



Hometown

Part 3 – When Opposed, Keep Working

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We are asking the Lord to give us a heart for our hometown, not a hometown attitude. We talked about that the first week, that after you've lived in a place for some time, you can grow complacent. We know that the needs of our community are great, and we've been asking the Lord to give us a burden for our community. We've been asking the Lord to give us a vision for our community and so today, we move into Chapter 4 of Nehemiah. We've been going through Nehemiah. Today's message is called *When Opposed, Keep Working*.

If you are a parent, when opposed, keep parenting. When marriage is a struggle, keep at it. When you have a co-worker sucking the life out of you, keep working. When you have a demanding, demeaning boss, keep working. And all God's people said... Amen. Don't quit because of the voices that creep into your life.

Here's where we jump into Chapter 4 of Nehemiah. We jump in with this big idea. **Don't give your enemy a microphone into your life.** Get the voices out of your head; those people who are telling you that you can't do it, that they won't let you do it. Get the voices out of your head.

This morning, we had technology problems over at the Chapel. We want to welcome all those at the Chapel. They've been live streaming this whole service. We are all on egg shells, hoping that it goes through and they don't have buffering problems. I wanted to do the whole introduction like that, but I just couldn't get the guts up and I've never practiced that. But, we are glad that you're here today.

It's so funny that we came into all... And we didn't even have lightning. Did anybody have lightning in their area last night? We didn't have any lightning. It was a beautiful rain; our gardens need this. They said technology was down so everybody was coming over to the Castle. No, they're not! We won't be able to fit them in here, so stay there. We said keep working, don't quit. We have to keep this thing going.

Too many of us allow the voices into our lives, into our hearts, in our narrative and if we're not careful, we'll start believing them. The insults and the threats of your enemy should not keep you from doing the work God has called you to do. That's what we are going to explore today.

I have to be very careful with this because I can give my enemies the microphone often and if I'm not careful, I allow that to sit on me so much during the week that it will come out in this microphone.

But, God has blessed me with a wife of 22 years named Amy. The Lord uses her as a sacred echo in my life all the time. It was a sacred echo this week. When we started this series and, in week one, looked at some of the challenges in our community, some of you said, "Ted, immediately when we started fasting and praying, someone broke into our house. We haven't had that problem ever. You bring it up, tell us to fast and pray and someone breaks in." This week, someone broke into the church in broad daylight, wearing a mask. They were stealing some technology out of the kids' area, some Dr. Pepper, and my swim trunks that I use for baptism. I have no idea. One of our staff members caught the person. And now I have had to instruct the staff members "You don't stop them, you get out of there; we're not tough."

And then everybody's developing a burden for their hometown and they want to bring it to one or two people. I just want to remind you, I love you and I care for you, but week one, we said, "Take your burden that God has given you, give it back to the Lord, and join him there." You don't have to set up a meeting with me to see if your burden is okay. I want you to take that back to the Lord. I want you to join him in that work as you continue to weep and mourn for your hometown as we looked at in Chapter 1, as you begin to fast and pray.

Amy has that sacred echo that she's always sharing with me before a message. She doesn't say it every week, but she can tell when some weeks are more frustrating. Then this week, I even had an elder text me the exact same thing. They don't know that Amy tells me this all the time. So, I said, "Lord, I will listen." Here's what Amy reminds me of often: **Don't preach to the few, preach to the whole.** She said, "What you want to do is take the voices of two or three people and punish everybody else." I don't do that. Do I do that? If you've been here for any period of time... I've never done that... I do that! I allow other people to have the microphone. They speak into my head and into my heart and then it comes out here. I have to be very careful.

Some of you have been going after it. The Lord gave you a vision, gave you a plan, you started a ministry, you started a job, you started a business, you started a family, and you allowed the wrong people to have the microphone into your life. It caused you to: 1) maybe slow down or 2) stop altogether.

Something we say at Woodland Hills about microphones is **we believe every marriage is a duet in need of great backup singers.** Be very careful who you let have the microphone to speak into your marriage. You know what I'm talking about. Some of you have bad backup singers. You're like, "Well she's my mother-in-law. How do I not give her the microphone?" I had a guy yesterday tell me this. He said, "Ted, help me. My dad is driving a wedge between me and my wife. You tell us to honor them; how do I honor him and yet tell him you can't do this anymore?" I told him to stop handing him the microphone. He's not a backup singer. It doesn't mean you have to hate him. We are going to look at this in a second: a great practical way that you can honor him. I said, "You don't have to allow him to speak into your marriage. Set up that boundary. Don't hand him the microphone."

Some of you have bad backup singers in your marriage and your family. You need to turn them down or mute them altogether. That's not saying that you don't love them, it doesn't say you don't care for them. Some of you have a new boss that you just don't like. You're like, "But I have to obey him. I have

to do what he says when I'm at work." I get that, but you don't have to give him the microphone to speak into your life and determine who you are.

Need → Burden → Vision → Plan → Commitment

Let's go back to Nehemiah. Here's what we looked at from week one. You'll see what brings us up to Nehemiah 4. We looked at a **need**. Nehemiah gets word from his brother and a few others that the walls are broken down in Jerusalem and the people are disgraced. This causes Nehemiah to sit down, weep, mourn, fast, and pray and that moves us to burden.

He gets a **burden** for his people. He knows something needs to be done. He waits four months before he approaches the king to ask for permission to go back to Jerusalem and begin rebuilding the wall. Some would say... And I believe both these two options are good. I'm not going to debate either one. Some would say he spent that four months weeping, fasting, praying before approaching the king with a plan. Others would say that in that day, as Travis talked about last week, if you ever went into the presence of the king sad, you could be put to death. The king only wanted happy people around him. Some would say he was not just fasting and praying, but he was also building up the courage in those four months to approach the king.

Whatever the case, he had a burden for his people and he knew something had to be done so he had a **vision** and the vision was to go back to Jerusalem and rebuild the wall and build back the people. He gets to Jerusalem - we saw this last week - and he gets a **plan** together. He goes out at night and inspects the wall. If we were to leave Nehemiah in chapter 3, you would think everything is great. He's got so and so over there on the wall and so and so over there on the wall and so and so over there on the gate. You would think it was easy and that's why it only took 52 days to rebuild the wall. But, when you get to Chapter 4, you realize he had major opposition.

God's work seldom moves forward without opposition. You should plan on it and that's why after he develops the plan and get people to work, we're now, today, in Chapter 4, talking about **commitment**. Don't quit. If you've asked and prayed, "Father, give me the eyes of Jesus to see the needs of people," and this causes you to weep and mourn, fast and pray, and you have that burden and you have a vision to do something about it... It's been fun to hear the visions over the last couple of week of what God has impressed upon your heart. I've heard everything from "Ted, when you mentioned that there are 550 homeless kids in the Branson schools..." A 75-year-old man told me, "That's what I'm supposed to be doing." Others heard about homelessness and said, "God has given me a heart to do something in the hotels where so many of our homeless live." God's giving you a vision and now you're moving forward in this series on your hometown with a plan, but once you get the plan and once you get to work, stay committed.

Amy and I, this morning in our quiet time, I said, "Who comes to mind when you think of someone who has gone through all of this and is in the middle of this right now and being opposed, like spiritual warfare is going on?" The first family that came to mind were the Trueloves. The Trueloves stood up before us not too long ago. We commissioned them, we prayed over them, we blessed them, as we sent them out of this country to go give their lives in Haiti as missionaries. I don't know if you remember what we said in week one that there may be many compelling reasons for you to stay doing what you're

doing. Nehemiah had all the comforts of the palace and he had access to the king. Many compelling reasons to stay at the feet of the king, but God had another plan for his life. With the Trueloves, God had another plan for them to go and give their lives in Haiti.

You support the Trueloves. You support them with prayer, you support them financially with \$700.00 a month. They saw the need of the people. They have family that are already down there that have been serving for decades. They saw the need of the people, God started to grow in them a burden for the people of Haiti. Then they got a vision saying, "We can't stay here anymore; we've got to go and we're going to give our lives to that work."

They started putting a plan together and this is where Woodland Hills came in. We got involved in their vision and their plan and this is part of raising support and leaving and shutting things down here and building a home there. The home they live in has a floorplan that would be less than half the size of this stage. They started putting the plan together and now they are in commitment. Let me tell you, in the short time they've been in Haiti, they have faced opposition. As you know, any missionary would, adjusting into a new culture. They can be discouraged at times. They've had some illness. They've had many challenges working with the workforce and all of that to get projects done.

While we pray for all of our missionaries here at Woodland Hills Family Church, this morning, as part of this message, I just want to pause and pray for the Trueloves. Let's pray that when opposed, when they feel the attacks of the enemy coming against them, they will stay faithful to the task that God has called them to because the work of God seldom moves forward unopposed. It is often met with great opposition, so we want to pray for them now.

Father, for Kaelee and Austin and for their children. I pray for the Trueloves that you will give them endurance and perseverance working in a challenging environment and a challenging country. The drive from their place to Port-au-Prince is ten hours of difficulty just to get supplies. This church family gathers today to lift them up to you, asking that you bless their work, strengthen their hands. Encourage them today, let them know how much they are loved by this church family and how much they are cared for that when needs arise that we would jump on those needs as this generous church has done so often. We pray all of this in the name of Jesus and everyone agreed and said... Amen.

Just a follow up on that. At the end of the year... And this is what we love about your generosity. They had some needs at the end of the year and at the end of the year, we had I think like \$100,000.00 over budget. We don't like to keep money in check books or savings accounts around here. You sent them \$8,000.00 on top of the support you already gave them just to kind of get them going. You can imagine trying to assimilate into a foreign land and how difficult and challenging that is. We just wanted to catch you up on that to know what you're doing.

The next group that came to mind were adoptive families. If you've adopted one or more children, would you raise your hand. Look around this morning at all those who have adopted. This is you to a tee right here. You see a need and you begin to develop a burden. This child needs a home. There are states around the country that have seen the need in foster care and they realize there are 800 or 1,200 and in some states, it was 1,500 kids in foster care.

Churches got together. Seeing the need, they developed a burden and God gave them the vision. The vision statement in some of these states... I think of Arizona, Colorado, Oklahoma. Alex Himaya will be here this summer as quasi on our teaching team. But, God gave them the vision to empty out the foster care program. They said, "Let's literally have no need for foster care in our community. Let's adopt all of these children and make them our own." And they did. They put a plan together and succeeded. States have emptied out foster care. For those of you who adopt, you know God gave you a need, you got a burden, you had a vision, and then you put the plan in place and you get "when opposed, keep working." I've not met one adoptive family who said, "That was easy." Has anybody heard that? I've never heard that. They may be out there. But, do you know what I see in families where God gives them a burden and a vision to adopt? I see major opposition.

If you see international adoptions, they are met with corruption and government roadblocks. They get over to the country, they've flown over as a family to pick up their new son or daughter and they are told there, "You can't have them right now." What that means is we need you to write us another check. Major opposition. Then you get home. The gavel came down and declared this child part of your family and now you are in commitment. You know the challenges going in as soon as the child becomes part of your family. Those of you who have adopted know exactly what we're talking about today when we say, "When opposed, keep working."

Let's jump into Nehemiah 4. As we left last week, Chapter 3, so and so over there and so and so over there. The work has begun. Watch what picks up in Chapter 4. **1 When Sanballat heard that we were rebuilding the wall, he became angry and was greatly incensed.** We'll start right there. When you set out to do a great work for God, please just go into it knowing people will get mad. You will be opposed. You should be more concerned right now in your life if you are not facing opposition. If you're not facing opposition, it means you haven't shown up on Satan's radar. You carry your Bible, attend church, do the cultural, midwestern Christian things, but there's no opposition in your life. I want to encourage you. See a need, develop a burden, get a vision, get a plan, stay committed to the Lord's work and you watch, you will show up on the enemy's radar and people will get mad. As we'll see today, not only will they get mad, they'll start insulting you. And when that doesn't stop you, then they'll start attacking you. They'll start threatening to attack you.

Sanballat becomes angry. Why? It's because he's the governor of Samaria. The rebuilding of the wall and the Jews being strengthened is going to affect trade, affect Sanballat's economy, and he's going to begin to lose the grip of his rule in this region. So, he just starts by getting mad.

He moves from anger and ***He ridiculed the Jews, 2 and in the presence of his associates and the army of Samaria, he said...*** You can say amen to this. Mockers are always looking for an audience. Those who love to throw the insults... And this was before social media. This was before the one that's like, "Oh, man, I've got a couple thousand followers, so I'm going to go rip this guy to shreds. And I want an audience to do it and I'm going to make other people mad I'm going to get them all stirred up." He needs an audience. He's going to share all this with others because they're always looking to grow the party when it comes to insulting and threatening the work of God.

“What are those feeble Jews doing? They’re weak, right? We know this from Chapter 1 of Nehemiah. The people were in disgrace. They were taken off into exile. The wall is in ruin. He’s saying there’s not enough of them. They’re not strong enough to do this project they’ve set out to do. ***“Will they restore their wall?”*** “I don’t even think they’ll get the job done. I don’t think they have what it takes.” We’ll see here as we move on. And if they do have what it takes and they do get the job done, it’s not going to last, it’s not going to be strong enough. That’s where we progress and in the presence of his associates, he keeps saying, ***“Will they offer sacrifices?”*** At the end of this, are they going to celebrate it and offer a sacrifice of thanksgiving? ***“Will they finish in a day?”*** They’re working pretty hard over there, going at it pretty hard. Who do they think they are? ***“Can they bring the stones back to life from those heaps of rubble—burned as they are?”***

Then one of the other associates joins in. ***3 Tobiah the Ammonite, who was at his side, said, “What they are building—even a fox climbing up on it would break down their wall of stones!”*** A fox, just a couple of pounds, climbing the wall is going to cause this whole wall to fall down, let alone an army. There’s no way it’s going to keep an army out, but we’re going to have a fox take this out.

Now, I want you to hear Nehemiah’s response to these insults and this ridicule. Then I said, “I’m going to march straight over to Sanballat and give him a piece of my mind. Who does he think he is talking about us that way? Doesn’t he know who we are? This guy is a donkey’s hind end.”

He didn’t say that. Every word on that screen right now, I just made up. I want to be very careful because those who know their Bible were chuckling and the other ones were going, *that’s strong*. Not to mention donkey’s hind end is redundant. Those are the King James people laughing. That’s not what he said, but isn’t that what we want to say when someone insults us? “Who do you think you are? You’re telling me I can’t do it, telling me I’m not good enough, telling me I’m too old or I’m too young? Listen, I’ll show you.”

You see, some of you have taken your work for God and have turned it into an “I’ll prove you wrong,” when you need to keep it still. Your burden is with the Lord and you’re joining him there. Don’t get sidetracked by the voices that are insulting you.

Some of you set out years and years ago in this town... When we’re talking hometown, I look around. I’ve been spending some time with a guy who has spent decades in this town. I would call him one of the builders of Branson. I’m inspired that he, at his age, is getting after it, wanting to see this place revitalized.

Some of you have poured your life’s blood into this community. You know that God called you here years and years ago, you’ve poured yourself out, and now you’re allowing a few or maybe many insults to slow you down. If I can encourage... You don’t see this a lot in church, but if I can just speak to the businessmen, the business women, the theater owners, those who built the shows, those in entertainment, and those who own hotels, we’re thinking a lot about you during this series because you’ve been opposed for years. We have elected officials in our church. They get what it means to be opposed. They understand opposition. This comes from the heart of a pastor who loves you, keep working. Don’t allow the opposition to slow you down or cause you to quit. You are needed.

Take it from one person who has been waking up on Mondays for years going, “It ain’t worth it.” I don’t mind sharing that with you. There have been times I’m like, “What in the world?” We tell people to mourn, fast, and pray and we’re getting robbed and people are breaking in. I texted the teaching team on Tuesday after we launched this series and said, “Series over. We’re going back to Love Like Confetti; that was fun. Love Like Confetti met with no opposition. We were throwing cakes around and confetti around.”

We get into this series and it’s like “What in the world?” Why? When you set out to do something great for the Lord, when you set out to get something done, you will make people mad. They will oppose you, they will insult you, they will threaten you. I am shocked – and this is me too; I do this – at the number of people that change their business strategy off of a Facebook comment. There’s a biblical term for it. Ridiculous. I just made that up too. I am making up a little bit today, but I’m striking it out when it’s not true. Don’t be thwarted in what God has called you to do. Don’t cease your labors because of the insults coming at you. Don’t go back at those insulting you. That’s not what Nehemiah does. Now, this next part is actually the Word of God, please hear me on this. We’re going to jump into Verse 4. This is actually what Nehemiah says.

4 Hear us, our God, for we are despised. Turn their insults back on their own heads. Give them over as plunder in a land of captivity. Now your going, “That sounds strong too. Jesus said love your enemies. Jesus said pray for your enemies. This is turning them into plunder in a land of captivity like we want them to turn into objects.” This is very important to understand. This is not a prayer of personal vengeance that Nehemiah is giving. He’s taking these insults being hurled against the children of God because he knows when they come against the children of God, ultimately, they are coming against God. I think sometimes we feel the burden that we’ve got to defend God, we’ve got to fight for God. We sometimes get this way politically and we need to understand that he’s got this. Let’s go back to him in prayer and say, “You take care of this. I’m going to get back to the work you’ve called me to. Will you go before me, will you be my lead on this?”

In prayer, he goes on to say, ***5 Do not cover up their guilt or blot out their sins from your sight...*** He’s simply saying, “You’re a covenant God. You made a promise to your people. I’m going to turn them back over to you. If you will bless Israel, according to the covenant, you will be blessed. If you curse Israel, you will be cursed. ***...for they have thrown insults in the face of the builders.*** That ultimately means they’re coming against God.

When you are met with insults, don’t go back to the insulter, take it straight to the Lord. Don’t take it back to the person attacking you. We’ve given the progression of Nehemiah. Look at the progression of just this book and the enemies of Nehemiah and the people of Israel.

Anger → Insults → Threats

It starts with **anger**. I’ve decide to start something, and I know God’s called me to this. I’m going to get after it. And people are going to get mad. I know this doesn’t happen in Branson, but it’s happening in this day. He decides to start rebuilding Jerusalem and another person goes, “Oh you’re going to be competition.” That doesn’t happen in Branson where people start something and the competition gets angry. If I can just encourage you... We’re all in this together to quote High School Musical.

I love what one of our business leaders in this town says, “Quit fighting for a piece of the pie. Let’s all work together to make the pie bigger.” Let’s come together on this.

But the anger will turn to **insults**. They’ll start coming at you. They’ll start giving you all the reason why. “Who do you think are? You don’t have what it takes.” Then someone says, “You could have done that years ago, but you’re not at a place really or a season in life where you can do that anymore.

And then, if the insults don’t stop you... I’ve just seen this time and time again in ministry – the insults will turn to **threats**. It’s not just you can’t do; now it’s “I’m not going to let you do it and I’m going to throw roadblock after roadblock after roadblock at you.”

When we started with Woodland Hills, we were met with major opposition. I was told over and over again, “It ain’t gonna happen. You cannot. You don’t have what it takes to lead a church in this community. Go somewhere else.”

I remember that when we cast a vision of being a church, we believed that one day in Southwest Missouri (at that point we didn’t have a little bit of Arkansas) ... I said, “I believe God, in this community and where it’s at, we can grow our church to 2,000 people and when we hit 2,000 (which we have hit about three times outside of Easter) ... When we hit 2,000, we’ll be a regional church in the community and God will call us to plant other churches.” That was before multisite and all that was really taking off. I remember sharing that with people and people in this town telling me, “If you get to 300 or 400 be grateful, but you won’t go much beyond that. You just don’t have what it takes.” How many of you love being encouraged by people telling you, “You ain’t got what it takes”?

When the insults don’t work, it then moves to **threats**. “We’re going to try to stop you.” I’ve really struggled with this over the years. I’ve been loving reading and listening to podcasts with Bob Goff. If you don’t know who Bob Goff is, I just believe God has raised him up in such a time as this in the church to just help Christians learn how to love one another and love our enemies. And people come after him and I don’t understand. He’s not saying he’s a prophet, calling people to repent. He’s not a pastor; he just feels the church could use a little bit more kindness and love toward one another. But people are attacking him.

I’ve struggled for years with is it okay for a pastor to block someone on social media? I don’t really have a great answer. I got a good answer this week, though. I feel like it just doesn’t seem... And not just as a pastor, but as a Christian. Should we be blocking people on social media? It doesn’t sound very Christlike to me. For my senior adult friends, a block on social media means you just don’t allow people access to your page or to your Twitter feed or Instagram anymore. I use it primarily when someone sends me vulgar stuff and you can just tell it’s spam. But, when I have a “friend” on Facebook that throws a vulgarity towards another person that is commenting, and they start using the wall to really attack each other, that’s when I bring the block.

I think I've blocked like ten people total in my ministry life. Six of you are in here right now. I've never really known what to do with that. Again, it just didn't seem Christlike to me, but Bob Goff blocks people. I tuned in because I needed to know what to do. It's because people come at him. Again, I don't even know why they're coming after him. How do you come after someone who says to love everybody always? I just don't know what the argument is there to counter that. He blocks them, but he goes a step beyond that and I love that. If he blocks you on social media, he sends you a cake pop. It could be the most brilliant thing I've ever heard. What he's doing is saying, "I'm going to establish a boundary with this person, but I'm also going to let them know 'I love you.'" Do you get that? Bob Goff is very specific; he said, "I don't give everybody a microphone into my life." He said, "I can take the microphone away from you and say you're not going to speak into my life or over my life anymore, but it's not going to keep me from loving you."

And this one, I don't think these are the ones he sends out, but I found this one because this baker makes these cake pops out of Dove chocolate. It's literally extending an olive branch with Dove. It doesn't get any better than that. But then I thought to myself, *I can't afford to give everyone who insults me a cake pop. This would be thousands and thousands of dollars.* And that was an objection they brought up to Bob. "How can you afford this?" His immediate response was, "It's like a \$1.29." Still, it would cost me thousands of dollars. That's a lot of money. But what a fantastic idea. You don't have a microphone into my life, but I love you and I will continue to love you.

An insult... Let's just break this down. An insult is "You can't do it." An insult is every one-star review your business, show, theater has received on Facebook. That's an insult; write it off. Move forward. Take it to the Lord. Move on; keep working. Or a one-star review on our church site. A threat moves from "You can't do it" to "We won't let you do it; we will stop you."

6 So we rebuilt the wall till all of it reached half its height, for the people worked with all their heart. 7 But when Sanballat, Tobiah, the Arabs, the Ammonites and the people of Ashdod heard that the repairs to Jerusalem's walls had gone ahead and that the gaps were being closed, they were very angry. 8 They all plotted together to come and fight against Jerusalem and stir up trouble against it. Those are people that get mad when you start to do something. You show up on the enemy's radar, so they just start stirring it up.

9 But we prayed to our God and posted a guard day and night to meet this threat. Christians sometimes fall for this one and only strategy. They think the only strategy is to pray and wait. That's not the strategy we see today. The strategy we see in Nehemiah 4 is pray and work. Don't just pray and wait and sit around and do nothing until the threat is met. We're going to pray and we're going to keep after it. We've been called to this. We have a passion for this. We know the vision and the plan is in place. Don't quit.

10 Meanwhile, the people in Judah said, "The strength of the laborers is giving out..." You know if you meet opposition long enough, opposition turns to exhaustion. "How long are we going to have to put up with this? This is wearing us out. This is too much." ***"...and there is so much rubble that we cannot rebuild the wall." 11 Also our enemies said, "Before they know it or see us, we will be right there among them and will kill them and put an end to the work."***

This is what happens when you allow the microphone into your life. You hand the microphone to someone to speak into your life and you begin believing this about yourself. You begin understanding it and saying okay this is going to happen and you take it as gospel and as truth. Pray? Yes. Work? Yes.

12 Then the Jews who lived near them came and told us ten times over, "Wherever you turn, they will attack us." So, now we are in threat mode. We're not in insult mode anymore; we're going to keep you from rebuilding this wall. And Nehemiah says, "We're not quitting. We've taken it to the Lord and we're going to keep doing the work."

13 Therefore I stationed some of the people behind the lowest points of the wall... meaning it's not built yet. It's not complete and there are still some spots that you can see eyeball to eyeball with someone standing on the ground on the other side of the wall. ***...at the exposed places, posting them by families...*** This is very interesting to me. In other words, now I'm at the wall doing the work or guarding the wall and I'm there with my wife and my children. It's interesting why they would post them now as families because my thinking would be men gather at the wall. Let's put the wife and children back as far as we can. But, what happens is when your children are with you, you're even more diligent. Can I get an amen from the parents on that one?

When I fly on an airplane alone, I put earbuds in and fall asleep. When I'm with my family, I'm Liam Neeson. Something is going to go down and I have to be ready. Corynn and I were on a flight on this regional jet. You've been on the regional jets out of Springfield. They're little tubes. The guy two rows in front of us started mouthing off to the flight attendant.

Now, I don't want to break in the message to instruct on this, but you can't do that. In today's post 9/11 world, you will get thrown off the plane and go to jail. Don't mouth off with the flight attendant.

This guy was mouthing off and then he stood up. It was a female flight attendant and he was this big man. He stood up and was going at it with her. Again, being a guy, I'm thinking, *Oh, I hope he does something. I hope he thinks he's going to get away with something.* There were like four other dads thinking the same thing, ready to go. I would let them go... "You go first, and then you go ahead; I'll be the backup in case." But, what am I doing? I'm a little more diligent because my daughter is with me. I think even after seeing that and the tension that was in the plane for now the entire flight, it was kind of awkward, but I'm sitting there now like the other four guys around me. We're all kind of on the edge of our seat watching him. The flight attendant handled it perfectly.

But posted with families, they are going to be extra diligent ***...with their swords, spears and bows.*** This is where the word picture comes in and I love this word picture in Nehemiah. The spear and trowel. Not one or the other, but both. We've got to continue to be on guard, but we can't stop the work. We're going to continue to work while we're on guard.

14 After I looked things over, I stood up and said to the nobles, the officials and the rest of the people, "Don't be afraid of them." He's now going to give a pep talk to all of the people. ***"Remember the Lord, who is great and awesome..."*** He is going before us. He will fight the battle before us, with us, through

us. *“...and fight for your families...”* I got it now. It’s not just about a brick wall; it’s about people. We’re protecting people. *“...your sons and your daughters, your wives and your homes.”*

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

And here is the bottom line of this first half of Nehemiah. **Don’t allow your enemy’s voice to be louder than God’s.** Stay focused on what you’re called to do. Some of you have seen the need, felt the burden, have a vision, but you’ve let this voice... You’ve handed the microphone to someone to speak this into your life and now this voice is in your head. “You can’t do that at your age. You’re too old.” “You can’t do that; you’re too young.”

A couple of weeks ago, our church ordained Jordan Whitmer. He’s graduating next month from Liberty University at the age of 19. I think he is our first 19-year-old we’ve ever ordained to gospel ministry. The reason I get so excited about that is I don’t want anybody in this church to tell Jordan, “You’re too young. You can’t do it; wait your turn in line. Let someone else do it. Join what someone else is doing.”

Someone has that in your head and remember what Paul told Timothy. “Don’t let anyone despise you because you are young.” Get after it. Don’t let anybody despise you because you’re old. Some of you have this in your head. You don’t have enough experience. You’re going to go do something that you don’t know anything about.

I would say that for some of you the Lord’s building in you this passion, this burden and you’re ready to go. You have a vision of how you’re going to meet this need, but you get stuck at the plan phase. You’re like, “I’m not a planner, I’m not an organizer.” That may be the Lord telling you “Don’t start something new, join something already going on.” Join where God’s already at work.

For some of you, God’s given you a passion to help the homeless. Guess what? In our town, you don’t need to start a new ministry, we’ve already got one. To be mentors to students in school, you don’t need to start a new ministry for that. You can join God where he’s already working. If you’ve got a burden and a vision, the plan is already in place. Get involved and stay committed and keep working. If you want to bring meals to people who are in need, that’s already going on. You can be a part of that. You don’t have to have experience.

Some of you have this in your head. You failed before. You’ve started a lot of things and you’ve never finished them. “I don’t know what makes you think you’re going to be able to do that now.” Then it gets even stronger and you just heard, “You are incompetent. You don’t have what it takes, you don’t have the character, you don’t have the skills.” This has been shared in churches for years. I don’t think I’ve ever shared it. It’s source unknown. I can’t even find who originally wrote it, but it’s out there like crazy if you want to look it up.

When you look through the scripture of at who God used to do great things, to accomplish projects, to reach people, to start the church, the keep the church going.

If God can use these people, He can certainly use you and me.

After all...

1. Noah was a drunk
2. Abraham was too old
3. Isaac was a daydreamer
4. Jacob was a liar
5. Leah was ugly
6. Joseph was abused
7. Moses had a stuttering problem
8. Gideon was afraid
9. Samson had long hair and was a womanizer
10. Rahab was a prostitute
11. Jeremiah was too young
12. David was an adulterer (not to mention a murderer)
13. Elijah was suicidal
14. Isaiah preached naked
15. Jonah ran from God
16. Naomi was a widow
17. Job went bankrupt
18. John the Baptist ate bugs
19. Andrew lived in the shadow of his big brother
20. Peter denied Christ
21. All the disciples fell asleep while praying (and ran away when Jesus really needed them.)
22. Martha worried about everything
23. The Samaritan woman was divorced (more than once)
24. Mary Magdalene was demon-possessed
25. Zacchaeus was too small
26. Timothy had an ulcer
27. Paul was a Christian-killer
28. Oh...and Lazarus was dead

Can he use you? And all God's people said... Amen. Yes! In your hometown.

16 From that day on, half of my men did the work, while the other half were equipped with spears...

This would be a good time for us to say thank you to the security team here at Woodland Hills Family Church. You don't see them; they're undercover, joining the 300 others of you in here with conceal to carry permits. We've hired an officer. A sheriff's deputy... You'll see officers here. You don't have to stop and talk to them. They are on duty, but you can walk by and simply wave and say, "Thank you very much." People saw we hired the officer and they were like, "What going on?" I said, "Nothing. He's here to hold the spear." It's not the end all and be all as we continue to do the work of God and pass out cake pops, he's going to be keeping an eye. This is not a great text for the passivist, is it.

...shields, bows and armor. The officers posted themselves behind all the people of Judah 17 who were building the wall. Those who carried materials did their work with one hand and held a weapon in the other, 18 and each of the builders wore his sword at his side as he worked. But the man who sounded the trumpet stayed with me.

19 Then I said to the nobles, the officials and the rest of the people, "The work is extensive and spread out, and we are widely separated from each other along the wall. 20 Wherever you hear the sound of the trumpet, join us there." That means threat is here at the wall. "Our God will fight for us!"

21 So we continued the work with half the men holding spears, from the first light of dawn till the stars came out. 22 At that time I also said to the people, "Have every man and his helper stay inside Jerusalem at night, so they can serve us as guards by night and as workers by day." And this is how vigilant they were. 23 Neither I nor my brothers nor my men nor the guards with me took off our clothes... They were so on guard that bathing entered into this. ...each had his weapon, even when he went for water.

Again, when you set out to do a great work for God, when you begin to truly do something for God, that is when you end up on Satan's radar. As you end up on the main enemy's radar, you will see the enemies come out after you. As we close, keep this passage from Paul in mind from Ephesians.

10 Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. 11 Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. 12 For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. – Ephesians 6

And all God's people said... Amen.

Father, it is in the name of Jesus that we desire to do great things in our hometown. In Stone and Taney Counties down into Arkansas, up into Springfield, east and west, would you continue to use Woodland Hills as an influence.

I want to pray for our elected officials that they would keep working on behalf of this great community to lead us in all of the challenges that we face. For our business owners that are having a very difficult time finding workers, they're trying to keep the workers they have encouraged, and it seems they can relate to this passage with the exhaustion that has set in. They are weary with trying to keep a labor force going in this town. They have run out of fumes. I just pray that you would breathe fresh life into them this morning, that they would be encouraged as we're entering into a new season in a tourist area. I pray that they would be encouraged and challenged in all that they do here in their hometown.

I pray for families, moms and dads who are facing many challenges right now as they stand their ground to be good parents, to lead their children in the way of the Lord, to set boundaries in the home, to setup consequences when those boundaries are broken. They are growing weary as parents. I pray that they continue to work and continue to parent well when faced with the opposition. For we have seen the enemy and they are small and we can be worn out as parents. Today, may we be encouraged and

challenged in that work as well. Thank you for what you do here. I pray that we continue to go out, see the need, have a burden, get a vision, make a plan, and stay faithful and committed to that as we face opposition, as we face insults, threats, and exhaustion.

And all God's people said... Amen.