

GAME ON | WEEK 3 | OVERCOMING ADVERSITY

INTRO:

ADVERSITY IS A NORMAL PART OF LIFE AND SPORTS.

Challenges are to be expected.

- We know about external opponents
- But often times the internal stuff is more dangerous (external adversity sometimes is the basis for a rallying or unifying of the team)
 - Whether what's going on in our own heads/hearts
 - OR what's happening in the locker room between teammates
- Internal trouble can destroy good teams

What do we do when we face both EXTERNAL and INTERNAL pressure, opposition and challenges.

- This is what happens in [Nehemiah 4-5](#).
- Today, we'll look at those texts and look at how Nehemiah responded to them.

MAIN SCRIPTURE:

Nehemiah 4:1-18 NIV

¹ When Sanballat heard that we were rebuilding the wall, he became angry and was greatly incensed. He ridiculed the Jews, ² and in the presence of his associates and the army of Samaria, he said, "What are those feeble Jews doing? Will they restore their wall? Will they offer sacrifices? Will they finish in a day? Can they bring the stones back to life from those heaps of rubble—burned as they are?" ³ Tobiah the Ammonite, who was at his side, said, "What they are building—even a fox climbing up on it would break down their wall of stones!" ⁴ Hear us, our God, for we are despised. Turn their insults back on their own heads. Give them over as plunder in a land of captivity. ⁵ Do not cover up their guilt or blot out their sins from your sight, for they have thrown insults in the face of the builders. ⁶ So we rebuilt the wall till all of it reached half its height, for the people worked with all their heart. ⁷ But when Sanballat, Tobiah, the Arabs, the Ammonites and the people of Ashdod heard that the repairs to Jerusalem's walls had gone ahead and that the gaps were being closed, they were very angry. ⁸ They all plotted together to come and fight against Jerusalem and stir up trouble against it. ⁹ But we prayed to our God and posted a guard day and night to meet this threat. ¹⁰ Meanwhile, the people in Judah said, "The strength of the laborers is giving out, and there is so much rubble that we cannot rebuild the wall." ¹¹ Also our enemies said, "Before they know it or see us, we will be right there among them and will kill them and put an end to the work." ¹² Then the Jews who lived near them came and told us ten times over, "Wherever you turn, they will attack us." ¹³ Therefore I stationed some of the people behind the lowest points of the wall at the exposed places, posting them by families, with their

swords, spears and bows. ¹⁴ After I looked things over, I stood up and said to the nobles, the officials and the rest of the people, “Don’t be afraid of them. Remember the Lord, who is great and awesome, and fight for your families, your sons and your daughters, your wives and your homes.” ¹⁵ When our enemies heard that we were aware of their plot and that God had frustrated it, we all returned to the wall, each to our own work. ¹⁶ From that day on, half of my men did the work, while the other half were equipped with spears, shields, bows and armor. The officers posted themselves behind all the people of Judah ¹⁷ who were building the wall. Those who carried materials did their work with one hand and held a weapon in the other, ¹⁸ and each of the builders wore his sword at his side as he worked. But the man who sounded the trumpet stayed with me.

NEHEMIAH 5 (SUMMARY)

- **It gets reported to Nehemiah that the people are really struggling.**
 - A famine has made food short
 - The king’s tax has put a heavy burden on the people
 - The nobles and leaders are lending at a high interest rate
 - The people are selling their lands, fields, vineyards, and homes in order to buy food or pay the king’s tax
 - Some of the people have had to sell their kids as slaves in order to pay off their debts (this enslavement ended when the debt was paid off).
 - **Nehemiah gets terribly upset at the nobles and leaders**
 - He confronts them publicly for their abuse of the people — they were benefitting from their brothers’ trouble
 - He calls on them to return the lands and interest — give it all back
 - He tells them they can no longer lend with interest
 - **The people agree to his call to obedience and praise God**
 - That’s a sign of true conviction and repentance
 - Nehemiah makes them take public vows before the priests to ensure they follow through.
 - Its one thing to say or agree to something and another to follow through — Nehemiah makes sure they follow through
 - **Nehemiah practices what he preaches with radical generosity**
 - He lends without interest
 - He lightens the load on the people by NOT receiving his governor’s allotment of food
 - He personally feeds his crew daily rather than passing that burden on to the people
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SETUP:

I WANT TO FRAME OUR STUDY AND APPLICATION OF NEHEMIAH'S STORY IN A WAY THAT YOU CAN READILY RECEIVE THIS MORNING.

- None of us are probably in charge of 40 some work crews, building up the defense of the city AND working towards biblical social justice simultaneously.
- But everyone knows what its like to face adversity.
 - What has God called you to do? (think about that for a moment)
 - What challenges have popped up along the way?
 - What voices try to ridicule or discourage you from obedience to God?
 - Have you ever faced threats (of persecution) for trying to honor God?
 - They might not be violent threats
 - But loss of relationships or opportunities
 - “If you do this... then...”

With that in mind, lets look at the internal and external foes/adversity that Nehemiah has to deal with and how we can overcome as well.

1: Hostile crowd noise

2: Dirty Opponents

3: Discouragement

4: How We Overcome

1: HOSTILE CROWD NOISE (OUTSIDE VOICES & RIDICULE)

IN SPORTS:

- Visiting teams have to deal with home crowd and all their noise. The noise is intended to make communication break down OR put more pressure on the visiting team.
- There's also the voices of the sports media. They have a never ending commentary running on every team and player.
 - This can inflate ego
 - This can kick a guy when he's already down
- But athletes and teams have to learn to shut out the noise and stay focused on their assignment.

THE TACTIC OF THE ENEMY: RIDICULE AND MOCK

Nehemiah 4:1-3 “1 When Sanballat heard that we were rebuilding the wall, he became angry and was greatly incensed. He ridiculed the Jews, 2 and in the presence of his associates and the army of Samaria, he said, “What are those feeble Jews doing? Will they restore their wall? Will they offer sacrifices? Will they finish in a day? Can they bring the stones back to life from those heaps of rubble—burned as they are?” 3 Tobiah the Ammonite, who was at his side, said, “What they are building—even a fox climbing up on it would break down their wall of stones!””

- **Nehemiah's enemies taunt, mock, and ridicule Nehemiah, the people and their work.**
 - They make fun of their perceived weakness: 'those feeble Jews'
 - They scoff at their efforts: 'Will they restore their wall? Will they offer sacrifices?'
 - They mock the project: 'Can they bring the stones back to life?'
 - They ridicule their progress: 'a fox climbing it would break it down'
- **These voices, these taunts are intended to discourage the people and the project.**
 - They want to get their focus off of the mission
 - They want them to doubt themselves and the work
 - They want them to NOT believe
- **We face similar noise in our lives today.**
 - Everyone has to deal with their 'haters'
 - Truth is no matter who you are, there's someone going to rise up and be a thorn in your flesh.
 - How do you shut out those voices?
 - How do you discern between 'the wounds of a friend' and the taunts of the enemy?
 - One is intended to better you — the other wants to destroy you
 - A friend will often speak truthfully in private — an enemy seeks to publicly humiliate you

2: DIRTY OPPONENTS (DEALING WITH THREATS & ACTIVE OPPOSITION)

[Nehemiah 4:7-8](#) “7 But when Sanballat, Tobiah, the Arabs, the Ammonites and the people of Ashdod heard that the repairs to Jerusalem's walls had gone ahead and that the gaps were being closed, they were very angry. 8 They all plotted together to come and fight against Jerusalem and stir up trouble against it.”

THE TACTIC OF THE ENEMY: THREATS & HOSTILITIES

- When the enemy's attempts to ridicule and mock the people ultimately come to failure, they resorted to violence and terrorism.
- In sports:
 - When a team knows they've lost the edge, sometimes their frustration boils over to cheap shots, late hits, etc.
 - We call them dirty players or teams — they're not playing fair anymore — the goal has shifted from winning to hurting.
- This is how our enemy fights.
 - He's a dirty fighter. He doesn't care about fighting fair.
 - He probably knows that he's not going to win ([Rev 12](#) notes that he is filled with fury because he knows his time is short.)

- He's resolved to hurting as many people as he can, because that hurts God's heart.
- So when you can't be ridiculed off your assignment — the tactic shifts to intimidation or persecution in extreme cases
 - Threats of losing the relationship, career, work promotion, places of influence, etc
 - Extreme: believers face arrests, imprisonment, suffering, violence and even death

3: BATTLING DISCOURAGEMENT (INTERNAL DEFEAT)

IN SPORTS:

- **NFL QB's and MLB Pitchers can suffer from a condition known as the 'yips'**
 - In baseball, pitchers will lose command of their pitch and underperform
 - In football, qb's will likewise become errant with their passes
 - The yips isn't a physical condition, but a psychological one — often times due to extreme stress or pressure.
- **We could spiritualize this and equate it with discouragement and defeatism.**
 - Look at what happened to the people when they heard the noise and the threats/taunts of the enemy (they believed it):

Nehemiah 4:10 “Meanwhile, the people in Judah said, “The strength of the laborers is giving out, and there is so much rubble that we cannot rebuild the wall.””

Nehemiah 4:12 “Then the Jews who lived near them came and told us ten times over, “Wherever you turn, they will attack us.””

THE TACTIC OF THE ENEMY: DISCOURAGEMENT AND DEMORALIZATION

- **The goal of the taunts, mockery, and ridicule was to demoralize the people — get them to believe that they've already been defeated.**
 - And it was working.
 - ‘We're running out of strength’
 - ‘There's too much rubble’
 - ‘They're going to attack us (and win)’
- **Nehemiah not only has to deal with the noise, but also the downcast spirits of his people.**
- **I observe that many times discouragement and demoralization kills the mission more than the actual challenge.**
 - The rubble wasn't a problem until the enemy taunted them.
 - They weren't overly tired until they began to believe the scoffers.
 - They weren't afraid when they first started
- **Your heart and mind need to be guarded**
 - If you have/keep/regain a healthy mindset and a heart of faith — you'll find the strength to finish the job and face your foes.

- If you become disheartened and discouraged — you couldn't muster the strength no matter the promised reward

So when we face adversity... how do we overcome. How did Nehemiah overcome?

4: HOW DOES NEHEMIAH RESPOND/OVERCOME:

CROWD NOISE:

[Nehemiah 4:4-6](#) “4 Hear us, our God, for we are despised. Turn their insults back on their own heads. Give them over as plunder in a land of captivity. 5 Do not cover up their guilt or blot out their sins from your sight, for they have thrown insults in the face of the builders. 6 So we rebuilt the wall till all of it reached half its height, for the people worked with all their heart.”

- He prayed to the Lord and kept building.
 - He never answers Sanballat.
 - He doesn't defend the project.
 - He doesn't trade insults.
- He leaves it all in God's hands and gets back to work.
 - The very next verse mentions that they get the wall to half its height.
 - Do you know what the best answer to mockery is (in this type of situation)... progress.
 - Their prayer and progress was a great way to shut them up.

THREATS:

[Nehemiah 4:9](#) “But we prayed to our God and posted a guard day and night to meet this threat.”

- He prayed and posted a guard
 - Not one or the other... both
 - He trusted God AND set a guard
 - He intentionally strengthened the most vulnerable places
 - [Nehemiah 4:13](#) “Therefore I stationed some of the people behind the lowest points of the wall at the exposed places, posting them by families, with their swords, spears and bows.”
 - Notice how he put them by families — its one thing to fight for your people, its another thing to fight alongside your family in defending each other and your people.

DISCOURAGEMENT:

[Nehemiah 4:14](#) “After I looked things over, I stood up and said to the nobles, the officials and the rest of the people, “Don't be afraid of them. Remember the Lord, who is great and awesome, and fight for your families, your sons and your daughters, your wives and your homes.””

- He shifted their focus off of themselves and their challenges back to the Lord.
 - Fear not! Remember the Lord!
- He also reminded them of why they were building the wall and what was at stake.

- Fight for your families, your sons and your daughters, your wives and your homes.

THE END RESULT OF NEHEMIAH'S LEADERSHIP THROUGH ADVERSITY WAS THAT THE PROJECT KEPT MOVING FORWARD

[Nehemiah 4:17-18](#) “Those who carried materials did their work with one hand and held a weapon in the other, 18 and each of the builders wore his sword at his side as he worked. But the man who sounded the trumpet stayed with me.”

- They didn't stop building — they didn't let the challenges defeat them.
- Rather they prayed, made the right preparations (arming and defending themselves), looking in the right place... and they worked.
- Sometimes winning looks like not quitting.
 - Just keep working.
 - Just keep your eyes on Jesus.
 - Keep on praying.
 - Keep on, keeping on.

OT: NEHEMIAH CH 5 - MORE ADVERSITY

WHEN SANBALLAT AND TOBIAH'S EFFORTS FAILED, THE ADVERSITY AND CHALLENGES DIDN'T STOP.

- Those external pressures were identified and dealt with.
- But the enemy wasn't done yet

CH 5 MENTIONS A FAMINE, THE WEIGHT OF THE KING'S TAX AND THE CLASS OF NOBLES OPPRESSING THEIR OWN PEOPLE — TAKING ADVANTAGE OF THEIR OWN.

- This almost undoes the whole people and project.
- Internal rift and division can destroy a team, even one that has overcome intense external pressures.
- Note also that not every adversity in this chapter has the devil to blame for it — sometimes the challenges come from the circumstances we find ourselves in AND how the people around us respond to them.

NEHEMIAH CONFRONTS THE PROBLEM HEAD ON, BUT HE ALSO MODELS WHAT HE EXPECTS FROM THEM: LEADERSHIP AND GENEROSITY.

- The take home here is that just because they overcame the first 3 rounds of adversity, didn't mean the road was easy afterwards.
- Nehemiah had to bring unity to the people through bold confrontation, leadership, and personal generosity.

BRING IT HOME | RESPONSE

WHAT ADVERSITY ARE YOU FACING TODAY?

CAN YOU IDENTIFY WHICH STRATEGY THIS ENEMY IS WORKING AGAINST YOU RIGHT NOW?

- Crowd noise — lying, mocking, taunting — seeking to paralyze the work God is doing in and through you?
- Threats and intimidation — pressuring you to quit or else
- Discouragement — getting you to believe the noise, shifting your focus off the Lord?
- Internal Division — the home team, tearing itself apart in selfishness

Nehemiah gave us the map / game plan to overcome

- Pray and stay busy on the task — leave the “Sanballat’s” in God’s hands
- Pray and post a guard — pray and think strategically — prepare for a fight, tool in one hand, sword in the other.
- Shift your focus — remember God, fear not, and remember the vision.
- Lead and model godliness — lead the way in healthy culture