

WALL BUILDERS

NEHEMIAH 4:6-20

Nehemiah 4:6 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. 4:7 Now it happened, when Sanballat, Tobiah, the Arabs, the Ammonites, and the Ashdodites heard that the walls of Jerusalem were being restored and the gaps were beginning to be closed, that they became very angry, 4:8 and all of them conspired together to come and attack Jerusalem and create confusion.

4:9 Nevertheless we made our prayer to our God, and because of them we set a watch against them day and night. 4:10 Then Judah said, "The strength of the laborers is failing, and there is so much rubbish that we are not able to build the wall." 4:11 And our adversaries said, "They will neither know nor see anything, till we come into their midst and kill them and cause the work to cease."

4:12 So it was, when the Jews who dwelt near them came, that they told us ten times, "From whatever place you turn, they will be upon us." 4:13 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

4:14 And I looked, and arose and 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."

4:15 And it happened, when our enemies heard that it was known to us, and that God had brought their plot to nothing, that all of us returned to the wall, everyone to his work. 4:16 So it was, from that time on, that half of my servants worked at construction, while the other half held the spears, the shields, the bows, and wore armor; and the leaders were behind all the house of Judah. 4:17 Those who built on the wall, and those who carried burdens, loaded themselves so that with one hand they worked at construction, and with the other held a weapon. 4:18 Every one of the builders had his sword girded at his side as he built.

And the one who sounded the trumpet was beside me. 4:19 Then I said to the nobles, the rulers, and the rest of the people, "The work is great and extensive, and we are separated far from one another on the wall. 4:20 Wherever you hear the sound of the trumpet, rally to us there. Our God will fight for us."

If you're a father or a grandfather; then you have a commonality with Nehemiah - **you carry a burden.**

Nehemiah spent his 8 to 5's in the royal court. He was the king's cupbearer, but when the whistle blew and his work was done Nehemiah headed home to bear a different kind of concern. Nehemiah was burdened for the children... *the children of Israel.*

Nehemiah was in Shushan, the winter residence of the Persian emperor, when news arrived of trouble in Jerusalem. The walls were rubble. The gates were burned. The city was in shambles, and the inhabitants were vulnerable to danger... *And Nehemiah's driving passion was to re-erect those ravaged walls.*

And if you're a dad or granddad, you too are saddled with a similar concern that's perpetually on your mind. When you punch the clock on the end of a day's business, and head home - you too carry a burden for the children - not the children of Israel, *but for your own children.* For like Nehemiah, we as fathers, see that the walls that once protected our kids have crumbled.

Where's the moral base today? - the transcendent values? - the divine truths that provide our kids the boundaries and guidelines they so desperately need?

The walls of morality and truth are in rubble, and it's every father's burden to rebuild them. **If you're a father you have a lot in common with Nehemiah...**

In ancient times a city's walls were extremely vital...

First, **walls reflected a city's prosperity.** The wealthier the city - the taller, thicker, more ornate the walls... One look at the walls revealed a city's status.

Second, **walls provided a city power.** They shielded the people from the enemy's onslaughts - the stronger the walls the stronger its citizen's resolve.

Third, **walls determined a city's protection.** They kept out wild animals and sinister people that might want to disturb the peace, and cause people harm.

And fourth, **walls expanded a city's perspective.** From the tops of the walls the look-outs could see further and clearer. It was a necessary vantage point.

Of course, modern cities no longer have literal walls. Today, the importance is on a different type of wall. Walls of truth and values - morality and spirituality - these are the walls that today provide a society with *prosperity, power, protection, and perspective.*

When a society acknowledges God's truth, and is governed by transcendent values people's lives have meaning. They become productive and **prosperous.**

A moral and spiritual people become a stronger people. Saying "no" to temptation, and saying "yes" to God, cultivates a personal **power** and resolve.

And a society based on divine truth affords people **protection**. God erects loving walls - more to keep dangers out, than hem us in. His truth is a safe haven.

And a people who promote God's truth gain an eternal **perspective**. From the top of the wall we see beyond the immediate to what God has on the horizon.

When Nehemiah returned to Jerusalem he took a night time stroll of the city. He toured the dilapidated walls, and the situation was as grim as he'd heard.

In 2:17 he tells the leaders of the Jews, [Nehemiah 2:17](#) "You see the distress that we are in, how Jerusalem lies in waste..."

Today, when I examine our society I reach the same conclusion. We're in dire distress. Morally, we're in ruins. Spiritually, we're a wasteland. Walls that once protected us and elevated our stature are now rubble.

Why is it hard for us to understand why a teenager can walk into a school with a loaded gun, and start blowing up the place? **There are no more walls!** We've never given that person a reason why one human whim is any more right or wrong than another.

Society's conscience doesn't blink when an unborn baby is murdered, so why is it wrong to kill them after they've been around a few years? If there's no ultimate truth, what's the point anyway? Life is just a cruel joke.

A society that kicks the Bible, and prayer, and absolute truth out of its schools tears down walls that are irreplaceable. Kids grow up confused and chaotic. People lack principle - and they become vulnerable to every hideous evil the devil can throw at them.

As a dad and grandpa here is my starting point... I envision my eleven treasured grandchildren surrounded by rabid pit-bulls - at least a dozen licking their chops, frothing at the mouth, closing in on my kiddos like they were *a pound of ground round*.

And that's no exaggeration! That is the spiritual environment we live in today. As fathers, we need to build walls... and we need to build them fast!

Social commentator, Jack Krammer, tells about the night he got stranded in rough and tumble South-central LA. Jack was late for a flight - and he couldn't find a taxi - so he decided to take a chance.

Three local teenagers were standing by their car. Jack asked them how much it would cost him to get a ride to the airport. The driver said, "**10 bucks.**" Jack offered them a 20, and jumped in with the three men.

Obviously, Jack was nervous. These guys could rip him off, take his suitcase, or worse... Jack grew more antsy and uneasy, when they reached the freeway, and turned east. He thought for sure the airport was west.

Finally Jack sighed, *"I hope you guys are going to take care of me?"* One of the men laughed, *"It's okay, man. We're good guys."* Jack hoped he was right. All the social issues Jack Krammer was fond of writing about were suddenly with him in the same car.

Before long Jack asked, *"Are there gangs at your school?"* *"There's gangs everywhere, man. It's crazy."* He said, *"Are you guys in a gang?"* *"No way, man."*

"Why not?" *"Because there's no hope in it. You just get a bullet in your head, man..."* *"Yeah, but what hope is there for you outside the gang?"* *"I don't know, man. I just want to get a future. Do something..."* *"What's the difference between you guys and the gangs?"* *"I don't know, man. I don't know. We're just lucky, I guess..."*

Jack thought for a minute, then he asked, *"What about fathers? Do you guys have a father at home?"* The kid in the backseat said, *"Yeah, I do."* The other two kids said, *"Yeah, I got a dad."* Jack probed further, *"Is he living with you?"* All three answered, *"Yeah."*

Jack followed a hunch, he asked, *"Do the guys in the gang have dads living with them?"* *"No way, man. None of them do..."* *"Does dad make a difference?"* *"Absolutely. He's always behind you, man, push'n you, man. Keeping you in line. Telling you what's what..."*

Jack concludes his account of his ride to LAX, *"I was taken right where I needed to go. The driver even asked what terminal I wanted. On time, without a hitch. And the men to whom I am most grateful are the men I never met. It was their fathers who got me to the airport. It was their fathers who kept me safe."*

Here's my point, *it's a father's job to build moral and spiritual walls around his kids!* And when it comes to building walls no one was better at it than Nehemiah...

I want all dads to notice four facets of Nehemiah's wall building – they also apply to us as fathers...

His priority was imperial.

His presence was imperative.

His plan was ingenious. *(He built, battled, bugled.)*

His persistence was important.

Dad, if you care about your kids, and care about their future, you'll build walls... and you'll start right now.

First, notice Nehemiah's **priority was imperial**. *It was from a King!* Nehemiah's return to Jerusalem, and the construction of the walls was commanded by a royal decree from the Persian Emperor, Artaxerxes.

And dad, no less than the King of the universe has sanctioned a father to involve himself in the lives of his kids, and grandkids - to build moral and spiritual walls.

A dad has divine authorization to teach his kids biblical truth - *to set limits, draw boundaries, erect standards*. Parenting your child is a God-given order!

There are actually very few pursuits in my life that I can say are sanctioned by God. I don't have a divine mandate to work in my front yard - or play golf - or piddle around on my computer - or tinker on a car...

I've never heard, "***Thus saith the Lord, Sandy watch sports on television.***" But I know I've been called by God to build spiritual and moral walls around my kids.

Second, Nehemiah's **presence was imperative**. It's hard to build walls in Jerusalem while you're hanging out on the other side of the world in Shushan. Nehemiah had to be on-site to construct walls.

Being a good dad involves many elements - but the first step, the indispensable step, is to simply be there. A dad's *presence* in the life of his kids *is imperative*.

Some dads act like kids come with a pause button. They can push pause on their child's development while they go off to do their own thing - or decide to grow up. They're under the illusion that the opportunities will still be there when they get ready.

Dad, if that's you - you're in for a rude awakening! By the time you're ready, your kid may no longer care.

Author Wade Horn writes this about his dad, "***My father was a great dad. I didn't always think so, of course. When I was growing up, I thought of him as an overbearing, autocratic, stick-in-the-mud whose main mission in life was to make mine miserable. But I have since come to realize he had one great quality. He was there. Someone once said 90% of life was just showing up. My dad showed up...***"

Some time ago I ran across the *Top 10 Dishes Served When Mom is Away and Dad is 'Cooking'...*

- 10) ***Hot dogs with a hint of Tabasco...***
- 9) ***'Kids Eat Free' night at the steak house...***
- 8) ***Pizza...***
- 7) ***Broiled bologna benedict on rye...***

- 6) Back-of-the-fridge goulash (with lots of pepper)...
 - 5) Chips and salsa...
 - 4) Cocoa Puffs...
 - 3) Something old, something blue, something frozen, call it stew...
 - 2) Cold Pizza...
 - 1) Whatever is cooking at Grandma's...
- But at least dad is there and he's trying...

Understand, what the statistics say are likely to happen if dad is not there... in the house with his kids...

63% of youth suicides are committed by kids from fatherless homes... 90% of runaways... 80% of rapists... 71% of High School drop-outs... 75% of kids on drugs or alcohol... and 85% of all youths in prison...

All come from homes without a father!

There's a Chinese proverb that says, "A broken nest seldom produces whole eggs." The involvement of a dad increases a child's chances of success. Dad, if you want to build walls you have got to be there!

Nehemiah's *priority was imperial*, and his *presence was imperative*... and third, his **plan was ingenious**. It involved three tactics - he **built, battled, and bugled**.

First, Nehemiah went to work **building** the walls. He rolled up his shirtsleeves and got after it. He worked...

Verse 6 says, **Nehemiah 4:6 "the people had a mind to work"** - and that needs to be a father's mentality. You've got to work at being a good dad, and an example to your kids.

When it comes to building walls here's where it's not going to come to you, dad. You've got to make it happen. You read the Bible to your kids, and pray with them, and talk about life, and solve problems together.

Always be on the look-out for a teachable moment - *when you can draw on a real-life situation to teach a spiritual truth*... The kid on the team who throws a temper tantrum or acts cocky, is an opportunity to talk to your child about why a good attitude is important.

Rejection from a friend your child once trusted - becomes the springboard for a lesson on why our security needs to be in God, and not in other people.

Nervousness before a test is fertile ground to teach the power of prayer and a reliance on the Holy Spirit... as well as, the importance of studying once in a while.

These are all opportunities to teach... For a wise dad who looks out for his kids, school is always open - class is always in session. All of life becomes a lesson.

Too many kids today feel as if their life has no value. They lack a desire and drive to excel. A dad builds walls by affirming his child's efforts. *Kids at every age live for their father's approval.* All the world may be a fan, but every kid needs to know dad is in his corner.

It reminds me of basketball great, Michael Jordan. While his dad, James, was alive, Michael, wanted him in the stands whenever he played basketball. Once a reporter asked Michael why his dad's presence at his games was so important. Michael Jordan replied, "[When dad is there, I know I have at least one fan.](#)"

That's amazing, *25,000 cheering fans can't provide as much motivation as a single dad.* Your child might have many fans, but there's no substitute for a dad.

Who can forget the story of Derek Redmond, a British track star who ran the 400 meters in the 92 Olympics. Derek cruised to an early lead. It looked like he would coast to victory, until he pulled up in pain. He'd torn an Achilles tendon - collapsed in the last 50 yards. *But that's when a marvelous thing happened...*

Derek's dad jumped out of the stands, and ran onto the track. He grabbed his son by the arm, and helped Derek cross the finish line. Obviously, Derek Redmond didn't win, but he finished the race, accomplishing a lifelong goal... *and it was thanks to his dad!*

Dads encourage kids to finish, and not give up. They pull for their kids - they tell them they can do it, and let them know it's okay when they don't. Dads build character in their kids, and offer them encouragement.

But *building* isn't the only task necessary to erect moral and spiritual walls, it also requires **battling**. Walls include standards of behavior, the demand for honesty, curfews, dating guidelines, academic expectations – *and the reasons behind those rules.*

The world is full of choices, and your kids need to be allowed to make some choices. But they also need parameters - limits to the choices they can make.

Without limits life is deadly. [Establishing appropriate limits, while cultivating the tools to make good choices is the demanding and never-ending job of a dad.](#)

Nehemiah knew a city without walls was susceptible to a long parade of danger. His enemies tried to thwart his efforts. To erect walls he had to *battle*, and *build*.

Notice all Nehemiah does in Chapter 4. In verse 9 he ^{4:9} "**set a watch**". In verse 13 he armed his workers. In verse 17 they held a sword in one hand and a shovel in the

other hand. And that's what it takes to grow healthy kids... both some *building* and some *battling*.

Notice verse 14, how Nehemiah instructs the people of Jerusalem. He sounds like a football coach firing up his team, ^{4:14} "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." In the world we live in dads also have to fight for their sons and daughters! We have to do battle.

Notice especially, where Nehemiah stationed the guards... Verse 13, ^{4:13} "behind the lower parts of the wall, at the openings." This is strategic. Nehemiah's chief concerns were *the foundations*, and *the openings*.

And these are also the areas where a father needs to focus - on the child's foundation, or his belief system - and on the openings, or his exposures to the world. Be attentive to what a kid *believes* and *receives*.

And this is an area where a dad not only has to battle the evil out there, but he battles his own kids.

For kids want to watch the hip movies, listen to the cool music, tune in the popular TV shows, have unlimited access to the internet - even when they're accessing moral filth and spiritual garbage. Curiosity, and peer pressure combine to produce a blindness. At times our children just don't see why we say "no."

It reminds me of the kids who wanted to go to a movie of which their father did not approve. The kids explained, "It only has four curse words, one sex scene, and some mild violence – but the special effects are incredible, and the good guy wins in the end."

Dad still put his foot down.

Later that night the dad went into the kitchen and made brownies. The kids were licking their chops... but just before they bit in, dad told them, "I put just a little bit of dog poop in with the brownie mix. It's not a lot. It shouldn't spoil the taste. They're still good brownies."

Of course, no one ate the brownies. Dad was trying to get the kids to see the obvious. If a little bit of poop in a brownie makes it inedible, why doesn't a little bit filth in a movie make it inappropriate to watch?

Dad, it's up to you to just say "No" - to build walls for yourself first - and then for your kids. What you make off-limits to your kids, be sure is also off-limits to you.

Kids sniff out hypocrisy a mile away.

Your child may grow older and buck your standards, but when they do, they'll never know how far they've fallen, if you haven't set the bar and raise the standard.

And at times, *will setting these standards put you at odds with your kids?* You bet it will. One author defines a dad as **"the provider of all, and the enemy of all."** That's how a dad can feel at times. He loves his kids, yet he'll be hated for insisting on what's best for them.

A dad has to remind himself... I am not running for re-election. A father's goal isn't to be the most popular dad on the block, it's to grow healthy and godly kids.

Bill Maher hosted the TV show, *"Politically Incorrect."* Trust me, I agree with very few of Bill's political opinions, but he did make one comment about being a father that really resonated with me... Once, Bill Maher was asked, **"Were you and your dad good friends?"**

He replied, **"Friends? We're friends now, but while growing up I didn't need him to be my friend, but my dad. This idea of dads getting mushy, and being friends is overblown. Dads are supposed to be the guy who tells you right from wrong."** Bill hit the nail on the head.

Dad, I know you want to be your child's friend one day, but while he or she is under your roof, your role is more important than *"friend."* You are their *"father."*

My kids had a lot of *"so-called friends"* who would tickle their ears and butter them up, but they only had one dad who would put his foot down and tell them the truth. At times **a dad's place is in his kid's face.**

I've heard it put, **"Kids are like stomachs – they don't need everything we can afford to give them."** Children don't need to be over-indulged. *They need to learn self-discipline, how to defer a desire, and turn from temptation, and put principle above convenience.*

One thing is for certain, a child won't develop the strength of character that says **"no to sin"** - if his dad and mom have lacked the courage to say **"no to him."**

A dad can't be afraid of the fight. At times we battle *for our kids.* At other times we battle *with our kids.* But if I've learned anything about being a dad it's this... **a father has to win the battles.** It's been said, **"Kids will forgive your weakness, but cowardice will send them elsewhere for strength."** A dad needs to win the battles.

It reminds me of a night when my sons and I were walking across the football field to the car. My middle son had just finished practice, when out of the blue, my oldest son -

15 at the time and full of testosterone - says to me, "Dad, take off your glasses and wrestle. I think I can take you." "Oh, you think you can take me?"

I took off my glasses, and handed them to his two stunned brothers. *The older sibling had challenged the status quo. Life as they knew it had been threatened.* It took me five seconds to have my son in a full nelson, rubbing his nose in the grass. I'd put down the challenge. Restored order! *The world was right again.*

Hey, a family is in big trouble when the patients take over the asylum. Your kids are going to wrestle with you dad - *both literally and figuratively.* But a godly father will learn how to pin his children in love.

It's amazing how our appreciation for dad changes...

At 7 years old: My Dad knows a lot, a whole lot.

At 10: My Father doesn't quite know everything.

At 17: Dad is so old-fashioned. I know more than him

At 22 years old: Dad knows a little bit, but not much.

At 30: A little patience. Let's find out what Dad thinks.

At 50: I wish I could talk this over with my Dad. He knew everything. Fathers, be encouraged. As Nehemiah said, ^{4:14} "fight for your sons and daughters."

Nehemiah's plan to erect the walls was ingenious - it included *building, and battling, and bugling.* He says to the workers in verse 19, ^{4:19} "The work is great and extensive, and we are separated far from one another on the wall. ^{4:20} Wherever you hear the sound of the trumpet, rally to us there. Our God will fight for us." In other words, we're so spread out you could get attacked, and no one would know until it's too late.

And this is the problem for modern families. We get so spread out - brother has a ballgame, sister has a dance recital, mom has a meeting, dad has to go out of town - it doesn't take long for family members to grow distant, and become unaware of each other's hurts.

Dad, erecting walls of *prosperity, and power, and protection, and perspective* for your kids, necessitates you finding ways to keep open lines of communication.

After each broadcast of ABC's World News Tonight, the late Peter Jennings used to pick up the telephone... *And the reason might surprise you...* In an interview Jennings explained, "Sometimes I call the producers to see if they liked the show, but just as often I call my children, and tell them that I'm on my way home for dinner." Peter Jennings brought news to the world, but his more important job was trying to find ways to communicate with his kids. Dad, if you value communication you'll be the one to initiate the effort.

I read an article about **door openers and door slammers**. You open doors of communication with expressions like, *“What do you think?” “That’s a good question.” “I’m here when you want to talk.”* But you slam the door with comments like, *“It’s none of your business.” “I’m busy right now.” “Because I said so.”*

I think the biggest hindrance to communication is pride... *Why should I have to take the first step?* It’s after you embrace some humility and empathy for the other person – *what to say* gets a lot easier.

Long time president of the University of Michigan, Dr. James Angell, explained the secret of his success with young people. He wrote, **“Grow antennae, not horns.”** This is the key to being a good dad. Stay sensitive. Often a behavior you’d like to gore is a cry for help.

Here’s some great advice, **“Talk to your kids in a way that will make them want to listen, and listen to your kids in a way that will make them want to talk.”**

Well, Nehemiah had a job to do. *His priority was imperial, his presence was imperative, his plan was ingenious,* and **his persistence was important.**

Throughout this book one of the traits we admire most about Nehemiah is his resistance to distraction. Nehemiah has an uncanny ability to stay focused.

His enemies taunt him, *but he works...* They invite him to pointless meetings, *but he works...* They accuse him falsely, *but he works.* He knows there’s nothing more vital for him to do than to work on the wall. Nehemiah’s focus is like a laser beam.

Dads can get distracted and discouraged. Being a father is a thankless job. If a dad is looking for kudos and pats-on-the-back, he’ll gravitate more toward work, or friends, or hobbies - than his children and family.

Dad, when was the last time one of your children thanked you for *paying the mortgage on time, or buying groceries, or providing them health insurance?*

I’m sure your little girl will give you a hug and kiss for making her return her new swimsuit because it’s too skimpy - or your son is going to brag to his friends about you, for taking his car keys away after his ticket.

Dad, you’re fighting for your kids - you’re trying to erect strong walls - but instead of *building walls*, at times you feel like you’re *beating your head against the wall*. Your kids are fighting against you. *Why keep at it? Why stay focused?* Logic says if a kid is determined to walk off a cliff, just let him! **But a dad can’t do that!**

A father has a God-given burden that supersedes logic. He sees the need for moral and spiritual walls around his kids, and he can't live with himself if he shirks his responsibility to build them. *It's more than a father's job... God burns it into his heart.*

Men, your kids need a dad - or perhaps a granddad with a laser focus - a man in his or her life who is just as sure of his calling as was Nehemiah...

His priority was imperial, and so is yours – every dad is commissioned by the King of kings...

His presence was imperative – nobody can take the place of a kid's dad... a kid spells love, "t-i-m-e."

His plan was ingenious – Nehemiah *built, battled, and bugled*. And his plan still works for fathers' today...

His persistence was important, as it is for all dads.

Being a father isn't easy, but it's desperately needed.

A father bears a burden... Dad, I hope you'll be about the vital task of building walls around your kids!