let me run an ad. I'm zero for everything in my efforts to try and get my message out. But you can't be for children and for ending the lives of children. Sometimes to be for something means you have to be against something that is against what you are for. But as a general rule, most platforms are either predominantly positive or predominantly negative, positive platforms, amass followers by communicating a message, negative platforms, amass followers by attacking the messenger on the other platform. So, there's two ways to get a crowd: one is to say something; the other is to attack someone that already has a crowd. They did this a lot in Jesus Day. Jesus had a platform, people followed Him. He literally had followers, I mean, so, social media started with Jesus. He's like, "Come follow Me." Click, okay. So, He had followers, and then, what would happen is the religious leaders who were against Him, they couldn't get the same followership. So, they would attack Him trying to take His followers. He had a positive platform, they had a negative platform. What happens here is Nehemiah has a positive platform. God wants the city open, God wants the church open. God wants religious freedom so people can exercise their faith, and they can love and serve and raise their family: that was his positive platform. His enemies and critics, they were trying to steal his platform. And what happens when you have a platform as Nehemiah does, those who are against you attack you, and they make it personal, and they want you to take it personal. The goal is to annoy and frustrate you until you engage them, and here's the big idea, if you engage, you will enrage. And what they really want is, number one, they want you to address or acknowledge them because, then, what you're doing is you're pulling them onto, what? Your platform. Your platform. And if they get your platform, they're gonna get some of your followers. Some of your followers are going to be naive, and gullible, and believe them. like, "Oh, my gosh, I can't believe Nehemiah is a terrorist, "and I can't believe he is a criminal, "and I can't believe he is lying to us." And say, "Well, that's not true." But that's what they said. And there'd be a percentage of people in the middle who would just be very scared and

suspicious. Like, "Well, Nehemiah says one thing, "and they say another thing, "and Nehemiah is attacking and responding, "so, maybe, what they're saying is true, "I don't know, "let's just leave, "let's quit, "let's resign, "let's move, "let's exit, "let's stop, "because I'm not sure what's true or false." And that's exactly what's happening. As a general rule, very, very, very, very, very rarely will I respond, because I have more important things to do.

- [Attendee] Amen.

- In addition, if I'm talking about God and they're talking about me, I don't wanna be talking about them, I'm supposed to be talking about God. And if people come together, like teach us the Bible, and somebody's like, "I'm gonna attack you." Okay, let me teach you about them. Why do I wanna teach you about them? At the end of the day, you're not gonna die and stand before them. You're not gonna give an account to them, neither will I, in addition, they have risen from the dead zero times. So, they're not really our highest priority, so, at the end of the day, as a general rule, I like to ignore. It's a spiritual gift. And I'll just tell you, there's something really beautiful about ignoring your enemies: you get your time back; get your health back; get your joy back. You get to hear from God because other people aren't in your ear telling you what to do.

- [Attendee] Amen.

- And so what Nehemiah does, he doesn't engage, he just continues to move forward. As a general rule, I'm just gonna ignore people and keep teaching the Bible. And here's the big idea: the war is over the word; the war is always over the word. If you fast forward to the end of the book, the reason that Nehemiah is building this ministry is so that Ezra can, literally, stand on a platform, literally, and preach the word of God. And then, the Holy Spirit falls like the Old Testament version of the Day of Pentecost, and people are saved, and the band starts writing songs, and people are learning the word of God, and getting freed from bondage, and getting forgiven for sin. And lives are being changed, and legacies are being transformed, and everything is to stop the preaching of the word of God. The war is always, make no mistake, the war is always on the word. It's always on the word. The goal here is to stop the word of God from being preached, and ministries that preach the word have enemies who are against the word. I'll give you an example, did Jesus have enemies? Yes. Did Jesus have a good ministry? Yeah. Did Jesus have a perfect ministry? Yes. I'll just tell you that's discouraging, so, you could have a perfect ministry and still have enemies, yeah. Jesus had a perfect ministry and enemies, question: does Jesus still, today on the earth, have a ministry? Yes. Does he still have enemies? Yes. The Bible calls the anti-Christ. They're just like Sanballat and Tobiah. Whatever Jesus is trying to do, they're trying to stop it. It's gonna be that way until Jesus comes back. Not only do ministries have enemies, I hate to tell you this, you will have enemies, you personally, individually. How many of you already know this? For some of you, it's new. And for some of you, you're a Christian so it's very painful, like, I wouldn't attack people, I wouldn't lie about people, I wouldn't slander people. I wouldn't try and destroy people, because you have the spirit of God, they have a different spirit. You need to believe, you need to understand that some

people are evil. Now, summer wise, Nehemiah's wise, some people are foolish, there's a lot of people in this story that are getting confused, they're a little bit foolish, Sanballat and Tobiah and the guys who are with them, evil. These are not good men, they don't tell the truth, and they don't play by the rules, these are the bad guys. You need to leave a category for evil people and they're gonna be your enemies. Here are some ways that people choose to be your enemies, and let me say this too, in the book of Nehemiah, eight times in the English translation, they use the word enemies, two times, it's here in chapter 4, but here's some different kinds of enemies, insecure people, they're just threatened by your success. You're like, "What did I do?" "Nothing. "You got a promotion. I didn't. "You got a job. I didn't. "You got married. I didn't. "You had a kid. I didn't." Insecure, jealous people. Your success causes their anger. That's part of what's going on in Nehemiah, they're starting to make progress, and then, people covet their success, how many of you had a relationship break up, and you didn't even do anything? Your life got better, their life got worse, so they didn't like you. Sometimes there are people that are just enemies and they have conflicting agendas and ideologies. I literally had a guy not too long ago, he's like, "Look, I'm a big advocate for gay marriage. "I'm wondering how we could reconcile." I'm like, yeah, we can't. Yeah, we are not going to. Yeah, nope, I'm not buying a dress and you're probably not gonna wear boots. I think we're just gonna stay in our lane. They're just our ideological, you're like, "We disagree." If you're for one political party, you're probably not super excited about the other. Entitled people, they just demand control, if there's money or power or influence, they just feel they have a right to it: I should be in charge; I should be on staff; I should hold people accountable; I should be on the board; I should make decisions; I have a right. No, no, you don't. And flexible, people just don't like change, these are highly traditional people, they just don't like change. They just don't like change. So, any change you bring, they're gonna oppose it 'cause they just don't like change. Have you ever been to this church? Some people are just like, "Hey, we're gonna put in a new song. "No. "Can we change the carpet? "No." But the carpet was on the arc, it's been here forever. We need a new carpet. It's fine, okay. Demonic people attack anyone doing good for God. And there are certain people who, literally, devote their entire life to just attacking anyone doing good for God. And so sometimes you can click through their website, so their social media or their YouTube channel, you're like, "Everyone you're attacking is serving Jesus." And then there's unrepentant people, they attack truth that they despise, hey, you're sleeping with your girlfriend, you shouldn't do that. Oh, that was, that was offensive and intolerant. Yeah, that's part of our ministry, yeah. Hey, you shouldn't be cheating on your wife. Well, that's controlling. No, no, it's convicting. They're just certain people. They just don't like what God says. So, you're gonna have some enemies, and here's how your enemies are gonna work. They're gonna get angry at you, and they're gonna try and manipulate control or determine your fate, but their anger is gonna trigger your fear. So, here, chapter 4:1 says, Sanballat was, quote, angry and greatly enraged. You're like, "He's angry. "We could see it." Red face, right? Weapons, soldiers, he's enraged. How many of you don't like enraged people? You're like, "No, I'm not a fan." Because enraged people, people that are just filled with anger, they're unpredictable, they're dangerous, and they're not in their right mind. So, they're capable of the worst evil. They're scary. It also says in chapter 4:7, so, chapter 4:1 it says that Sanballat was angry, but chapter 4:7 it says that the people with him were all greatly angry, it's one thing to have an angry person, it's another thing when they got a

mob. Now, you're like, "Okay, there's a growing number of you "making a lot of noise, "recruiting a lot of new soldiers into this fight." So, their anger triggers your fear, it's not a sin to have fear, it's a sin to stay in fear. Satan will want you to move into your fear to make all your decisions from there. You will never make a good decision from fear. We only make good decisions from faith. And that fear in the Bible, it comes with the demonic spirit. Bible says that God has not given us a spirit of fear, and it's the love of God that casts out fear. So, ultimately, you've gotta decide, am I gonna live by faith or fear? Am I gonna live by the spirit of God or the spirit of fear? So, here's what's gonna happen, fear is gonna come on you, but you can't let it in you. You can't let it in you. Nehemiah has fear come upon him, here's what he said in chapter 2:2: "I was very much afraid." He says here in chapter 4:14, he says to the people, "Do not be afraid." In chapter 5, or excuse me, 6:13 and 19. They have this false prophet named Shemaiah, he is a, quote-unquote, believer, religious leader, he gets a book deal, and a tour deal, and gets some late-night talk opportunities, and they put the mic in his hand to prophesy lies, he's a false prophet about Nehemiah, but he's credible 'cause the people are like, I don't know, he's a leader. Says that Shemaiah was hired, that I should be afraid and sin so they could give me a bad name in order to taunt me, and Tobiah sent letters to make me afraid. What he says is, everything they're trying to do is to scare me, make me afraid, they threatened me, that made me afraid, they threatened the people, that made the people afraid, they hired a false profit to function as a demonic PR firm to attack me and to say horrible things against me. And then, they sent out an open letter, you'll see this in chapter 6. They sent out an open letter accusing me publicly of crimes and trying to get all the people to abandon the ministry, and he said, "They did that to make me afraid." And the point is this, it's not that there is no reason to fear, but the only thing in the Bible we are told to fear is to fear the Lord, that the fear of the Lord is beginning of wisdom, Proverbs tells us, and the fear of anyone else leads to foolish decisions. Literally, what they're trying to do is take God's place. We are angry, we're gonna pour out wrath on you, we're gonna make your life hell, therefore, you need to obey us, worship us, do what we say, and there'll be no pain for you. These are people who threaten, manipulate, and control. And sometimes people think, well, I just don't wanna make them mad, I don't wanna set them off, I don't wanna have a conflict, what can I do to make this better? Surrender is what they want, and if you give it to them, they will destroy you. These are not people who are for you, they're against you. These are not people sent by God, they're sent by God's enemy. So, what Nehemiah is saying, they're angry, I'm afraid. Who or what do you fear? The Bible says in Proverbs that there is something called the fear of man. And it says that it's a trap or a snare. If you're a hunter out in the woods, you set a trap, you're trying to find a foolish animal that you can trap and snare so you can destroy and consume. Now, Satan's a bit of a trapper, and he sets traps all over, and the traps that he set are angry, controlling enemies, and if you fear them: you're gonna fall into the trap; you're gonna get snared. Who or what are you afraid of? Nehemiah is honest. I want you to be honest. Yeah, there's somebody, I'm scared of them. I just try to avoid them, I try to just say yes, I try to give 'em what they want, I just try and make 'em happy, they're like a grenade with a pin pulled in the middle of my life, and I'm always working around 'em. Their anger may be real, your fear may be real, it will come upon you, Nehemiah is a godly man, but you can't let it in you. So, when their anger triggers your fear and your fear comes upon you, some of you, you can feel it, some of you, the person you are when you're

afraid is not the person you normally are. And the people who love you can see, they're like, "Are you okay? "What's going on? "You're not yourself." You're like, "Yeah, I'm not doing so good." That's the spirit of fear. When it's on you, let me ask you this important question, they're saying, do you know how to get it off you? Do you know how to get it off you? You can't do it with medication, you can't do it with self-help. You can't do it with positive self-esteem. You need the Holy Spirit to take it off you. If it's a spirit of fear that comes upon you, then spirit of God needs to take it off you. So he prays, and this is what you do, you pray. Pray is like spirit of God, the spirit of fear is upon me, please get the spirit of fear off me before it gets in me and destroys me. So, he prays. This is one of his nine prayers in the book here, chapter 4:4-5, here, O' our God, for we are despised, everybody hates us, but you still love us. It doesn't matter who hates you if God still loves you. Turn back their taunt on their own heads, and give them up to be plundered in a land where they are captives, do not cover their guilt, and let not their sin be blotted out from your side, for they have provoked you to anger in the presence of the builders. Their anger triggers his fear, the fear is on 'em, it's the spirit of fear, he prays, and the spirit of God takes off the spirit of fear. And here's what he prays, two things, God bless us; and deal with them. Bless us, and deal with them. It's always good to pray for God's people and pray against their enemies, starting with the demonic, 'cause our war isn't just against flesh and blood, but powers, principalities, and spirits, to be sure demons are at work behind the scenes in this, he prays for the blessing of God's people and the judging of God's enemies, and we should do the same. God hears and answers the prayer by chapter 4:6, the fear comes off the leader, the fear comes off the people, it says that they had a mind to work, they were really unified and they march forward together, in every organization, this can be your family, your marriage, your parenting or ministry, your business or company, once you let fear in, it's really hard to get out. Once people start getting used to fear, they become controlled by fear. Once people start surrendering to fear, they start being driven by fear. Part of the problem in our culture is for a few years, Americans, literally, submitted surrender to the spirit of fear: shut your businesses; shut your church; don't go home; everybody's gonna die; be scared, be very scared; lots of bad news; everybody be scared, be very, very scared, very, very scared. Now, there's a spirit of fear. Nobody can make a decision. There's no plan for the future. Everybody's just scared. Just scared. The whole planet embraced the spirit of fear. I'll never forget I was talking, and I don't mean to be cruel, but I was talking with one guy, I was like, "You're gonna die." He's like, "Eventually, either way." I'm 51. Here's what I know. Gravity is undefeated. At some point, I'm going in a hole, I just know where that's gonna end up. And I would rather live my life in my faith, preaching the Bible, standing before Jesus, then sitting home at the couch for the rest of my life, scared that something bad might happen, because I think sitting on the couch is a bad thing that happens. And so, I mean, I saw it this week, I mean, it's just craziness. Two people have faith, they're like, "Yay." Everybody else is air clapping, like, I'm not sure, I could go either way, so, air clap. But just fear, just crazy fear. I was hiking in the woods this week. Like I told you, I'm not on the internet so I have time for hiking, and so I was hiking in the woods, and there was a family, a mom, and a dad, and one child, there were the only people at the lake, and they were fishing, the kid had a mask on, the dad had a mask on, the mom also had a face shield. I'm like, "Are you a gaseous family?" Like, what is happening? But it's like you're, literally, just making sure that your child lives under the spirit of fear. It's just the spirit of fear. What

Nehemiah decides is I'm not going to let the spirit of fear in me, and we can't let the spirit of fear in us. Yeah, the world is a disaster, but we are God's people, and we need to make a plan to have a better future for us.

- [Attendee] Amen.

- And so ultimately too, what we see next is godly men bless women and children, this is the theme for real men on Wednesday night, live or online, we'll see you, men, there, but here's what he says, "I station the people by their clans, "father, son, that's your house, "that's your neighborhood, "that's your family, "you keep 'em safe." With their swords, their spears, and their bows. So, they're open-carry Hebrews, that's what they are. And said to the nobles, and to the officials, and to 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 homes." What God works through Nehemiah is this plan: hey, men, that's your family, that's your responsibility. It's your responsibility: make sure your wife is safe; make sure your kids are safe; make sure your family is safe. So, he assigns fathers and sons, 24-hour security guard, here's the big idea: are God's people picking fights? No, they're not attacking anyone. They're just protecting themselves from those who are attacking them. So, this is not aggressive militia. This is like, "Hey, people keep robbing me." Well, do something. Don't just vote for idiots who defund people who do things, do something. So what he tells him is three things, number one, do not be afraid, number two, remember the Lord, if God told you to do this, he's gonna go do it with you. So, go do it. And then, he says, "Fight. "If you need to fight, fight. "If you need to push back, "if you need to disagree, "if you need to get fired, "if you need to say no, "fight." 'Cause, evil never stops itself. I've never seen evil say, "Well, that was enough pain I've inflicted "feel like I'm done now." Evil never stops itself, and so sometimes it needs to be stopped. Sometimes it needs to be, this is why we like police officers, we like security guards, we like soldiers: they stop evil. So, people don't believe in evil, those people are evil. But let me say this as well, real men like to keep women and children safe, that's what he's telling them to do. And you're gonna hear about a trumpet, a trumpet is if they're somewhere that an invasion or an attack is happening, they blow the trumpet, and all the men would rally there to defend the women and the children. We wanna have an environment where women and children are blessed and feel safe. I've had people come in there like, why do you have security guards? 'Cause, the Bible says so. We're actually gonna build a perimeter out front, 'cause I was reading Nehemiah and they had a wall, we're gonna build ourselves one of those. Why do you have security cameras? Well, because there are some bad people and we wanna discourage them from doing bad things: this is why you have security; this is why you have security cameras; this is why you have background checks; it's why you have policies. Not because people who are in the church are always bad, but sometimes Satan sends somebody else in. We just need to make sure that the women and children are safe. So, let me give you a leadership lesson here: your pain tolerance determines your leadership lid. Nehemiah is a great historical case study in leadership. And here's what happens from the beginning of the book to the end of the book, his pain tolerance has to increase for his leadership influence to increase, how much pain you can endure is absolutely tied to how much influence you will have. Most people who want influence

can't handle pain. You can't have one without the other. Pain is the price you pay for influence. I'll prove it to you in Nehemiah. Chapter 2:10: Sanballat and Tobiah were displeased greatly. so, it starts with two guys, they're like, "We don't like you." There's a little bit of pain there. Chapter 2:19: they jeered at us. Well, now, it's public, now, you're trashing me on social media, now, you're calling people, now, you're sending out texts and emails. and now it's getting loud, and noisy, and painful. Chapter 4:1: they jeered publicly. Now, there's a small forming group, now, they're posting, and reposting, and tagging, and retagging, and now it's getting to be a bit of a hot mess, it's a situation. Chapter 4:3, not only is it Sanballat, now Tobiah steps in, one guy who's a leader, another guy's a leader, uh-oh, now, we've got a two-headed monster. Now, they're bringing all of their fans, and followers, and friends, it's getting to be a situation. By chapter 4:7, it mentions Sanballat, Tobiah, the Arabs, the Ammonites, the Ashdodites. says, they, quote, plotted together to fight and cause confusion. Now, it's an angry mob, they're gonna fight us, and the whole goal is to cause confusion. The people are like, "Well, I don't know, "I heard this, and I heard that, "and they said this and I'm confused." That doesn't mean the people are bad, means that they're in a bad situation. By chapter 4:10, in Judah, it was said, "The strength of those who bear the burden is failing." So, now the story's going out like they're losing, they're failing, they're not succeeding, and you know what that does? That encourages all their enemies. If you were on the fence, now it's time for the fight. This is like the nearing days toward an election.

- Amen.

- Right? They're fighting, fighting, fighting, and they're like, "Oh, they're dropping behind in the pools, "join us, join us, join us." The battle escalates. By chapter 4:11. They threaten we're gonna kill you. How much pain tolerance do you need to have as a leader? It's one thing when you're trashing us, it's another thing when you're murdering us. It's one thing to read about us, it's another thing to bury us. His pain tolerance is increasing, his pain tolerance has to increase. And then, we see as well here in chapter 4:12, that believers, quote, came from all directions, and said to us, 10 times, "Return to us." So, God's people are like: no, no, no, we're gonna serve the Lord; we're gonna finish the project; we're gonna get the church open; we're gonna do what God said. And a bunch of their family and friends who were far away are just like, "I don't know what's going on, "it sounds crazy there. "You guys, please come home, run for your life, "quit, move back home." 10 times. So, now, well-intended family and friends are trying to rescue and save people, and they think it's their ministry, but ultimately, what they're telling the people is to stop doing their ministry. Your ministry is not to stop them from doing their ministry, but that's what's happening. So, now, you've got Nehemiah leading, you've got enemies attacking, you've got people coalescing, and you've got family and friends trying to save, trying to remove people from the mission. And what is happening? They're up against people with a murderous spirit. And when you're up against people with a murderous spirit, you give nothing, you surrender nothing, you say nothing, nothing, nothing, that's what Nehemiah gives them. Your goal is to destroy us, therefore, no conversation, no meeting, no compromise, no negotiation. Here's how we say it today, we do not negotiate with-

- [Congregation] Terrorists.

- Terrorists. Unless, of course, you're in the wrong administration. Say, well, what do they wanna do? They wanna destroy us. Well, then, why should we even get involved? Why? If your goal is to end me, why should I even start with you? So, let me point this out to you, who's the person with the greatest influence in the history of the world? Jesus Christ. Who is the person who has endured the most pain in the history of the world? Jesus Christ. Your pain tolerance determines your leadership influence. Jesus comes to the earth, that was painful, He left heaven came to earth. How many of you right now you're like, "I'd like to be in heaven?" We're in Paradise Valley and it still sucks compared to heaven. Jesus in heaven comes to earth, that's painful. He goes from being worshiped by angels to being hated and opposed. His own family for a season thinks He's lost his mind and abandons Him, that was painful. Judas Iscariot, pretend friend, betrayed Him, Peter denied Him, lot of pain. Spends a whole night in the Garden of Gethsemane shedding like drops of blood and crying out to the Father, 'cause He knows that what is before Him is the cross, which is the greatest pain that anyone has ever endured in the history of the world. And He says, "Your will be done." And He goes to the cross. Now, He suffers emotionally. He's being mocked publicly. His reputation is destroyed. He is suffering psychologically, the torment. He is suffering physically, but the worst suffering of all, for the Lord Jesus on the cross, was spiritual. My God, my God, why have You forsaken Me? That's the greatest pain anyone's ever felt. At that point, the Son of God endured the wrath of God. The Son of God became an enemy of God. The Son of God became rejected by God the Father. He who knew no sin became our sin, that's what St. Corinthians 5:21 says. He took our place so He could put us in His place. Jesus endured the greatest pain. He died. He rose, He returned to heaven. And today, He has the highest influence, there's nothing above the throne of Jesus Christ: He rules and reigns as King of kings and Lord of lords. The highest influence because He endured the greatest pain. If you wanna have influence, you need to endure pain. I'm sorry it's that way, but in a fallen, sinful, cursed world, that's the way that it is. And if you're like, I don't do pain, then, you don't do good, you don't do influence, you don't do leadership, and you don't do Jesus. Jesus said, pick up your cross and follow Me, you're like, "I don't like pain." Well, if you love Jesus, you don't have to like pain, but you have to accept pain. If Jesus accepted pain to have a relationship with you, you need to have pain to accept a relationship with him. So, it all comes down to these two great images: the sword and the trowel. So, I'll give them as an analogy. In chapter 4, literally, so let's say in the day, and I'm not probably not gonna use 'em, so we have joined the team as, hey come, we'll give you a brownie, and tell you where you can help, you wanna be a grater, what do you wanna do? So, in Nehemiah 4, you show up, and you're like, "Join the team." You're like, "Great. "Do I get a water bottle or a sticker for my camel?" Nope, here's what you get, you got a sword and trowel. This is join the team. You're like, "Oh, what do we do with these?" Okay, good, thanks for asking. What do you do with the trowel? You build something. They're gonna use it to build the wall. My question to you dear friend is, what has God called you to build? A family, a business, a ministry, or church, a department within our church. What has God called you to build? God called them to build something, that's the trowel. And so they're gonna use the trowel to build the wall, and to build the city, and to build the church that God told them to build, in the same way, let's say you've got a home, how many of

you have a door on your house? You should. Otherwise, you need to go home right now, you've got a problem. How many of you at your house, you have a gate around your house, you've got a fence around your house? How many of you've got a dog in your house? How many of you've got a security system in your house? How many of you have got a gun just in case everything else fails? That's the sword. Because there's two ways to get something: build it or steal it. Right? Satan comes to steal, kill, destroy, he takes. Whatever God is trying to build, Satan is trying to break, whatever God is building. Satan is in the process of stealing. And a lot of Christians are like, "Can't we just love everybody?" "Can't we just do our best?" "Can't we try our hardest?" Yeah, but you also need to defend and protect that what you build. Otherwise, your family will get taken over by an evildoer, your business will get gutted by a competitor, your church will be run by Judas on the board. So at some point, you've gotta pick up the sword, not to start a fight, but to protect what you care for. So he talks about the trial, he says, "We all returned to the wall, each to his work, "and we worked on construction and we labored at the work." And then it talks about the sword, he says, "half of them had spears, shields, bows, "coats of mail. "Each labored on the work with one hand "and held his weapon in the other." They went to work with a sword and trowel. Each of the builders had his swords strapped to his side. Well, here's the big idea. Ministry is physical and spiritual. We build in the spiritual by preaching the word of God, by praying, by being filled with the spirit, by worshiping God. And then, we also have war in the spiritual realm with prayer and intercession, and he's gonna demonstrate that. So, he builds and defends in the spiritual, but also in the physical. He builds what God calls him to build, and then, he defends it from those who wanna destroy it. You need to know that there are powerful forces at work, political, cultural, some even religious and spiritual that are going to seek to destroy everything that God is trying to do in our church, in our life, in our ministry, in your family, and in your company. And you can't be naive and gullible. In heaven, there will be no gates, it says in Revelation. But in Nehemiah, there are gates, it's because everybody in heaven is filled with the spirit. In Nehemiah, not everyone is filled with the spirit, they're filled with other spirits. So the question is, what has God asked you to build? And how can you defend and protect that which God has asked you to build? And I just wanna close with encouragement. Jesus says this, "I will build my church." The goal is to spend most of our time and the energy not fighting with our enemies, but completing our ministry. I believe God has a great future for us: I don't think that there is going to be, in the next two years, a great future for our economy; I do not believe in the next two years there will be a great future for our political leadership; I do not believe in the next few years there will be a great future for the culture. But I do believe that there will be a great future for God's people if we will build what God has told us to build, and defend it from those who seek to destroy it. And that's exactly what is happening in the days of Nehemiah and in our own day. I love you, I'm excited, I got vision for the future, I'm actually the most excited, the most joyful, the most content, the most hopeful I've ever been in 26 years as senior pastor, and it's not because I'm looking out at the culture, the politicians or the economy, but I'm looking up to God who likes to bless his people, that's what I see. So, we are rebuilding our home, we're glad to have you. Next week is Commitment Weekend, we've got a Rebuilding Home campaign: phase one over the course of two years, build a park out front; phase two, more room for kids; phase three, more broadcast, we reached 100 million people last year, Lord willing will reach more; phase four, pay off our mortgage in two

years before the election, and we're all doing the purge. That's the big plan for Rebuilding Home. Next week, you can either go to trinitychurch.com or grab the brochure, bring it next week, it's Commitment Weekend. We're asking you to ask the Lord, what do you want me to give a one-time gift? Or over the course of two years, we'll total it up and get to work. In a moment we're gonna worship. I love you. Let me pray for you. Father, thanks for an opportunity to worship together, to come together. God, they were fighting to be able to have a place where they could worship, we already have one, they were working to bring back an old building, and God, thank You for all the places that are open, and Jesus is worshiped, and the Bible is taught. And God, the war in their day was against the word, and it's always the same war. So, let us be devoted, committed, uncompromised about, unashamed of Your word. In Jesus' name, amen.