

Hope Church January 25th 2026

Nehemiah 4:6-18

Renovate: the heat is on.

Life is hard and messy and complicated. Faith is, too. **It's not neat or simple.**

Trying to follow Jesus in a volatile and unpredictable and complex and ambiguous world is anything but easy. We feel that.

What I struggle with is how quickly we grab to Christian one-liners that offer **easy and often unbiblical answers** to really difficult questions. Really heart-breaking situations.

- God will never give you more than you can handle. **The Bible never says that this life will be “too much” for us.** In **2 CORINTHIANS 1:8–9** Paul talks about going through things in life so intense that it was beyond what he could handle. Paul confessed that God used that to teach him to stop relying on himself and to trust God instead.
- Follow your heart. The Bible actually says *our hearts* can **mislead us**. Our hearts need changing and not just affirmation. Instead of simply “trusting your heart,” we’re invited to *bring our hearts to God and let him reshape* what we love and want and need.

- You're perfect just the way you are. **God's love meets us exactly where we are, but it doesn't leave us there.** His love exposes what is broken. His loves helps us deal with our sin. His love *slowly reshapes* our habits and patterns and relationships.

Today we're exploring one of the most popular Christian one-liners against the life of Nehemiah:

Let go and let God.

- It sounds great, right? But that little phrase actually comes from a way of thinking that's been around for centuries.
- It is based on the idea of **QUIETISM**:

Quietism believes the ideal Christian life is when you stop trying. If God wants something done or wants something to happen, He will do it. Our job is just to *sit back and wait* while

God does everything.

- Quietism was a reaction to the idea of **ACTIVISM**:

Activism believes that if you just work hard enough and plan enough and grind enough, you can fix anything. God becomes more of an optional extra.

- Both of these believes miss something.
- The Bible gives a different picture:
 - ⇒ Following Jesus isn't about being passive and doing nothing. God as the big-puppet-master.
 - ⇒ And following Jesus isn't about **grabbing the steering wheel** and **trying to control everything**. God as the absent-father.
- Jesus showed us that believing in Him is *active trust*.
- It is about **depending on God and about showing up** . It is about God's grace and about obeying and loving and serving. Not because God needs us, but because *He chooses to work through us*.

You can open your Bibles to **NEHEMIAH 4**. Under Nehemiah's leadership the rebuilding of Jerusalem's wall has begun. And their enemies were not happy.

- SANBALLAT and TOBIAH and the ARABS were the **local power players**. This rebuilding project was a threat to their influence.

- If Jerusalem's walls go up, their political and economic reach gets smaller. They risked losing **status** and **connections** and **money**.

Verses 6-9:

So we rebuilt the wall till all of it reached half its height, for the people worked with all their heart. 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. They all plotted together to come and fight against Jerusalem and stir up trouble against it. But we prayed to our God and posted a guard day and night to meet this threat.

- The rebuilding was a steady and intentional process. There was no quick fix – no call to Brian Timmer and Site-Work-Solutions. Just real and visible progress – time and effort.
- It didn't happen because of Nehemiah was a brilliant leader. **The people threw their whole hearts into the work**. They genuinely bought into Nehemiah's vision.
- The jokes and trash talk from *Sanballat and his gang* eventually turn into a real military threat.

- Nehemiah's response is *beautifully simple*: his first instinct is to pray. His next move was to **put guards in place**.
- His reaction is a reminder that **prayer doesn't replace the work**. Prayer keeps the work going.
- It's not a choice between depending on God or making a plan. It's **dependence and planning** woven together. Trusting God while still doing your part.

Verses 10-12:

Meanwhile, the people in Judah said, "The strength of the laborers is giving out, and there is so much rubble that we cannot rebuild the wall." 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." Then the Jews who lived near them came and told us ten times over, "Wherever you turn, they will attack us."

- Nehemiah points out three pressures that really tested their trust in God. In their dust and sweat and blood:
 - ⇒ Getting **exhausted**.
 - ⇒ Feeling completely **overwhelmed**.
 - ⇒ Being **afraid**.

Verses 13-14:

Therefore I stationed some of the people behind the lowest points of the wall at the exposed places, posting them by families, with their swords, spears and bows. 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. Remember the Lord, who is great and awesome, and fight for your families, your sons and your daughters, your wives and your homes.”

- Nehemiah doesn’t panic. He responds with a **wise practical plan**.
 - ⇒ He places FAMILIES TOGETHER at the most **vulnerable spots** on the wall and armed them with swords and spears and bows.
 - ⇒ It is different when the person next to you on the line **is someone you know and love**. Different motivation.
- Then Nehemiah stands and gives his halftime speech: Don’t be afraid of them.

Remember the Lord!

- ⇒ He uses a Hebrew IMPERATIVE – זְכוֹר אֶת־אֲדֹנָי (*zakor et-Adonai*).
- ⇒ SHIFT YOUR FOCUS from what scares you and **onto who God is**.

Verses 15-18:

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. From that day on, half of my men did the work,

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

- Nehemiah never says: Put your swords down. God's got it now. He says: **Our God will fight for us** but he *arms them and warns them to stay alert.*
- They literally hold a tool in one hand and a weapon in the other. That's a picture of the Christian life: we build and we guard at the same time.

The first thing Nehemiah shows us is that **God moves his work forward right in the middle of pressure. God moves forward in our challenges and when the heat is turned on.**

- God usually does his best work in less-than-ideal moments. Right in the middle of stress and pressure. *Not when life is calm and easy.*
- So when you decide to actually follow Jesus and do what God says, **expect some pushback.** Pushback from other people and even from your own doubts and fears.

- When you start rebuilding parts of your life that have been WRECKED by **selfishness** and **disappointment** and **apathy** and **sin** or **the pull of the culture** around you, it's *normal for things* to feel like they get harder and not easier.
- That kind of pressure can hit you from two directions.
- FROM THE OUTSIDE:
 - ⇒ Job insecurity or money stress or changing workplace policies or relational issues.
 - ⇒ When a family member treats your faith as naïve or a bit over the top.
 - ⇒ When a culture treats serious faith as weird or even dangerous.
- FROM THE INSIDE:
 - ⇒ Those knot-in-your-stomach-self questions: What if I lose my job? What if people think I'm extreme? What if I'm wrong and this all falls apart? What if all of this isn't real?
- Through all of that, God is shaping his people. People who don't just talk about their faith, but actually **live it out with a tough and resilient faith**. Faith that others can see and hear and feel.

But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us.

2 Corinthians 4:7 NIV

- When life gets intense and you feel pushed from every side, that does not mean God has banded you. It **doesn't erase what he's doing in you**.
- In a strange way, THOSE MOMENTS can actually *shine a spotlight on his presence* and show his power at work.
- Nehemiah's story never promises that God will remove all the pressures and challenges. God doesn't always **shut down the mockery** or the **doubts** or the **anxious thoughts**.
- Instead He meets his people right in the middle of it. Instead He **gives us the courage to stay** where he's placed them. To keep BUILDING. To keep PRAYING. To keep SHOWING UP.
- The good news isn't – ***follow God and life gets easy***.
- The good news is that God will hold you up so you can stay faithful when life is ***loud and complicated and messy and scary***.

We need to change our self-talk. From saying ***God is MIA***, to saying ***God is actually forming something in me through this***.

Second, **trusting God is actively walking with him. Not passively waiting around.**

- **NEHEMIAH 4** shows us a pattern: he prayed and posted guards. He *trusted God but he also took responsibility*.
- Many of us quietly feel stuck between two bad options:
 - ⇒ If I really trust God, I shouldn't have to plan.
 - ⇒ If I plan well enough, I don't really need to pray.
- Nehemiah cuts right through that.
- Faith isn't sitting back and doing nothing. It's an active trust that starts with prayer and then makes plans and prepares and works in a **way that lines up with what God wants**.
- You could say it this way: praying without ever preparing is just wishful thinking.
Preparing without praying is just pride.
- Real faith brings these two things together.
- Paul says the same thing in **PHILIPPIANS 2** – *it's always God at work and it's always us at work*.

Dear friends, you always followed my instructions when I was with you. And now that I am away, it is even more important. Work hard to show the results of your salvation, obeying God

with deep reverence and fear. For God is working in you, giving you the desire and the power to do what pleases him.

Philippians 2:12-13 New Living Translation

- Here's what this looks like in real life:
 - ⇒ **You ask God to heal a relationship** – and you also put a date and time on the calendar for the hard conversation. You write out what you need to say. And invite honest input from a trusted friend or mentor.
 - ⇒ You ask God to provide financially – and you also build a budget and talk with a financial planner and update your résumé and actually send out applications.
 - ⇒ **You ask God for healing** – and you also show up for your appointments and adjust your habits and change your diet and follow sound medical advice.
 - ⇒ You ask God to meet your needs – and you also humble yourself enough to let others know what's going on and ask for help.
- *Actively walking with Jesus* – always have this **healthy tension between dependence and responsibility**.
- *Actively walking with Jesus* – doesn't just live in a worship song or a quiet time. **It shows up in your calendar and on your to-do list.**
- *Actively walking with Jesus* – is **praying and taking the next step**.

- As R. C. Sproul and others have said:
 - ⇒ with QUIETISM we erase our effort in the name of God's work.
 - ⇒ With ACTIVISM **we erase God's work in the name of our effort.**
- A healthier way, as Augustine put it, is to *depend fully on God while fully engaging our responsibility.*

Pray as though everything depended on God. Work as though everything depended on you.

St Augustine

Third, Nehemiah calls us to **to remember who God is even as we act.**

- When fear spikes, it's usually because my circumstances or my problems **have taken center stage in my mind** and pushed everything else off to the side. Including God.
- Fear shrinks our view of God and makes the threat look bigger.
- Nehemiah's command is simple: "Remember the Lord, who is great and awesome."
- That means ALLOWING God's greatness and love and grace and goodness consume my mind and become the lens through which I look at what I'm facing.
- Remembering who God is **doesn't pretend the problem isn't real**. It moves me from ***this might crush me*** to ***the One who holds me is bigger than this.***

- Moves me from staring at the waves to realizing I'm actually standing on solid ground.
- That kind of remembering isn't denial; it's a **REFRAME**.
- Nehemiah is basically saying: don't forget the threat, but put the threat where it belongs.
- Name the diagnosis or the bill or the conflict or the uncertainty. **But place it under the promises of God**. Under the greatness of God.
- In real life, it might look like:
 - ⇒ Bring specific promises to mind when worst-case scenarios start running wild.
 - ⇒ Praying "Lord, you are my refuge and strength" when anxiety hits.
 - ⇒ Talking your own heart through the truth that nothing can separate you from God's love.

Nehemiah reminds us that our circumstances may not change quickly, but the **way you carry them need to**.

Turn to God and ask for help first. Then do whatever you can.

Instead of living by the lie of *let go and let God* Nehemiah calls us to something better:

Trust God and get moving.