

Nehemiah, Lesson #5

Good Questions have groups talking

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Creative element

Play a bit of a song. Just when it gets the end, but NOT at the end, stop it. You want to stop it when everything in you wants it to resolve, but you stop it before it does. Talk importance of finishing well, completing the project.

Nehemiah 6.1 - 16¹

ACCOUNTABILITY

- What three fellowships do we have schedule for the next three months? Who will invite every member? Who will help invite every prospect? Who will help plan the party?

OPEN

- Let's each share your name and one unfinished project you have in your life.

DIG

1. **As we read through look for the various ways Nehemiah was opposed or distracted from completing the wall.**¹
2. How do Sanballat and friends change tactics in chapter six?²
3. Why did Nehemiah reject their plan? Why did Nehemiah say "Oh no!" to Ono?³

¹We have seen that Nehemiah encountered just about every form of opposition imaginable in rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem. Satan has thrown in his pathway many things from his bag of tricks to cause him to stumble and fall and fail in his endeavor. Satan does the same thing to us today, only many times in our experience he succeeds and we fail. God does not want us to fail. In fact, He has made every arrangement so that we do not need to fail -- yet we do. But Nehemiah did not fail. – Thru The Bible with J. Vernon McGee.

²Up to this point in the building program, Sanballat, Tobiah, and Geshem (Gashmu, v. 6) opposed everything that the Jews did; but now they offered to cooperate and help the Jews build the wall. They offered to meet Nehemiah in a village halfway between Jerusalem and Samaria, a quiet place where they could make plans on how to work together. "We're willing to meet you halfway," was their approach. "Now, don't be an unfriendly neighbor!" Of course, the enemy's strategy was, "If you can't whip 'em, join 'em—and then take over!" Once the enemy gets a foothold in a ministry, he starts to weaken the work from within; and ultimately, the work will fail. While cooperation in the Lord's work is a noble thing, leaders must take care that they cooperate with the right people at the right time for the right purpose; otherwise they may end up cooperating with the enemy. Satan is a master deceiver and has his servants ready to join hands with God's people so he can weaken their hands in the work (2 Cor. 11:13-15). – Old Testament - The Bible Exposition Commentary – History.

³Nehemiah rejected their offer because of three convictions. First, he knew that they were lying and wanted to kill him (Neh. 6:2). Nehemiah had the kind of spiritual discernment that leaders must possess if they are going to detect the enemy's strategy and defeat it. Second, he was convinced of the greatness of the work God had given him to do (v. 3). If Nehemiah allowed himself to be distracted and detoured from the work God had called him to do, where would his people go for leadership? A leaderless project is an aimless project and eventually falls apart. Leaders must be good examples and stay on the job. – Old Testament - The Bible Exposition Commentary – History.

4. Why did Sanballat and friends repeat their invitation so many times?⁴
 5. Why do we learn about following God from Nehemiah's example in verse 3?⁵
 6. Why was it so important that this wall be completed?⁶
 7. How can focusing on a great work keep us from distraction?⁷
 8. What is our great work?⁸
 9. Think of Sanballat and friends as a type of Satan. What do we learn about our enemy from their behavior?⁹
 10. Verse 5. What is the significance of an unsealed letter?¹⁰
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⁴These men repeated their invitation "four times," which shows their desperation to halt the work. Repeated temptation can also weaken one's resistance. Nehemiah stood firm and was careful not to let the opposition divert him from his main purpose. – New American Commentary – Volume 10: Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther.

⁵"I am doing a great work, so that I cannot come down." This reply of Nehemiah to his subtle enemies is worthy of adoption by us in relation to all that would hinder us in Christ's service. In giving them this turn, we may employ the words "come down," used here of locality, in the sense of descending to a lower mental or moral level. – The Pulpit Commentary – Volume 7: Ezra-Job.

⁶If it was ever finished, they would lose all hope of continuing to control the people of Judah and to profit off of them commercially. Their authority over the area would be greatly diminished. Furthermore, they would never be able to attack Jerusalem militarily because the Persian king himself had appointed Nehemiah to rebuild the city and its wall. Thus once completed, the wall would allow the Jewish returnees to become more settled and grow stronger year by year. In coming decades, there was even the possibility that the Jews could become more powerful than the surrounding nations and begin to exert control over them. In desperation, the officials of the surrounding nations plotted to assassinate Nehemiah and to discredit him among the people. Three different schemes were launched against God's lay servant, schemes that are still used by the enemies of God's people today. – The Preacher's Outline & Sermon Bible – Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther.

⁷This is a great verse, verse 3. It is a concept all of us ought to embrace. We are involved in a great work, so we can't. . . whatever! Involvement in a great work frees us from distraction. It focuses our attention. It gives us concentration.

⁸Doing the Great Commission! And how do we do that? Through micro-churches living out 2 Timothy 2.2. Jesus' method was all about his small group. We must make disciples through our small group, as Jesus did. We must say 2 Timothy 2.2 to someone in our group, unleashing the power of multiplication by dividing. This is how atomic power works: multiplication through dividing. And, it will release explosive power in your church as you embrace the vision. It is a great work!

⁹The enemy was persistent. He always is. Did they really want to be friendly and compromise with Nehemiah? The fact of the matter is that Nehemiah's presence was desperately needed in Jerusalem in order to complete the building of the wall. – Thru The Bible with J. Vernon McGee.

¹⁰It's interesting to see how often the enemy used letters in their attacks against the work (Neh. 6:5, 17, 19). An "open letter" to a royal governor would be both intimidating and insulting. Letters to officials were rolled up and secured with seals so that only those with authority could open and read them. Sanballat wanted the public to know the contents of the letter because he

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11. Note the passive voice in verse 6 – “It has been reported.” Have you ever noticed that gossipers tend to prefer this kind of language and, “I heard; people are saying,” than, “John said thus”? This is sometimes called puffery. What damage comes from such things?¹¹
12. What was the content of this letter?¹²
13. Verse 8. How did Nehemiah respond to this accusation?¹³
14. What do we learn about handling criticism from Nehemiah’s example?¹⁴
15. Verse 10. What was Shemaiah’s plan for stopping Nehemiah?¹⁵

¹⁰(...continued)

hoped to undermine Nehemiah’s reputation and authority. If some of the Jewish workers believed what was in the letter, Sanballat could organize them and create division within the ranks. It was a splendid opportunity for the enemy to divide and conquer. – Old Testament - The Bible Exposition Commentary – History.

¹¹Statements like “it’s been reported” and “they say” have caused trouble in many local churches and other ministries. In every organization, there are gossip-mongers, hovering like vultures, just waiting for tidbits of slander that they can chew, swallow, and then regurgitate. An anonymous wit has defined gossip as news you have to hurry and tell somebody else before you find out it isn’t true! – Old Testament - The Bible Exposition Commentary – History.

¹²The reported rumors were serious accusations. Jerusalem had a history of rebelling against controlling empires. A strong wall around Jerusalem would have made rebellion more viable. No doubt some of the Jews were remembering the prophecies of restoration of the Davidic kingship; some commentators think Nehemiah was a descendant of David, although there is no biblical evidence that he was. – New American Commentary – Volume 10: Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther.

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¹⁴Christian leaders must know how to handle false accusations, vicious letters, unfounded press reports, and gossip. Otherwise, these devilish weapons will so upset them that they will lose their perspective and spend so much time defending themselves that they will neglect their work. Nehemiah didn’t make that mistake. He simply denied the reports, prayed to God for strength, and went back to work. He knew that his character was such that no honest person would believe the false reports. If we take care of our character, we can trust God to take care of our reputation.

On more than one occasion, Bible teacher G. Campbell Morgan was the target of savage gossip that accused him of unfaithfulness to the Christian faith. His usual approach was to say, “It will blow over. Meanwhile, I go quietly on with my work.” Nehemiah would have approved of his approach. – Old Testament - The Bible Exposition Commentary – History.

¹⁵Shemaiah, a hireling prophet (v. 12), devised a clever plan for trapping Nehemiah. He shut himself up in his house and gave the impression that, like Nehemiah, his life was in danger. When Nehemiah came to see him, Shemaiah suggested that they both take refuge in the temple, where the enemy couldn’t reach them (Ex. 21:13-14; 1 Kings 1:50-53). His words were very threatening: “They are coming to kill you; indeed, at night they will come to kill you” (Neh. 6:10, nkjv).

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16. How did Nehemiah respond?¹⁶
17. What is the lesson for us in verse 15?¹⁷
18. Let's summarize this chapter? What do you learn about following God from this chapter?¹⁸
19. Let's summarize this book. What do you admire about Nehemiah? What can we learn from Nehemiah's example?¹⁹
20. How can we support one another in prayer this week?

1.1 When word came to Sanballat, Tobiah, Geshem the Arab and the rest of our enemies that I

¹⁵(...continued)

Since he had access to the temple, it's possible that Shemaiah was of priestly descent; but even this didn't influence Nehemiah's decision. He quickly detected the hoax and let it be known that he was not about to run away in the face of danger. In the first place, he was not that kind of a leader. – Old Testament - The Bible Exposition Commentary – History.

¹⁶“Should such a man as I flee?” he asked (v. 11). He had previously said, “I cannot come down!” (v. 3) and now he declared, “I will not go in!” (v. 11) Nehemiah was a true shepherd and not a hireling like Shemaiah (John 10:12-13). If he had run away and hidden in the temple, it would have ruined his reputation forever. – Old Testament - The Bible Exposition Commentary – History.

¹⁷What a note of victory! The best answer to opposition is to keep working and fulfill God's will; thus others will see God's power.

“The twenty-fifth of Elul” has been determined to correspond with October 2, 445 b.c., although the date is disputed. Elul was the sixth month starting with Nisan as the first (2:1); so all the events of chaps. 2–6 fit into these six months. “In fifty-two days” seems very short, but there is no good reason to doubt it. It shows what can be accomplished when the community works together under good leadership. – New American Commentary – Volume 10: Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther.

¹⁸Summary of chapters 5 - 7: Internal problems threaten to do what external enemies could not. Nehemiah learns that wealthy Jews have charged their poorer neighbors high interest rates in violation of Old Testament Law. Many are near starvation, and others have been forced to sell children as slaves to pay their debts (5:1-5). Nehemiah confronts the wealthy and gets their commitment to correct the injustice (vv. 6-13). Nehemiah himself sets an example for the rich by paying the costs of administering Judea himself, rather than exercising his right to tax his already burdened people (vv. 14-19). But Sanballat has not given up. He tries to get Nehemiah to meet him, assuming that without Nehemiah's leadership work would cease (6:1-4). When neither invitations nor threats work (vv. 5-9), Sanballat hires a prophet to urge Nehemiah to hide, hoping the act will discredit him. Nehemiah scornfully rejects what he sees as a coward's course (vv. 10-14). And so the wall is rebuilt—in just 52 days (vv. 15-19). With the walls complete, Nehemiah consults the census lists as a first step toward repopulating the holy city (7:1-73).— Bible Reader's Companion.

¹⁹The people of Judah were discouraged about themselves and their future. Not Nehemiah! On his return to Judah he surveyed the tasks to be accomplished and laid his plans quietly (Neh. 2:11-16). Nehemiah then boldly called the people of Israel to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem “and we will no longer be in disgrace” (Neh. 2:17). The response of the people was immediate—but so was the reaction of the Jewish opponents. They were greatly displeased that “someone had come to promote the welfare of the Israelites” (Neh. 2:10).

“Bold” seems to be the best word to use to describe Nehemiah's character. A catalog of the challenges he had to face, and his response to them, makes it clear that in spite of Judah's weakness Nehemiah was unimpressed by problems. – The Teacher's Commentary.

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-- 2 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; 3 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?" 4 Four times they sent me the same message, and each time I gave them the same answer.

5 Then, the fifth time, Sanballat sent his aide to me with the same message, and in his hand was an unsealed letter 6 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 7 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 confer together."

8 I sent him this reply: "Nothing like what you are saying is happening; you are just making it up out of your head."

9 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."

10 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."

11 But I said, "Should a man like me run away? Or should one like me go into the temple to save his life? I will not go!" 12 I realized that God had not sent him, but that he had prophesied against me because Tobiah and Sanballat had hired him. 13 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.

14 Remember Tobiah and Sanballat, O my God, because of what they have done; remember also the prophetess Noadiah and the rest of the prophets who have been trying to intimidate me.

15 So the wall was completed on the twenty-fifth of Elul, in fifty-two days. 16 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.

Neh 6:1-16 (NIV)