



NEHEMIAH WEEK 7: WHEN DISTRACTIONS COME

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Pastor Randy Remington

INTRO:

- As chapter six continues the story, Nehemiah and the team he leads are coming to the completion of the walls after 100 years of them lying in ruins. They were finished in 52 days. That's almost miraculous.
- Even so, there's not one "miracle" recorded in Nehemiah. There's just faithful people pursuing a God-given vision and completing a task in arguably a miraculous time frame, without distraction.

*"As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him. She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet listening to what he said. But Martha was **distracted** by all the preparations that had to be made. She came to him and asked, "Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!" "Martha, Martha," the Lord answered, "**you are worried and upset about many things, but only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better and it will not be taken away from her.**"(Luke 10:38-42)*

- One of the key strategies of the Enemy is distraction. The Enemy always wants to abort what God wants to birth. But, failing that, he employs distraction and discouragement.
- Illustration: If you become distracted from the important things, it can kill you. At 55 mph, you'll travel more than 130 yards during a 5-second glance at a text. Distracted driving while texting is six times more likely to cause an accident than DUI.
- God is a God of purpose. There is something God wants to do in you and through you. (Ephesians 2:10)
- The Enemy is always trying to derail that, and distraction is a tactic of the Enemy who seeks to destroy you.

MAIN TEXT:

*"When word came to Sanballat, Tobiah, Geshem the Arab and the rest of our enemies that 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—Sanballat and Geshem sent me this message: "Come, let us meet together in one of the villages on the plain of Ono." But they were scheming to harm me; so I sent messengers to them with this reply: "**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?**" Four times they sent me the same message, and each time I gave them the same answer." (Nehemiah 6:1-4)*

OVERCOMING DISTRACTIONS IS A MATTER OF PURPOSE AND PERSEVERANCE:

"I am doing a great work and I cannot come down." (6:3 NASB)

- When vision is clear, decisions become easy
- "Opportunities", things that appear to be good, can be traps and distractions.
- "I am doing a great work, why should I...?" becomes a guiding principle for a purposeful life
 - Marriage; How has God called me to love my spouse?
 - Family; How is God using me to shape the lives of my kids?
 - Vocation; What has God called me to?
- When I understand God's purpose for me, life becomes a confident, focused adventure.
- Priorities become clear. Perseverance is possible (James 1:2-4, Romans 5:2-5)

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

- Focus is motivating and energizing
- Weariness becomes a function of purposelessness, "Why am I even doing this?"

OVERCOMING DISTRACTIONS IS A MATTER OF PRAYER AND POWER:

"Then, the fifth time, Sanballat sent his aide to me with the same message, and in his hand was an unsealed letter in which was written: "It is reported among the nations—and Geshem says it is true—that you and the Jews are plotting to revolt, and therefore you are building the wall. Moreover, according to these reports you

are about to become their king and have even appointed prophets to make this proclamation about you in Jerusalem: 'There is a king in Judah!' Now this report will get back to the king; so come, let us meet together." I sent him this reply: **"Nothing like what you are saying is happening; you are just making it up out of your head."** They were all trying to frighten us, thinking, "Their hands will get too weak for the work, and it will not be completed." **But I prayed, "Now strengthen my hands."** (Nehemiah 6:5-9)

- Distraction can often come as accusations, even public slander.
- The letter Sanballat sent was unsealed because he wanted others to read the false accusations and the false information in it.
- Nehemiah was selfless and sacrificial in his pursuit of rebuilding the walls. He was the exact opposite of that which he was accused.
- The letter was a manipulation to leverage a "meeting", which was a waster of time, a distraction, and probably a trap.
- The temptation, the distraction, was the desire to defend himself.
- Nehemiah's vision and purpose gave him resolve in the face of intimidation, because he knew that he could go to God for strength with open hands and a pure heart.
- Jesus is our example, who regularly pursued times of intimate prayer with his Father. Constant communion in prayer = abiding power.

OVERCOMING DISTRACTIONS IS A MATTER OF PRINCIPLE AND POSITIVITY:

*"...Mehetabel, who was shut in at his home. He said, "Let us meet in the house of God, inside the temple, and let us close the temple doors, because men are coming to kill you—by night they are coming to kill you." But I said, **"Should a man like me run away? Or should someone like me go into the temple to save his life? I will not go!"** I realized that God had not sent him, but that he had prophesied against me because Tobiah and Sanballat had hired him. **He had been hired to intimidate me so that I would commit a sin by doing this, and then they would give me a bad name to discredit me.**" (Nehemiah 6:10b-13)*

- Mehetabel was likely a priest who was "shut in" while ritually unclean. He pretended to be Nehemiah's friend, but was bribed to distract, discourage, and trap him into compromising his principles.
- Religious intimidation can be at least as discouraging as overt opposition from outside God's family.
- It can cause a unique fear, but it cannot undermine the settled confidence Nehemiah had in God's purpose for him. He displayed unique courage in the face of Mehetabel's "prophecy."
- "Positivity" is really confidence, and courage is not based in bravado, but in rock-solid confidence.

COURAGE IS ONLY AS GOOD AS THE CONFIDENCE BEHIND IT:

*"Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And **let us run with perseverance** the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. **For the joy set before him he endured** the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. **Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.**" (Hebrews 12:1-3)*

- The big question is this: Do I really trust the promises of God? Is He as good as His Word?
- If you stand before God confident in Him, then you can step out and act in courage.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. How do you see yourself susceptible to distraction as you go about your day?
2. Have you ever considered distraction as a spiritual matter, even a spiritual battle? If so, how, and if not, why not?
3. How do you discern where God wants your focus? How does prayer play a part?
4. Where do the Scriptures fit in that process for you?
5. How do you persevere when you face serious head winds?
6. Where do you see distractions that invite you to compromise your principles?

7. How does confidence in God birth courage in you? Or does it? If not, why not?
8. What do you think of the idea that the rebuilding of the walls in 52 days was “miraculous”?
9. Do you think all miracles have to be supernatural, and why or why not?
10. What could you do for 52 straight days that would help you focus on God’s purpose for you?

