

Bible Studies for Life for March 15: Don't despair

March 3, 2009

Has anyone every asked you, "Why is it so hard to be a Christian?" This question usually is asked when a believer has made the choice to totally follow Christ to accomplish a task. Instead of everything going smoothly, bumps occur. How do we overcome the bumps of despair?

Maintain confidence in God (Nehemiah 2:19-20)

As Nehemiah stepped up to serve the Lord to build back the walls of Jerusalem he faced discouragement. When Nehemiah shared his plans with Sanballat the Horonite, Tobiah the Ammonite official and Geshem the Arab, they mocked and ridiculed him. They asked two questions, "What is this your are doing?" and "Are you rebelling against the king (v. 20)?"

The three tried to stop Nehemiah. Because of his popular support, he was a threat to them. If Nehemiah was successful in building the walls back, they in turn would see their control in the region fade away. Judah was kept helpless as long as the walls were in ruins. They attempted to discourage the cupbearer by saying they saw this as a rebellion against the king.

Nehemiah did not waver in his confidence that God had called him to do a great work. He could have told them he had permission from the king, but instead he chose to prove his authority came from a greater source than a king (v. 20).

When you hit opposition, how do you respond? It should not come as a surprise to believers that a step of faith to follow the Lord almost certainly will bring opposition.

Ask God for help (4:1-6)

Sanballat and Tobiah understood the rebuilding of the city wall was evidence that Judah's power was on the rise. With Nehemiah having full support of the king, they had to be careful in their sabotage efforts to stop the project. The king would have them executed if he discovered their plans.

The tactic they chose to use was ridicule. The plan was to destroy the morale and confidence of the workers with words.

I obtained my first job in radio as a disc jockey when I was 16 years old in Kilgore at KOCA. The very first time I had to anchor the newscast, I was anxious to say the least.

After the five-minute newscast was over, I believed I had done a good job. The next day, the program director informed me that I would not be reading the news anymore. The reason he gave was that I did not sound like someone speaking with authority. This criticism at the time deflated the confidence I had built in my young broadcasting career.

Tobiah spewed out his disapproval by saying "if even a fox climbed up on it, he would break down their wall of stones!" (v. 3). A fox would have a hard time bringing down walls that were nine feet thick.

When criticism comes, the first reaction is to answer back with more criticism. Nehemiah refused to get into a show down of ridicule. He turned instead to prayer. His vengeance toward his opposition was shared with God.

Nehemiah's prayer in verses four and five might seem out of place for a Christian to pray today. Jesus taught forgiveness of enemies. The prayer is one of vengeance. He felt his people were following the will of God and reasoned those who opposed stood in opposition to the Lord.

Imprecatory prayers were common and acceptable by Old Testament standards. The heart of his prayer is that he is asking God for help and his justice will be carried out.

What is the best way to fight despair? By communicating our feelings to the Lord and relying on him. We must remember God's promise to be with us always.

Take reasonable precautions (4:7-14)

Why do we have an annual physical? Why do we take a visit to the dental hygienist twice a year? These are wise actions by us to promote good health. When Nehemiah and the others learned of the plot to attack them they took wise measures to stay on task and to protect themselves.

Nehemiah continued to display his faith in the Lord by combining prayer with preparation and planning. "But we prayed to our God and posted a guard day and night to meet this threat" (v. 9).

The opposition soon discovered its original plan of sabotage did not work. They were angry because it was reported, "that the repairs to Jerusalem's walls had gone ahead and gaps were being closed" (v. 7).

The new plan of attack from the opposition was their organized violence against the laborers. The ones rebuilding the walls almost gave up saying that "the strength of the laborers is giving out (v. 10)."

How easy it is to listen to negative words and let it bring us down. We are brought down because we forget to look up. Nehemiah just kept turning to the Lord. He was called and he knew he must remain faithful to the call.

Nehemiah did not give up. He took the necessary steps, posting individuals with "their swords, spears, and bows," to protect and give confidence to the

workers. Likewise, I didn't give up on my broadcasting career. I sought advice and continued to persevere. Eventually, God was able to use my broadcasting experience for his glory in various ways.

When the attackers learned their plot had been discovered, they were the ones that became discouraged. Nehemiah pressed on because his direction and confidence came from his "great and awesome" Lord. The cure for discouragement is focusing on God's purposes.

Satan attacks Christians because he recognizes that if we stay on course the will of God will be accomplished.