

“Defeating Discouragement”

Sticks & Stones week #4

Introduction

As we look carefully into Nehemiah’s mission of rebuilding the wall around Jerusalem, we have seen the importance of hearing God’s call and taking action. But the outcome of Nehemiah’s mission was dependent on how he handled the difficulties in actually building the wall. The greatest of these was the opposition he faced and the resulting discouragement and doubt his workforce experienced. But as we all can attest to, the outcome of our efforts are so dependent on how we respond to these difficulties. In this study we will look at how Nehemiah led his people through that opposition and discouragement and explore how we too might respond to overcome our difficulties.

Ice Breaker (Optional):

Share a time in your life where you have come back from a setback?

Study Questions (45 MIN)

When Opposition Comes

Q1. Read Nehemiah 4:1-3, John 16:33

Nehemiah had gotten off to a tremendous start: he had found God’s call and acted, he had found the favor of Artaxerxes to rebuild the wall with and provide the resources he needed. He had also found favor with the Israelites as they joined together to begin the arduous task of building. If we look to our own spiritual journeys we might see how we heard God’s call to salvation in Jesus, and responded. It may have been an easy, fast start to our journey with Jesus, but soon we discovered that following God doesn’t guarantee fast, easy success in life. Rather, what does Jesus tell his followers in John 16:33? Are you now experiencing the reality of this in anyway?

External Opposition

Q2. Read Nehemiah 4:4-9

As the Israelites made continued progress in the midst of opposition, officials from the Israelites’ neighbors grew more outraged that the walls around Jerusalem were being rebuilt. This would definitely shift the balance of power in the region and they were not about to have any of it. How did Sanballat and Tobiah escalate their efforts (v.8)? Have you ever experienced mounting opposition the closer you got to your goal? How did the Israelites respond?

Internal Opposition

Q3. Read Nehemiah 4:10-12, 2Corinthians 12:8-10

Under the continual pressure, cracks in the Israelites’ devotion began to appear. What did this look like? (Neh 4:10) There were even some Jews who were arguing that the workers should stop building and go home. Are there people in your life that have surprised you by their discouragement rather than encouragement – even people close to you? What truth did the apostle Paul turn to as he faced his own discouragement? (2Cor 12:9)

Defeating Opposition

Q4. Read Nehemiah 4:13-18, Ephesians 6:10-13

Nehemiah didn’t give up, he responded to the escalated threats by doing everything he could. What were physical responses and what were spiritual? From Ephesians 6:12 we are reminded that the battle includes wrestling against spiritual forces using the armor of God. Where are we to get the strength to overcome? When we ‘put on the armor of God’, what are the results that are promised? (Eph 6:13). What are some “items” of spiritual armor that we can turn to in time of need? Can your group encourage you and pray for you that you will withstand opposition, setbacks and doubt?

Wrap-Up

The building of the wall evoked great opposition and doubts arose whether the Jews would be able to finish. But Nehemiah didn’t let the presence of opposition cause him to doubt the presence of God. He developed his battle plan, did everything he could, and depended on God to see the work succeed. We can do the same when we are faced with opposition and doubt.

Memory Verse

Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might.

Ephesians 6:10 ESV

Prayer (20 MIN)

Ask your group to pray regarding one area where you can apply this study in your life and other needs (see space to write on back).

Challenge: Develop a battle plan for something in your life – or help encourage someone else to do the same.

