

HAND ME ANOTHER BRICK: TIMELESS LESSONS ON LEADERSHIP

Discouragement: Its Causes and Cure

Nehemiah 4:9–23



LET'S BEGIN HERE

The farther we travel through the pages of Nehemiah, the more we discover the value and relevance of its instruction for every level of leadership. As we turn to Nehemiah 4:9–23, we find Nehemiah's work crew discouraged for the first time since the project of rebuilding the walls around Jerusalem began. But what caused the discouragement? How did Nehemiah handle it? The answers to these questions apply directly to the discouragement many leaders face today.



LET'S DIG DEEPER

1. The Cause of Discouragement (Nehemiah 4:9–12)

As we observed in the last message, while Nehemiah's workers were building up Jerusalem's broken walls a little more each day, their confidence and faith were being torn down, brick by brick. The repeated threats and criticism from their enemies chiseled away at their resolve and determination (Nehemiah 4:5). And in spite of Nehemiah's efforts to encourage the people, discouragement finally brought their work to a standstill. Let's take a closer look at the problem and see what caused the discouragement and how Nehemiah dealt with it.

The first source of the Israelites' discouragement was a *loss of strength*. The people felt physically burned-out. They stumbled, tottered, and staggered under their loads. Though the workers rebuilt the wall to provide protection for Jerusalem, the people forgot to protect themselves from the enemy within—exhaustion. They started strong but their stamina fizzled.

Another source of discouragement was their *loss of vision*. The people had worked so hard. But instead of feeling encouraged by what they had accomplished, they saw only the huge task before them—all the rubble they still had to clean up. They could no longer see the end goal—a completed wall.

A third source of discouragement was their *loss of confidence*. The erosion of the people's physical reserves and vision also affected their confidence. At one time the people "had a mind to work" (4:6). Now, their motivation had vanished and in its place loomed an overwhelming feeling that they could never finish the task that they had so joyfully begun.



Quotable

*You can't ignore
discouragement.*

*It's like ignoring
a flat tire.*

You've got to fix it!

— Charles R. Swindoll



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Finally, the Jews felt a *loss of security*. They faced vocal and violent enemies who didn't want to see them succeed (Nehemiah 4:11). The people had to place each brick while looking over their shoulders, not knowing from moment to moment whether they might get attacked and their work destroyed.

2. The Cure for Discouragement (Nehemiah 4:13–23)

Nehemiah must have felt overwhelmed and out of control. The troops wilted with discouragement, and his project crumbled before his eyes. But Nehemiah didn't stand around wringing his hands. Instead, he put five specific steps into action in order to rebuild the people's confidence.

First, *Nehemiah unified the people around the same goal* (Nehemiah 4:13). Nehemiah noticed that the basic unit of encouragement, the family, had been broken because relatives worked at different places on the walls. So he reorganized the work and placed his people into family units centered on common goals.

Second, *Nehemiah directed the people's attention to the Lord* (4:14). Nehemiah saw his people's fear and knew that he must point them back to the Lord. Unless they changed their focus from their obstacles to their goal, they would make very little progress.

Third, *Nehemiah encouraged the people to maintain a balance* (4:15–17). Some workers probably wanted to concentrate on building the protective wall. Others wanted to grab their spears and go to war. Nehemiah brought about balance by directing them to continue the work while also being prepared to fight.

Fourth, *Nehemiah provided a rallying point for the people* (4:18–20). Nehemiah's rallying point involved a place. He knew the enemy could attack at any time, in any place. The people needed to know that if one section of the wall was put under siege, others would drop what they were doing and rally to their aid at that location. The rallying point also involved a principle: mutual encouragement. Nehemiah bolstered his people's faith by reminding them that their fellow Israelites as well as their God would be fighting alongside them.

Fifth, *Nehemiah occupied the people with service to others* (4:21–23). Nehemiah created a protective “buddy system.” He knew that if the people were involved in serving one another regularly and consistently, strong relationships would form, and their confidence and morale about the work at hand would increase.



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LET'S LIVE IT

In the seasons of leadership, you'll experience times when those you lead feel discouraged. The result? Bad morale that spreads like a disease, low productivity that affects the bottom line, a lack of creativity and new ideas, and ultimately a high turnover rate. If you've been through these periods of discouragement recently, chances are your heart is pounding at the thought.

But you can resolve—and even prevent—discouragement from overtaking you and those under your leadership. Nehemiah put an end to discouragement among his workers by employing these five principles. As you read, consider your current realms of leadership and the presence or absence of these principles within them.

First, *unify people around the same goal*. Remind people of the major purpose of the organization, ministry, or family and of each person's or group's role in achieving that purpose. This may require strategic reorganization to help move people in a common, unified direction.

What is the primary goal of each of your realms of leadership? Are those who serve with you focused on that goal? If not, how could you create a renewed focus on the goal?

Second, *direct their attention to the Lord*. During times of discouragement, it's important for us to refocus our attention on the Lord. Meditate on His promises, memorize His Word, and reflect on His character.

Do you spend time in prayer, Bible study, or reading Scripture with those under your leadership? How might you incorporate those things into your time together?

Third, *encourage them to maintain a balance*. When we're discouraged, it's easy to see only one perspective at a time, never the whole picture. Maintaining balance helps keep people focused on the Lord and on the overall goal of the organization, group, or project.

Consider the competing issues that vie for attention in your realm of leadership—finances, deadlines, and so on. Do you feel that these issues are handled in a balanced manner?



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Fourth, *provide a rallying point*. Designing an “encouragement plan” in case of crisis will help leaders deal with potential discouragement quickly and effectively. Incorporate a physical place, mental focus, and emotional emphasis to facilitate interaction and encouragement.

Take a few moments to sketch out an “encouragement plan” for your realms of leadership. What physical, mental, and emotional elements might you include?

Fifth, *occupy them with serving each other*. If our investment in each other’s lives comes only during times of crisis, our interpersonal relationships will not withstand the storms of discouragement. However, when people consistently show they value each other beyond their tasks by actively serving one another, morale will be high, relationships will be strong, and discouragement will be rare. When the storms of discouragement move in on such strong relationships, they will often break like waves against rocks.

How might you encourage those in your realm of leadership to serve one another? Think of several specific tasks you might assign, emphases you might make, or opportunities you might provide. Then, commit to following through with at least one of your ideas.



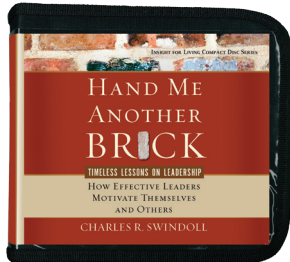
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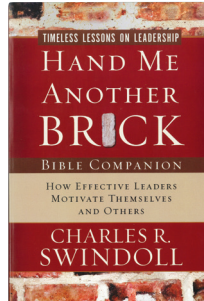
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