



DEVOTION 1

**If it doesn't challenge you,
it doesn't change you!**

During the month of Chislev in the twentieth year, when I was in the fortress city of Susa, Hanani, one of my brothers, arrived with men from Judah, and I questioned them about Jerusalem and the Jewish remnant that had survived the exile. They said to me, "The remnant in the province, who survived the exile, are in great trouble and disgrace. Jerusalem's wall has been broken down, and its gates have been burned down." (Nehemiah 1:1–3)

Jerusalem was destroyed. For over 140 years, the wall around the city lay in ruins. The small remnant of people had no way of protecting themselves from invaders and no way of establishing any form of stable lifestyle. A group of Jews from Persia made the 750-mile journey back to their homeland. What they saw challenged them deeply. When they returned to Persia, Hanani shared the news of what he had seen with his brother, Nehemiah. He told Nehemiah that the people were in great trouble and were living in disgrace because the walls had been destroyed. The book of Nehemiah begins approximately fifteen years after the book of Ezra. The people who had returned to Jerusalem had tried to rebuild the walls but failed. The rubble of debris that once was a strong wall around a thriving city was deeply connected to the struggling people with no way to protect themselves.

Walls matter. Walls mean stability, security, and success. Walls do more than keep the enemy out; walls allow the people inside to keep moving toward victory. Walls have traditionally been built around ancient cities for defense, privacy, and protection from the influence or perceived danger posed by outsiders. People living in unwalled cities lived in continual fear and stress due to the constant threat from a more powerful enemy. They lived with a survivor mentality and hoped for the best. In the days of Nehemiah, broken-down walls meant broken lives and broken dreams.

Challenges and obstacles are like walls. They are a way of life. It's not when, if, or how they show up; it's how we choose to respond to them. If it doesn't challenge you, it doesn't change you. Nehemiah was challenged by what he heard. His homeland was in trouble, and something had to be done. Every great accomplishment begins with a need that presents a challenge to someone who sees it not as an obstacle but as an opportunity. I love the verse in 2 Timothy 1:7 (NKJV) where Paul admonishes Timothy: "For God has not given us a spirit of fearfulness, but one of power, love, and sound judgment." The game of life presents many moments where we have to decide to give in to the spirit of fear or rise up with the Spirit of God. We give in far too much and way too easily. If we want to do more than survive, we have to persevere with faith, courage, and determination. It's never easy, and it was never meant to be. Romans 8:31 reads, "If God is for us, who can be against us?" It's a great question that also contains a powerful answer: If God calls you to it, He will bring you through it. Today the challenges are many, but God is the same. He always has been and always will be the same yesterday, today, and forever. We have to learn how to trust Him. Remember these four things if you want to experience greater trust in your life:

- Worship
- Read
- Pray
- Focus

You won't rise to the occasion unless you are faithful to the process. What moves you? What is challenging you? What obstacle are you trying to overcome? Don't ever underestimate the ripple effect of one act of obedience. When the God of heaven is involved, no problem is unsolvable, no obstacle is immovable, and no challenge is overwhelming. Stop telling God about your problems, and start telling your problems about your God.

Jeff Williams

Prayer

Heavenly Father, You are the Creator of all things. You created me to live on this planet for You. You have given me the ability to live with Your power, love, and a sound mind. The enemy is very real and very active. He wants me to take my eyes off you and let my problems appear insurmountable. He wants me to turn away from Your Spirit and let the spirit of fear take over. He wants me to live as a survivor instead of a conqueror. That is not who You made me or saved me to be. Help me today to live according to who You say I am and stay focused on You. Amen.

Coach/Chaplain Pregame

Every new season brings new challenges. The goals generally stay the same: Build and develop young people through the weight room, classroom, film room, and practice field all while winning as many games as possible. It's more than just putting more trophies in cases, rings on fingers, and patches on jackets. It's about building men and women to succeed in the game of life. For a team to be successful, it always takes a coach finding at least one player to buy in to the process, to the goal, and to the vision of winning it all. One who will nurture the health and vitality of the team and who will be mean about the mission.

The statement "If it doesn't challenge you, it doesn't change you" is built around the entire story of Nehemiah and the exiled people living in Jerusalem. It's the amazing story of what one person with passion and perseverance can accomplish with the help of God. The sport season you are about to enter requires those two essential components: passion and perseverance. Without them, it's almost impossible to sustain any kind of long-term success, but with them, your team is nearly unstoppable. A new season means a new team but the same dream. Last year's team is no more. Their accomplishments, no matter good or bad, are a thing of the past. Today is a new day. And with a new day comes new obstacles. It's a challenge. It's a call to accept responsibility. It's an opportunity to accomplish something great. A fight is coming! You have to decide if you are going to watch it or get in it! It's your decision! It's your moment! It's your challenge! Remember, if it doesn't challenge you, it doesn't change you!

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