

SESSION 4

OPPOSITION

Nehemiah 4 / Personal study

Opening prayer

Gracious Father, incline my heart to Your testimonies. Open my eyes that I might behold wonderful things in Your Word. Unite my heart to fear Your name and satisfy me with Your steadfast love. I ask this by Your Spirit and through Your Son.

Introduction

The people have a mind to work. They take to the rubble together and begin to sort, sweat and build until the work is halfway done. The wall will be rebuilt, and they will do it.

Little Israel, picked on and bullied by the nations – everyone hears the name-calling, the harsh taunts. Israel's enemies speak with sideways glances just in ear shot of someone who tells someone else, with each retelling tearing at the seams of Israel's confidence.

Soon the people grow weary, and their progress slows: "By ourselves we will not be able to rebuild the wall." The people no longer have a mind to work. Instead, they have a mind to fear, building with their doubts and framing walls of worry. "We will never finish at this rate." they tell themselves. "It is too much." they say. "We can't keep building; we have to defend ourselves now. Please, help us!"

Nehemiah watches Israel's strength fail and hears their fearful cries. "Do not be afraid of them!" he says. "Remember the Lord, who is great and awesome, and fight for your brothers, your sons, your daughters, your wives and your homes!"

And with the fear of the Lord, every man returns to his work, each stone a stitch repairing the true confidence of Israel. The people have a mind to remember the Lord.

Read Nehemiah 4 and answer the following questions:

1. Summarize the events in chapter 4 into three sections. List a key theme of each section below:
 - (vv. 1-9)
 - (vv. 10-14)
 - (vv. 15-23)
2. Sanballat and Tobiah criticize and mock the Israelites. Why are they unhappy about the rebuilding of the wall? What do they hope to accomplish with their criticism?
3. Nehemiah responds to their criticism with a strongly worded prayer in 4:4-5. What do you think of his prayer? Does it seem harsh? Why or why not?
4. Think of a time when someone criticized you for doing good. How did you respond? Did you respond like Nehemiah, with righteous words directed toward God? Did you respond with angry words directed toward your attacker? Did you respond with self-justifying words directed toward your supporters? What does our response toward criticism reveal about our fears?
5. When Sanballat and Tobiah begin plotting an attack, what two actions do the builders take in response (4:9)? Why are both important?
6. The Israelites in the surrounding areas hear rumors of attack when the wall is only halfway done. They come in from the field and beg for help. What do we learn about the confidence of the Israelites? How would you characterize their state of mind (4:10-12)?
7. Nehemiah gives three commands to the people in 4:14. What are they? Why does he give these three specific commands?
8. What kind of a work environment does Nehemiah describe in 4:21-23?
How is the Christian life similar to what Nehemiah describes? In what ways do we build the kingdom with a shovel in one hand and a sword in the other?

9. How might you act as a type of Nehemiah to your church and your family, leading them away from the fear of opposition and into a reliance on God?

Closing Prayer

Father, You are faithful and gracious, and Your presence will soothe all of my fears if only I trust You more fully. Show me the roots of my unbelief and grant me repentance. Help me to recall Your gracious provision in the gospel. Help me to say with Nehemiah, "My God will fight for me." Thank You for Christ who perfectly demonstrated reliance on You. Bless me with a great passion for You and Your kingdom. Amen.

SESSION 4

OPPOSITION Nehemiah 4 / Group Study

Answer the following questions:

1. What thoughts do you have based upon this week's personal study?
2. What stood out to you? What challenged you? What prompted questions?

Read Nehemiah 4 and answer the following questions:

1. What emotions or feelings would be natural in the midst of the opposition that surrounded the Israelites?
Which of these feelings are acceptable and which are the result of unbelief?
2. What is often your first response to fear? What does your response say about where you place your confidence?
3. How do you handle loss of control? What does your response say about where you place your confidence?
4. While physical harm might not be our imminent threat, there is a very real threat against our souls every day. What are some of the daily battles you fight and how might you need the Lord's help in them?
5. What does it look like for you as a believer to fight for holiness through grace-driven effort? Give an example.
6. Where are you tempted to fear man over God? What situation or relationship tempts you to trust in your own strength, control or provision more than God's?
7. Read Romans 8:14-17 aloud. How does our adoption as sons and daughters of God change both our doubts about His attitude toward us and our ability to face opposition?

Guide to prayer

- *Praise God for His faithfulness and provision.*
- *Confess your doubts, worries and fears.*
- *Ask the Lord to help you to rest in His love more fully.*

LEADER GUIDE

SESSION 4

OPPOSITION / **Nehemiah 4**

1. Personal response
2. Personal response
3. Fear, anxiety, worry, anger, bitterness, confusion, etc. would all be fairly natural. Any of these responses could be motivated by disbelief or doubt in the goodness of God. Help the group to understand that natural responses are often prompted by the old nature in rebellion to God and not the new nature ruled by the Spirit.
4. While some people might be frozen by fear, others are challenged by it. Either can be detrimental. Our first response to fear shows where our trust is: If panicked or terrified, an individual might be trusting in their own strength, unable to see beyond their doubts and worry. If challenged, it could show an over-reliance upon one's self to perform and control. The proper response is to walk with a gospel-centred confidence that acknowledges God's sovereignty and good will toward His children.
5. The underlying issue for people may be new to you. The "fight or flight" response may have never been seen as a failure to recognize God's provision, power and favour toward them in Christ. One's attitude toward control shows who is believed to really be in charge. For the believer who is to become like a child, this is a humble dependence upon God's ultimate plan. It is an active placing of trust within the mind of the individual.
6. Eugene Peterson writes, "Everyone you meet is fighting a great battle." Each individual has bents, sin patterns, hurts and trials that they have either walked through or are walking in. While the devil is actively pursuing the destruction of believers, we have within us our remaining corruption, the part of us that is still loyal to sin, and it is active as well.
7. Talk through what a disciplined life looks like. What habits shape your character in large and small ways? Do these honor the Lord? Like the Hebrews were called to live a life set apart from the nations because of their relationship to God, Christians are called to live holy lives because we are God's children. This means that we live out our identity as God's children instead of trying to earn this identity. We order our steps, limit our options and pursue depth over convenience out of gratitude to God, not to earn His favour.