

WEDNESDAY BIBLE FELLOWSHIP

Christ Church, Crouch End Hill

Tel/ Fax: 020 8340 1566

STUDY NOTES ON NEHEMIAH Chapter 4: Problems and Pressures

Problems and pressures do not discriminate. They have no respect for rank, race, or riches. Problems and pressures do not care whether you are an honourable person in pursuit of noble ends or a troubled person longing for relief. Problems and pressures have no respect for your privacy, person, or property. They do not wait for an invitation but are always ready to take the initiative. In addition, problems and pressures like thieves, may rob you of sleep, your peace, and your happiness. Our lesson today, Nehemiah chapter 4, will address how Nehemiah dealt with the problems and pressures that he and the people encountered when they were doing a great work for God.

The chapter provides some clues to the following questions:

1. How do we face opposition?
2. How do we deal with people who:
 - a) Disagree with us?
 - b) Ridicule our beliefs?
 - c) Block us getting on?
 - d) Never see the positive in our ideas?
 - e) Always seem against us?

It also provides us with insights on how to cope with:

- a) New Tasks
- b) New ways of doing things
- c) Difficult or frightening situations.

Nehemiah is faced with two external forms of opposition and two internal. The two external oppositions were ridicule (4:1-6) and threats (4:7-9), while the two internal oppositions were dissent (4:10) and panic (4:11-23).

As far as Sanballat was concerned the Jews had no visible resources to commit to the rebuilding of the walls. What Sanballat and his friends could not see was the Jews' great spiritual resources. The world glories in its wealth and power, but God's people glory in their poverty and weakness. "Will they offer sacrifices" (v.2), has the idea of, 'Will they seek God through sacrifice and expect Him to miraculously build the walls? Will they pray the walls up?' "Will they finish in a day" (v.2), has the idea of 'Do they have any idea what they are taking on? This isn't an easy project.'

Like most attacks of discouragement, there is a trace of truth in the words of the enemy. As builders, the Jews were "feeble". They would not "complete it in a day". They didn't have the best materials to work with. A lying, discouraging attack will often have *some* truth in it, but it will neglect the great truth: *God was with them and has promised to see them through.*

Sanballat and Tobiah sought to bring the discouragement through criticism. Charles Swindoll points out that there were many of them together doing the sarcastic, mocking criticism - and observes "critics run with critics." One measure of a leader is to be able to measure criticism; to not allow one to be run down by the critical, while still be sensitive to God's voice even in the midst of criticism.

Discouragement is such a powerful weapon because it is somewhat the opposite of faith. Where faith believes God and His love and promises, discouragement looks for and believes the worst - and tends to pretty much forget about who God is, what He has promised to do and what He has done.

Nehemiah ignores the temptation to respond to the ridicule and prays instead. He suspects that his enemies will launch an attack, so he posts guards and encourages the people to pray. The workers hold both tools and weapons (5:17) and were prepared to fight when the signal was given. "Watch and pray" combines faith and works and is a good example for us to follow even today some 2500 years later.

Nehemiah's prayer in verses 4 and 5 seems pretty tough, but prayers in the Psalms are even tougher: "Break the teeth in their mouth, O God!" (Psalm 58:6). It is proper for a child of God to pray such a prayer, because they are giving their violent inclinations over to God, and letting *Him* deal with them. God is just and He is the One who decides how to deal with those who make life unbearable for His beloved ones.

The reason for the dissent in the ranks becomes clear in 6:17-19. Marriage ties and a love of money have caused some of the Jews to be compromised from the task in hand.

To boost confidence Nehemiah inspects the walls nightly and encourages the workers daily. Nehemiah and the Jews rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem succeeded in overcoming the opposition through a) Prayer, b) Faith in God, who he is and what he has done and c) A single minded focus on the task in hand, namely rebuilding the walls.

Practical Considerations.

Listening to the enemy: can lead to discouragement. The words of a children's song caution, "Be careful little ears what you hear!" We learn from Nehemiah 4 that listening to the words of the enemy can lead to discouragement. The opposition to the work of rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem was loud and cruel. Every word was filled with venom and spoken to the end that the Jews would become discouraged, and demoralized. We must be careful what we listen to lest we be rendered ineffective in God's work.

Prayer: puts problems and pressures into perspective. Nehemiah was successful in dealing with problems and pressures because he was a man of prayer. Problems never seem quite as ominous before our omnipotent and awesome God. We should follow Nehemiah's example and pray, rather than panic, in the face of problems and pressures.

We should not lose heart in doing good: Nehemiah dealt with problems and pressures not only through praying alone, but through persistent work as well. By so doing, he modelled Paul's counsel to the Corinthians, "Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you...because you know that your labour in the Lord is not in vain" (1 Corinthians 15:58). We too, should keep at the task even in the face of opposition.

We should never do things just half-way in God's work: When the Jews reached the half-way point in the work of rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem, they were ready to stop the work because of fatigue and fear. We must guard against the tendency to do things half-way in God's work. We should look to God when we are weary that He may renew our strength (Isaiah 40:31). We should look to God when we are fearful that He may remind us of His presence and protection. And, we should look to God when we are discouraged that He may bolster our resolve.

Fatigue can cause us to lose our vision: The Jews began the rebuilding of the walls with great enthusiasm and energy. As they continued the work however, they became both physically and emotionally exhausted as they daily contended with the rubble of the walls and the rumours of their enemies. This relentless pressure finally took its toll as the people lost sight of their progress and became discouraged at the thought of the remainder of the work. We must learn the value of rest and relaxation and learn to schedule such moments into our busy days lest we too, lose sight of the bigger picture.