

Fear Has No Power

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Work in Progress / Nehemiah 6:1–19

In Nehemiah, chapter 6, we find that the wall is nearing completion. However, as that work finishes, Nehemiah faces his greatest threat yet: fear. His enemies use lies, pressure, and false counsel to try to stop the work. But Nehemiah's steady faith reveals the source of true strength. Fear has no power when our trust is placed in God.

The Fear of Fraud

- Every one of us has had this situation unfold before.
 - Your phone rings, and it's a number you don't recognize.
 - You answer it, and there's a voice on the other end that sounds calm, confident, professional.
 - "Hello, this is the IRS. There's a problem with your account."
 - Or maybe it's, "This is your bank. We've detected suspicious activity."
 - Or, "Your Amazon account has been compromised."
 - And for just a moment, even if you're a cautious person, your heart skips a beat.
 - You start thinking, *Wait... is this real? Did something happen?*
 - Truth be told, they're counting on that moment.
 - Because they know fear makes people react.
 - Fear makes people say things they wouldn't normally say.
 - Fear makes people do things they wouldn't normally do.
 - Eventually you realize it's a scam, and you hang up.
 - Maybe you laugh about it.
 - Maybe you shake your head and wonder who falls for that.

- Honestly, there have been times when I keep the ruse going for longer than I should.
- But recently, I learned something I didn't expect.
 - There are places in the world where the people making those calls don't want to be making them.
 - There are people who were promised good jobs... who boarded planes... who thought they were going to build a future for their families...
 - And instead, they found themselves trapped.
 - I recently heard a story of a young man called Max who found himself in that exact situation.
- Max is from the Philippines.
 - He's a husband. He's a dad.
 - He was doing everything he could to provide for his family.
 - He drove people around in his family's van, trying to piece together enough income to make ends meet. But it was getting harder.
- So when someone approached him about a job in Thailand, it sounded like an incredible opportunity.
 - They told him he'd be working for an online casino.
 - The pay would be about four times what he was making at home.
 - They'd provide housing. They'd provide food. Everything was taken care of.
 - His sister was cautious, which you'd expect.
 - She actually met the recruiter face-to-face.
 - Asked him question after question.
 - And he had an answer for everything. He was friendly. He was generous.

- He looked her in the eye and told her it was safe.
- So Max got on the plane.
 - He landed in Bangkok, and a driver picked him up to take him to the job site.
 - But the drive just kept going. They left the city. They went out into the countryside.
 - Eventually, they stopped at a river and told him to get into a boat.
- On the other side, there were men with guns.
 - They put him in another vehicle and drove him to a compound surrounded by concrete walls and barbed wire.
 - That's when he realized something wasn't right.
- The next day, he reported for work. Sat down at a desk. They handed him a script.
 - Only it wasn't a script for an online casino.
 - It was a script to scam people.
 - So he went to his supervisor and said, "There's been a mistake. This isn't the job I agreed to."
 - And his supervisor looked at him and said, "This is your job now. And if you try to escape, there's a shoot-to-kill order."
 - Just like that, everything changed.
 - He wasn't free.
 - His phone was monitored. Cameras watched his every move. He was given quotas he had to hit. He worked long hours every day.
 - One of his fellow prisoners summed it up perfectly. She said, "I am scared... but I don't have a choice."
- That's how the whole system worked.
 - Fear kept people in their seats.

- Fear kept their hands moving.
- Fear kept them doing work they never would have chosen.
- The goal was simple.
- If fear could control them... fear could control their future.
- That story gives us a little bit of insight into [Nehemiah 6](#).
 - Because Nehemiah had enemies who understood that same principle.
 - They couldn't stop the wall with force.
 - So they tried to stop the work with fear.
 - [Nehemiah 6:9](#) says, "They all wanted to frighten us, thinking, 'Their hands will drop from the work.'"
- That was the plan.
 - If fear could make their hands drop... the work would stop.
 - Let's turn our attention to the Scriptures now as we take a look at all of chapter 6.

Scripture Reading

Nehemiah 6:1–9 *ESV*

¹ 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),

² 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.

³ 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?"

⁴ And they sent to me four times in this way, and I answered them in the same manner.

⁵ In the same way Sanballat for the fifth time sent his servant to me with an open letter in his hand.

⁶ 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.

⁷ 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.”

⁸ 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.”

⁹ 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.

- At first glance, this chapter is all about Nehemiah’s enemies pulling out last-ditch efforts to stop the work.
- In the first section, they attempt to lure Nehemiah into a...what we might call a “summit” in today’s vernacular.
 - They attempt to lure Nehemiah away to a place called Ono. (It’s probably wise to never meet your enemies in a place called Ono).
 - However, Nehemiah sees right through it and tells them he’s too busy to meet with them.
 - They are persistent, sending invitations on 5 different occasions.
 - However, on the fifth occasion, they up the ante.
- It says in v. 6 that they have drafted a letter.
 - The letter is basically an attempt at blackmail, saying that the Jews are getting ready to rebel against Persia.
 - Nehemiah is going to be their king.

- They need to meet to discuss this letter and the implications therein.
- That's when Nehemiah recognizes their play...fear.
- In fact, Nehemiah calls out the tactic down in verses 13, 14, and 19.
- Fear isn't necessarily a bad thing.
 - It is an emotion that God gave us to help protect us from harm.
 - I was listening to a pastor friend of mine preach one time and he said the funniest line, "Every zoo is a petting zoo if you're brave enough."
 - Fear - especially when coupled with things like wisdom - is really for our good.
- **Some of you may have heard about this...SHOW HONNOLD PIC**
 - Back in January, Netflix streamed Alex Honnold's attempt to free climb Taipei 101 - one of the tallest skyscrapers in the world.
 - The climber did this without ropes, without nets, and honestly, without common sense.
 - One wrong move, one bad grip, one misstep and that's the end of his story.
 - While Honnold was successful in his climb, we can ultimately see how a healthy measure of fear is for our good.
- What about when fear becomes unhealthy?
 - One of the most repeated phrases in the Bible is "do not fear."
 - Sadly, we do know that like all of our emotions, fear can become crippling.
 - What God gave us for our good and for our protection can become overpowering.
 - Not only can fear become crippling in the moment, it can ultimately evolve into an even more paralyzing form.
 - We call it anxiety.

- The WHO says that anxiety disorders are the most common mental disorders in the world - impacting hundreds of millions of people around the globe.
- It isn't lost on me the struggle that people face when their fears and worries turn into chronic anxiety.
- My goal this morning isn't to try to "fix" those issues.
- Sometimes, these issues are deeply rooted and a Sunday morning sermon doesn't even scratch the surface.
- Those who struggle with chronic anxiety need the support of godly, trained professionals who can help get to the root cause.
- However, I do believe that [Nehemiah 6](#) can help us recognize how the enemy uses fear and anxiety to render us ineffective in the work that God has called us to do.
 - What we see in this chapter is that fear and anxiety aren't just emotions on the fritz.
 - Fear and anxiety are strategies that our enemy wants to use to sideline us from making a meaningful contribution to the work of the Kingdom of God.
- How do those strategies play out?

Fear tries to distract you (vv. 1-4)

- We go back to the first four verses and we see them trying to get Nehemiah's attention elsewhere.
 - There's no doubt that Nehemiah has been a driven, efficient leader.
 - He's had a laser focus on his calling and hasn't taken his foot off the gas since his first conversation with the king back in chapter 2.
 - We find out in v. 15 of this chapter that he is able to accomplish that which seemed impossible in 52 days.
- So their first play is a very persistent "we'd like to 'meet' with you."

- He recognized their intentions.
- Whether he had intelligence that told him that or whether he just discerned that, we do not know.
- But it isn't hard to see how that fact could produce crippling fear.
- Just imagine this thought rumbling around in your head, "They're out to get me."
 - That's a particular kind of fear called paranoia.
 - The idea that there's a boogie man around every corner.
 - In Nehemiah's case, the boogie man is hiding in plain sight at Ono.
 - If the bible said, "Out of fear for my life, I posted a guard outside my residence while the workers completed the project," we wouldn't find that to be a surprising response.
- Of course, Nehemiah's response is "I'm busy right now."
 - He doesn't let paranoia distract him from the work.
 - Paranoia can become an overwhelming kind of fear.
 - You can't see what's in front of you because you're always looking over your shoulder.
- How does Nehemiah overcome the temptation to paranoia?
 - Instead of getting distracted by fear, he lets God's work distract him from the fear.
 - He knew that he was exactly where God wanted him to be.
 - This attempt at distraction was just a tactic.
- Now, let's be mindful of the potential error here...
 - We can't allow our work in the Kingdom to be a cover for dealing with hard things.
 - We can't dodge hard, but needed conversations because we're "busy."

- We can't neglect our clear but difficult responsibilities because we're building whatever wall we're working on.
- That's not what Nehemiah is doing here...he knows what these guys are up to and he isn't hiding behind his responsibilities.

Fear grows in the soil of conspiracies and half-truths (vv. 5-9)

- After the first play fails, Nehemiah's opponents go back to their playbook and call up a new formation.
- This time, they produce the letter that is full of conspiracies.
 - The sinister part of the letter isn't the part about Jerusalem rebelling, it's the part about Nehemiah setting up prophets declaring him to be the King.
 - This is very much a personal attack and it seeks to raise doubts about Nehemiah's intentions.
 - He's doing good things, but now people have to ask, is he doing it for the wrong reasons?
 - This isn't about God's fame, this is about Nehemiah's fame.
 - Nobody wants to follow that leader - the guy that is only in it for himself.
 - All they have to do is raise a little bit of doubt about his character and the wheels come off the whole project.
- If this played out today, this would be a post on social media that goes viral.
 - There would be sensational headlines and clickbait.
 - People would share the story without taking time to check the source and actually read the content.
 - They'd fail to see that it was just propaganda from Nehemiah's enemies.
- Fear feeds off this kind of stuff.

- It was likely a challenge for Nehemiah even in his moment, but it can be devastating today when there are so many ways to besmirch other people's character without any evidence or proof.
- Nehemiah shows us how to handle this...
 - Tell the truth.
 - Nehemiah counters their claims with the statement of truth.
 - He simply says, "None of this is true. You're making it all up."
 - Pray.
 - That sounds so simple, but that's the honest to goodness answer.
 - If you're a Christian, you were saved by a God who understands a thing or two about being maligned and falsely accused.
 - You pray to a Savior who understands false accusation firsthand, and who stands with you in it.
- And I think there's an unwritten response here too that Peter actually articulates in the New Testament.
 - [1 Peter 2:12](#) "12 Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation."
 - Have the kind of character that stands up against false accusations.
 - I believe Nehemiah demonstrated that kind of character even though Peter wouldn't write these down for 500 more years.
- And let me say this as a freebie...
 - One of the things that grieves me in the church today is when people send anonymous letters to voice their complaints and criticisms.
 - When people do this, they're quite literally using the strategy of the enemy.
 - God has given us a method of conflict resolution in his word and it isn't hiding behind postage stamps and blank return addresses.

Fear tries to spiritualize compromise (vv. 10-14)

- After the second play fails, Nehemiah's opponents go hit the transfer portal and pick themselves up a false prophet.
- And this guy sets a nasty trap.
 - He tells Nehemiah that his enemies are coming to kill him.
 - So he needs to find a safe place to hide.
 - There is provision in the law for someone to take refuge by clinging to the altar.
 - Adonijah seeks refuge from Solomon in this way in [1 Kings 1](#)... but the altar is in the courtyard of the Temple.
 - This false prophet is telling Nehemiah to enter the Temple itself.
- Now that would be a place that nobody could come in and kill you... but it's not because the Temple is safe.
 - The reality is if Nehemiah entered the sanctuary as a layman, the opponents wouldn't have the opportunity.
 - You don't get to go there.
 - Nehemiah would not only defy his character by running from the work.
 - He's got confident, strong soldiers standing guard.
 - Running away from rumors is not who he has shown himself to be.
 - But clearly Nehemiah would be defying God's law by doing what this guy suggested.
- Fear can make us do some irrational things.
- But here, the more sinister play is that all of this sounds like a good idea if you're not confident in your faith.
- That's the danger.

- Fear can cause us to rationalize compromise.
- It can even lead us to sanction compromise.
- Again, Nehemiah's defense is perfect.
 - He sniffs out the trick. Is it hard knowing there are people who want to do you harm?
 - Absolutely...I can't even imagine how that had to feel.
 - But Nehemiah also understood his place and he understood his calling.
 - He resolves, "I'm not going to let fear lead me into disobedience."
 - A little bit of sin might help him feel safe - but at what cost?

Fear tries to wear you down (vv. 15-19)

- We get to the end of the chapter and the work is finished.
 - It's a stunning result.
 - It had to blow away everybody's expectations.
 - It clearly blew away the expectations of the bad guys in the book.
 - But look at what happens at the very end of the chapter.

- **Verses 17-19 say:**

Nehemiah 6:17-19 ESV

¹⁷ Moreover, in those days the nobles of Judah sent many letters to Tobiah, and Tobiah's letters came to them.

¹⁸ 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.

¹⁹ Also they spoke of his good deeds in my presence and reported my words to him. And Tobiah sent letters to make me afraid.

- The opponents are **STILL** trying.

- He's sending letters.
- He's got people on the inside.
- There are people who Nehemiah has to work with who are cheerleaders for the guy that has been causing so much trouble.
- I think we need to be mindful of this last play.
 - You can work through fear in the moment.
 - But sometimes, it lingers.
 - That is when fear can take the shape of its much more chronic cousin that we call anxiety.
 - That's when we wake up every day facing the same fears.
- For Nehemiah...
 - Am I getting another letter today?
 - What's today's accusation?
 - What are they going to say about him today?
 - We all know, those letters don't hurt anybody.
 - Tobiah's cheerleaders are just blinded to reality.
 - There's no danger here.
- But that's the reality when we're wrestling with anxiety, right?
 - There's really not any serious danger.
 - It's more that ongoing, nagging, unrelenting fear of what might be coming next.
 - Listen, some of us in the room live in that space a lot.
- If there is any encouragement for you, it is to let Nehemiah's response inform your response.
 - You celebrate that which is worthy of celebrating.

- The wall got built.
- The people who saw it realized that it was a miraculous event.
- You guard against those things that you can guard against.
 - Chapter 7 - Nehemiah establishes policies about when the gates were opened and closed.
 - He empowered other people to help in the process.
- And you stay faithful to the work.
 - V. 4 in chapter 7 recognizes that there's another problem to be solved.
 - He's not finished yet because there's more work to do.
- When you're wrestling with that kind of ongoing, nagging, perhaps even faceless fear, you need to hear that God is working for your good.
 - Even those things that are the source of your anxiety are things that God is working together for your good.
 - You may not see it in the moment, but there will come a day that you look back and see exactly how God worked those things together for your good.
- Inasmuch as it wants to wear you down, you need to know that at the end of the day, your fears are powerless.
- Why is that? Because what was true with the LORD once is true with the LORD always.
- [Isaiah 41:10](#) "10 fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand."
- At the end of the day, even at the end of your darkest day, your scariest day, your most anxiety-ridden day - God's promises still stand.
 - I will strengthen you.
 - I will help you

- I will uphold you
- No matter if your opposition, or your fear, or your worries want to convince you otherwise.

Conclusion

- Nehemiah gives us one of the shortest prayers in all of Scripture.
 - Right in the middle of the rumors...
 - Right in the middle of the pressure...
 - Right in the middle of the fear...
 - He prays:
 - “But now, O God, strengthen my hands.”
 - That prayer becomes our invitation today.
- We know that Fear still runs the same plays.
 - Fear distracts.
 - Fear grows in conspiracies and half-truths.
 - Fear pressures you toward compromise.
 - Fear wears you down over time.
 - Fear wants your hands to fall still.
- Some of you recognize that feeling.
 - You’ve carried the weight.
 - You’ve felt the pressure.
 - You’ve sensed the hesitation.
- And today, God invites you into a different response.
 - Lift your hands again.
 - Lift your hands in trust.

- Lift your hands in obedience.
- Lift your hands in faith.
- Pray the same prayer Nehemiah prayed:
 - God, strengthen my hands.
 - Strengthen my hands to keep building.
 - Strengthen my hands to keep serving.
 - Strengthen my hands to keep trusting You.
- And for some, strengthened hands begin with surrender to Christ.
- Jesus walked straight toward the cross.
 - He endured every accusation.
 - He carried the full weight of sin.
 - He completed the work that brings forgiveness and life.
 - Through Him, you receive new life.
 - Through Him, you receive strength.
 - Through Him, you rise and build again.
- Today, lift your hands to Him.
 - And watch what God builds through a life that trusts His strength.