

Series: Purposeful	Reference: Nehemiah 6:1-3	Title: Nehemiah: Dealing with Distractions	Date: 02.17.18
Website Writeup:			
<i>We all live called to the Great Commission, how we go about that individually is always being revealed. But we can be assured of attack, distractions & discouragement along the way. This comes in many forms, but great purpose diminishes all distraction. Nehemiah shows us how to stay on task.</i>			

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Nehemiah 6:1-3

“When Sanballat, Tobiah, Geshem the Arab, and the rest of our enemies heard that I had rebuilt the wall & that no gap was left in it - though at that time I had not installed the doors in the gates— 2 Sanballat & Geshem sent me a message: “Come, let’s meet together in the villages of the Ono Valley.” But they were planning to harm me. 3 So I sent messengers to them, saying, “I am doing a great work & cannot come down. Why should the work cease while I leave it & go down to you?””

Staying on target has its challenges, and each one of us needs to work on our ability to keep the main thing the main thing. Rachel uses a phrase, *‘keep the main thing the plain thing, and the plain thing the main thing’*. **The Great Commission, Matthew 28:18-20, is the plain thing & the main thing. His last command, our first concern.**

God’s mission is the overarching theme of all Scripture as it relates to Christ’s completed work on the cross. The whole Bible unveils God’s plan in Christ, and through the Holy Spirit progressively. The Old Testament is the New Testament concealed, and the New Testament is the Old Testament revealed. God’s plans & purposes completely define the Bible, and should be the center of our lives & ministry. However, living out God’s mission does not come without opposition or distraction.

We need a little background on Nehemiah to understand this passage...Jerusalem at the time of Nehemiah lay with the gates & walls in disrepair, bare to her enemies, vulnerable & unprotected. She’d lost all her defenses; open to continued hurt & misery. God called Nehemiah back to rebuild the walls so his people could flourish in witness. Nehemiah was cupbearer to the King, like Moses, he lived in the lap of luxury. He gave that up to follow God’s calling. It was a great time in their history, and one of eventual revival. But it didn’t come without opposition, these particular guys continually gave Nehemiah opposition in his call to rebuild the walls.

To personalize this, we live in a world where people live with their walls broken down, exposed to continued hurt. But God’s repairing & renewing us, just as he did with his people. He wants to write a new story in us in Jesus, over all our past hurts, to restore order, peace, unity & usefulness to our lives. The lesson of Nehemiah is, we need God to do for us what we cannot do for ourselves. To repair, to bring recovery & healing - to believe him when he says we are a new creation. This is when walls are a good thing - healthy boundaries & it means our relying on his wisdom & cooperation with his Spirit

& Word. It means we are not indifferent, nor inactive, but engaging, partnering with God in the work of Kingdom building.

Enemies have many tactics from a full frontal assault to the friendly approach with a knife behind the back. Nehemiah faced various forms. His enemies had tried taunting & belittling, a threat of assault, which had been thwarted by Nehemiah's prayers & preparation as he stayed on task. God worked through this faithful man. Today his attack comes in an extension of the false hand of friendship. 'Come, let us meet together & discuss our problem,' in enemy territory nonetheless.

Nehemiah demonstrates for us how to deal with distractions to God's mission, and that our resoluteness will meet great opposition & mockery from those we might least expect it from. And the question for us is, are we drowning in the busyness of life, or are we able to prioritize & eliminate distractions which eclipse God's greater purpose?

There will be opposition to our lives & ministry, we can count on that. How do we deal with it? Nehemiah had earned the privilege of being opposed, but had God's wisdom as a safety net (Vs. 1).

Six:Eight just had 10 great years. We've prayed for favor in our community, for the Holy Spirit to clear the way for ministry among us & with others who need to know him. We too are building our healthy walls in order to be a shining light to the nations. Our reach extends beyond the Eastern Main Line & into Indonesia, Morocco, Syria, Lebanon, and many other places in the world through our global partnerships. We grew by leaps & bounds last year, which is still happening. We have our Prayer Conference coming up this Saturday. Our Women's Retreat right on the heels of that, followed quickly by the Men's Retreat. Then we're gathering a bunch of local churches here in the region on April 6th for a night of worship & prayer for all of us to reach this wider community. And there is much beyond that. Some folks answered the call to recommit their lives to Jesus last week. And many others feel they're growing more deeply in their faith.

That's all healthy & good, but what does it bring? Spiritual attack! Joyous wonderful spiritual attack! Like Nehemiah, we've earned the privilege of being opposed! There are spiritual forces which do not want you to find freedom in Jesus. Which do not want others to know him through your ministry. And they will consistently fight progress.

Discouragement will come amidst times of great progress in ministry.

Sanballat, Tobiah & Geshem the Arab did not wait for the work to be completed before striking (Vs 1). We will be tempted towards discouragement, distraction & the like as we seek to walk more deeply in Christ's purposes for us. **But as 2 Corinthians 4:7-12 says...**

⁷ But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us. ⁸ We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; ⁹ persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed. ¹⁰ We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body. ¹¹ For we who are alive are always being given

*over to death for Jesus' sake, so that his life may also be revealed in our mortal body.
12 So then, death is at work in us, but life is at work in you.*

Our vision has to rise above the distractions, temptations & discouragements we face. Not acting as victims, but as warriors in the work of God. Like last week when we said, Christians must have a long-term outlook, viewing obedience in light of the fact that God's using our lives to his glory. Rather than seeing everything for short-term personal benefit, we realize the eternal trumps the temporal & choosing obedience, even when we are hard-pressed, is always the best option.

Nehemiah was not deterred from his purpose, and believing in the supremacy of it allowed him to diminish the distraction presented by his enemies. Not every meeting leads to a kingdom outcome, and God's Spirit is needed for wisdom & discernment. For Him to go down to meet with these guys would have taken him off task.

Have you ever felt spiritual attack like this? When you set out to repair the spiritual walls of your life, to reinforce the strength of the Word, or purity, there seems to come ridicule, criticism, or a temptation to distraction? Maybe in the form of old negative voices? Voices which say you can't change! **But realize, you can be transformed by the renewing of your mind, by offering your body as a living sacrifice, holy & pleasing to God (Rm 12:1-2)! Nehemiah teaches not to give those voices a chance to influence. He simply says, "No, I'm not going to have that conversation."**

Sometimes attack comes from others making little of our efforts towards purity & holiness. They patronize, talking down as if they're a friend pointing out our folly. Maybe even someone close. They may not want you transformed! "Sure, go ahead, you follow Jesus...we'll see how that turns out."

This ridicule is often strongest for someone just coming to Christ, or those recommitting themselves. As we grow older in Jesus, these temptations often become more subtle in nature. Old patterns must be changed, the decision of offering your body & life as a living sacrifice often feels like going backwards. We've come to trust those things which make us comfortable & so have others - the extra drink, the sensual touch or words of another, the complaining tongue, or bitter words. To seek purity often feels like ripping off a limb! We've birthed & reared our sin, nursing it over time, it's precious to us & those around us - it's a hard thing to change old patterns. These things are only changed by submitting ourselves to Jesus, being fully given over to his purposes for us.

You might experience direct frontal attack - some may get mad at you, to the point of verbal and/or physical assault due to the choices you're making for Jesus. The farther you go in walking with Christ, those old relationships & friends who expect the old you will grow increasingly more uncomfortable & angry with the new - but the old has died & been made new, resurrected in Christ! Our part is to make sure their anger isn't a result of our pride; we want Jesus to be their stumbling block, not us.

Your choices in following Jesus directly affect others in physical, financial, psychological, emotional & spiritual ways. You may be called judgmental, even when it's farthest from your mind to be so. Hurtful, even if it's beyond you to be so. Arrogant & prideful, when you're feeling the most humbled. Sinful patterns are almost always shared with others. Destructive patterns take two to tango - those around you are used to the way you've operated, finding comfort in the patterns of your own indifference & sin, and they've engaged with you in it, to a greater or lesser degree.

Members of Al-Anon know this. The family has always wanted the alcoholic to stop & change, not realizing they've been affected as well. They've also developed destructive negative patterns/habits which help them to cope & have become part of their identity. They're addicted to the old alcoholic & don't know how to handle a healthy new person. When an alcoholic turns their life around saying no to behaviors from family & friends they get mad - the relationship stays broken, given they can't break patterns & grow together. Prophet's goes unaccepted in their hometown. Like crabs in a bucket, when one wants to climb out, others hold them back. When you grow in Christ, you disrupt those close to you - attack's inevitable. Our sudden seeking of purity & holiness makes others uneasy, they question themselves, which they may not be ready to do.

This is what's happened with Nehemiah, he's followed the call of God to rebuild the walls & gates. But it's disrupted the normalcy of others, they don't like change & losing power - crabs in a bucket. It may affect their economy, or frighten them to see the Israelites growing in strength & identity, they like their slave labor & the way things were. They're upset & the tools they've used thus far, haven't worked; God has prevailed.

Now, these enemies resort to an invitation of friendship & compromise. Waving Nehemiah over with one hand, while holding a knife behind their backs with the other. Nehemiah shows no compromise with sin. Although promising peace & friendship, it always has your destruction in mind. Satan's described as a roaring lion in Scripture, seeking whom he may devour in 1 Peter 5:8b. Lions are able to crush bone & cut through flesh like butter. Satan's depicted as one who can destroy & sin shouldn't be taken lightly. Satan's also depicted as an angel of light in 2 Corinthians 11:14b with flattery, promises, compromise & accommodation; always promising his way won't cost a thing. "Just this once, it won't hurt." "You don't have to go, stay, hang out." "Come on, what are you better than us?"

Nehemiah answers simply & rightly four times, "Not coming, got a job to do." No need to defend, engage in conversation, or entertain the enemy, just say no. Jesus, tempted in the desert, answered simply using the Word of God. The spiritual equivalent of 'talk to the hand'. When rebuilding our spiritual lives, being committed to His Mission, there's no need to compromise, or to entertain the enemy. Whether voices in your head, or from others. Sometimes we need to break relationship with someone when it interferes with our walk with Jesus. Maybe for good, or only for a time. It's a question with which you may need to wrestle.

Up to this time Nehemiah had already endured ridicule, threats & now false friendship. Later he endures more threats & gossip. But each time he simply puts them off with a word, good preparation, and staying on task of God's purpose. Nehemiah, like Moses last week, has worked hard for the people, denying his own chances at great riches as the cupbearer to the King, showing himself committed to a greater Kingdom purpose.

When we face the rebuilding of our spiritual lives, spiritual warfare's evident & doesn't tire using whatever tactics it can. False accusation, gossip & the proposal of friendly **compromise** - seeking to inject insecurity into our thought process as it continues in Nehemiah 6... *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."* He doesn't listen to the lies, but confronts them with Truth, then goes directly back to God where he can draw spiritual strength.

What's your role in rebuilding the ruins of this world? Nehemiah as a leader didn't sit on the sidelines, but demonstrated the biblical principle of servant leadership, like Jesus, in that he led the charge & was willing to get his hands dirty along with the other builders.

God's work needs to be done God's way if it will stand the test of time & the trials of persecution & oppression. Are you ministering in your own strength & wisdom? Or are you keeping your eyes on Jesus, simply not engaging with the temptations?

Great purpose diminishes all distractions. Is your purpose great enough to keep you on track & in the frontlines of service in God's kingdom?

The biblical principle of servanthood defines all of God's people - we serve our master, Jesus Christ.

Each one of us is tempted to allow the distractions of life to redirect our attention & energy. The busyness of life & ministry can rob us of the joy of service, and of seeing the completed work. What aspects of our lives need to be radically altered to allow God's tasks the place of priority in life?

How have your own decisions & lifestyle impeded the work of ministry? What corrective measures can be taken? Spend a moment defining your sense of God's purpose in your life right now- what's God stirring up in your heart, and how does that lead toward a greater purpose in the future?