



Frisco First Baptist Church

Distracted • Maintaining Focus • Neh 6:1-16 • Feb 9, 2025

MAIN POINT

TODAY is Start the Party Early! Make sure you welcome guests and take the time to get to know them. As a church, we want everyone to find a place to belong, and Start the Party Early is their excuse to try out some of the LIFEGroups. Make every effort to create an environment where everyone belongs. Thank you.

Today's Lesson **Maintaining focus.** (**Nehemiah 6:1-16**) Set healthy boundaries to overcome distractions and finish the wall. We all have good intentions, when it comes to prioritizing God, family, work and friends. Yet we are easily distracted from staying the course. The biblical example of Nehemiah reminds us of the importance of clarity and diligence when it comes to distractions.

INTRODUCTION

The Restoration Books describe the return of a remnant of the Jews to their homeland after seventy years (605–536 b.c.) of captivity. They were led in the period from 536–420 b.c. by Zerubbabel, Ezra, and Nehemiah.

Ezra—Babylon was conquered by Persia in 539 b.c. and Cyrus issued a decree in 536 b.c. that allowed the Jews to return to Palestine. Zerubbabel led about fifty thousand to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple, and years later (458 b.c.), Ezra the priest returned with almost two thousand Jews.

Nehemiah—The temple was built, but the wall of Jerusalem still lay in ruins. Nehemiah obtained permission, supplies, and money from the king of Persia to rebuild the walls (444 b.c.). After the walls were built, Ezra and Nehemiah led the people in revival and reforms.ⁱ

1. **What would you tell a child who was being picked on by a bully?**
2. **What do you think are the most important attributes in a good leader?**
3. **How does it feel to finish a project that no one thought you could finish?**

UNDERSTANDING

HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ Nehemiah 6:1-16

Nehemiah, contemporary of Ezra and cupbearer to the king in the Persian palace, leads the third and last return to Jerusalem after the Babylonian exile. His concern for the welfare of Jerusalem and its inhabitants prompts him to take bold action. Granted permission to return to his homeland, Nehemiah challenges his countrymen to arise and rebuild the shattered walls of Jerusalem. In spite of opposition from without and abuse from within, the task is completed in only fifty-two days—a feat which even the enemies of Israel must attribute to God's enabling. By contrast, the task of reviving and reforming the people of God within those rebuilt walls demands years of Nehemiah's godly life and leadership.ⁱⁱ

4. When have you felt God's guidance or leading in your life?

5. In what ways can you be open to God's leading? What can you do to be more sensitive to God's leading?

6:1–9. Five messages from Sanballat The defence works had now reached that crucial stage, on the very brink of completion, at which all could still be lost or soon be won. The open gateways (1) were the enemy's last hope of regaining the upper hand without actually mounting a siege, which would be out of the question against fellow subjects of Persia.

...The suggestion of the plain of Ono was plausible, for it was about equidistant from Samaria and Jerusalem. At the same time, it was for Nehemiah more than a day's journey from his city, and (as Brockington points out) at the very limit of his territory to the north-west, bordering the districts of both Samaria and Ashdod. Since both of these were hostile regions (cf. 4:2, 7) the plan smelt of treachery. At best, the journey would have wasted precious days; therefore wisely enough he based his refusal on this, rather than on his suspicions. Incidentally, the familiar translation in rsv (following av, rv), I am doing a great work, may seem to smack of self-praise. The sense comes across better in, e.g. neb: 'I have important work on my hands', or still more objectively, '... a huge task ...'

4–9. By the fourth time of asking, Sanballat must have realized that his anxiety was beginning to show through. His change of tactics, the sending of an open letter, ensured that the malicious rumours it contained would sooner or later be public property, and that Nehemiah would realize this. It would take some courage to brush the whole thing aside, and indeed verse 9 confirms the fact by its urgent little prayer.

6. What was different about the fifth time Sanballat sent the message to Nehemiah? (6:5–7)

7. What did Nehemiah's opponents assume would be the result of their threats? (6:9)

8. From where did Nehemiah receive his strength to continue the work? (6:9)

9. Why didn't Nehemiah back down as his opponents wanted? (6:12–13)

10. Toward what goal were Nehemiah's enemies working? (6:13)

6:10. Persisting in their evil planning, Nehemiah's enemies then tried to destroy his credibility by luring him into the temple. They hired Shemaiah, a man "on the inside," to propose a solution to Nehemiah. Claiming to be a prophet, he purposely locked himself in his house, supposedly from some debility or ritual defilement, and sent word for Nehemiah to visit him. Perhaps Shemaiah devised an urgent situation that would arouse Nehemiah's curiosity. Shemaiah must have been a man Nehemiah trusted, for it would have been illogical for him to meet secretly with someone he did not trust. When Nehemiah arrived, Shemaiah suggested they meet in the temple behind closed doors. He pretended to be protecting Nehemiah from would-be nighttime assassins.

6:11–14. Nehemiah discerned two flaws in Shemaiah's so-called prophecy. First, God would hardly ask Nehemiah to run when the project on the walls was nearing completion. Second, no true prophet would ask someone to violate God's Law. Only priests were allowed in the sanctuary (Num. 3:10; 18:7). If Nehemiah, not being a priest, entered the temple, he would have desecrated it and brought himself under God's judgment. He would not disobey God to try to gain safety from his enemies. Nehemiah was convinced that Shemaiah was a false prophet, employed by Tobiah and Sanballat to trick him. If the governor had entered the temple and lived, his people would know he disregarded God's commands.ⁱⁱⁱ

11. What basic principles did Nehemiah follow when he faced opposition?

12. What sin did Nehemiah want to avoid?

13. When do you think it is important to fight back, and when is it better to back down?

Once again Nehemiah prayed, this time that God would remember (see comments on Neh. 5:19) his enemies and judge them for their evil scheming. In this imprecation he also included the Prophetess Noadiah, mentioned only here, who with other false prophets was seeking to intimidate him.

14. What opposition do you face in your Christian walk?

15. What temptations threaten to distract you from doing what is right?

16. How can you prevent yourself from being distracted from the work God has given you?

APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

17. To what task or project do you want to recommit your efforts?

18. What specific responsibilities or challenges will you face this next week?

19. What specific steps can you take to strengthen your commitment to the responsibilities God has given you?

20. What can you do to prepare yourself for the next time someone tries to influence you through intimidation?

PRAYER

Heavenly Father,

We come before You today, thankful for Your Word that lights our path and strengthens our hearts. As we learn from the story of Nehemiah, we are reminded of the importance of staying focused on the work You have called us to do.

Lord, just as Nehemiah faced distractions and opposition, we too encounter challenges that threaten to pull us away from You and the purpose You have placed in our lives. Help us to discern Your will clearly and to set healthy boundaries that protect the mission You have entrusted to us.

Give us courage like Nehemiah to stand firm when others seek to deter or intimidate us. Help us to remain steadfast in prayer, drawing our strength from You alone. Teach us to trust in Your provision and guidance, knowing that the great work we are doing is for Your glory.

Lord, as we go into this week, give us the clarity to prioritize You above all else, the diligence to complete the tasks You've set before us, and the grace to navigate every challenge with faith. Strengthen our hands and hearts to fulfill Your calling.

We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

COMMENTARY

AGAIN our attention is directed to the opposition of Sanballat, Tobiah, and Geshem (or Gashmu) with the rest of Judah's enemies. Every move within the city was reported to them without, and no doubt they had felt a sense of deep satisfaction when the news of internal strife had reached them. This may account for our having heard nothing of them in the last chapter. If God's people get quarrelling among themselves, the enemy from without can afford to rest in his tents, but as soon as things get right within he actively bestirs himself.

Word having reached the adversaries that the wall was builded and no breach left in it (although the doors had not yet been set up on the gates), Sanballat and Geshem sent an apparently friendly message to Nehemiah, saying, "Come, let us meet together in some one of the villages in the plain of Ono" (ver. 2). They would lure him unto neutral ground, outside the wall, as though to confer on matters of importance; but he recognized the evil purpose of their hearts; he inwardly knew their thought was to do him mischief.

His reply is worthy of the man, and should have a voice for any in our day who are tempted to take neutral ground where the truth of Christ is in question. "I am doing a great work, so that I cannot come down: why should the work cease, whilst I leave it, and come down to you?" He had been entrusted by God with a commission "to restore and build Jerusalem," and he will brook nothing that would for a moment turn him aside from this. A separated man, he would have no part in the surrounding confusion where the word of God was rejected and His people

despised. Notice here: it was no question of ministering to, or caring for the children of God scattered abroad that was before him. These Samaritans were the enemies of God's truth, while pretending to serve Him. "They feared the Lord, and served their own gods" (2 Kings 17:33). They represent, as we have seen, unreal professors, yet presuming to have full title to the name and place of worshipers. With such the faithful servant can have no fellowship. He must maintain and guard what has been committed to him, and if he attempts to mix with these "deceitful workers" he will only lose what he himself has.

Four times Sanballat and Geshem sent to Nehemiah "after this sort," and four times he returned the same answer.

Then they changed their tactics. They had tried conciliatory methods and failed to corrupt him. Now they would use a scandalous report with intent to intimidate him. There is nothing new under the sun. Satan's wiles are such that the man of God must not be ignorant of his devices. The fifth time Sanballat sends his servant with "an open letter in his hand." Oh, these "open letters!" How often, while fairly worded, have they been penned only to gender strife. This one contained a covert insinuation to the effect that all Nehemiah's work had been unauthorized, and a direct charge that his object was self-aggrandizement and rebellion against the king.

Themselves in rebellion against God, they charge God's servant with their own sin. The "open letter" reads somewhat graciously, but the object of its writer was to occupy the Jews with his apparently gracious spirit in order to poison their minds against Nehemiah. "It is reported among the nations, and Gashmu saith it, that thou and the Jews think to rebel: for which cause thou buildest the wall, that thou mayest be their king, according to these words. And thou hast also appointed prophets to preach of thee at Jerusalem, saying, There is a king in Judah; and now shall it be reported to the king according to these words. Come now, therefore, and let us take counsel together" (vers. 6, 7). Such were the contents of the open letter, and we are not told what impression, if any, it made on the Jews. It was so worded as to intimate that Sanballat's only desire was to clear Nehemiah of the charges whispered about, and yet so cunningly phrased that any disaffected ones within might readily charge the governor with fearing an investigation if he did not go down to confer with Sanballat.

But Nehemiah is not at all concerned about this. He knows he is personally right with God and he fears not suspicion and idle tales. "There are no such things done as thou saigest," he retorts boldly, "but thou feignest them out of thine own heart."

Nehemiah's conscience was free, so he could throw the accusation back upon the man who made it; and knowing it was only done to weaken their hands from the work, he looks heavenward and cries, "Now therefore, O God, strengthen my hands" (ver. 9).

But Satan has not yet exhausted his ammunition. A man is found within the city to act for Sanballat and Tobiah, upon the payment of a bribe. Shemaiah, the son of Delaiah, is said to have been "shut up." This probably means that he was ill, or confined to his house, and unable to take his place among the workers on the wall. Such a man, if not in fellowship with God as to His then present ways, would prove a ready tool for the conspirators. Nehemiah called upon him, and Shemaiah warned him with pretended sincerity of danger to his life, counselling that he should flee to the temple, there to seek security by hiding in the sanctuary. To do so would have at once spread fear and distrust among the people, and this was just what Sanballat desired.

But God's devoted servant again rose, strong in faith, superior to the situation. "Should such a man as I flee?" he asks, "and who is there, that, being as I am, would go into the temple to save his life? I will not go in" (ver. 11). To desert the rest, and act as though panic-stricken, would ill become one in his position, one who also had confessed his faith in God so boldly. He realized

that he was again face to face with evidence of the plots of his enemies, and that God had not sent Shemaiah with such a message, but that he was hired by Tobiah and Sanballat to give this unworthy counsel.

Nehemiah, in his customary way, brings the whole matter at once to God, and puts the case in His hands. “My God,” he prays, “think Thou upon Tobiah and Sanballat according to these their works, and on the prophetess Noadiah, and the rest of the prophets, that would have put me in fear” (ver. 14). It is no longer a matter between Nehemiah and the conspirators, but it is now an affair between God and these unholy plotters. And in His own time He can be depended upon to settle all righteously^{iv}

ⁱ Wilkinson, B., & Boa, K. (1983). *Talk thru the Bible* (pp. 48–49). T. Nelson.

ⁱⁱ Wilkinson, B., & Boa, K. (1983). *Talk thru the Bible* (p. 123). T. Nelson.

ⁱⁱⁱ Getz, G. A. (1985). Nehemiah. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 1, p. 686). Victor Books.

^{iv} Ironside, H. A. (1913). *Notes on the Book of Nehemiah* (pp. 69–74). Loizeaux Bros.