

When Following God Isn't Easy

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By Dave Butts

Sometimes it all seems so easy. Everything in life falls together for you. Your job is fulfilling. The family is happy. Things are going well at church. Your loved ones are healthy. Those times seem kind of rare, don't they? All too often, we feel as though we are under attack. Life seems so hard. Difficulties surround us. Relationships are fractured, health has fled, and finances are a struggle. These valleys of struggle seem all too common.

How can we deal with these hard times? Where is God when life gets tough? Is there a key to overcome discouragement? The Bible addresses the difficulties of life with great honesty. God's Word never presents the believer's life as one without struggle. Hardships come with the package of life.

One of the great stories of overcoming adversity is found in the fourth chapter of Nehemiah. It is an inspiring story of how the Jewish returned exiles are led by Nehemiah to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem. The enemies of God attempted to stop them. In spite of great danger and opposition, the exiles triumphed. There is much we can learn from them:

"When Sanballat heard that we were rebuilding the wall, he became angry and was greatly incensed. He ridiculed the Jews, and in the presence of his associates and the army of Samaria, he said, 'What are those feeble Jews doing? Will they restore their wall? Will they offer sacrifices? Will they finish in a day? Can they bring the stones back to life from those heaps of rubble – burned as they are?' Tobiah the Ammonite, who was

at his side, said, 'What they are building – if even a fox climbed up on it, he would break down their wall of stones!'

"Hear us, O our God, for we are despised. Turn their insults back on their own heads. Give them over as plunder in a land of captivity. Do not cover up their guilt or blot out their sins from Your sight, for they have thrown insults in the face of the builders. 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 men 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.

"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.'

"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 brothers, your sons and your daughters, your wives and your homes.' 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 his 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.

“Then I said to the nobles, the officials and the rest of the people, ‘The work is extensive and spread out, and we are widely separated from each other along the wall. Wherever you hear the sound of the trumpet, join us there. Our God will fight for us!’

“So we continued the work with half the men holding spears, from the first light of dawn till the stars came out. At that time I also said to the people, ‘Have every man and his helper stay inside Jerusalem at night, so they can serve us as guards by night and workmen by day.’ Neither I nor my brothers nor my men nor the guards with me took off our clothes; each had his weapon, even when he went for water” (Nehemiah 4).

Any work of God must expect opposition. In Nehemiah’s day, the work was rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem. In your life, it might be rebuilding the walls of God’s protection and blessing around your family or church. It’s entirely possible that the work of God for you today involves tearing down the walls that separate believers. Regardless of the specific work, know this...Satan will oppose you.

In Jerusalem, rebuilding the walls would make the people of God strong. It was a big first step toward the restoration of God’s purposes for His people. It is only natural to expect the enemy to bring opposition against that. Satan wants us weak. God wants us strong. Satan wanted to see the Jews defeated...crawling among the ruins, fearful of attack, never accomplishing anything. Satan resorts to the same tactics with Christians today.

God today is stirring us up to rebuild the walls. Within the

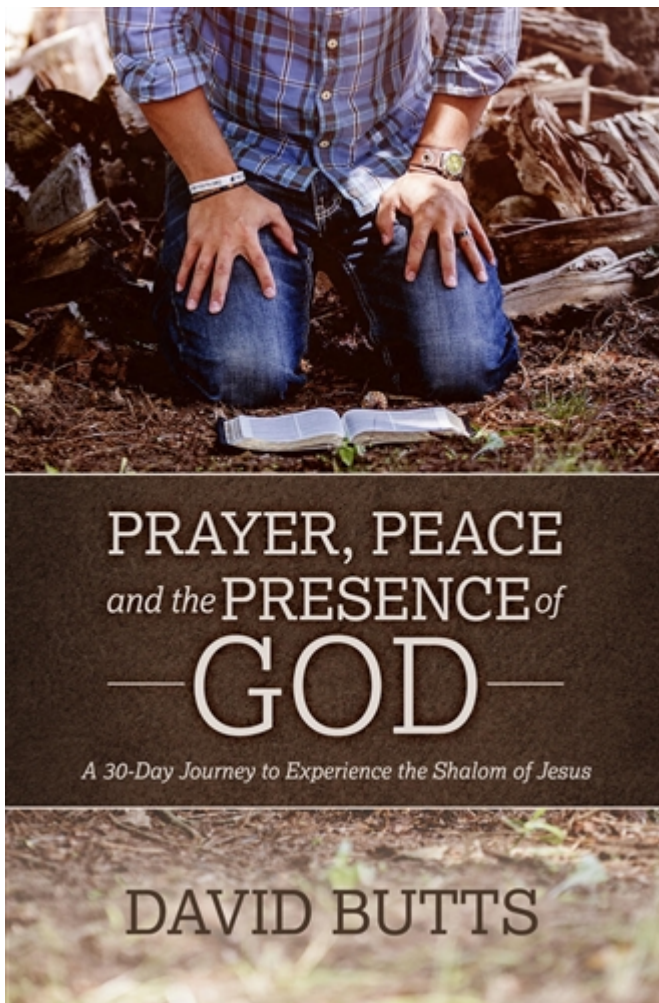
walls of our own lives, we are to get serious about God in prayer, the Word, in witness, and in lifestyle. In our churches, God's walls represent protection against the attacks of Satan that destroy unity, damage witness, and prevent the Church from fulfilling its mission.

Chapter four of Nehemiah gives us some key principles for dealing with times of discouragement and trial:

1. We must proceed in spite of opposition (vv. 4-6). They prayed and went to work *"with all their heart."*
2. Discouragement will hit (vv. 10-11). Don't be surprised by this. The people in Jerusalem said that their strength was giving out. There was too much rubble to be moved. On top of this, the presence of active opposition made the job seem impossible.
3. Be aware of Satan's plan (vv. 14-15). This is the turning point toward victory. All too often we are unaware of the enemy's schemes. Nehemiah reminded his people to remember the Lord and to fight for their loved ones. By returning to work, they would frustrate the plans of their enemies.
4. Work with preparedness for battle (vv. 16-18). This is an amazing picture of those who understood the situation they were in. They worked with their weapons and armor close at hand.
5. Answer the call when the trumpet sounds (vv. 18-20). Nehemiah trained the people to respond to the sound of the trumpet during times of intense attack. We must likewise train ourselves to respond during times of spiritual intensity. There will be times of special prayer...times of ministering to those who are hurting.

The Christian life is lived out in the midst of a battlefield. That means tough times and difficult situations. God's Word provides principles for victory. His Word also gives us assurance of the power of God at work within us to allow us to become *"more than conquerors."* Jesus said in John 16:33, *"In*

this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world."



PRAYER, PEACE, and the PRESENCE of GOD by David Butts

As believers, we are supposed to walk in the peace of Christ, yet we all have stressful issues and circumstances that rob us of this peace. Subtitled "A 30-Day Journey to Experience the Shalom of Jesus," *Prayer, Peace and the Presence of God* powerfully encourages the reader on how to hold onto that peace in any circumstance.

The author, David Butts (1953-2022), started writing this book and 10 days into it he got word that he was in stage 4 with a rare form of lymphoma. God allowed him to live in a greater way for five additional years of full-strength ministry. Dave has challenged readers in *Prayer, Peace and the Presence of God* to seek after His best life, no matter what it holds.

His 30-day devotional will encourage, inspire and challenge you that you, too, can experience and walk in the peace of Jesus no matter what circumstances you are walking through.

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