

The Walls Completed

Nehemiah 5-7

Opening Slide

Memory Verse Slide

*"...Our enemies lost their self-confidence, because **they realized that this work had been done with the help of our God**" - Neh. 6:16.*

What if I'm wrong? Is this what the enemies began to entertain?

What if this endeavor really is from God? In Acts 5, The Apostles were brought before the Sanhedrin. They wanted to put them to death.

Gamaliel makes the following statement, *"Leave these men alone! Let them go! For if their purpose or activity is of human origin, it will fail. But if it is from God, you will not be able to stop these men; you will only find yourselves fighting against God."* 5:38-39.

Acts 23:9. Paul arrested in Jerusalem, *"Some of the teachers of the law who were Pharisees stood up and argued vigorously. "We find nothing wrong with this man," they said. **"What if a spirit or an angel has spoken to him?"***

Matt. 5:16, *"In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven."*

Hebrew History Slide – Return on the Exiles

Introduction

An Amazing Man!

Nehemiah was truly one of the great leaders of all time. The principles that flow from his life to ours are profound, powerful, and practical!

Nehemiah's experience touches all of us—whether we are married, a parent, pastor, CEO, president, supervisor, or director.

He models:

- How to pray when there seems to be no human solution to our problems (1:5-11). See Esther 4:12-17. Nehemiah approached the king as did Esther many years prior.
- How to blend human and divine factors when facing incredible predicaments (2:19-20; 4:8-9, 13-20; 6:15-16). **NOTE:** Not once did Nehemiah present his letters of safe-conduct from King Artaxerxes)

- How to "plan our work" and "work our plan"—and, at the same time, rely on God as our divine resource Person (2:7-10, 11-18). **Walls of Jerusalem Slide**
- How to set goals and achieve them when everything around us seems to be falling apart (2:13-18)
- How to motivate others when morale is at an all-time low (4:10-15)
- How to cope with anger and other negative emotions (5:1-13; 13:15-31)
- How to accept promotion and success without abusing or misusing our privileges (5:14-19)
- How to respond to those who make false accusations against us and malign our motives (6:8-14)
- How to help others develop God's perspective on life. **NOTE:** In chapters 8-10, Ezra takes center stage. This was not Nehemiah's gift and he recognized his limitations.

In short, Nehemiah embodies these 7 qualities of a leader:

1. Passion for the project,
2. Ability to motivate others,
3. Unswerving confidence in God,
4. Resilient/patient in opposition,
5. Practical/balanced grip on reality,
6. Willingness to work hard and remain unselfish, and
7. Discipline to finish the job. In chapter 2, the enemies are disturbed. In chapter 4 they launch an all out assault. In chapter 5, they launch a subtle attack aimed at Nehemiah's sense of duty and integrity.

Confrontation – Nehemiah 5:1-13

Is. 58:12, Your people will rebuild the ancient ruins and will raise up the age-old foundations; you will be called Repairer of Broken Walls, Restorer of Streets with Dwellings.

As chapter 5 opens Nehemiah is confronted with a problem that had the potential to scuttle the whole building project and would have spelled victory for Israel's enemies. Worse yet, it would have brought reproach on the name of the Lord. Remember, Ezra/Nehemiah are one book in the Hebrew Scriptures. The authors are concerned with the reformation of the spiritual lives of the people as much as the rebuilding of the temple and the walls of Jerusalem.

There Was A Great Outcry – 5:1-5

Why?

1. Some were running out of Food – v. 2
2. Some were mortgaging their property to put food on the table – v. 3
3. Some were borrowing money to pay their taxes – v. 4. Worse yet, those who borrowed were forced to pay exorbitant interest rates (usury – v.10).
4. Worst of all, when their crops failed, their creditors took away their property and sold their children into slavery – v. 5.

To Get All The Facts, Get Distance – 5:6-7a

Spouting off before listening to the facts is both shameful and foolish (Proverbs 18:13).

Chuck Swindoll relates this about jumping to conclusions prematurely,

"I was invited to Forest Home to speak, and I didn't know most of the group. And if you have been there before, you know that when you get there it begins with a lovely Sunday evening meal, and at that time I met a few couples I had not met before. One was of special interest to me, he seemed a bit shy, but he was kind. And she was bubbly, they had come some distance to the conference, and said nice things about my ministry and I thanked her, and told them I looked forward to seeing them during the week, and she mentioned that we just live for this. And as the meeting began I noticed he went to sleep. Now I often talk people to sleep, but Monday came, he is out, Tuesday, I hadn't got four sentences into my stuff, and he was gone, by Wednesday, I had it figured out. This lady is spiritually minded, very discerning, loves the Lord, and she is married to this klutz. This guy she has dragged here, I mean why did he even worry about coming? He is taking the place of someone who really wants to be here. They would have enjoyed it, grown from it, learned.

Friday morning after breakfast she asked to see after the evening session. And I said sure, I knew that she needed help. After everyone had left, she walked up to me, gave me a big hug, thanked me for the conference and said, that hug is for my husband too. I said really? Yes, she said you see he has cancer and the medication he takes makes him sleepy, and he is so embarrassed that he can't tell you how much you mean to him. He will be gone in about four weeks, but she said that one of his last dying wishes was to be able to come to one of the conferences where you spoke. And I want to thank you for that. And she left.

I walked out into the night air, and decided that would be the last time I would make snap judgments before gathering all the facts.

What Does God Have To Say?

Is this what Nehemiah referred to as, *"I pondered them in my mind"* (5:7).

Action Steps

1. He called together a large assembly - vs. 7. The problem was well known and wide spread. In this case, a public response was in order. Nehemiah called together a large meeting.
2. He pulled no punches – vs. 8. We're buy back the same brothers you are selling!! STOP THAT! See Luke 3:8-14. What does the Lord require? Micah 6:8.
3. Obey God's Word – vs. 9. Ex. 22:25, *"If you lend money to one of my people among you who is needy, do not be like a moneylender; charge him no interest."* Deut. 23:19-20, *"Do not charge your brother interest, whether on money or food or anything else that may earn interest. You may charge a foreigner interest, but not a brother Israelite, so that the LORD your God may bless you in everything you put your hand to in the land you are entering to possess."* WALK IN THE FEAR OF THE LORD!

4. Follow my lead – vs. 10. We are lending these folks money, without interest. Do the same! See 5:14-16. Nehemiah was the example, not the exception.
 - a. As Governor (appointed halfway through the project), Nehemiah chose NOT to eat the allotted food – his expense account. The poor were being exploited by the rich, he would take no part.
 - b. Nehemiah chose to serve and not to be served. Mark 10:42-45, *Jesus called them together and said, "You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. 43 Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, 44 and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. 45 For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."*
 - c. Nehemiah was not above manual labor. He stayed focused on his calling. In short, Nehemiah handled his appointment/promotion in a God honoring way. Chuck Swindoll wrote in his work, Hand Me Another Brick (page 113), "Few people can live in the lap of luxury and maintain their spiritual, emotional, and moral equilibrium. Sudden elevation often disturbs balance, which leads to pride and a sense of self-sufficiency and then, a fall. It's ironic, but more of us can hang tough through a demotion than through a promotion. And it is at this level a godly leader shows himself or herself strong. The right kind of leaders, when promoted, know how to handle the honor."
5. Give back what you have taken – vs. 11
6. Trust, but verify – vss. 12-13

The New Strategy Of Intimidation - Neh. 6.

It's often more difficult to complete the second half of a task than the first half.

In 4:6, *"we rebuilt the wall till all of it reached half its height, for the people worked with all their heart."*

In 6:1, *"...I had rebuilt the wall and not a gap was left in it—though up to that time I had not set the doors in the gates..."*

Once the Jews reached the halfway point in rebuilding the wall around Jerusalem, they faced a normal motivational problem. Of course, for them it was not a normal challenge. They were faced with a possibility of a military attack from all sides. However, even in the best of times, it's easy to "let down" when we're halfway there.

Nehemiah's response to the military threat is found in chapter 4.

When I teach Men's Fraternity, this is our theme verse -

4:14, *"Don't be afraid of them. Remember the Lord, who is great and awesome, and fight for your brothers, your sons and your daughters, your wives and your homes."*

Since I am a football coach, A Football Metaphor is in order...

The Jews were definitely ahead at **halftime** when they went into the locker room. **Nehemiah** was definitely a better coach. **Sanballat**, on the other hand, couldn't seem to get his team off the line of scrimmage.

But come the second half, things were different. Nehemiah's team had worked their hearts out. They were physically and emotionally exhausted. You'll recall Neh. 4:10, *"The strength of the laborers is giving out, and there is so much rubble that we cannot rebuild the wall."*

Sanballat, on the other hand, brought in fresh recruits and a whole new set of plays. And as we all know, games are not won at halftime.

A Few Insights...

First, there's always a natural tendency for most of us to start strong when we attack a challenging project. But once we get into the thick of it, it's easy to lose momentum—particularly if we're putting out a lot of energy. Furthermore, once we get beyond the opening minutes (or hours) and settle into the step-by-step process, it's also easy to lose sight of the goal.

Excitement normally wanes when we get into the steady, day-by-day, responsibilities of life.

Second, it's also easy to get caught off guard when we're winning. We sometimes let our guard down. It's then that we can lose perspective and momentum. And momentum can turn quickly.

Third, our tendency to "let down" is accentuated when we grow weary.

It takes unusual motivation to complete difficult tasks when we're tired.

How many worthy projects are there in life which we tackle enthusiastically, but never get beyond the halfway point? Remember!

- a. First, it's a natural tendency.
- b. Second, fatigue and boredom will try to stop us every time.
- c. Third, Satan delights in uncompleted tasks.

Day 4 in our reading, "What Scriptures from the NT would you have used to encourage Nehemiah?"

Gal. 6:9, *Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.*

Heb. 12:3, *Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.*

Nehemiah was accused of:

1. plotting a revolt
2. setting himself up as the new king

Artaxerxes' Potential Response

1. Consider the source. Who did he trust? Sanballat and Geshem or Nehemiah? BELIEVE THE BEST OF SOMEONE **BEFORE** THE WORST! If it doesn't sound right, it probably isn't. What if the source is trustworthy? Investigate further. Did they simply mis-hear what was said?
2. Would he be tempted to believe the report from Geshem as he did some 20 years earlier from Rehum? See Ezra 4:6-24.

Nehemiah's Response

1. He denied the accusations – vs. 8. He was not planning to rebel. He was not planning to be their king. He had not appointed prophets.
2. He made his response public – vs. 9. "They were trying to frighten us..."
3. He prayed – vs. 9b. "Now strengthen my hands."

The Result

Neh. 6:15-16, So the wall was completed on the twenty-fifth of Elul, (27 October 445 B.C.) in fifty-two days. When all our enemies heard about this, all the surrounding nations were afraid and lost their self-confidence, because they realized that this work had been done with the help of our God.

Understanding Conflict and Our Responses To It

*So whether you eat or drink or **whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God***
(1 Cor. 10:31)

A. What is Conflict?

- A difference in opinion or purpose that frustrates someone's goals or desires. In a fallen world, conflict is inevitable and should be expected (see James 4:1-3; Acts 15:1-2, 36-39).

B. What Causes Conflict?

- Misunderstandings (Acts 15:24-29)
- Differences in values, goals, gifts, calling, priorities, expectations, interests, or opinions (1 Cor. 12:14-19)
- Competition over limited resources (Gen. 13:1-9)
- Sinful attitudes and desires that lead to sinful words and actions (James 4:1-3).

C. God Provides The Way To Deal With Conflict

- We are guided by what God commands us to do (**the 4 G's**)

GLORIFY God... (1 Cor. 10:31)

How can I please and honor the Lord in this situation?

GET the log out of your eye...(Matt. 7:5)

How have I contributed to this conflict and what do I need to do to resolve it?

GO and show your brother his fault...(Matt. 18:15-17)

How can I help others to understand how they have contributed to this conflict?

GO and be reconciled...(Matt. 5:23-24; 6:12; Eph. 4:1-3, 32)

How can I demonstrate forgiveness and encourage a reasonable solution to this conflict?

D. We are inspired and empowered by what God has already done and continues to do for us.

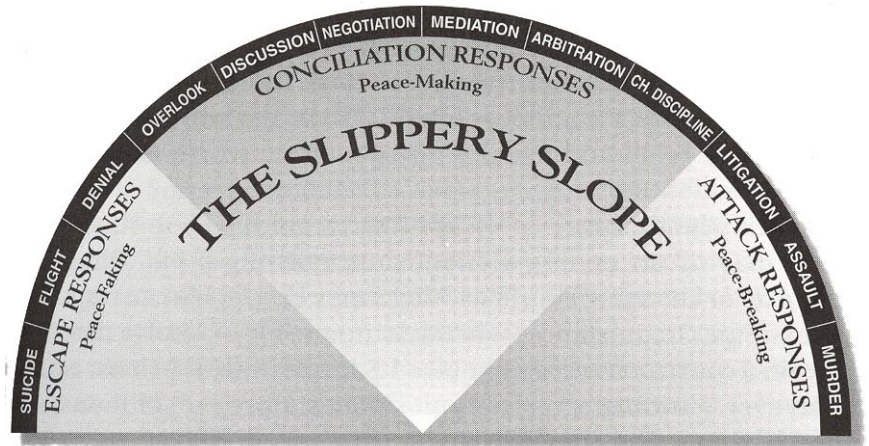
- Making peace doesn't come naturally (Rom. 7:15)
- The foundation for peacemaking and reconciliation is our justification by God's grace. (Rom. 3:10,17; Eph. 2:8)

- Jesus is the model of a peacemaker: He died for us while we were still sinners (Rom. 5:8; Phil. 2:5-11), He suffered wrongs without retaliation (1 Pet. 2:23), He confronted others only for their good (John 4:1-26), He understood others misunderstandings of Him (Mark 3:1-6, 20-26, 30-35), and He loved and forgave His enemies (Luke 23:34). He promises to work in us so that we may too may be peacemakers (see Phil. 2:13; Col. 3:15).

E. How Do We Respond To Conflict?

Escape Responses – The three responses found on the left side of the curve are directed at getting away from the conflict situation rather than resolving it. These responses are:

- Denial:** Pretend that a conflict does not exist, or refuse to do what you should do to resolve it properly (1 Sam. 2:22-25).
- Flight:** Run away from the person with whom you are having a conflict. This is a legitimate response only when it is presently impossible to resolve the conflict in a constructive manner (1 Sam. 19:9-10).
- Suicide:** A person takes his or her own life.



Attack Responses – The three responses found on the right side of the curve are directed at bringing as much pressure to bear on opponents as is necessary to defeat their claims and eliminate their opposition. These responses are:

- Litigation:** A matter is taken before the civil authorities for a decision. At times this a legitimate response, but it should be used only after exhausting the work-it-out responses.
- Assault:** Use force or intimidation (physical, verbal, financial, or otherwise) to compel an opponent to give in to your demands.
- Murder:** Kill the person or persons who oppose you.

Conciliation Responses – (work-it-out responses)

The six responses found along the top portion of the curve are directed at finding a just and mutually agreeable solution to a conflict. These responses may be divided into two subcategories:

- (1) Personal peacemaking responses, which involve only the parties:

- a. **Overlook** an offense (*Prov. 19:11; 12:16; 17:14; 1 Pet. 4:8; Col. 3:13*): One person deliberately and unilaterally decides to forgive a wrong and walk away from a conflict.
- b. **Discussion** (*Matt. 18:15; 5:23-24; Gal. 6:1-3; Prov. 28:13*): Personal offenses are resolved through confession or confrontation, leading to forgiveness and reconciliation.
- c. **Negotiation** (*Phil. 2:3-4*): Substantive issues are resolved through a bargaining process in which the parties seek to reach a mutually agreeable settlement of their differences through an exchange of promises.

(2) Assisted responses, which involve others in the parties' church or community:

- a. **Mediation** (*Matt. 18:16*): One or two other people meet with the parties to improve communication and facilitate a resolution. (Mediators can only suggest solutions and have no power to impose a solution.)
- b. **Arbitration** (*1 Cor. 6:1-8*): When the parties cannot come to a voluntary solution, they explain the matter to one or more arbitrators who are empowered to render a binding decision on the matter.
- c. **Church Discipline** (*Matt. 18:17-20*): When a Christian party refuses to do what is right and just, the church family formally intervenes to promote repentance and reconciliation (*2 Tim. 2:24-26; 2 Cor. 2:5-11*).