

SERVING GOD WITH DETERMINED FAITH - 5

Stay Focused on God's Work

"I am carrying on a great project and cannot go down. Why should the work stop while I leave it and go down to you?"
- Nehemiah 6:3

Bible Truth:

Those who attempt great missions for God will have to endure personal attacks.

Life Impact:

A faith that perseveres is characterized by a compelling purpose, a clear perspective, and continual prayer.

Even the wisest and godliest of men and women can be led away from the work God has called them to do by listening to distracting voices. Voices that pull us away from what we should be doing can call from many quarters. Sometimes these voices sound legitimate, yet they call us in a direction opposite to what God has called us to do. In Nehemiah's case, not only were the voices calls to distract and to postpone the completion of his God-ordained work, but he soon found out that these were malicious voices intended to bring harm to him and to his character.

Welcome

Share an accomplishment in your life that initially seemed quite foreboding; but ultimately was quite gratifying.

Word

Read Nehemiah 6:1-19

1. What prompted Nehemiah's enemies to summon him to a meeting? What was their intention? What strikes you about Nehemiah's response (v 3)?
2. After repeated attempts to distract Nehemiah, how did his enemies try to intimidate and dissuade him (vv 5-7)? What is the significance of their letter being unsealed? How would you have reacted to smear campaign like this? How did Nehemiah respond? Have your motives or actions ever been maligned? What do you notice from Nehemiah's response that would be helpful in dealing with your own detractors?
3. In a last ditch effort, Shemaiah tries to frighten Nehemiah and appeals for him to seek the safety of the temple (v 10). If Nehemiah had followed Shemaiah's advice, how would this have discredited him and destroyed his effectiveness as a leader? What does Nehemiah's response reveal about him?
4. Nehemiah kept working in spite of *distractions* (vv 1-4), *defamation* (vv 5-7), and *danger* (or fear, vv 11-14). As you look back on your life, which of these factors has proven most disruptive to your pursuing what God was calling you to do? Explain.
5. Nehemiah refused to quit, and the wall was built in a remarkably short time (v 15). Nehemiah's faith was characterized by a compelling purpose, a clear perspective and continual prayer. Which of these three qualities would be most helpful in your spiritual walk right now? Why?

Worship

Spend your time encouraging one another and praying in response to the discussion, particularly to questions 4 and 5. Pray for boldness and persevering faith **1 Corinthians 16:13**, "*Be on your guard; stand firm in the faith; be men of courage; be strong.*"

Works

How persistent are you in doing God's will? Do you pursue God's will only when it's convenient? Is there an area of your life in which you need to decide to be God's person, regardless of what anybody does or thinks? Share your response with someone who can encourage you, and hold you to a godly accountability.

Leader's Notes – Stay Focused on God's Work (Lesson Five)

Discussion:

Question 1: Nehemiah's enemies were attempting to set an ambush (v 2). Even at best, it was an effort to sidetrack Nehemiah from finishing the project. Even if their invitation had been sincere, Nehemiah would not let the "good" get in the way of the "better." Nehemiah had a compelling purpose (v 3) which greatly helped him set priorities for his life. God hadn't sent Nehemiah to Jerusalem as a diplomat, but to rebuild the city wall. Don't miss the additional pressure Nehemiah was under to accept their invitation which, to many people in Jerusalem, seemed a quite reasonable alternative to continued harassment (notice verses 17-19).

It's also interesting to note that the work was almost finished. The wall had been rebuilt and all that remained was assembling the gates. The timing is significant. Just when you think you've gotten over all the obstacles and are on the final stretch, Satan loves to strike because he knows that is when you are susceptible to attack. 1 Cor. 10:12, *"So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall!"*

Question 2: Sanballat's letter must have irritated Nehemiah greatly, since he would have understood the gravity of the charges and he would have wanted to vindicate himself by proving them false. But to turn from his work and travel to declare that these charges were false would have postponed the work's completion, and it also would have drawn him away from the city and made him more vulnerable. The letter was sent unsealed because Nehemiah's enemies wanted to make certain that many eyes would see this letter before it ever got to Nehemiah. Satan is still successful using this tactic today! Nehemiah made an initial response, prayed for God's strength, and trusted that the truth would ultimately prevail. Nehemiah knew he could spend most of his time fighting criticism or building the wall. Notice what Paul says about the sins of evil men in 1 Timothy 5:24-25.

Question 3: Taking refuge in the temple would have appeared cowardly, but even more important, would have been against God's word which allowed only a priest to enter the sanctuary (Numbers 18:7).