

How to Handle Discouragement

Nehemiah 4

Have you ever been discouraged?

What Does The Bible Say?

1 Sanballat was very angry when he learned that we were rebuilding the wall. He flew into a rage and mocked the Jews, 2 saying in front of his friends and the Samaritan army officers, “What does this bunch of poor, feeble Jews think they’re doing? Do they think they can build the wall in a single day by just offering a few sacrifices? Do they actually think they can make something of stones from a rubbish heap—and charred ones at that?”

3 Tobiah the Ammonite, who was standing beside him, remarked, “That stone wall would collapse if even a fox walked along the top of it!” (Nehemiah 4:1–3 NLT)

Sanballat and Tobiah are looking out for their personal interests at the expense of others, while Nehemiah is looking out for the interests of others.

10 But when Sanballat the Horonite and Tobiah the Ammonite official heard of my arrival, they were very displeased that someone had come to help the people of Israel. (Nehemiah 2:10 NLT)

Are you concerned about others, or are you only concerned about yourself?

Four reasons we become discouraged:

What Does The Bible Say?

10 Then the people of Judah began to complain, “The workers are getting tired, (Nehemiah 4:10a NLT)

Because we get tired.

10 and there is so much rubble to be moved. (Nehemiah 4:10b NLT)

Because we get frustrated.

10 We will never be able to build the wall by ourselves.”
(Nehemiah 4:10c NLT)

Because we lose hope.

11 Meanwhile, our enemies were saying, “Before they know what’s happening, we will swoop down on them and kill them and end their work.” (Nehemiah 4:11 NLT)

Because we are afraid of failure.

How Can We Obey

4 Then I prayed, “Hear us, our God, for we are being mocked. May their scoffing fall back on their own heads, and may they themselves become captives in a foreign land! 5 Do not ignore their guilt. Do not blot out their sins, for they have provoked you to anger here in front of the builders.” (Nehemiah 4:4–5 NLT)

Go to Lord in prayer.

12 The Jews who lived near the enemy came and told us again and again, “They will come from all directions and attack us!”

13 So I placed armed guards behind the lowest parts of the wall in the exposed areas. I stationed the people to stand guard by families, armed with swords, spears, and bows. (Nehemiah 4:12–13 NLT)

Do not isolate. Be with people who support you.

14 Then as I looked over the situation, I called together the nobles and the rest of the people and said to them, “Don’t be afraid of the enemy! Remember the Lord, who is great and glorious, (Nehemiah 4:14a NLT)

Remember your God is greater than your enemy.

and fight for your brothers, your sons, your daughters, your wives, and your homes!” (Nehemiah 4:14b NLT)

God has people that He wants you to influence.

Additional Notes:

If you would like to use your home to disciple others, check out our training at www.crosswaveschurch.com/host. Cross Waves

has produced short videos to train you how to use your home to reach others for Christ. So please check it out.

Explore:

KEY TRUTHS:

1. Opposition Is Inevitable When Doing What Is Right

(Nehemiah 4:1-9)

2. Believers Should Be Ready for Spiritual Opposition

(Nehemiah 4:10-13, 15-23)

3. Believers Should Fight for Their Families and Fellow

Church Members (Nehemiah 4:14)

HOW IT FITS: Where This Lesson Fits in the Story of the

Bible: The events of the book of Nehemiah took place just after those of the book of Ezra (445 BC—431 BC) with Nehemiah arriving in Jerusalem in 444 BC, 13 years after Ezra arrived.

Explore:

In chapters 1 and 2 of Nehemiah we saw the preparation to rebuild the walls, and this week in chapters 3-7 we look at the actual rebuilding process, focusing primarily on chapter 4.

Nehemiah was onsite working on his plan but facing obstacles.

The enemy applied pressure to halt the progress. When you ride by construction sites, you notice progress and begin to wonder what is going up on that site. The neighbors around Jerusalem were no different, but their motives went beyond curiosity. They wanted to sabotage the rebuilding efforts. Nehemiah was about to discover what Christians face routinely when doing God's

work: opposition. In this lesson we will learn that opposition, while not desired, serves a purpose and confirms a direction or commitment.

Opposition Is Inevitable When Doing What Is Right

(Nehemiah 4:1-9)

Two villains emerged in Nehemiah's plans to rebuild the walls, Sanballat and Tobiah. A third anti-hero named Geshem played a part as well (Nehemiah 2:19; 6:1-2, 6). These three appear to have been leaders of enemies in the land who opposed the rebuilding of the walls. Let's learn more about them.

Sanballat the Horonite (2:10) served in a position equal to the governor of Samaria and ruled from one of the towns in Beth-Horon, a region in Moab, about 12-18 miles northwest of Jerusalem. Sanballat appeared as the group's ring leader opposing Nehemiah and the rebuilding efforts.

Tobiah, an Ammonite official, was most likely the governor of Ammon. Ironically, his name was Jewish and meant “Yahweh is good,” suggesting his family intermarried, and he descended from the same categorical ancestry as Nehemiah. Tobiah’s title had a double meaning. The Hebrew word ‘ebed can be translated as servant/slave or official/ruler, and Bible translations vary. Regardless of which word your version uses, the context shows that Tobiah was an official from an aristocratic family. His position as governor was, by extension, a servant of the king of Ammon.

Geshem appears as a third ruthless figure who opposed the work. Archaeological evidence shows Geshem’s name appears on a silver vessel given to an Arabian goddess in the fifth century BC. Historically, Geshem and his sons were Arabian rulers of tribes who conquered Moab and Edom. He was a powerful opposing force as a leader of Arabs in the land (4:7).

Enemies came from opposing regions: Samaria, Ammon, and Arabia. Three antagonistic leaders with influence and numbers compared to the inexperienced leader Nehemiah leading a rag-tag group of untrained people who quarreled among themselves. Odds did not look good to those who did not understand what can happen when people do things God's way.

A cursory reading of chapter 3 shows significant progress.

People outside the city noticed the walls going up at a surprising pace. Feeling threatened after hearing reports of the rebuilding, Sanballat and Tobiah decided to oppose this "start-up venture" before it got out of hand. In Nehemiah 4:1-3, Sanballat and Tobiah attempted to stymie the work with ridicule. Notice the adjectives and the condescending tone used by the enemies to describe the Jews' work. It is demeaning to degrade someone's hard work, especially when they are showing progress. The outsiders' criticism affected morale just as it would for us today.

Notice Sanballat and Tobiah's disdain (4:2), taunting (4:3), anger (4:7b), plotting (4:8a), and instigating (4:8b). Realize that people will oppose God's work. While it feels personal, their attacks are actually directed at God's work, not at us. No one, however, can ultimately thwart God's will, even if he or she wins some occasional victories. Notice the response to each of the above tactics: prayer. When we feel opposed, we can pray just as Nehemiah did in verses 4, 5, and 9. Pray, depending on God, while also continuing to advance the work. Verse 9 shows they prayed and posted a guard, a defensive posture rather than sending an attacking force against their enemies. When attacked, defend. But try hard not to lash back. Show the attitude of a servant of God by staying on task.

Explore:

Interestingly, the contemporary study of the field of leadership shows one of the most preferred styles is called servant-leadership. The term servant indicates serving others in the role while also pursuing the mission. Service to others removes the tendency to dictate, condescend, or rule without regard for those around you and those whom you serve. Nehemiah displayed this positive style of leadership.

Explore:

Believers Should Be Ready for Spiritual Opposition

(Nehemiah 4:10-13, 15-23)

Nehemiah's builders had rebuilt the wall to half its height (4:6), which is different from saying they had rebuilt half the wall.

Walls served as a city's primary defense to keep out the enemy.

Gates provided the only entrances through a city's wall and needed to be strong and well-guarded. While the people rebuilt the walls at a rapid rate, some worked faster than others, and

some spots were more challenging than others. Nehemiah 4:10 paints a clear image of random piles of rocks and boulders where the Babylon army had broken through the walls 140 years earlier. Boulders had to be moved and rubble cleared before they could make good progress.

Take time to compare the walls of Jerusalem to the defenses we, as Christians, need in place to stand against Satan's attacks.

Walk your class through these probing application questions asking them to ponder their answers. Their answers do not need to be shared aloud but could be discussed with their accountability partners.

Have you, like Jerusalem, suffered a defeat that tore down your defenses, allowing the enemy to come in and plunder your heart, mind, marriage, ethics, integrity, reputation, addiction, or other areas? (Pause at each comma, and don't rush this list).

What are the weaknesses in your life where Sa- tan goes to attack you?

Are you rebuilding your defenses but not yet back to full strength, a work in progress? If so, how are you continuing to build your defenses to ward off temptation?

Nehemiah was a leader who observed the big picture but walked the wall inspecting it up close. He recognized the fears of his people and the threats of the enemy (4:10-12), and he placed people at the lowest and weakest points of the wall to defend it (verse 13). When we have weak places in our lives, it's good to ask for help. The enemy will try to exploit the weakest places.

Nehemiah assigned families to work on the wall near their homes. With work assignments close to home, they reduced their commute and maximized work time. More importantly, builder quality and pace increased, fearing the enemy would exploit weaknesses.

Dads and moms need to help build walls of protection around their families. Such defenses do not isolate kids from the world, but give them defenses to ward off the enemy. Parents are to teach their kids to respect the enemy but trust their Savior. Christ is greater than Satan (1 John 4:4). Therefore, do not remove kids from all contact with the world, but teach them to be salt and light. Teach them to influence rather than be influenced.

In addition to tools to build the walls, Nehemiah gave his people swords, bows, and spears (4:13). Verses 15-23 demonstrate a typical military posture, with 50 percent on watch. Infantry soldiers never all sleep at once. Some stand guard even when back on post or base. But when in the field or near battle zones, typically, half are assigned to keep watch with weapons in hand. Nehemiah deployed this tactic to keep enemies like Sanballat, Tobiah, and Geshem in check. Enemies rarely attack when they know you are ready and capable of defending yourself.

Explore:

Consider discussing the following ideas for building spiritual defenses. Parents of kids with cell phones could consider not allowing cell phones in the kid's bedrooms (the same way they would not allow a person of the opposite sex in their kid's bedroom). Yes, they will need a standard alarm clock, but at a small price for safe browsing and sleep for everyone. Parents could allow them to visit friends but not allow sleepovers in homes that may not be monitored like their own. Discuss common-sense ideas like these for defensively protecting our kids.

Explore:

Believers Should Fight for Their Families and Fellow Christians (Nehemiah 4:14)

Be sure to include this third point in the lesson, even if you must

shorten the time you spend on the first two sections. The takeaway from verse 14 encourages learners, including single adults, to prioritize family. If possible, share the following three-minute clip of one of the most famous pre-battle speeches:

[Bit.ly/KingHenrySpeech](https://bit.ly/KingHenrySpeech). Read the following or summarize the context before playing the video.

The clip depicts the scene taken from Shakespeare's *Henry V*, act IV Scene 3, on the eve of St. Crispin's Day just before the Battle of Agincourt in the Hundred Years War. Knowing his men faced overwhelming odds because of being outnumbered five to one by the French, King Henry challenged them to be brave and to fight for their families back home. This speech includes the famous phrase "band of brothers" and led England to victory. Winston Churchill found this speech so inspiring; he pressed Laurence Olivier to produce a film (first released in 1944) to help rally troops in World War II.

Even if you cannot show the video, your class can imagine Nehemiah rallying the people with the battle speech found in Nehemiah 4:14. Read this verse like a general giving a speech just before the troops go into battle, and use louder, urgent tones with dramatic pauses at the commas.

In this verse, Nehemiah called his people (and us) to courage over fear and God over enemies. When we worry, we magnify our problem as more significant than our God. Nehemiah called us to fight for all the members of our families. Notice he said to fight for, and not against, them. Chapters 5-7 show Nehemiah reminding the people of Jerusalem to fight those outside the wall, not those in our family or church. We are to build each other up and use our weapons to defend family members and fellow believers. Consider challenging your learners to read Nehemiah 4:14 several times this week and to look for ways to fight alongside family and other believers.

Our marriages would be stronger if we acknowledged the enemy is Satan, not each other. Our parenting relationships would be different if we fought, not with, but for and alongside our kids against Sa- tan. Our churches would be different if we fought for other generations rather than against them. This posture of fighting for, and not against, those who truly matter makes the most famous statement of Nehemiah even more powerful. When challenged by his enemies (6:1-4), Nehemiah basically said this — God has called me to a great work, and you are a dis- traction not worth my time. I am staying on this wall because the people within it are worth defending.

Explore:

Christianity is about more than going to church and living a good moral life. Being a Christian is about having a vibrant personal relationship with Jesus Christ. Every Sunday School

teacher or Bible study leader should want to see each of his or her learners enter into this relationship—their eternal destiny depends on it. As you work toward this goal, keep the following in mind:

Following Christ is about more than a mere decision; it is about a lifelong relationship. Jesus called us to make disciples, not mere decision-makers. Aim for long-term faith, not momentary emotion.

Salvation is a matter of grace, not works. Our works do not save us (Ephesians 2:8-9), nor do they keep us (Galatians 3:2-6).

Good works are a product of salvation, not a prerequisite to it.

Don't confuse sanctification with salvation. Holiness follows salvation; it doesn't precede it. Don't try to impose "Christian" expectations on men and women who don't know Christ.

- Keep it simple. Being born again is not complicated. Here's a simple way to explain it:

- Acknowledge your sinfulness and your need for a Savior (Romans 3:10, 23).
- Trust in Christ's sacrifice for your sins and in His resurrection (Romans 10:9-10).

Surrender your life to God's transforming power (Romans 12:1-2).

Most of all, remember that your job is to tell the truth in a way others can understand, answer their questions, and give them an opportunity to respond. If you do that faithfully, some will respond and join the band of Christ-followers. When they do, Heaven will rejoice!

Question 1 of 4

Please share, but no names, who seem to make things miserable for you about your faith. For example, they mock your Christian belief by mocking your investment in reading the Word, attending church, financially supporting God's work, or volunteering your time for ministry.

Question 2 of 5

How do you tell if someone is a gossip/troublemaker or trying to help you?

Question 3 of 5

What actions and habits help prepare us for spiritual battle?

Question 4 of 5

What does it look like to fight for your church family?

Question 5 of 5

Why is it important to confess your sins daily and ask for forgiveness when praying?