

Fathers Day - Nehemiah

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[0:00] I was glad when they said to me, let us go into the house of the Lord. I love that verse because every Sunday morning when I come here to CFC and we breach these doors,! So, I really, I know that it is God's grace alone that I have the privilege to come here and share a little bit with you all this morning.

I'm always reminded when you have an opportunity like this of how very little I actually have to say. But I want to share with you all a little bit this morning as appropriate, ironically enough, since today's Father's Day.

And we'll talk a little bit about being a father and leadership and how that plays into it. And even more specifically, I just want to talk to you all about building a wall around your family.

And even though I'm going to address dads a lot during this, I'm talking to you moms. I'm talking to all of you college students, all of you kiddos. I remember very vividly in 1990 when I came to North Georgia College during Frog Week.

And I was just a single guy and a new believer. And if there was ever time in my wall where I needed a wall around my family, which was me, it was then. So, listen closely, please.

[1:33] If you're going to, I always encourage people if you're going to take notes to write stuff down. So, if you're going to do it, you better hurry up and grab your writing utensil because I'm going to go fast today. And I'm usually not fast.

So, saddle up your horses. I was, we got a trail to blaze. Y'all know that song? I can't sing Stephen Curtis Chapman, but that's the song we played on our wedding day.

We also just had our 20-year anniversary. We weren't here last week. And thank you, thank you, thank you, thank you. My partner last night as a paramedic, my partner last night on the ambulance was 19 years old.

So, I could be your daddy. So, but we played that song, saddle up your horses when you walk down the aisle out the doors. So, my daddy, I feel bad saying this, but I felt like I should.

But my daddy was a very committed alcoholic. And he always kept to himself. Not one time can I ever really remember an encouraging conversation I ever had with my father.

[2:40] I used to think that my father is just not a good leader. And now as I've gotten older and my kids are starting to grow up, I realize that I was wrong to think that my father was actually not a leader.

There are many passages in Scripture that support the truth that a man is the head, the master, and the leader of his family. Some of the main passages, Ephesians 5, Colossians 3, 1 Peter 3, Titus 2, Titus 5, Genesis 1 through 3, all teach us that a man is the head, the master, and the leader of his home.

And there's really nothing that you or I can do about it. I think it works like this. You're either going to lead effectively or you're going to lead poorly.

But you're going to lead by default. As a father, you are going to lead. Votie Bachman said it like this, A man's failure to lead is actually just a man leading in failure.

I'm very passionate about the subject of manhood and everything that goes with that on several different levels. Therefore, I would also say I'm a pretty manhood that has everything to do about being a father, so I'm very passionate about being a father.

[3:56] But I have not always, by any means, been that way. And I think a lot of the reason I'm so passionate now is because I've been so guilty in the past of abdicating my role as a father, abdicating my role as a husband.

And especially early on in our marriage, I would always pass off the buck to Belinda or pass it off to the children's minister at our church.

Really, I would pass it off to anybody else who was willing to do it. It was much easier for me as a father to do what my daddy taught me to do, which is always bring home the bacon. It was a lot easier for me to go to work and work six and seven days a week, which I did all the time, and I'd work out of town for a long time at a time, and be the physical provider for my family than it was for me to actually have to pour into their souls.

Belinda and I have made many mistakes with our children. She wanted to make sure I pointed this out to you all twice.

[5:08] But we made many mistakes with our children, and we still do. We are still figuring things out constantly. We're always changing our thought processes and the way we do things.

Obviously, one kid is different from the other, and we depend on God's discernment to show us. We've made the mistake of speaking ugly to one another. We've made the mistake of speaking ugly to our children.

We've made the mistake of not disciplining our children because we were just too busy or thought, that's just no big deal. We've made the mistake of not training our children many times because we were being lazy or we just had something else that we wanted to do.

Oftentimes, we're just very selfish. We have made the mistake of trying to make our kids look and act and present themselves in such a way that it makes us look good as parents.

We've made the mistake of being legalistic and oftentimes completely missing their hearts. We, in a nutshell, have had to really look at our children and we see that sin nature that's in them, and especially as they grow up and they start to hit these teenage years.

[6:43] And we have to remember that that sin nature that we see in them, they inherited it from Adam, but through me. They inherited it from Adam, but through her.

And in a lot of ways, we gave it to them. You know, I would probably venture to say you probably can't hardly ask a dad around who's a believer, who his kids are grown up, that won't tell you that he sees his own sin nature in some of his own children too, and especially those sins that we don't want to deal with.

I've said it before, I've worked at a couple of different boys' homes, most recently right before I worked up here for several years, probably eight or nine years. And when boys would come in, I would always make a point to read their files from front to back.

I would read their stories. I wanted to understand how they got to where they were as an 18, 19, 20-year-old court-ordered kid that I was dealing with. And there was always one constant thing. They just didn't have dads in the picture. And whether you believe it or not, I really do think that we have a generation of what I would call fatherless boys who grow up to be fatherless men who have very little reference points and no right understanding of God's Word.

[8:11] A lot of it I just told you is because you have men like myself who have abdicated their roles as father, abdicated their roles as husbands. More and more I see moms doing the same thing, becoming disconnected with their families, disconnected with their husbands and their kiddos.

And kids are growing up with very little sense of parental environment. This is just what I have seen. And it's as if we say we masculinize our women and we feminize our men.

Well, when I did mention this to you real quick, fathers, one thing I have struggled with for years is just the fact that I just don't like myself.

And I'm not really totally sure what that is other than I think a lot of times as believers we feel like we have no authority or we're just not qualified.

And the problem I've realized, other friends of mine and believers, is that if we don't like ourselves at all, how can we like others?

[9:19] How can we bless others? How can we teach others? How can we encourage others? And that has everything to do with our wives and our children too. I think the problem with me is I've got my identity and my work and a lot of other stuff rather than from Christ and in Christ.

Christ. So, I have a question. Excuse me. Is it? Question. I'm going to probably do that a few times today. But what would be your one desire?

And this is a question for you dads. And you can spit it out there if you want. If you had to choose, what would be your one desire for your children? For me, I had to ask myself this question many times over the last several years.

Would it not probably be salvation? Of everything else you want, you want your kids to know God intimately. So, for me, the next natural question I had to ask myself was, do my actions line up with what I say my first desire for my children is to be?

And for me, the answer was no. I don't know why it is, but for some reason, I think for guys, a lot of times there seems to be a huge disconnect between what we say and what we do.

[10:37] Part of it we don't mean to and part of it we do. Let me ask you this. Aside from my relationship with God, what should be my first calling?

I would say it's to be Belinda's husband. After that, I would say to be father to Sarah, father to Stephen, father to Samuel and Rachel and Joseph and Josiah and Ruth and Caleb.

I can't remember what year they're all born, but I can do that. But for me, work is not an excuse not to be husband and father.

Ministry is not an excuse not to be. Lack of knowledge is not an excuse not to be. Personality, not an excuse not to be. A spouse, not on board with you, not an excuse not to be.

Ministry. Several years ago, for whatever reason, God in His mercy began to open up my eyes to a lot of the errors of the ways I was doing things.

[11:46] And I had to go through some very painful circumstances, as I know many people have. And God began to transform my mind and the way I was thinking and my perspective on things.

And He began to make me want to be, or at least willing to be, a man who is trying to lead. In His mercy, He began making me to a man that was willing to try and love and exhort his wife and try to make difficult decisions and try to train and restrain and teach his children.

I had to come to the place where I realized that my motivation can no longer be bottom dollar being the physical provider. I had to learn as a dad that I cannot lead my family effectively when I'm not there.

So my desire, I say in God's mercy again, my desire is I want to be a man who understands his role. A man who doesn't apologize for his role.

A man who doesn't back down from his role. I've heard Paul Washer say it several times. It's been a couple of years. And it's always stuck with me about how he says that at some degree he believes that a man, as a father and a husband, will some degree be responsible for the maturity of his wife and his children on Judgment Day.

[13:10] And when I think about it at times, oftentimes I'm terrified at the fact that I do not understand the magnitude of the responsibility that God has really given me.

The history of the world is the history of fathers who endured with their sons and their daughters and those who did not. Some fathers who would raise their sons in the fear of the Lord and their daughters in the fear of the Lord and some who would not.

And I have the opportunity now, I feel like God has given me the opportunity now, where I can open up God's Word every day and I can read and do family devotion, which is the pattern and the principles we see in Scripture, and speak to my kids and read out of the New Testament, read out of the Old Testament, and we can study from their lives and we can learn from their lives.

Like, for example, the life of Eli, who Scripture says was a godly man, but failed to restrain his two children. If you're familiar with the story, one day it was reported to Eli that his two sons had been killed.

If you remember correctly, Eli fell over backwards, he broke his neck and he died. And just like that, a father, two sons, all dead in the judgments of God come down on them.

[14:21] If you were to sit down, for example, with anybody here in this church, somebody that you really trusted and they really confronted you, and you had to be honest with them, Dads, what would you say you struggle with?

Or moms, what would you say you struggle with? Or kiddos and college students, what would you say you struggle with? I'm in a men's grade that meets every week.

With very few exceptions, I believe it's imperative for all of us guys to sort of find that inner circle of guys to meet with on a regular basis. But one thing I've seen is that oftentimes men, and women too, allow our struggles to define us.

And the problem I have had with that is, unfortunately, it makes a huge impact on my role as a husband or a wife, a mom, and a dad.

It makes a huge impact on our parenting. I am not exaggerating when I say that I'm at a place in my life right now where I feel like I have to fight every day against Satan's lies.

[15:27] But I know this truth, and I believe it applies to every one of us. When we read the Scripture, we know that our story no longer is that we are failed, are fallible men or women, so much as it is that we are redeemed in Christ and by His power, we are overcomers.

So Hebrews 11 includes a long list of harlots, of men distracted by women, of murderers and liars. Yet that's not what we really read in Hebrews 11.

Really, the whole point of it is that they were heroes of the faith. So here's what I'm trying to say. I believe that a man's leadership is pivotal in the home and in the church.

A man, or a home, is the place where leadership for the church is forged. And Scripture teaches us that a man is first to be examined for leadership in the church by looking at his track record of leadership in the home.

I hope you follow me there. 1 Timothy 3 and Titus chapter 1. In other words, a man's leadership in his family is foundational to whether or not he's even qualified for leadership among God's people.

[16:39] It's pretty cool, I think. That's the way God designed it. My home has to be the place that forges duty and responsibility and work ethic and character prior to my kiddos leaving the house, going into the workforce and going to college or going to school and starting their own families and finding their own church.

Our home has to be that place. In about the year 600 B.C., King Nebuchadnezzar conquered Judah. God's people, the Jews, allowed sin in their midst and did not condemn it.

As a result, they suffered God's judgment and their cities were burned down. Their walls were broke down. Turn with me, if you will, please, to Nehemiah chapter 1. Nehemiah chapter 1.

While you're turning there, I'll tell you a little more. In the year 530 B.C., the Persians conquered the Babylonians and they allowed a remnant. I read somewhere around 50,000 Jews to return home.

The Jews did return home. They did rebuild their temple. And again, they returned to a lot of their same sins. Sound familiar with what we read this morning? So I'm going to read Nehemiah chapter 1, verses 2 through 4.

[17:54] I am reading out of the New King James Version here. Hanani, one of my brethren came with men from Judah. Verse 2 here.

And I asked them concerning the Jews who had escaped, who had survived the captivity and concerning Jerusalem. And they said to me, the survivors who left the captivity in the province are there in great distress and reproach.

The wall of Jerusalem is also broke down, and its gates are burned with fire. So it was when I heard these words that I sat down and wept and mourned for many days.

I was fasting and praying before the God of heaven. So Nehemiah is specifically burdened for two things, if you caught that. Two things. First of all, the distress of his people and the broke down walls.

Most of you all are familiar. Pastor Nathan took us through the entire book of Nehemiah not very long ago. And when he did, the thought really came to me about this parallel between the broke down walls in Jerusalem and our families.

[19:03] So that's kind of what I'm going to quickly give you a big picture or remind you, if you will. And then I'm also just going to give you a very specific picture.

So the rest of Nehemiah chapter 1 is really Nehemiah's prayer. But I want you to look again at verse 4. Did you notice Nehemiah's reaction to his brother Hanani concerning the Jews?

You see it in there in verse 4? Nehemiah's reaction to it. He sat down. He wept. He mourned.

He fasted. He prayed. And the thing that really hits me here, every time I would read that passage, is does anything in your life make you stop and respond like that?

Or you sit down, you actually weep. You mourn, you fast, and pray. I heard a guy say one time, the things that make us laugh and cry are often an indication of our character.

[20:05] So, going on. Nehemiah. Everybody know who Nehemiah was? He was the emperor's cupbearer. A position really of great responsibility and privilege.

He was the guy who would test the king's wine to ensure that it was not poisoned. Be kind of like that secret service agent today that's appointed to be right there at the president's side. Who doesn't think twice to jump on him and cover him if bullets were to start flying.

The guy willing to risk his life without hesitation. But we know, when we read the scripture, that Nehemiah was burdened. He was burdened for his people.

And my focus this morning was the fact that he was burdened for the wall. If you go on, you read in chapter 2. I didn't actually write the verse down. I think it's verse 2.

You read that Nehemiah was actually confronted by the king because he had a sad face. A sad spirit. And the scripture says that Nehemiah was terribly afraid.

[21:06] Do you know why? Well, in those days, you didn't go before a king with a sad face with anything other than a happy spirit. A contemptful spirit. But he actually risked being put to death by going before his king with a sad face.

And keep in mind that the emperor, nothing we read, alludes to the fact that he was a believer at all. But remember this, that God had placed a burden on Nehemiah's heart.

And he did not try to escape it. So a question I have for me and a question I have for you. Is there any burdens that God has placed on your heart? This morning, a week ago, a month ago, a year ago, two years ago.

Is there any specific burdens that God has placed on your heart? Scripture goes on to tell us that Nehemiah received permission from the emperor to travel to Judah and rebuild its walls.

A neat verse I wrote down here, Proverbs 21.1. The king's heart is in the hand of the Lord. Like rivers of water, he turns it wherever it wishes. It reminds me of the Lithia Way. This morning we read about Pharaoh.

[22:20] Was God not sovereign through Pharaoh to accomplish his purposes? God can be sovereign through the United States president. And God can be sovereign through our pastor. Any way he chooses to accomplish his purpose.

So let's talk about walls. Why did old cities, former days, create walls? I think they created them probably for two things. Really to protect the people and to protect their wealth.

I'm sure most of you are probably familiar. They would build towers and gates and drawbridges and moats. This was their fortress.

How they kept out danger. How they kept the enemy outside the walls. Guards were placed to monitor who and what came in. Guards were placed to monitor who and what came out.

So if I hadn't said it specifically already today, I want you all to please think about this wall in terms of your families. Please think about this wall in terms of your family.

[23:20] Chapter 2, verse 11. Read with me again here. Nehemiah chapter 2, verse 11. So I came to Jerusalem and was there three days. Then I arose in the night, I and a few men with me.

I told no one of my God what my God had put in my heart to do at Jerusalem. Nor was there any animal with me except the one on which I rode. Skip down to verse 15.

So I went up in the night by the valley and viewed the wall. And then I turned back and entered by the valley gate and so returned. And the officials did not know where I had gone or what I had done. I had not yet told the Jews, the priests, the nobles, the officials, and the others who did the work. So what we see here, we see Nehemiah did not want the enemy to know what he was doing.

I.e., he investigated by night. So here's what we have. We have Nehemiah. He first took an inventory. He investigated.

[24:26] He was very shrewd about it in a wise sort of different way. And make no doubt, Nehemiah had a strategy and he made a plan.

So I have another question for you. And I want to encourage every dad to work on answering this question for me. And really, again, it's for all of you.

But the question is, do you have a plan? The Apostle Paul teaches us as fathers that we are supposed to raise our children up in the fear and the admonition of the Lord in Ephesians chapter 6. So do you have a plan? I don't have one unless I'm intentional about making a plan. But we have to have a plan.

Chapters 3 and chapters 4 describe the rebuilding process. I'm not going to read through it all right now.

[25:23] If you want to just kind of pick through it a little bit. Here's the truth that you'll find. Chapters 3 and 4 when you look through it. First and most of all, that wall building is very difficult.

I think most things that we categorize as difficult in our lives do reap great benefits. Wall building is very difficult. Wall building is boring sometimes.

Wall building is costly. In other words, it comes at a price. Wall building is time consuming. Wall building is repetitive. Wall building is difficult.

All right. Chapter 4, verse 6. Look right there with me. I'm boring. Nehemiah chapter 4, verse 6. So we built the wall and the entire wall was joined together up to half its height.

For the people had a mind to work. Verse 7. Now it happened when Sambalat, Tobiah, the Arabs, and the Ammonites, and the Astrodites heard that the wall of Jerusalem were being restored and that the gaps were beginning to be closed, that they became very angry and all of them conspired together to come and attack Jerusalem and create confusion.

[26:41] So did you all catch what we read here? Scripture tells us that they had already built it to half its height. I take that to mean that they were halfway there.

They had accomplished half of what they wanted to do. It also says very specifically they had closed gaps and they had made advances. And then what do we read in verse 7 there? It says that the enemy became very angry.

And then in verse 8, the enemy conspired to attack and make confusion. Most of you all can probably see the application here.

The way I understand it is, say for example, like Nehemiah, you have a burden. Then you begin to walk in obedience. You start to take risk.

You begin to see a harvest and fruit from seeds that you've planted. And then the enemy becomes very angry. Satan is our enemy.

[27:47] He is the thief that comes to steal, kill, and destroy. Scripture tells us he is our adversary, roaring around like a lion, seeking someone to devour, something like that.

But you know, I think about adversary, when you look it up, it actually means to stand opposed. Satan stands opposed to us. He is our enemy.

I always think in the terms of standing opposed, like a boxer standing up the heavyweight championship of the world. And they're standing there no matter what, their only goal is to knock you out, to destroy you, no matter what the cost.

And that's how our enemy stands against us. Look at verse 9 with me. We want to see how Nehemiah begins to respond. Verse 9. It reads like this, Nevertheless, we prayed our prayer to God, to our God.

And because of them, we set a watch against them day and night. So what? So we see how Nehemiah responds. We're not talking about any sort of cowardice right here.

[28:57] The first thing he does, he says, We prayed to our God. What an example for us. When the enemy attacks, the first thing we do, we pray to our God. The next thing, we see how Nehemiah really stuck his foot in the ground, and he set up a defense.

And we're going to read a little bit. Basically, Nehemiah had resolve. He could not be shaken. That's how I want to stand when it comes to building a wall in terms of my family, in terms of my own life. I want to have resolve. I want to not be shaken. So let's look specifically how Nehemiah sets up his defense. Look at verse 4, verse 13. Verse 13 and 14 right here.

I'm going to read. Therefore, I positioned men behind the lower parts of the wall at the openings, and I set the people according to their families with their swords, their spears, and their bows.

And I looked, and I rose, and I said to the nobles, to the leaders, and to the rest of the people, Do not be afraid of them. Remember the Lord, great and awesome, and fight for your brethren, your sons, your daughters, your wives, and your houses.

[30:08] How brilliant, I think, Nehemiah takes the entire family and uses them to defend the wall. In fact, they're actually standing armed against the enemy.

He even strategically places them at the positions where they were most vulnerable. And then, Nehemiah goes on to sort of commission them. He tells them three things.

What does he say? He says, Do not be afraid. Remember the Lord. And he says, Fight for your brethren. Fight for your family.

Question, How carefully and strongly would we build a wall around our homes if we knew that our lives, the lives of our loved ones depended upon it?

And since we know, we just established that the enemy is intent on destroying our lives, our families, our churches. How seriously do we undertake the task of wall building?

[31:17] Walls are actually scriptural. I'm going to read this to you really quick. Revelation chapter 21, the New Jerusalem has towering walls and gates. In Genesis chapter 3, we read that God placed cherubim with flaming swords at the entrance of the Garden of Eden to guard the way of the tree of life.

And in Job chapter 1, verse 2, Satan is actually dialoguing with God and he says, Have you not made a hedge around him? Talking about Job. Around his house, around all that he has on every side.

Satan hates walls. I just drove, just a couple of days ago, I can picture a particular daycare in my mind over here in Hall County on a very busy road and all the kids are out there running and playing and having a good time.

Can you imagine if those kids were out there running and there were no walls in place, or in this case, fences? It would be a very dangerous place for all the children.

I make that parallel to each of us in the form of a question. Do we have gates that are open or unguarded in each of our own lives?

[32 : 32] Have we set up a wall to keep the enemies of God out of our life? The way I like to think about it is have we set up boundaries against the world?

Belinda told me too also not to put my opinion in here. So I struggle with that. So I'm trying not to do that this morning. So it would be inappropriate for me to tell you exactly every way that we do that as a family.

But I want to do this. I'm going to ask you to turn, go ahead and turn to Revelation chapter 21. Are we willing to fight to defend our families?

Revelation chapter 21. It describes the New Jerusalem and really it lists the standard that I believe each of us can make for our own. I just alluded to it a little bit ago about the towering walls and the gates here.

Let's look at chapter 21 verses 26 and 27. Starting in verse 26. And they shall bring the glory and the honor of the nations into it.

[33 : 50] And verse 27. But there shall by no means enter it anything that defiles or causes an abomination or a lie, but only those who are written in the Lamb's book of life.

I, as a dad, have to be very cautious not to be amused by what amuses the world. That's one reason we homeschool. It's also a big struggle that Belinda and I are having right now.

My desire is I want to build a wall around my family to include setting up a stronghold against Satan's thoughts and against Satan's ways and against Satan's attitudes to the point to where they are kept out, uninvited.

If you read chapters 4 through 6, you'll find several tactics that the enemy uses to oppose our walls that we try to build or rebuild or establish.

Some of the tactics that the enemy uses you'll find in the Scripture are ridicule, intimidation, slander, threats, discouragement, compromise, fear.

[35 : 09] If you start building a wall, you're soon going to be battling it. And if your wall is breached, I would encourage you to rebuild it. Mine has been breached many times. The word built is actually built is actually used six times in Nehemiah chapter 3.

It actually means rebuilt. The word built actually means rebuilt. In other words, the way I understand it, in restoring the wall, no new material was actually needed.

In the debris of ruins that lay on the ground was everything that was required. In other words, I think God has really equipped us with all we need to keep the enemy out, to make defense, to make a plan, to build a wall.

The word repair is used 35 times in the book of Nehemiah. And in the Hebrew, it means to make strong and firm. Nehemiah knew that wall building would be difficult and that there was no quick fix. And I believe that we have to expect the same. So I want to give you two words. Joy and consistency. Joy and consistency.

[36 : 26] One of my most, talking about my dad again, one of my most vivid memories was I remember one time that I watched my daddy laugh hysterically. I don't even remember why.

I just remember that it felt good. It made me smile. I liked it. the way I understand that today, I would say I cannot really communicate effectively to you enough how imperative I think it is that us as parents learn to laugh and love our children and love each other as parents.

Daddies are a definite factor in the fun category, whereas I think oftentimes mamas kind of determine how far the fun is going to go. or if it will go at all.

But have you ever noticed that families who can be absolutely heathen, not of God, yet they can raise happy, stable children?

I think the answer is simple. A lot of times it's because they were raised in a healthy atmosphere. ungodly but still healthy. So my first word to you is joy.

[37 : 51] Make the joy of the Lord your strength. That's one of our biggest prayers lately. Make the joy of the Lord your strength and let your kids see it. Let them see you love on one another.

My second word was consistency. consistency. We've got to be consistent across the board.

Consistent in our training, consistent in our discipline, consistent in our love, our personal time, our quiet time, consistent in our prayer times, and in our family devotions.

I've probably seen more fruit in doing family devotion time with our family than anything else that we've done. So let's be the guy that understands his role as a shepherd and doesn't back down from it, please.

I say that to myself. Let's make a plan if we have not already done so. And in the words of Nehemiah, do not be afraid. Remember the Lord.

Fight for your brethren and your families. Make the joy of the Lord your strength and be consistent. Let's pray.