



### Nehemiah 4:10-14 New Revised Standard Version

<sup>10</sup> But Judah said, "The strength of the burden bearers is failing, and there is too much rubbish so that we are unable to work on the wall." <sup>11</sup> And our enemies said, "They will not know or see anything before we come upon them and kill them and stop the work." <sup>12</sup> When the Jews who lived near them came, they said to us ten times, "From all the places where they live they will come up against us." <sup>13</sup> So in the lowest parts of the space behind the wall, in open places, I stationed the people according to their families, with their swords, their spears, and their bows. <sup>14</sup> After I looked these things over, I stood up and said to the nobles and the officials and the rest of the people, "Do not be afraid of them. Remember the LORD, who is great and awesome, and fight for your kin, your sons, your daughters, your wives, and your homes."



Little did Oliver Chase know that his 1847 invention would have such an impact on Valentine's Day candy. Looking for a more efficient way to manufacture throat lozenges, Chase (a Boston pharmacist) created a machine which would aid in the cutting process. With time, Chase moved away from making the lozenges in order to devote his time to candy manufacturing. You might be wondering just what was so special about Chase's product. His brother, Daniel, devised a way to print messages upon the candy discs and eventually the discs took on the shape of hearts. Pastel in color and chalky in texture, "Conversation Hearts" have proven to be one of the most popular candies during this time of the year. While many of the messages express love and affection toward a "certain someone," the general idea is that they offer encouragement to others.

Encouragement is a much-needed gift in our world today. Unfortunately, it often goes overlooked or is used in rare circumstances. Sometimes it is easy to desire encouragement, but difficult to express it to other people. To look at our world is to discover far too many things to make us feel down and out. There is no lack of discouragement coming from the mouths of so many in our world. It can seem sometimes like we take more delight in tearing others down rather than making their situation better.

At a difficult time in their rebuilding, the people of Judah experienced discouragement. Their enemies made verbal and physical threats against them. It was more than enough to lower their morale. In response to their cries, Nehemiah brought the people together and spoke words of encouragement over them which served to lift their spirits and enabled them to resume their work.

Even as a people of faith, we can feel our spirits sink. We look at our efforts and wonder if we are making a difference. Other churches seem to be adding more people than we are. One more group forms within society which stands against the values of God's Kingdom. Sickness, strife, and separation consume our thinking at times. What are we to do? We are to be encouragers! It is not a gift limited to certain ones within God's Kingdom. As Christians, we have a responsibility to speak words of life, affirmation, gratitude, support, etc. into others. Encouragement supplies other people with the "courage" needed for the living of their faith.

**Prayer Pebble:** Lord, so many in this life have need of encouragement. Help me not to contribute to the discouragement, but rather be an encourager.