

# **ON THE VANGUARD**

**SOLID – TENACIOUS – AND NEVER DEFEATED**

## **STUDY GUIDE**

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Scripture quotations identified are from the New International Version of the Bible unless otherwise stated.

Cover design by author.

## NOTE FROM THE AUTHOR

In 1996, while attending college, I served in my second year as a dorm chaplain. I was given the opportunity to choose which dorm wing I wanted to serve on. (The school did not have fraternities and sororities but rather wings). I had been seeking God in relation to this question and felt Him telling me to take a walk on each of the wings, and that in doing so He would make it clear as to where I was to request.

I began from the top down, walking the three wings on the fourth floor yet feeling no peace about any. I then moved down to the third floor where I again walked the halls. Still there was no release. I was getting nervous now as there were only three wings left. To the left was where I had lived both my freshman and sophomore years. Honestly this was where I wanted to be. But as I walked up and down this hall, a little slower still so that God would have enough time to answer, I still felt no peace. I walk then down the hall in the middle, growing more anxious because I knew it was either this one or the one to the right. Neither one I had heard good things about. Still no peace was found in the middle.

My choices were dwindling and now only one option remained. Still to make it fair, I walked the hall and allowed God a chance to speak and bring His peace. And He did. The moment I stepped foot on this wing, peace flooded me, as well as I heard His voice very soft, yet clear. "This is your home." Tears came to my eyes as I fought still the fact of not wanting to serve here, but also the fact that God assured me this was home. So I accepted my call to serve on this wing, named Vanguard.

As the days passed and I began to not only embrace my new home but look into the meaning and status behind this wing, I knew God had directed me right. I found out that *Vanguard* was a military term for the troops moving at the head of an army, the forefront of an

action or movement. I also began to learn that of the forty young men that would be living on this wing, thirty-some would be freshmen. The pieces began to come clearer as I realized God was allowing me to serve as chaplain to a new army of men He was rising up. And let me just say, I say men rise up that year. These men began to take their place as spiritual warriors in worship, prayer, and community service. These men daily encouraged others, and challenged me, to live constantly on the vanguard.

From the time I graduated college until 2009, I had felt the drive to write a book, but my attempts never panned out. Taking an honest inventory as to why, it isn't hard to figure out. I simply wasn't ready. Yes, I had graduated from a Christian university, but I still had things in life that needed to be corrected. There was still a great deal of training that I needed. I needed to make changes in my life, needed to allow God His rightful place in areas, and needed to grow up. I found an outlet, though, in keeping a blog in which I shared the exact lessons God was teaching me to any who wanted to read them. And in keeping with desire to be trained by God, I titled my blog *On The Vanguard*.

New Years Eve, 2009, as I watched on television the ball dropping, I began to weep. It felt as if God was wiping away the hurt and pain that had been harbored in me from that year, and blowing forgiveness over me. And suddenly I knew, I felt it, it was time to start writing the book. The grace I was looking for in my past attempts came with little effort. There was an ease in writing as words dripped on to the pages that followed. But mostly, there was a renewed sense that now was the time for me to once again encourage the masses to stand their ground on the vanguard.

So it is for this very reason that I have written both the book and the study guide, so as to encourage you as you take your place on the vanguard. The men and women in the pages to follow did just that, and now they are cheering us on. It is time that we heed the words of Hebrews 12:1, stripping off the entanglements and run the race marked out for us. It is time that we stand our ground. Now is the time to grab your gear and join me ON THE VANGUARD!

## **SECTION ONE: SOLID**

**YOU WILL NOT HAVE TO FIGHT THIS BATTLE. TAKE UP YOUR POSITIONS; STAND FIRM AND SEE THE DELIVERANCE THE LORD WILL GIVE YOU...**

**II CHRONICLES 20:17A**

## **CHAPTER ONE: IT'S TIME TO TAKE A STAND**

June 6, 1944, D-Day. It began with a stance, and for some it would be their last. Still they stood. For many soldiers of the U.S. 29<sup>th</sup> and 1<sup>st</sup> infantry divisions who made the attack on Omaha Beach, an onslaught of German firepower met them as they worked to make their way on land. They sought shelter behind Hedgehogs and any other obstacles where protection could be found from the spray of gunfire that exploded around them. In small groups, the men made the deadly race across the beach to find little relief along the seawall.

In a number of hours, German fire had decreased and defensive positions were taken from the rear as Navy Destroyers attacked with pounding arms against the German fortifications at close range. By nightfall, the remaining soldiers of the 29<sup>th</sup> and 1<sup>st</sup> divisions, now joined with the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> Ranger Battalions, stood their ground around Vierville, Saint-Laurent, and Colleville. Four years of preparation for only hours of combat, and yet, the invasion of Normandy on June 6, 1944, is said to be the beginning of the end of World War II.

There had to be a stance made against the imposing enemy, and these soldiers were willing to make one. The Allies were determined to stop the advances of the Germans who had already invaded Poland, France, Belgium, and the Soviet Union, among others. General Eisenhower saw the moment to make one of many stands that America would remember by deploying these troops on French soil. As the men bravely fought, they took back the land that had been stolen. These men made their stand.

Although you and I may not be in the military at this time, we too have a General who is giving us orders to make our stand. While one could ask if we are following those orders, perhaps the question at hand is if the orders are even known to us, the soldier.

Do you know your orders? Take a minute to write out these orders as found in I Corinthians 16:13.

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The objective of our enemy has also been told to us and can be found in John 10:10. Write out the enemy's objective?

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Like the men who stormed Omaha, David too was one who prepared. When the enemy came against him, he proved he was ready. David didn't go looking for a fight, but he was ready when it came. When the beasts attacked his possessions, he stood up and fought them off. He was never officially trained for war prior to Goliath, yet he brought Goliath down. David's motto was simple: Attack me or my possessions, and you're going down! This man of courage, with a heart that beat for God, knew how to stand his ground. When David fought these wild beasts he had faith in God for the skill and strength needed to find his victory.

Growing up, I can honestly say that I learned the lesson of standing a little too late. If I had heeded the example of David as he stood his ground, I may have been able to dodge the years of addiction that overcame me. Where did I go wrong? When did my life turn from simple bliss to years of addiction? It happened the moment I let the enemy run all over me. In my own pasture, unlike David, I wasn't training. I wasn't running after the thief, seizing it by the hair, striking

it, and killing it. Instead I was letting my thief come in and take more and more away from me.

Perhaps this has been at one time the same for you. When the thief came into your camp, what action did you take, or not take?

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Again, for me I made no stand. I knew I should have, but instead I allowed myself to be taken captive by the thief. Deuteronomy 30:19 finds Moses telling the people of a choice set before them. He says that life and death, blessings and curses are set before them. If they chose to walk in God's ways, they receive life and blessing. However, if they chose to go against God's ways and follow after sinful patterns, death and curses follow them. Looking back, I see clearly the choice I made in those moments. I was not honoring God and keeping His commands, but instead was opening myself to bowing down to another god. I was choosing death. It is not too late, though. We can still rise up and take our stand!

Are you willing to take your stand now? \_\_\_\_\_

As David was delivering supplies to his brothers on the battle field, Goliath roared out as he had for the past forty days.

*“Choose a man and have him come down to me. If he is able to fight and kill me, we will become your subjects; but if I overcome him and kill him, you will become our subjects and serve us.’ Then the Philistine said, ‘This day I defy the ranks of Israel! Give me a man and let us fight each other’” (I Samuel 17:8b-10).*

While the rest of Israel ran and hid when this taunt was made, David questioned who was going to lead this army and teach this giant



of a man a lesson. Who did this giant think he was speaking against God's chosen people? Too many times no one does anything. For forty days already, the army of Israel stood at attention to hear the condescending blasphemy of the giant, Goliath. For forty days he spit out his usual chant of defiance against God and His people.

The nation needed a leader, and sadly enough they did not even find one in their own king. So David stood up and spoke with the king. *"David said to Saul, "Let no one lose heart on account of this Philistine; your servant will go and fight him." (1 Samuel 17:32)*

All the training in the wilderness against the wild animals was about to pay off. David took the stand. But let me ask, what is it that is marching into your life, screaming, taunting, jeering, and harassing you? What is it that is sucking the very life out of you? What are you giving into, whether daily or just at times, that you know very well is of the enemy? And what are you prepared to do about it?

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David was ready to stand. To the men of Israel, Goliath was the problem that crippled them with fear. To David, Goliath was a roadblock between where Israel stood and where they were headed. The question begs even today for us, which of these is our view of Goliath? David knew that Israel was afraid because they were looking at their own skills in battle as opposed to looking at God's skills in battle. So then, when David stood physically before Goliath with a stick and a sling shot, he was really standing in the strength of the Lord in faith. The victory that would come would not come to David because of who David was, but because of who David was in the Lord.

When will we realize that what we do not confront will not change? The same enemy jeers at us when we get serious about making

our stand. “Are you serious? You think you can war the demons of sin with a little prayer? You think years of addiction will just obey when you call on the name of Jesus?” But do not flinch in the face of danger. For just as David was empowered with the Spirit of God, that same Spirit empowers us when we, ourselves, stand up. We must stand and confront the enemy face to face as David did if we ever want to see change. God was with David and honored his stance with a victory. Will He not do the same for you when you also take the stand He is calling you to?

David stood, feet planted in the ground and roared right back at Goliath. Summarize the words of David in I Samuel 17:45-47 as if they are your words as you are standing face to face with your Goliath.

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The battle didn’t stop there. David ran straight for the giant and met him at the battle line. He reached into his sack and grabbed one of the five stones, slipped it into the sling shot and whirled. Before the giant had a chance to know what hit him, he was hit. In the midst of both allies and enemies, God’s name was proudly pronounced as the mighty Goliath found his end.

So answer this, is the only sound in your camp the sound of knees shaking? Are you going to let the enemy continue to ride your last nerve, hoping it will just go away? Or are you going to be like David who tightened his laces and went out to stand his ground against the enemy? Yes, the giant is big. Yes, he has a sword, a spear, and a javelin. And yes, the rest of the army is in hiding. But what about you? Are you going to retreat with them, or will you meet the giant head on, clothed in the power of the Holy Spirit, ready to run at him?

The men on D-Day had no way of retreat. Once they were dropped off they couldn't just run back to the boat. They were forced to make their stand, and make it count. They knew that they were either going to succeed or die trying. So it is with us. Will we continue to sit in our easy chair and let the enemy rule us, or will we take our stand and make it count?

In a previous answer you summarized the words of David from I Samuel 17:45-47 as if they were your own. Consider now the stand you are willing to take. Thinking of both together, write out the stance you will take against the enemy going forward.

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Just as David, we all are called by God to make our stand. I remember hearing that if we don't stand for something, we will fall for anything. Do not be one who falls so easily. Take your stand at work, in your home, in your marriage, and in those times when no one else is around. Stand up and be solid in your faith and give up the idea of shrinking back. Start now and declare in your heart that you will be the one to dig your feet in, take a stand, and declare to the enemy that he cannot take one more inch from you. Now grab your sling shot and join me **ON THE VANGUARD!**

## **CHAPTER TWO: LISTEN TO THE TRUTH**

A Spanish fleet of 11 ships and roughly 500 men sailed the seas in the spring of 1519. News had reached the governor of Cuba that land had been spotted just past the oceanic horizon, and Spain desired to expand. The governor appointed Hernan Cortes to lead this mission and with a limited army, Cortes took on and destroyed the Aztec Empire of more than five million men.

Cortes explored the coastline of the Yucatan Peninsula before choosing to land at port in Tabasco where he had no trouble enlisting the natives as part of his expanding army. It was here that he learned of the great wealth of the Aztec Empire. Establishing his troops northward at Vera Cruz, his men trained for battle as he planned their attack. He was giving the men purpose, a piece of the action, and a prize if they won. He had made no declaration of this mission being a second thought, therefore his men knew the dedication related to this mission. But as the troops began to fear their outcome and desired to go home, Cortes made one simple command that would change their passion for the fight. “Burn the ships.”

Cortes left no way of retreat for his army. The only option they had for leaving the vanguard was either by death or in the boats of the Aztecs. As the men suddenly overcame their fear and hesitation, strength welled up inside them and urged them to continue the fight till finally they overcame the Empire. Cortes and his men triumphed not only in this battle, but continued to defeat several other native tribes and form alliances with previous enemies. Still, despite all the training, preparation, battle plans, and ideas, the rampage on the Aztec Empire would have been another failed attempt if he had not removed the ability for retreat.

Have you burnt the ships in your own life? \_\_\_\_\_

I question who it is that we, ourselves, listen to. Cortes' men listened to the voice of fear. At first they began to long to go home due to an outcome that ravaged their thoughts. Cortes, though, listened to a different voice. Perhaps it was greed, pride, or fame. It too may have been fear to some degree. But who is it that we are listening to? As believers of Christ we are told to fear not, because God is with us.

Write out Isaiah 41:10 and remind yourself who it is that upholds you.

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As believers of Christ we are urged to listen to, obey, and act on the voice of God. The problem is that we are more prone to retreat instead of pursue. The nation of Israel desired to do that exact same thing. Beginning in Numbers 13, we read of Moses sending out a man from each of the twelve tribes to spy on the Promised Land, as commanded by God. Of the twelve chosen were Joshua and Caleb. The spies as a whole were asked to bring back a report on the people, the land, the towns, and even the dirt. Once they had gathered the requested information, they were to come back and share their findings with Moses.

After being gone for forty days, they returned from their exploration with the news Moses had requested. Keep in mind that each of the spies went to the same places, saw the same people, tested the same soil, and yet they came back with both agreement and dispute when reporting to Moses.

Name the agreement of the spies.

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Name the disagreement of the spies.

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There was agreement on the fact that the land was abundant as they showed the people of Israel the cluster of grapes that took two of the spies to carry. But they were split as they described the people currently living in their land. The majority of ten all agreed that the people there were powerful and protected behind fortified cities. They shared that they had watched from their posts the men of Anak, the Amalekites, the Amorites, the Hittites, the Jebusites, and the Canaanites. But two, Joshua and Caleb boldly disagreed. Caleb spoke up in the camp and announced, “We can take them.”

Before we move forward, let us look briefly at who currently resided in the land God had promised to Israel:

- The men of Anak, who proved to be the ancestors of Goliath, were giants. It may be of these men that the spies rightly said, “We seemed like grasshoppers in our own eyes” (Num 13:33).
- The Amalekites were dwellers of the valley, people of prey whose joy was found in trickery, tyranny, and ruthlessness.
- The Canaanites, who later joined forces with the Amalekites to form a stronger army, were the ancestors of the grandson of Esau (1 Chr. 1:36), and were later ordered to be destroyed for their wickedness.
- The Amorites were a people of bitterness and pride.
- The Hittites moved the masses with fear, terror, and broken promises.
- The Jebusites left their enemies down trodden.

Altogether, the tribes that the spies had watched for forty days now was nothing more than a wrecking crew of giants and barbarians. Still, Caleb stood up and announced that God was mighty enough to bring their victory as He had already promised. Did you catch that? Their victory was already promised.

Has God made a promise to you that you, like the ten spies, have lost hope in once you saw the size of the giants and the number of barbarians? Take a moment to write out this promise.

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For those in Israel's camp, word spread of what the spies saw and both negative report and panic leaked in the hearts of many. Seeds of fear were planted by the ten spies and that night the sound of weeping was heard within their community. The people chose to listen to the wrong report and forsake the promise of God. But are we any different than they? How many times have we read or heard the promises of God and then doubted that they would happen?

The promise that God spoke to you, where is it now?

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Have you moved out on this promise, or have you allowed fear to be planted in your heart?

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Here are a few words to remember. When God gives you a promise, you can be sure there will be a problem between the promise and the provision. The enemy cannot stand for God's promises to come to pass.

Israel is an example of this as not only did they continued to cry out in fear to God, but they also grumble against Moses and Aaron. It even came to the point of debating whether to return to Egypt under a newly appointed leader. But Moses and Aaron fell face down in front of everyone, wondering what they were to do. Their promise had been given and God was making the provision, but all Israel saw was the problem.

So again Caleb stood up, this time with Joshua by his side. They tore their robes and agreed in the presence of all of Israel that yes, the land was good. Yes, God had at one time told Israel that the Promised Land would be theirs. And yes, the Lord would give them the victory. With boldness the two encouraged the camp, “*Only do not rebel against the LORD. And do not be afraid of the people of the land because we will swallow them up. Their protection is gone, but the Lord is with us. Do not be afraid of them.*” (Numbers 14:9)

Caleb and Joshua didn't contemplate if's and maybes when they reminded the people of God's promise. They didn't say *if* God swallows them up. Rather they boldly announced God *will* swallow them up. These two remembered what God had told Abraham years before (Gen 15:18-21), that they would indeed inherit this land again.

Who will you listen to going forward? \_\_\_\_\_

As a result of Israel's unbelief, God determined what would happen next. First, for every day that the spies were gone, Israel would wander in the desert for a year. Forty days quickly became forty years. Furthermore, Moses had to deliver the news that not one of the Israelites currently living would see the Promised Land, except for Joshua and Caleb. Talk about hard punishment. God was serious about His promise and had every intention of keeping His word.

Just like the people of Israel, we can easily allow ourselves to listen to the spies of life. When God has spoken a future and a calling, the enemy has spoken fear, doubt, and discouragement. We must be solid in listening to God's voice, and we must rid ourselves of the ability to retreat based on what is seen.



So I ask once more, who exactly are you listening to? Do not be so quick to answer this question this time, but truly consider who the answer is for this go-around. Who are you listening to? Are you, like Israel was, listening to the voice of fear? This same voice of fear cries out, "Jesus, my mortgage is due! Jesus, my marriage is crumbling! Jesus, I just lost my job! Jesus, my family member is dying! JESUS!" And He, who never lets us go, says "Listen to My voice. What have I promised you?" It is true that in this world trouble is abundant, but Christ has overcome the world (Jn 16:33).

What will you do when you find the giants and barbarians living in your promised land? Write out your battle plan.

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If God is for us, then who can be against us? The giants of Anak will come at you. The barbarians of Canaan will attack you. But what does God say? Deuteronomy 31:6 tells us we are not forgotten or forsaken by God. Why are we so afraid that the God who loves us enough to send His Son to die for us will let us die in our struggles? When will we realize the power that He holds and rest in Him? Isn't it time we stand solid, just as Caleb and Joshua, and recall the truth from the past of what God has told us? Listen to the voice of truth. Throw down the lies of the devil. Tell the devil to shut-up and join me ON THE VANGUARD!

## **CHAPTER THREE: DEFEND YOUR CASTLE**

It is estimated that in the 7<sup>th</sup> century BC, a series of walls were beginning to be built. Regional kingdoms desired protection and erected borders and boundaries of great stature as a method of defense. What originated as a means of safety was looked at as a feat to be conquered. Qin Shi Huang was the first to take on this challenge and as an act of unification, he destroyed all the walled sections originally erected and ordered a new wall to be built to protect the empire from the Xiongnu in the North. This new wall was the beginning of what we now know as the Great Wall of China.

During the Ming Dynasty in 1449, plans were considered for yet another new wall. A new and stronger wall was needed to help keep brute tribes out of China. With approval given for work to begin for a more fortified structure, the use of brick was added in place of the early structures of ground rock and wood. Victory against such foes as the Manchurians at first seemed like a success, but failure was seen during the Yuan Chonghuan Manchu invasion around 1644. This defeat led to the capture of China's key city of Beijing, and spurred the beginning of the Qing Dynasty. Under Qing, the wall again was fortified and then extended south in defense against the Miao. All the additions made by peasants, soldiers, and criminals alike have brought about the Great Wall as we now know it, stretching over 5,500 miles from China's seaport to Xinjiang in the east.

This history of building and rebuilding has also been true for the city of Jerusalem. During the reign of King Artaxerxes I, ruler of the Persian Empire, Nehemiah served as the royal cupbearer. His position was one of responsibility and risk, testing the king's wine for poison. Yet his position was also a place of influence, as it opened the door for him to become a close advisor of the king. However, it was when his brother came to visit him at the citadel of Susa that the news

concerning Jerusalem wounded him more than any poison which could be found in the king's cup.

Write out the news delivered by Nehemiah's brother, Hanani, as found in Nehemiah 1:3.

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Nehemiah sat down and began to weep, allowing himself to mourn and fast over the news. In his lament he pleaded for the forgiveness of Israel's past sin, as well as the sins of his own family and self. His sadness continued on for four months, until finally he could no longer put up a front. He entered the king's service with sorrow on his face. At this the king questioned Nehemiah's expression. Nehemiah opened his heart to the king concerning the report his brother had brought.

Name Nehemiah's request of the king.

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Nehemiah's request was approved. With letters in hand, in addition to army officers and cavalry, the mission to rebuild the walls surrounding Jerusalem was now under way. However, Nehemiah was about to come face-to-face with his opposition: Sanballat and Tobiah.

Like Jerusalem, I started out with a wall of protection around myself. As a child, I went through the normal things: sibling rivalry, disobedience, lying, cheating, and even thievery. I would say my prayers of forgiveness each night and ask God to make me a better person. But letting go of my addiction was a different story. This addiction eased the pain I felt from the sting of rejection I was

suffering. My addiction told me, although lying, that I was free to be accepted and welcomed. I did not want to let this acceptance go, and as a result, I continued to let more and more sin into my life. It opened the door to other sin, though, such lying, stealing, and rebelling.

Have you also at one time had the right walls up, only later to find that they were destroyed? Briefly write out what caused the destruction of your walls.

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My enemy, 'sin', came and knocked down the walls that had once stood in a place of strength and protection around my life. There no longer remained a point where the walls were intact. At one time the walls were strong, thick, and intimidating to those opposing. Yet unattended and vulnerable, I had allowed the enemy to gain direct access right into my courtyard. He took his plunder and left me empty. Stripped bare, I looked for anything that would heal this wound, but I found that, with broken walls, I could have no defense. My addiction, followed by all the pride, selfishness, and other sins that came in with it, showed the cracks in my walls. Unlike Nehemiah, when I came face-to-face with my opposition, I did not stand my ground.

Take a minute to write out the end result you faced when your walls were no longer intact.

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Nehemiah walked around the wall of the city, inspecting the damage and determining the best method of repair. He probably touched it, pushed against it, listened for creaks and felt for loose stones. He examined the walls, as well as the gates that had been burned. This word ‘examine’, found in Nehemiah 2:13, is the Hebrew word SABAR, meaning “to inspect, examine, wait, or hope.” It does not make sense nor does it sound right to say that Nehemiah, by night, “went out through the Valley Gate toward the Jackal Well and the Dung Gate, *hoping* the walls of Jerusalem, which had been destroyed by fire.” There has to be more to this word. And there is.

The word *sabar* does mean “hope”, but more accurately, it means “to be expectant of.” To read it with this understanding, hope does make sense. By night, he went out through the gate, toward the well, seeing and hoping with expectation concerning the walls of Jerusalem, which had been destroyed by fire. Nehemiah examined with his physical eyes the damage done, but with an expectancy of faith, he also saw the walls rebuilt. So with hope, he told the officials about his assignment and of the gracious hand of God. It was then that the two, Sanballat and Tobiah, began to mock him, questioning his orders from the king, and ultimately questioning his orders from God, Himself. To these two Nehemiah was able to answer, “*The God of heaven will give us success*” (Nehemiah 2:20).

Right now where you are, do you see SABAR in your future? \_\_\_\_\_

The people worked with all their heart to repair the walls. Even when Sanballat and Tobiah came to mock them, the people kept on working. When it was leaked that an enemy was planning to attack while they were building, God frustrated the enemy’s plan and the men kept working. With weapons in one hand and a tool in the other, they stood prepared for whatever would come. They weren’t there to be spectators, but they were there to both work and keep watch. There is a difference between a spectator and one who keeps watch. The spectator is looking for a ‘good game’ so to say. But the one keeping watch is looking diligently, with focused vision, for any situation out of the ordinary. This was the role of the men who helped Nehemiah rebuild

the wall. As some built, others kept watch for the enemy's attack (Neh 4:10-18).

Where is the purpose in which we fight? If we know that the enemy is waiting to pounce on us, are we standing watch? And if not, then why are we not standing watch?

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The spectator will never win. The one who is the watcher and warrior, with one hand on the sword while working - he is the one who will win. His eyes are watching like a hawk for any movement out beyond the tree line. His hand is already tight on his weapon. He is waiting, almost with the silent voice saying, *Go ahead, make my day*. The warrior who stands with sword ready and eyes watching is the warrior that the enemy fears. Why? It is because this is the warrior that cannot be snuck up on. You and I would do well to fix our grip and train our eyes. The time to be a spectator is past. It is now time to become the warrior.

Are you ready to become the warrior? \_\_\_\_\_

From start to finish, the wall was completed in fifty-two days. When their enemies heard about the reconstruction, they were full of fear. Suddenly, Jerusalem was no longer a joke. Self-confidence for Jerusalem rose, while for their enemies it was lost. God had helped them to build a stronger city by helping them fortify their wall. By the time of the Feast of Trumpets, the Jewish New Year, the Israelites had already settled in their own towns. As they met together Ezra began reading the Book of the Law. Following the Feast, the people joined together for a commanded time of fasting called Yom Kippur, or the

Day of Atonement. It was during this time that Israel cried out as a whole for the forgiveness of their sin and the wickedness of their fathers. They repented and turned. The Hebrew word TESHUVAH means “to turn around”. God heard their cry and took them back. God offered His forgiveness and extended His love. But God could not make the people seek, could not make them choose His ways, and could not force them to return. The people had to choose for themselves.

Years have passed since my freedom from addiction. God continued to not let go until finally, like Nehemiah, the realization that the walls were destroyed in my life became evident. I then surveyed my walls, looked intently at my gates, and hoping with a great expectation of what could be, found the best method for repair. It was God. When I examined myself and repented of my sin, God helped rebuild me based on His word. Just as the latter structures of the Great Wall were rebuilt stronger each time, so my wall is also stronger and more fortified than the early rendition.

As with Israel, so we must choose to turn around and find repair for the walls that we have let be destroyed. Take inventory of your life and see if your walls have been destroyed.

Where does a rebuilding need to be done in you, and what steps is God leading you to take in this effort?

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Worship God for the reconstruction He is even now doing in your life. I urge you to survey your walls, repair the cracks, and join me **ON THE VANGUARD!**

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## FINAL THOUGHTS

One of my all-time favorite quotes reads, "Every man creates his story - HISTORY. What will HISTORY reflect of you?" As I have worked on this book, I have found myself asking this question many times. What will HISTORY reflect of me? These words still challenge me. Some days I feel like my life is still an open empty book waiting to be written in. Other times I feel like my past has already written my future for me, so there is nothing new to add in the book. But that is where I am wrong, and where Micah 7:8 begins to take shape. *"Do not gloat over me, my enemy! Though I have fallen, I will rise. Though I sit in darkness, the LORD will be my light"*

In every one's book there will be stories of victory as well as defeat. In those lines of sadness or error, our enemy tries to keep us down. The villain never wants a happy ending, so he will twist the story to work in his favor. If we allow ourselves to be robbed of the happy ending, then yes, our story is complete and not many will reflect on the legacy our pages left. But I encourage you with this. You are the main character in your story, and the story isn't finished yet. Let us not end our story in defeat, but say to our enemy that there is no cause to rejoice over a stumble or a moment of darkness.

My story begins with the LORD Himself, raising me out of my despair and placing me in the light of His countenance. Your story may begin the same way, or with a darker first paragraph. Or maybe even, your story begins happy and then comes the cloud of darkness. But we cannot let ourselves live in this darkness. Christ came to free us.

Galatians 5:1 tells us that it is for freedom that Christ has set us free. But then it says, *"Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery."* STAND FIRM. As we have seen in the pages of the Bible and in the pages of history, we must also stand. Let us move forward in God's army, Solid, Tenacious, and Never Defeated.

Now write your story...write history for all to remember.



## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Daniel Tichota, along with his wife, Melissa, and their four children, live in Nashville, Tennessee. Daniel was called at a young age into ministry, graduated from Oral Roberts University's theology department, and now has the passion to fuel a return to the ancient paths as recorded in Jeremiah 6:16. Daniel also desires to bridge the gap of understanding between the Jewish roots and the Christian church.

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If your life has been changed by this book, please write and let me know in what way. I look forward to hearing from you.  
(Your prayer requests are welcome.)

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