

HAND ME ANOTHER BRICK

Timeless Lessons on Leadership

STUDY NINE

Operation Intimidation

Nehemiah 6

I'm convinced that the number one enemy of unity is the tongue—not drink, not drugs, not poverty, not even a weak pulpit. It's the tongue. Using words well requires wisdom.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

THE conventional “wisdom” of the world often tries to downplay the damage words can cause. Using expressions like, “Sticks and stone may break my bones, but words will never hurt me,” seem to offer a sense of security. *Remember that talk is cheap, and you'll be okay!*

Sadly, this is an illusion. Words are not purely innocent. Scripture paints the true picture about the danger of the tongue: “And among all the parts of the body, the tongue is a flame of fire. It is a whole world of wickedness, corrupting your entire body. It can set your whole life on fire, for it is set on fire by hell itself” ([James 3:6](#)). *Strong words!*

Yes, mere words can set someone's life ablaze in a tempest so fierce that it consumes everything . . . absolutely everything . . . and Satan uses this fact to his advantage.

After all, with the simple question, “Did God really say . . . ?” the sly serpent sparked the fire of sin—a fire that still burns in the hearts of humanity this very day ([Genesis 3:1](#)). Like their forefather Satan, enemies of God will do *anything* to stop His work in the world. This certainly includes the crafty misuse of words through gossip, deception, manipulation, and intimidation.



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Committed to Excellence in Communicating Biblical Truth and Its Application

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PREPARE YOUR HEART

Nehemiah's firm faith equipped him to extinguish his foes' lies with the truth of God. He could only do this because of his close relationship with God. Say this prayer to grow closer to Him today:

Father, I recognize that Your enemies want to stop me from serving You with my whole heart. Through my study of Your Word, give me the discernment and the determination to hold fast to Your truth, even amid the most searing attacks. In Jesus' name, amen.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

Nehemiah prayed, planned, and worked for several months to rebuild Jerusalem's walls. And in [Nehemiah 6](#), his goal was finally in sight! Nehemiah's team had completed building and fortifying the walls. One last step remained: to "set up the doors in the gates" ([Nehemiah 6:1](#)).

All throughout Nehemiah's journey, Jerusalem's local gentile rivals attempted to set up roadblocks every step of the way. Now that Nehemiah could clearly see the final destination, these gentiles ramped up their opposition. In [Nehemiah 6](#), we read about a series of attacks and Nehemiah's faithful and wise response to each plot.



Observation: The Power of Speech

Up to this point in the narrative, Nehemiah's conflict with his gentile adversaries has felt like an intense sword fight. The gentiles attempted to swing at Nehemiah, and he dodged it. They'd strike again, and he'd block. Swipe and deflect. As the wall neared completion, the critics leveled a volley of strikes in one final push to defeat Nehemiah.



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As you read *Nehemiah 6:2–19*, fill in the chart below. In the lefthand column, describe each plot Nehemiah’s critics used in an attempt to stop him from completing the wall. Then, in the righthand column, record how Nehemiah responded to these attacks with faith and wisdom.

Verses	Critics’ Attack	Nehemiah’s Response
<i>Nehemiah</i> 6:2–4		
<i>Nehemiah</i> 6:5–9		
<i>Nehemiah</i> 6:10–14		
<i>Nehemiah</i> 6:16–19		

Despite the effort of his opponents, Nehemiah emerged victorious: “So on October 2 the wall was finished—just fifty-two days after we had begun. When our enemies and the surrounding nations heard about it, they were frightened and humiliated” (*Nehemiah 6:15–16a*).



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Interpretation: Violent Words

Nehemiah's enemies used verbal weapons like gossip, deception, manipulation, and intimidation. In what ways did these rivals distort the truth? How did Nehemiah confront the lies with the truth?

The schemes of Nehemiah's enemies carried *real risk*. Nehemiah could have lost his position, his own life, or the lives of the people under his charge. How was Nehemiah able to discern these threats? What did his actions reveal about his walk with God?

Using the following template, write two or three timeless truths based on this passage: *A godly leader can withstand verbal attacks by . . . because . . .*



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It is the most thrilling experience in the world to watch God come to your rescue when you've been helpless. Ever experience that? —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

 **Correlation: Protection from Temptation**

Satan has been using the same playbook since the beginning of time. The tactic he used against Adam and Eve was the same he used against Nehemiah . . . and the same he used against Jesus, the very Son of God. Read an account of this scene in [Matthew 4:1–11](#), and fill in the chart below as you read.

Verses	Satan's Attack	Jesus' Response
<i>Matthew</i> 4:3–4		
<i>Matthew</i> 4:5–7		
<i>Matthew</i> 4:8–10		



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In what way did Satan distort the truth to Jesus? How did Jesus match the deception with the truth of Scripture?

Even though Satan failed to sway Jesus, he doesn't stop in his endeavor to lead Jesus' followers into sin today. The apostle Paul wrote about this battle in [Ephesians 6:11](#) when he said, "Put on all of God's armor so that you will be able to stand firm against all strategies of the devil." According to [6:16](#), what attribute is essential to block Satan's fiery arrows? How does this specific attribute allow a believer to extinguish searing verbal attacks?

It is impossible to do the will of God and walk by faith without attack. How do you withstand the attack? The answer is discernment, a sensitive spirit to God, and a teachable, willing heart. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



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Application: Listening with Wisdom

Any servant of God will, like Nehemiah, eventually face the hot fires sparked by the tongue. Pastor Chuck Swindoll offers three steps for extinguishing the flames before they spread too far and cause too much damage:

1. *Calmly deny the charge.* A loving rebuke is always the best response.
2. *Put the blame where it rightly belongs.* Stop the rumor mill with facts.
3. *Take your pain to God.* Find comfort in Him who knows the truth.

Have you ever been the victim of deception, manipulation, gossip, or intimidation? How did God carry you through this season and ultimately carry out His plan? How did you witness the truth overcome the lies?

Even after a verbal conflict is resolved, you may continue to feel the burn of the words. How can the God of truth treat these wounds and cool the sting? What are some practical steps you can take to bring your pain to God and allow Him to begin the process of healing you?



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Passages like [Nehemiah 6](#) offer an excellent opportunity for self-examination. How have you been using your words lately? Have they been more honest or dishonest? Have they been helping or hindering the work of Christ in the world? In what ways can you use your words in an ever-increasingly God-honoring way?

Most of the time, your body will heal from physical wounds, but words might cause emotional damage that stays with you for the rest of your life. Do you carry those scars with you today? Bring them to God, our Great Physician. Allow Him to apply the cooling salve of truth to your soul, and experience the relief that only He can offer.



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, forgive me for the times I have burned others with my words. I know that others will inevitably do the same to me. When they do, prepare me to match any lies with Your truth so Your good work in this world won't be hindered. Give me the wisdom and faith to do this well. I ask these things in the name of Jesus. Amen.

