

This powerful exploration of Nehemiah chapter 6 reminds us that we are God's handiwork, created with specific purposes that He has already prepared for us to fulfill. The message takes us through Nehemiah's final challenges in rebuilding Jerusalem's wall, showing us how he faced persistent opposition, lies, false prophecies, and even betrayal from friends—yet never wavered from his mission. What's striking is Nehemiah's ability to discern the enemy's schemes and respond with confidence: 'I am carrying on a great project and cannot come down.' This isn't arrogance; it's clarity about divine assignment. The sermon challenges us to examine our own lives and recognize that whatever we do—whether we're teachers, mechanics, parents, or farmers—we're not just making a living, we're fulfilling God's purpose to serve people, because Jesus died for people. The enemy will use distractions, fear, and even our closest relationships to pull us away from our calling, but like Nehemiah who turned his enemies over to God and kept building, we must stay focused on the work God has given us. The wall was completed in just 52 days—a miracle that caused even their enemies to recognize God's hand. We're reminded that temptation doesn't end until we reach heaven, so we must daily pray for deliverance and take every thought captive to Christ. The question that echoes throughout is profound: What good work has God prepared for you to do?

Title: Never Shirk the Task: Completing God's Work Despite Opposition

Sermon Summary: This sermon explores Nehemiah chapter 6, examining how Nehemiah completed the rebuilding of Jerusalem's wall in just 52 days despite persistent opposition, threats, and deception from enemies. The central message emphasizes that believers are God's handiwork, created for specific purposes that God has prepared in advance. Like Nehemiah, Christians must discern the enemy's schemes, resist distractions, accept their God-given responsibilities, and persist in completing the work God has called them to do. The sermon challenges listeners to recognize that their daily work—whether farming, teaching, parenting, or any vocation—has divine purpose beyond merely earning money; it's about serving people, which reflects Jesus' mission. The pastor emphasizes that spiritual warfare doesn't end until we reach heaven, requiring constant vigilance and dependence on God's strength.

Key Points:

- Nehemiah was God's handiwork created in Christ Jesus to do good works which God prepared in advance for him to do (Ephesians 2:10)
- Nehemiah discerned and resisted the wiles of his enemy, refusing to be distracted from God's work
- Nehemiah accepted and fulfilled the responsibility God gave him, completing Jerusalem's wall in 52 days
- When the devil is defeated, he retreats and waits for another opportunity to stop God's will
- The devil used lies, false prophets, fear, and even Nehemiah's friends to try to stop God's work
- It is dangerous to believe temptation will cease until we are in heaven with Jesus
- Nehemiah turned his enemies over to God and continued his work without being distracted
- Nehemiah upset the political schemes of corrupt leaders, just like Jesus upset religious leaders in His day

- Every Christian has a God-prepared work to accomplish, and people are watching how we respond to challenges
- The call to "never shirk a task" and maintain "cheerful in all weather" and "splendid behavior"

Scripture Reference:

- Nehemiah 6:1-19 (primary focus)
- Ephesians 2:10
- Ephesians 6 (armor of God)
- Luke 4:13 (devil leaving Jesus until an opportune time)

Stories:

- The pastor's experience farming and God revealing that his purpose wasn't just making money but feeding God's people
- The epitaph from the movie "Lonesome Dove" for Josh Dietz: "Never shirked a task, cheerful in all weather, splendid behavior"
- The fishing trip where the pastor initially doubted the fish would bite due to clear water, but they immediately started biting, illustrating how the enemy plants doubts
- The incident 25-30 years ago when the pastor's son DJ accidentally locked the running car during a snowstorm, and another man (Kevin) watched to see if the pastor would yell at his son—the pastor passed the test by remaining calm, demonstrating the Gospel without words
- The plain of Ono—highlighting God's sense of humor in biblical place names
- Nehemiah's four refusals to meet with his enemies, stating "I am carrying on a great project and cannot go down"
- The false prophet who tried to get Nehemiah to hide in the temple, which would have caused him to sin and be discredited

Matthew 6:13 / Luke 11:4 - "Lead me not into temptation, but deliver me" (from the Lord's Prayer)

Matthew 21:12-13 / Mark 11:15-17 - Jesus cleansing the temple, overturning money changers' tables

Luke 22:42 / Matthew 26:39 - Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane: "Father, if it's your will, let this pass from me"

2 Corinthians 10:5 - "Take every thought captive to Jesus"

Suggested Relevant Verses for Main Themes:

Theme: Discerning the Enemy's Schemes

2 Corinthians 2:11 - "...in order that Satan might not outwit us. For we are not unaware of his schemes"

1 Peter 5:8 - "Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion"

Theme: Completing God's Work Despite Opposition

Philippians 1:6 - "He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion"

Galatians 6:9 - "Let us not become weary in doing good"

Theme: God's Purpose and Calling

Jeremiah 29:11 - God's plans to prosper and not to harm

Romans 8:28 - All things work together for good

Theme: Responsibility and Faithfulness

1 Corinthians 4:2 - "It is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful"

Matthew 25:21 - "Well done, good and faithful servant"

How does understanding yourself as God's handiwork, created for works He prepared in advance, change the way you view your current job or daily responsibilities?

Nehemiah discerned and resisted his enemies' schemes four times before they changed tactics. What patterns of spiritual attack do you notice in your own life, and how can you better discern them?

The sermon mentions that the devil retreats when defeated but waits for another opportunity. How does this reality affect the way you approach spiritual victory and ongoing vigilance?

Nehemiah said he was doing a great work and refused to come down from the wall. What distractions are currently trying to pull you away from the work God has called you to do?

The pastor shared that God told him someone else could feed His people when he complained about farming. How might God be using your profession or daily tasks to serve others in ways you have not considered?

Nehemiah turned his enemies over to God rather than dwelling on them or seeking revenge. What situations or people do you need to release to God so you can continue your work?

The sermon describes how Nehemiah upset the political and economic schemes of corrupt leaders, just as Jesus did. When has living righteously disrupted systems or relationships around you, and how did you respond?

The pastor mentioned that every time you sin or think about sinning, you grow a handle for the devil to grab. What handles might you be giving the enemy, and how can you become like a grease pig to him?

Nehemiah completed the wall in 52 days, and surrounding nations recognized it was done with God's help. When has God worked through you in a way that was undeniably supernatural to those watching?

The story about breaking into the locked car illustrates preaching the Gospel without words. What opportunities do you have this week to demonstrate Christ's character through your actions rather than your words?

Small Group Guide: "Never Shirk Your Task"

Based on Nehemiah Chapter 6

Opening Prayer (2-3 minutes)

Begin by asking God to open hearts and minds to His purpose for each group member's life.

Ice Breaker (5-10 minutes)

Question: Share about a time when you felt distracted from something important you were trying to accomplish. What was the distraction, and how did you handle it?

Key Takeaways from the Sermon

We are God's handiwork - Created in Christ Jesus for good works that God has prepared in advance for us to do (Ephesians 2:10)

Discernment is critical - Nehemiah recognized and resisted the schemes of his enemies four times

Responsibility matters - Nehemiah accepted his calling even though he had a comfortable life as the king's cupbearer

The enemy is persistent - When defeated, the devil retreats but waits for another opportunity

Your work has eternal purpose - Whether farming, teaching, construction, or parenting—God has a purpose beyond just making money

Turn enemies over to God - Nehemiah didn't dwell on his opponents; he gave them to God and continued his work

Discussion Questions

Section 1: Understanding Your Purpose (15 minutes)

Q1: The pastor said, "God has a purpose for you and what you do." What is your current occupation or primary role? How might God be using that position to serve others and glorify Him?

Q2: Nehemiah could have stayed comfortable as the king's cupbearer, but he accepted God's call to rebuild the wall. What "comfortable" things might God be asking you to leave behind to fulfill His purpose for your life?

Q3: Read the epitaph from the sermon: "Cheerful in all weather. Never shirked a task. Splendid behavior." Which of these three characteristics do you find most challenging? Why?

Section 2: Recognizing and Resisting Distractions (15 minutes)

Q4: Nehemiah was invited four times to the plain of Ono and resisted each time. What are the "plains of Ono" in your life—the persistent distractions trying to pull you away from God's work?

Q5: The pastor mentioned how ads, social media, and countless things vie for our attention daily. How do you practically discern between legitimate needs and enemy distractions?

Q6: Nehemiah said, "I am carrying on a great project and cannot go down." When was the last time you had to say "no" to something good in order to say "yes" to something God-ordained?

Section 3: Dealing with Opposition (15 minutes)

Q7: The enemy used lies, false prophets, fear, and even Nehemiah's friends to stop God's work. Which of these tactics do you find most effective against you personally?

Q8: Nehemiah turned his enemies over to God rather than dwelling on them. Is there a person or situation you need to "turn over to God" today instead of letting it wreck your focus?

Q9: The sermon mentioned that "the more we fulfill God's purpose in our lives, the more the enemy comes." Have you experienced increased spiritual opposition when doing God's work? Share your experience.

Section 4: Living with Purpose (15 minutes)

Q10: The pastor shared how God told him, "I'll get somebody else to feed my people" when he complained about farming. How does viewing your work as service to people (rather than just making money) change your perspective?

Q11: The story about the locked car illustrated how people are watching Christians even when we don't know it. When has someone been watching you during a difficult moment? How did you respond?

Q12: The final question of the sermon was: "What good work has God prepared for you to do?" Take a moment of silence, then share what comes to mind.

Practical Application

Individual Actions (Choose 1-2 to commit to this week)

Identify Your Purpose Statement

Write a one-sentence description of how God might be using your current role to serve others

Example: "I teach children not just academics, but how to see God's love in learning"

Create a "Distraction Filter"

List your top 3 distractions

Write out Nehemiah's response: "I am carrying on a great project and cannot go down"

Use this as your response when these distractions arise

Practice the "Turn Over" Prayer

Make a list of people or situations that are stealing your focus

Pray specifically: "Lord, I turn _____ over to You. Help me focus on the work You've given me"

Identify Your "Handles"

The pastor mentioned that sin creates "handles" for the devil to grab

Confess areas of temptation to God and ask for grace to become "like a grease pig to the devil"

Reframe Your Work

This week, before starting work each day, pray: "Lord, show me how this work serves people and glorifies You"

Keep a journal of insights

Group Challenge

The "Never Shirk" Accountability Partnership

Pair up with another group member

Share one specific "task" God has given you that you've been avoiding or struggling with

Commit to checking in with each other twice before the next meeting

Encourage each other with Nehemiah's example

Memory Verse

Ephesians 2:10 (NIV) "For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do."

Closing Reflection (5 minutes)

Question for Silent Reflection: If someone wrote an epitaph for you today, what would it say?

What would you want it to say?

Group Prayer Focus:

Pray for each member to clearly understand their God-given purpose

Pray for discernment to recognize enemy schemes

Pray for courage to never shirk the tasks God has given

Pray for protection from distractions and temptations

Before Next Week

Read Nehemiah Chapter 7

Journal about one time this week when you recognized a distraction and chose to stay focused on God's work

Practice saying "no" to at least one good thing in order to say "yes" to God's best

Leader Notes

Time Management: This guide contains more material than most groups can cover in one session. Select questions most relevant to your group's needs.

Sensitive Topics: Questions about work and purpose can be difficult for those unemployed or in transition. Be sensitive and emphasize that God's purpose extends beyond paid employment.

Encourage Honesty: The question about "handles" (areas of sin) requires vulnerability. Model transparency as a leader.

Follow Up: Consider checking in with group members mid-week about their practical applications.

Adapt as Needed: If your group is new to small group discussion, start with the ice breaker and sections 1 and 4, saving sections 2 and 3 for more mature groups.

"I am carrying on a great project and cannot go down." - Nehemiah 6:3