1-21-2012, COTR Texarkana
Title: Obstacles
Purpose: Provoke people to deal with the obstacles of discouragement, injustice and inner conflicts that stand between them and significance.
Spiritual Truth: God will help me deal with every obstacle I face on my journey towards significance.
Text: Ne 2:11-18; 5:1-12; 5:14-19
Topic: Obstacles, Injustice, Rights, Significance
Series Title: Rise Up
Spiritual Truth: I can make a difference.
Series Purpose: Provoke people to imitate the example of Nehemiah and make a difference in the world.

Obstacles

I. Introduction

A. Review

1. In the New Year I've been doing a series called, "Rise Up". It's about significance and making a difference with our lives. We've found a role model in a man named Nehemiah. He found significance by helping the Jews in Jerusalem.
   a. Listen to messages @ChurchOnTheRock.org or on your iphone or Android.
2. Nehemiah 2:5-8 (ESV) [Last week]
   [5] And I said to the king… if your servant has found favor in your sight, that you send me to Judah…that I may rebuild it."…[8] …And the king granted me what I asked, for **the good hand of my God was upon me.**
3. He couldn't do what God called him to do on his own. He needed God's help to make a difference. God's hand was on his life because of:
   a. The condition of his heart…He cared about what God cared about.
   b. The content of his prayer…He prayed "the burden of the Lord" with confession of sin and faith in God's promise.
   c. The courage to act…he was willing to sacrifice and take a risk.

B. Today we'll see him face the obstacles of discouragement, injustice and an inner conflict. (// obstacle course) An obstacle is a barrier standing between me and my goal.

C. Title: Obstacles

D. Purpose: Provoke people to deal with the obstacles of discouragement, injustice and inner conflicts that stand between them and significance.

E. Spiritual Truth: God will help me deal with every obstacle I face on my journey towards significance.

II. Obstacle #1: discouragement

A. Nehemiah 2:11-18 (NLT)

[11] So I arrived in Jerusalem…[17] … I said to them, "You know very well what trouble we are in. **Jerusalem lies in ruins, and its gates have been destroyed by fire.** Let us rebuild the wall of Jerusalem and end this disgrace!" [18] Then I told them about how the gracious hand of God had been on me, and about my conversation with the king. They replied at once, "**Yes, let's rebuild the wall!"**…

1. Context: Jewish history: After centuries of rebellion God judged the children of Israel. . The divided Jewish nation was taken captive by the Assyrians and Babylonians and Jerusalem was destroyed. After 70 years of divine discipline God had mercy and sent them back to rebuild the city and the nation. In

Nehemiah's day it had been 90 years since the rebuilding started. For most of their lives they lived in a broken down city and didn't see God's hand at work.

a. We don't know why they didn't finish the job. Maybe they lacked money and materials; maybe their enemies grew powerful and intimidated them; maybe they were tired. One thing is for sure, they were discouraged.
b. The 1st obstacle Nehemiah faced was discouragement among the people.

B. Def. of discouragement: to have lost confidence and hope; to feel helpless.

1. Discouragement is like a drained car battery. It needs its' faith jump started.
2. Nehemiah and the people saw the same broken down walls but Nehemiah saw the situation differently. He had faith in God and they had lost theirs. They needed a "jump start" in their faith.

C. How did Nehemiah "jump start" their faith?

1. Nehemiah had a word from God…"Let's rebuild"
   a. He didn't say "when life gives you lemons make lemon aid". He didn't have a "Hint from Heloise" or advice from "Dear Abby". He had a Word from God and it brought life to them. There's power in a Word from God.
   b. Romans 10:17 (ESV) So **faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.**
   c. People will respond to you if you know what God is saying to them.
2. Nehemiah also had a testimony about how God was working, i.e. he told them about the king and showed them the letters. The testimony they heard made them believe that God was involved. It awakened their faith.

D. Application: when you're on a mission from God and encounter discouraged people, tell them what God is saying and tell them what God is doing. Their discouragement will turn into faith and they'll begin to believe again.

III. Obstacle #2: injustice

A. Nehemiah 5:1-12 (NLT)

1 …some of the men and their wives raised a cry of protest against their fellow Jews.
2 …We need more food to survive."…4 And others said, "We have had to borrow money on our fields…to pay our taxes. 5 We belong to the same family as those who are wealthy, and our children are just like theirs. Yet **we must sell our children into slavery just to get enough money to live….**7 …I told them, "You are hurting your own relatives by charging interest when they borrow money!" ... 11 You must restore their fields, vineyards, olive groves, and homes to them this very day…

1. The obstacle Nehemiah faced was injustice. The wealthy were taking advantage of the poor and it was wrong. He did something about it.
2. Def. injustice: being unfair or violating someone's God given rights.

B. Justice is God's idea.

1. Isaiah 1:16-17 (NLT)
   16 …Give up your evil ways. 17 Learn to do good. **Seek justice. Help the oppressed. Defend the cause of orphans. Fight for the rights of widows.**
2. Our Pledge of Allegiance affirms that America is supposed to be a place where there is "freedom and justice for all".

C. God wants Christians to stand against injustice, Rosa Parks stood for racial equality. Randall Terry founded operation rescue to be a voice for the unborn. The "Voice of the Martyrs" stands for freedom of religion for the persecuted church. Mother Teresa was a voice for the poor on the streets of Calcutta.

1. True justice is based on truth. We find truth in the Bible. Some call it unjust when society won't condone same sex marriage. God calls it sin. Some call it unjust when a woman isn't given a right to abort her baby. God calls it murder.

D. Application: as Christians we should be at the forefront of insuring Biblical justice for all people, especially those who cannot stand for themselves.

IV. Obstacle #3: inner conflict...would Nehemiah demand his rights or give them up?

A. Nehemiah 5:14-19 (NCV)

14 …I was governor of Judah for twelve years…During that time neither my brothers nor I ate the food that was allowed for a governor. 15 But the governors before me had placed a heavy load on the people. They took about one pound of silver from each person, along with food and wine…but I did not do that, because I feared God… 18 …But I never demanded the food that was due a governor, because the people were already working very hard. 19 Remember to be kind to me, my God, for all the good I have done for these people.

1. One of the "fringe benefits" of being **governor** was a **food** allowance. However, Nehemiah did not take advantage of what was rightfully his. He refused to demand his rights when others were suffering.
2. Jesus gave up the rights of Divinity on earth and Paul gave up his right of support

B. People follow a leader who has a servants heart

1. Matthew 20:26-28 (NLT) [The words of Jesus]
   26 …Whoever wants to be a leader among you must be your servant… 28 For even **the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve others** and to give his life as a ransom for many."
2. I know a pastor who car, ins, wife worked free
3. Contrast: Nehemiah to the Cruise ship captain that capsized & modern politicians

C. Nehemiah invested his money in God's work.

1. Nehemiah 5:17 (ESV) there were at my table 150 men…
2. Why did he take no pay and invest his money in God's work?
   a. Matthew 6:20-21 (The Message) Stockpile treasure in heaven… (ESV) 21 For **where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.**
   b. You can't serve God without giving your money to his work. This is why tithing/ offerings are a spiritual test to see what's more important to us, The Kingdom of God or the kingdom of self.
3. It's easy to say we believe in God; it's hard to put our money where our mouth is.
4. Nehemiah gave up his rights and God blessed his efforts. He'll do the same for us

V. Conclusion: Nehemiah faced 3 obstacles: discouragement, injustice and an inner conflict over his rights.

A. God helped him with every obstacle on the road to significance. He'll do the same for us.

B. Next week we'll see how he faced opposition from those who opposed him.

VI. Response

A. Prayer: What is the Holy Spirit saying to you?

B. Souls