

## **COURAGE**

What comes to mind when you think of someone who is courageous? The word **courage** is often associated with soldiers, fire fighters, and explorers of the unknown... those whom we imagine to be fearless. But courage is not the absence of fear. In fact, it is often taking action in the face of fear. As the old Hollywood cowboy John Wayne once put it: "Courage is being scared to death... and saddling up anyway." Courage is having the determination to do the right thing, even when others don't. It's a willingness to stand for what you believe, even when others won't. It's having the state of mind or spirit to align your thinking and your behavior with your beliefs and convictions, especially in the face of difficulty, pain, or danger.

It takes courage to fight the temptations and struggles in everyday life. It takes courage to stand alone. But how does one become courageous? Sometimes we think courageous people were just born that way... fearless. However, courageous people are no different than anyone else. They're just ordinary people who chose at some point to face their fears rather than run from them.

### **REFLECTION QUESTIONS**

- Who is someone you have admired because of their courage? Why?
  
- Think of a time when you found it difficult to display courage? What fear, difficulty, pain or danger were you facing? How did you handle it?

### **SCRIPTURE LESSON**

Background: In 445 BC, Nehemiah was a devout Jew serving in the highly trusted position as royal cupbearer to Persian King Artaxerxes in the Persian capital of Susa. Upon hearing about his fellow Jews' plight, Nehemiah becomes burdened in his spirit to help his countrymen rebuild and restore the city of Jerusalem and God's temple. God's moves on the heart of King Artaxerxes to appoint Nehemiah for the task of rebuilding Jerusalem, and while engaged in this difficult work, Nehemiah is challenged by a group of non-Jewish leaders (Sanballat, Tobiah, Geshem, and others) whose authority and financial well-being will be undermined by any successful restoration of Jerusalem.

## Read Nehemiah 6:1-17

Chapter 2 <sup>1</sup>In the month of Nisan in the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes, when wine was brought for him, I took the wine and gave it to the king. I had not been sad in his presence before, <sup>2</sup>so the king asked me, “Why does your face look so sad when you are not ill? This can be nothing but sadness of heart.” I was very much afraid, <sup>3</sup>but I said to the king, “May the king live forever! Why should my face not look sad when the city where my ancestors are buried lies in ruins, and its gates have been destroyed by fire?” <sup>4</sup>The king said to me, “What is it you want?” Then I prayed to the God of heaven, <sup>5</sup>and I answered the king, “If it pleases the king and if your servant has found favor in his sight, let him send me to the city in Judah where my ancestors are buried so that I can rebuild it.” <sup>8</sup>And because the gracious hand of my God was on me, the king granted my requests.

Chapter 6 <sup>1</sup>When word came to Sanballat, Tobiah, Geshem the Arab and the rest of our enemies that I had rebuilt the wall and not a gap was left in it—though up to that time I had not set the doors in the gates—<sup>2</sup>Sanballat and Geshem sent me this message: “Come, let us meet together in one of the villages on the plain of Ono.”

But they were scheming to harm me; <sup>3</sup>so I sent messengers to them with this reply: “I am carrying on a great project and cannot go down. Why should the work stop while I leave it and go down to you?” <sup>4</sup>Four times they sent me the same message, and each time I gave them the same answer.

<sup>5</sup>Then, the fifth time, Sanballat sent his aide to me with the same message, and in his hand was an unsealed letter <sup>6</sup>in which was written: “It is reported among the nations—and Geshem says it is true—that you and the Jews are plotting to revolt, and therefore you are building the wall. Moreover, according to these reports you are about to become their king <sup>7</sup>and have even appointed prophets to make this proclamation about you in Jerusalem: ‘There is a king in Judah!’ Now this report will get back to the king; so come, let us meet together.”

<sup>8</sup>I sent him this reply: “Nothing like what you are saying is happening; you are just making it up out of your head.” <sup>9</sup>They were all trying to frighten us, thinking, “Their hands will get too weak for the work, and it will not be completed.” But I prayed, “Now strengthen my hands.”

<sup>10</sup>One day I went to the house of Shemaiah son of Delaiah, the son of Mehetabel, who was shut in at his home. He said, “Let us meet in the house of God, inside the temple, and let us close the temple doors, because men are coming to kill you—by night they are coming to kill you.” <sup>11</sup>But I said, “Should a man like me run away? Or should someone like me go into the temple to save his life? I will not go!” <sup>12</sup>I realized that God had not sent him, but that he had prophesied against me because Tobiah and Sanballat had hired him. <sup>13</sup>He had been hired to intimidate me so that I would commit a sin by doing this, and then they would give me a bad name to discredit me.

<sup>14</sup>Remember Tobiah and Sanballat, my God, because of what they have done; remember also the prophet Noadiah and how she and the rest of the prophets have been trying to intimidate me. <sup>15</sup>So the wall was completed on the twenty-fifth of Elul, in fifty-two days. <sup>16</sup>When all our enemies heard about this, all the surrounding nations were afraid and lost their self-confidence, because they realized that this work had been done with the help of our God.

1. Courage is required to stand for what is important. How do we know that the task of rebuilding the Temple and Jerusalem was very important to Nehemiah?
2. Was Nehemiah taking a risk in allowing his sad countenance to be seen by the King? Why?
3. What important thing did Nehemiah do in Chapter 2, Verse 4 to help him have courage before answering King Artaxerxes?
4. What tactics did Nehemiah's enemies use when attempting to get him to stop rebuilding the walls? What happens when we allow ourselves to be intimidated?
5. How much of his energy did Nehemiah spend on the threats from his opposition and how much did he pour into the task of rebuilding? Why is this kind of focus so important to sustaining courage in the face of adversity?
6. What activity provided Nehemiah with a key source of strength, helping him to persist in the face of difficulty and adversity (Chapter 6, Verse 9)?

7. What was the greatest fear Nehemiah faced, and how much was he willing to sacrifice in pursuing what he believed to be the right course of action (Chapter 2, Verse 8 and Chapter 6, Verse 10)?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
8. To whom does Nehemiah attribute the successfully rebuilt wall that resulted from his courageous stand (Chapter 6, Verse 16)? How critical was Nehemiah's reliance and dependence upon God to the level of courage he mustered?

### ***APPLICATION***

- Think about a challenge or opportunity you currently face (or may face in the near future) that will require courage on your part in order to be strong and stand for what is right and just. What decisions are important for you to make now in order to prepare yourself?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- Consider the consequences you may experience as a result of doing what is right and just. Are you willing to pay the price?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- Pray that God would help you to have the courage needed to stand for what is right and just.