

Nehemiah 4 “Working while being attack”

Introduction

Always fun to sign-up for things and to get started, but no matter how much fun, there is a point where you get either “familiar, regular and/or bored with” and then you have to push through to finish or complete what you started.

And sometimes on top of those “regular human traits” you have opposition from inside and outside to make you doubly make you feel like stopping or quitting.

So when the romance wears off and the honeymoon period is over and the opposition gets sever, what does a leader do?

What did Nehemiah do?

We will discover that he has to find ways to keep the people or his team, “Team Nehemiah”:

1. Praying
2. To be and stay focused
3. To keep their Faith in God, His promises, strength and blessings

4:1 when Sanballat heard... he was furious and very indignant, and mocked

Neh 4:1

1 But it so happened, when Sanballat heard that we were rebuilding the wall, that he was furious and very indignant, and mocked the Jews.

A. when Sanballat heard that we were rebuilding the wall

Remember about these guys (enemies of God and His people last week in Chapter 2.

Neh 2:10

10 When Sanballat the Horonite and Tobiah the Ammonite official heard of it, they were deeply disturbed that a man had come to seek the well-being of the children of Israel.

Neh 2:19

19 But when Sanballat the Horonite, Tobiah the Ammonite official, and Geshem the Arab heard of it, they laughed at us and despised us, and said, "What is this thing that you are doing? Will you rebel against the king?"

But now that the work had begun, they were **furious and very indignant.**

B. he was furious

Literally means to “burn hot”. (Kindled, wrath, hot, angry, displeased, fret, incensed, burn)

These guys were fuming in anger against the Jews trying to better themselves.

First time this Hebrew word (Hara) is used in the Bible (first usage):

Gen 4:5-6

5 but He did not respect Cain and his offering. And Cain was **very angry**, and his countenance fell.

6 So the LORD said to Cain, "**Why are you angry?** And why has your countenance fallen?"

The end of this story is Cain murdered his brother Abel.

C. very indignant

The Hebrew word (Kaas); vexed, indignation, to be provoked to anger and wrath. The first usage of this word is in Deut. 4:25, when it speaks of God's anger over the children of Israel's idolatry.

Because Nehemiah and the workers did in fact have legal protection from the king (proven by the letters mentioned in Nehemiah 2:7), Sanballat and Tobiah had no authority to actually stop the work.

D. mocked the Jews

The nature of their discouraging attack is evident. They used a mocking, sarcastic tone. Try and make them feel "stupid" for even trying. It's always better to try and fail, then to not try at all.

However notice, all these enemies could do, was to try to discourage the Jews into stopping, they couldn't actually stop them.

4:2 Sanballat spoke before his brethren and the army of Samaria and asked...

Neh 4:2

2 And he spoke before his brethren and the army of Samaria, and said, "What are these feeble Jews doing? Will they fortify themselves? Will they offer sacrifices? Will they complete it in a day? Will they revive the stones from the heaps of rubbish--stones that are burned?"

A. Sanballat spoke before his brethren and the army of Samaria

B. He proposed 5 mocking questions:

1. "What are these feeble Jews doing?"

The idea was that they are foolish to think they could accomplish this and they look stupid trying and they will look even more stupid when they fail.

2. Will they fortify themselves?

They will not be safe from us no matter what they do.

3. Will they offer sacrifices?

The idea of, "Will they seek God through sacrifice and expect Him to miraculously build the walls? Will they pray the walls up?"

4. Will they complete it in a day?

The idea of "Do they have any idea what they are taking on? This isn't an easy project." They can't finish it. They don't have the ability to see this to completion.

Quote: (Guzik)

"Like most attacks of discouragement, there is a trace of truth in the words of the enemy. As builders, the Jews were **feeble**. They would not **complete it in a day**. They didn't have the best materials to work with. A lying, discouraging attack will often have some truth in it, but it will neglect the great truth: God was with them and has promised to see them through".

5. Will they revive the stones from the heaps of rubbish--stones that are burned?"

Do they really think these worthless, burned out stones are really going to work and be able to make a sufficiently strong wall?

4:3 Tobiah the Ammonite was beside Sanballat, added....

Neh 4:3

3 Now Tobiah the Ammonite was beside him, and he said, "Whatever they build, if even a fox goes up on it, he will break down their stone wall."

A. Tobiah the Ammonite was next to him, by his side:

B. "Whatever they build, if even a fox goes up on it, he will break down their stone wall

This was probably a true statement, if the Lord did not strengthen and hold up the wall. But God was and is still today and in the future. (Ezekiel 38-39)

Psalms 127:1 (A Song of Ascents. Of Solomon)

1 Unless the LORD builds the house,
They labor in vain who build it;
Unless the LORD guards the city,
The watchman stays awake in vain.

C. "Their"...stone wall

Tobiah made a huge mistake. He called the wall **their stone wall**; it wasn't **their** wall at all, but God's – he was criticizing God's wall, God's work.

D. They are mocking "God's wall"...like the enemy today does the church:

Critics who bring nothing but discouragement often miss what God is doing; because they don't like the wall, they can't believe it is God's work.

In the same way, the church is God's church; Jesus loves His bride. One should always be careful about the way you talk about Jesus' bride.

4:4-5 Nehemiah prayed this prayed at asked God for 4 things

Neh 4:4-5

4 Hear, O our God, for we are despised; turn their reproach on their own heads, and give them as plunder to a land of captivity!

5 Do not cover their iniquity, and do not let their sin be blotted out from before You; for they have provoked You to anger before the builders.

A. Hear, O our God,

For Nehemiah, prayer was a first resource, not a last resort.

When times of opposition come, God wants us to rely on Him – and the purest way of expressing our reliance on God is through prayer.

Nehemiah didn't deal with the two enemies directly. Instead, he took it to God in prayer.

1 Peter 5:7

7 casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you.

Phil 4:6-7

6 Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God;

7 and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

B. for we are despised

Hey Daddy, they are picking on your children!!!!

The truth about God and His Children of Abraham, stands forever!!!

Gen 12:3

3 I will bless those who bless you,

And I will curse him who curses you;

And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."

Note: (it is true that the Jews as a nation have rejected the Messiah)

Rom 11:28

28 Concerning the gospel they are enemies for your sake, but concerning the election they are beloved for the sake of the fathers.

Let's not forget:

Rom 11:17-18

17 And if some of the branches were broken off, and you, being a wild olive tree, were grafted in among them, and with them became a partaker of the root and fatness of the olive tree,

18 **do not boast against the branches. But if you do boast, remember that you do not support the root, but the root supports you.**

Rom 11:25-26a

25 For I do not desire, brethren, that you should be ignorant of this mystery, lest you should be wise in your own opinion, that blindness in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in.

26a And so all Israel will be saved.....

C. Nehemiah prayed an "Imprecatory pray":

An imprecatory prayer at found mostly in the Psalms.

Imprecatory Psalms, contained within the Book of Psalms of the Hebrew Bible (תנ"ך), are those that imprecate – that is, those that invoke judgment, calamity or curses upon one's enemies or those perceived as the enemies of God. Major imprecatory Psalms include Psalm 69 and Psalms 109.

In the New Testament we learn not to Judge anyone including our enemies or wish harm to them. And that also, they will only have the judgment of God upon them if they die unrepentant.

Important note; Don't forget that many Pharisees (John 12:42; Acts 15:5) that apposed Christ became believers, including the Apostle Paul.

In the New Testament we have a greater revelation:

Matt 5:43-44

43 "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.'

44 "But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you,

Rom 12:17

17 Repay no one evil for evil. Have regard for good things in the sight of all men.

Rom 12:20-21

20 Therefore

"If your enemy is hungry, feed him;

If he is thirsty, give him a drink;

For in so doing you will heap coals of fire on his head."

21 Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

D. Nehemiah prayed 4 things:

This is true of what God's will to do to such men who have no hope of salvation,

1. turn their reproach on their own heads,
2. and give them as plunder to a land of captivity!
3. Do not cover their iniquity,
4. and do not let their sin be blotted out from before You;

(In the Old Testament, they did not have the gospel, where men may turn from their wicked ways and be saved, but thanks be through Christ Jesus our Lord, we have hope for the “worst of all sinners”)

E. for they have provoked “YOU” to anger before the builders.

The idea is, God it must be your will for You be provoked and put your wrath upon them!!!
(Jonah felt the same way about Nineveh)

Isa 55:8-9

8 "For My thoughts are not your thoughts,
Nor are your ways My ways," says the LORD.
9 "For as the heavens are higher than the earth,
So are My ways higher than your ways,
And My thoughts than your thoughts.

Rom 11:34

34 "For who has known the mind of the LORD?
Or who has become His counselor?"

4:6 They built the wall, and the entire wall was joined together up to half its height

Neh 4:6

6 So we built the wall, and the entire wall was joined together up to half its height, for the people had a mind to work.

A. we built the wall, and the entire wall was joined together up to half its height,

Satan’s plan to make them feel defeated, passive, or discouraged did not work!

Nehemiah encouraged and led the people to a path to victory:

- If the enemy **destroys**.....God’s leaders helps the people **rebuild**
- If the enemy **discourages**....God’s leaders **encourages** them with Godly thinking and faith to press on.
- If the enemy bring **opposition**....God’s leaders helps the people to **defeats** it.

B. for the people had a mind to work

Interesting that God did not answer Nehemiah’s prayer in the way Nehemiah wanted. Nehemiah’s asked God to take care of his enemies, and God answered by taking care of His people.

The prayer was answered in the people of God doing the work.

Eph 3:20-21

20 Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think,
 according to the power that works in us,
 21 to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever.
 Amen.

The Civil war soldier's prayer:

I asked God for strength, that I might achieve.
 I was made weak, that I might learn humbly how to obey.

I asked for health, that I might do greater things.
 I was given infirmity, that I might do better things.

I asked for riches, that I might be happy.
 I was given poverty, that I might be wise.

I asked for power, that I might have the praise of men.
 I was given weakness, that I might feel the need of God.

I asked for all things, that I might enjoy life.
 I was given life, that I might enjoy all things.

I got nothing that I asked for – but everything I had hoped for.

Almost despite myself, my unspoken prayers were answered.
 I am, among all men, most richly blessed.

4:7-8 Sanballat, Tobiah, the Arabs, the Ammonites, and the Ashdodites planned to attack**Neh 4:7-8**

7 Now it happened, when Sanballat, Tobiah, the Arabs, the Ammonites, and the Ashdodites heard that the walls of Jerusalem were being restored and the gaps were beginning to be closed, that they became very angry,

8 and all of them conspired together to come and attack Jerusalem and create confusion.

A. Sanballat, Tobiah, the Arabs, the Ammonites, and the Ashdodites

The number of God's enemies is growing, because it was obvious the Jews were succeeding.

B. heard that the walls of Jerusalem were being restored and the gaps were beginning to be closed

Because the enemy could see that they were succeeding and their success was a very visible thing.

When we becoming visibly more fruitful we must expect the attack to become greater.

Quote: (Guzik)

“It must be that the work of God often makes the enemy of our soul angry. He must often rage against the progress being made by God’s people in touching a lost world for Jesus Christ. It’s not bad to make the devil angry”.

C. all of them conspired together to come and attack Jerusalem

As the work progressed the enemies became more serious. Now they didn’t simply complain or mock, they threatened and planned for violence.

Note: (By the way, they never did attack)

They never did attack – they just talked about it.

The enemy was hoping that the threat of attack would be enough.

Satan uses the same strategy of fear against us, and if we are paralyzed by a threat the threat has worked – even when nothing actually happens against us.

D. and create confusion

This is an important strategy of Satan – to create confusion among the people of God. A confused people will never move forward and fulfill God’s work. They are usually confused because they are distracted by the tricks of their enemies instead of focusing on God and His promises.

Satan’s plan is try to complicate things and bring division:

2 Cor 11:3

3 But I fear, lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds may be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ.

1 Cor 14:33

33 For God is not the author of confusion but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints.

4:9 Nehemiah both, prayed and he acted**Neh 4:9**

9 Nevertheless we made our prayer to our God, and because of them we set a watch against them day and night.

A. we made our prayer to our God

They continued the pattern that Nehemiah’s leadership had set!!!!

Notice it doesn’t say that Nehemiah prayed this time.

But all the people prayed!!!

Nothing would make them stop as they continued to depend upon God through prayer.

Quote: (Guzik)

“God allowed the attack to go on, even though He could have instantly swept it away. Yet He allowed it to continue because He was delighted that His people drew closer to

Him with a deeper trust than ever before. God did His perfect work both in building the walls and His people.”

B. AND we set a watch against them day and night

Nehemiah “prayed” and “acted”, this is what faith on earth looks like.

They also knew that prayer didn’t mean they were not to do something. Our prayers do not replace our actions; they make our actions effective for God’s work. Thus, they used common sense and prepared against a possible attack. They used God’s willing servants to be the wall, until the wall was built.

C. day and night

When it said that the people had a mind to work, we understand now that they wanted very little sleep and had a mind to work 24 hours a day.

4:10 Discouragement from within by those who didn’t put their shoulder to the work

Neh 4:10

10 Then Judah said, "The strength of the laborers is failing, and there is so much rubbish that we are not able to build the wall."

A. Important note: Special difficulties arise after the half way mark

Nehemiah and the Jews rebuilding Jerusalem have been standing strong in the face of attack.

But now that the rebuilding work is at the half-way point, and wall is almost continuous, special challenges arise.

B. Satan’s plan is always to find the weak link and then bring division.

C. Judah said,

Judah was supposed to be the strongest, bravest tribe. It was the tribe of great kings and ultimately, the Messiah Himself. It was a special challenge and a discouragement to have this word come from the tribe of Judah.

Remember earlier it was those nobles of the tribe of Judah that would not join:

Neh 3:5

5 Next to them the Tekoites made repairs; **but their nobles did not put their shoulders to the work of their Lord.**

D. Tribe of Judah said, "The strength of the laborers is failing,

The simplest of lies can bring great damage.

But also the simplest of truths can strengthen and heal.

No doubt this was somewhat true:

The half-way point is a dangerous place.

There is a reasoning that says, “Much has been done, let’s take a break”.

However, there is still much to do.
No doubt fatigue is setting in, if you choose to focus on that.

It isn't enough to just begin well.
The rebuilding work has gone very well and many obstacles have been overcome – but the job isn't done yet, there is still much to do and there is time to yet to lose.

Analogy:

Many a team has had a great first half – only to lose in the final minutes.

E. and there is so much rubbish

The work of rebuilding the walls was not only construction, but cleaning and hauling away the rubbish. The ruins of the walls, lying in waste for 100 years had become a collecting point for all kinds of rubbish.

Clearing away the rubbish was not an option – it had to be done. The destroyed parts of the wall and the accumulated rubbish had to be cleared away so the walls could be rebuilt upon their foundations. If they didn't do this, the walls wouldn't stand at all.

F. we are not able to build the wall

Every leader wants to lead an excited and enthusiastic group. But for every leader there is going to be those times when everybody wants to quit.

Quote: (President Calvin Coolidge)

“Nothing in this world can take the place of persistence.

Talent will not; nothing is more common than unsuccessful men with talent.

Genius will not; unrewarded genius is almost a proverb.

Education will not; the world is full of educated derelicts.

Persistence and determination alone are omnipotent.

The slogan Press On! has solved and always will solve the problems of the human race.”

4:11-12 The enemy tried to cause “irrational fears” and some believed the enemies lies

Neh 4:11-12

11 And our adversaries said, "They will neither know nor see anything, till we come into their midst and kill them and cause the work to cease."

12 So it was, when the Jews who dwelt near them came, that they told us ten times, "From whatever place you turn, they will be upon us."

A. And our adversaries said:

More threatening's.

It is best not to listen to the enemy.

We would have been off even Eve would have never listen to the enemy.

B. They will neither know nor see anything:

This is the enemy trying to create an irrational fear. When people are exhausted our brains don't reason so well, and such absurdities sometimes work.

C. Kill them and cause the work to cease:

The enemies of God's people paid a back-handed compliment by saying this. They knew by now the only way to get them to stop serving God and doing His work was to **kill them**.

D. The Jews who dwelt near them came:

Those people motives we don't know, but they were being a spokes person for the enemies and spreading their lies and fears.

We need people who will join with us and stay near with us.

E. They told us ten times:

It is easy to picture this scene, and see the informants repeating over and over again, "An attack is coming! It's for real! They will defeat us!" "From whatever place you turn, they will be upon us!"

These who overheard the plan didn't have the wisdom to know what to do in response.

They were in a panic, and they were probably troubled that Nehemiah didn't also panic.

4:13 Nehemiah planned more specifically for an imminent attack (that never came)**Neh 4:13**

13 Therefore I positioned men behind the lower parts of the wall, at the openings; and I set the people according to their families, with their swords, their spears, and their bows.

Nehemiah did not panicked.

But he wisely organized things once again into a better defensive position as they all continued the work.

4:14 Nehemiah spoke to the people to not be afraid, because of God...**Neh 4:14**

14 And I looked, and arose and said to the nobles, to the leaders, and to the rest of the people, "Do not be afraid of them. Remember the Lord, great and awesome, and fight for your brethren, your sons, your daughters, your wives, and your houses."

A. Do not be afraid of them. Remember the Lord, great and awesome:

Nehemiah put their mind in the right perspective.

The challenge was great but there was no reason for fear.

God who is greater is with them.

The same is true for us:

1 John 4:4

4 You are of God, little children, and have overcome them, **because He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world.**

Isa 54:17

17 **No weapon formed against you shall prosper,**
 And every tongue which rises against you in judgment
 You shall condemn.
 This is the heritage of the servants of the LORD,
 And their righteousness is from Me,"
 Says the LORD.

- B. Fight for your brethren, your sons, your daughters, your wives, and your houses:**
 Nehemiah reminded them what they were fighting for.

4:15-18 The enemy schemes did not stop them, nor even slow them down

Neh 4:15-18

15 And it happened, when our enemies heard that it was known to us, and that God had brought their plot to nothing, that all of us returned to the wall, everyone to his work.

16 So it was, from that time on, that half of my servants worked at construction, while the other half held the spears, the shields, the bows, and wore armor; and the leaders were behind all the house of Judah.

17 Those who built on the wall, and those who carried burdens, loaded themselves so that with one hand they worked at construction, and with the other held a weapon.

18 Every one of the builders had his sword girded at his side as he built. And the one who sounded the trumpet was beside me.

- A. When our enemies heard that it was known to us, and that God had brought their plot to nothing:**

Once they saw the defenses of the people of God, the enemies shrunk back.
 They didn't want a battle because they knew they would lose.
 What the enemies wanted was for the people of God to hand them the victory.

- B. All of us returned to the wall, everyone to his work:**

Getting back to the the work was the victory, not thwarting the enemy.

Quote: (Guzik)

When we are under spiritual attack it is easy to feel that just enduring the storm is the victory. It isn't. The attack often comes to prevent your progress and work for the LORD. Victory is enduring the attack and continuing the progress and work for the LORD.

- C. So that with one hand they worked at construction, and with the other held a weapon:**

The workers had a sword at their side and a trowel in their hands to get the work done.

The kingdom of God is built with both a sword and a trowel, a sword to come against every spiritual force of wickedness in high places, and trowel to do the work of building up the people of God.

4:19-23 Nehemiah gave further plans in case of an attack...the people worked even harder

Neh 4:19-23

19 Then I said to the nobles, the rulers, and the rest of the people, "The work is great and extensive, and we are separated far from one another on the wall.

20 "Wherever you hear the sound of the trumpet, rally to us there. Our God will fight for us."

21 So we labored in the work, and half of the men held the spears from daybreak until the stars appeared.

22 At the same time I also said to the people, "Let each man and his servant stay at night in Jerusalem, that they may be our guard by night and a working party by day."

23 So neither I, my brethren, my servants, nor the men of the guard who followed me took off our clothes, except that everyone took them off for washing.

A. The work is great and extensive, and we are separated far from one another:

Nehemiah knew they had to keep in communication if the work was going to be done.

The number one job of the leader is to be the "communicator". It is his job to keep finding unique and creative ways to communicate to his group or team.

The trumpets were a new way of communication.

B. Wherever you hear the sound of the trumpet, rally to us there:

They stayed ready to sound the alarm at the slightest notice. They would not be caught off guard.

C. From daybreak until the stars appeared:

They dedicated themselves to the work all the more, working hard from sunrise to past dark, even spending the night out at the job site to protect against attack.

D. So neither I, my brethren, my servants, nor the men of the guard who followed me took off our clothes:

They kept their clothes on all the time because they did not want to be caught unprepared. They were always ready to respond to the blast of a trumpet.

Christians need to be armed with the same attitude today. They need to be always ready, always clothed with the righteousness of Jesus Christ, always wearing the armor of God, ready for that final trumpet blast that will gather us together with our LORD.

Conclusion

Principles of Leadership:

1. Leaders cannot lose sight of our goal and purpose regardless of the circumstances.
2. Leaders cannot get distracted by either taking time to argue with the enemy or letting the enemies word's get to him so that it distracts him from the job at hand.

3. Leaders are to focus on the right things; prayer and the needed task to be done in the moment.

Practical application:

1. Keep your eyes on God and not the situation
2. Need endurancelooking unto Jesus the author and the finisher of our faith
3. Don't fear or be afraid, God will fight for us and He is our great shield,
4. Be faithful...1 Cor 4, God will judge us whether we have been faithful or not

1 Cor 4:2

2 Moreover it is required in stewards that one be found faithful.