



| | | | |
|---|---------------------------------|---|-------------------------|
| Series: Nehemiah, Healthy Walls | Reference: Nehemiah 4 | Title: The Sword & The Trowel | Date: 5.28.17 |
| Website Writeup: | | | |
| We're called to be disciples who disciple. We work at the kingdom of God aware of imminent spiritual attack at all times with a sword in one hand, and a trowel in the other - Prayer & Preparedness! We are called to build each other up in the faith, working as a spiritual community, so in our overall calling to reach the People Groups of the world, we must work towards our own spiritual formation together through the very practical means of discipling one another. Let's see how Nehemiah 4 reflects all this. | | | |

Color Changes in text indicate slide changes

UPG Prayer of the Day... The Bugis are a rough & mobile people group of 6.5 million in South Sulawesi. Many Bugis have a strong desire to seek success & wealth. They believe certain days of the week to be good fortune days & some to be bad, with misfortune more likely to happen on those days. They're almost 100% adherents to Sunni Islam mixed with animistic beliefs. They're where we get the term the Boogey Man, since they are sometimes pirates. When sailing off shore people say, "Awas orang Bugis!" "Be careful, the Bugis Man!" I did a film for the ministry to the Bugis a few years back for a friend who was ministering among them.

Sermon... We find ourselves in Nehemiah Chapter 4 today (Summarize including last weeks Gates). We'll see that Satan's first tactic is to deride & discourage when we endeavor to rebuild the walls & gates in our lives & community; opposition will come. So, how do we face it? Let's start in Nehemiah 4:1-3... *When Sanballat heard that we were rebuilding the wall, he became angry and was greatly incensed. He ridiculed the Jews, 2 and in the presence of his associates and the army of Samaria, he said, "What are those feeble Jews doing? Will they restore their wall? Will they offer sacrifices? Will they finish in a day? Can they bring the stones back to life from those heaps of rubble—burned as they are?" 3 Tobiah the Ammonite, who was at his side, said, "What they are building—if even a fox climbed up on it, he would break down their wall of stones!"*

Sanballat was the governor of Samaria, the area of Palestine which is known today as the West Bank. Tobiah was the representative of the country of Ammon, which is modern day Jordan. In v7 we'll learn this coalition includes Arabs, and 'the men of Ashdod'. Today Ashdod would've been a part of the Gaza Strip. These tensions are still alive today. Truth doesn't change & people rarely do either. When you take this ridicule in light of rebuilding your spiritual walk in Christ, what do these verses mean to you? Have you experienced external or internal pressure & ridicule?

Last week we outlined these gates & what they can mean allegorically to us. The Sheep Gate, the Dung Gate, the Fountain Gate, the Water Gate, etc. I prayed God would lead each one of us to a gate(s), which are in need of rebuilding in our lives. Today, we need to think back to what the Holy Spirit may have revealed to you concerning them. However, also remember we're a community of faith endeavoring to rebuild the walls &



gates of God's Kingdom in the Eastern Main Line; working together, serving each other & local community & finishing the task which is before us.

In both of these scenarios, personal & corporate, since they go hand-in-hand, we'll find attack & trouble. Remember the Horse Gate which reminds us, spiritual warfare is evident all around us. I wouldn't be at all surprised if you told me you endeavored to get back into the Word this week, rebuilding the Water Gate, but were met with busyness. Or you told me you were seeking purity, but heard those familiar old voices in your head saying, "Why bother? You can't do it!" Or, ran into that old friend who'd lead you down a path you're trying to avoid. Or, you need to make a commitment to Jesus, but were gripped with fear you'd turn into a self-righteous jerk.

As soon as we make positive decisions to nurture our relationship with Jesus, derision, fear, old voices, negative thoughts & situations arise to derail our progress. It's a truth which won't change until Christ returns.

As soon as leadership endeavors to move our community closer to Christ & his purposes we'll be met with derision, anger & roadblocks. We have a choice when faced with spiritual attack just like Cain did in Genesis 4 when he succumbed & brought a less than worthy offering to God & was angry when God didn't look favorably on it. God responds to his anger, *"Why are you angry? Why is your face downcast? 7 If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must master it."*

I have choices when faced with opposition - give up, get angry, get bitter, be hurt, insecure, withdraw from community, hide, or turn from God's call. Those are all within my realm of choice - but there are other choices I can also make. How did Nehemiah respond? *Nehemiah 4:4-5... Hear us, O our God, for we are despised. Turn their insults back on their own heads. Give them over as plunder in a land of captivity. 5 Do not cover up their guilt or blot out their sins from your sight, for they have thrown insults in the face of the builders.*

The margin indicates a more thorough translation of that last phrase as, *'they have provoked You to anger before the builder.'* These people aren't only deriding Nehemiah & the people, but God himself. And Nehemiah goes to prayer. He doesn't lash out, get angry, bitter, or attack; but puts the problem right back into the hands of the one with power. If we could learn the same lesson, the things which irk us wouldn't bite so deep, or rob us of peace. If we could believe Jesus when he says, *28"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest."* (Matt 11:28) we'd be a lot better off. Bring it back to him. Unload it on him. His back's strong, mine's weak. His power's great, mine's limited. But the relationship needs nurturing; we need to listen & follow.

We often allow things & people to rob us of our peace, but Jesus said, *...the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you. 27Peace I leave with you; my peace I*



give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid. John 14:26-27

Remember the Water Gate representing The Word of God & the Fountain Gate representing the Spirit-filled life. Christ promised the Spirit & speaks to us saying, *33 "I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world." (John 16:33)*

Nehemiah 4:6 - So we rebuilt the wall till all of it reached half its height, for the people worked with all their heart. They didn't give up even in the face of scorn & adversity; but dug in more seriously - an image of the church facing opposition in unity.

Nehemiah 4:7-9 - But when Sanballat, Tobiah, the Arabs, the Ammonites and the men of Ashdod heard that the repairs to Jerusalem's walls had gone ahead and that the gaps were being closed, they were very angry. 8 They all plotted together to come and fight against Jerusalem and stir up trouble against it. 9 But we prayed to our God and posted a guard day and night to meet this threat.

Prayer & preparedness. In the same sense we're reminded to put on the full armor of God for defense as it says in *Ephesians 6 - 10 Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. 11 Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. 12 For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. 13 Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. 14 Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, 15 and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. 16 In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. 17 Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. 18 And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints.*

This list is very congruent with the Gates in Nehemiah 3. They weren't on the offensive, but the defensive. The people weren't their problem, rather the dark forces which drove them. Christians view the world through the lens of the Kingdom - people aren't our enemy, rather the sin & evil forces behind what drives them. Nehemiah 4:10 - *Meanwhile, the people in Judah said, "The strength of the laborers is giving out, and there is so much rubble that we cannot rebuild the wall."*

Before married, I lived with 5 guys in their early 20's in a house which was certainly less than clean. Repairs weren't done. Unkept. One guy was the worst - he had long hair, no furniture in his room, only clothes & one small foam mat to sleep on. His door would hardly open with dirty clothes 1-2 feet deep. He'd just pick something up, shake it & wear it, dirty or not. He did laundry about once a year. He'd unroll his foam mat on top



of the clothes to sleep at night. He eventually moved out, but left a shower encrusted with black fungus, clogged & unusable. When we cleaned out the drain, it was like extracting a small black poodle! He'd let it go & it was going to be a daunting task to clean up. Have you ever mowed your lawn at a foot high? You mow a few feet, the mower stops, you clean it out & do the same again. You've let it go, but once it's cut you can keep it manicured & presentable.

Often times, our own personal lives are like my house, that lawn, or the show 'Hoarders' - so much has built up. Mere enthusiasm to rebuild the gates of our life isn't enough. It's overwhelming; it'll take a lot of hard work in the beginning; not something we can do on our own. We need community, and certainly the hand of God. You may approach the gates of your life which have been in disrepair for years & say, "I just can't do this!" Too much has happened, it's in shambles. But that's not true & you're not alone, but it takes us allowing God to work through community to help each other - it takes three dirty words; vulnerability, trust & work. You guys have carried me through discouraging times in this church, reminding me of Truth & praying over me. God working through the Body, challenging me when I'm wrong, bringing me back to Jesus.

Nehemiah 4:11-12 - Also our enemies said, "Before they know it or see us, we will be right there among them and will kill them and put an end to the work." Then the Jews who lived near them came and told us ten times over, "Wherever you turn, they will attack us."

Consistent threats. They're told ten times over by other Jews these men were going to kill them. The person not responding in faith, allowing emotion to control, seeing everything as half empty, not half full. Complaining, allowing Satan to tell them we're all going to die, it's not worth the work! And they believe it - don't be that person in community governed by self-pity, anxiety & fear! Remember, despite opposition, things were going well - tired & somewhat overwhelmed, they'd still come a long way working with all their hearts. The walls were half built! Even when things are going well, there's ongoing attack (the Horse Gate) even in our enthusiasm we realize, there'll be roadblocks to personal spiritual growth & kingdom building, but Christ has overcome! The war's already won in the midst of our current battles. It's the storming of the beach at Normandy which effectively won WWII. Although the war would continue in battles fought for a time longer. The actions of the allies at Normandy broke the back of the enemy, the overall war was won on that beach. The Cross won the spiritual war, although we continue to fight our battles until Jesus returns.

Nehemiah 4:13-14a - Therefore I stationed some of the people behind the lowest points of the wall at the exposed places, posting them by families, with their swords, spears and bows. 14 After I looked things over...

Nehemiah assesses & evaluates the need - good leadership. Looking for weak exposed spots; bolstering. When the area, or source of attack's identified he places a guard there. As we seek to rebuild gates & find ourselves exposed to attack, we pray like Nehemiah, we post guard in that area with the necessary implements to fend off the attack. It may



be a Christian friend with the freedom to call us back to Truth. Or a verse with which we use to fight. The Pastoral Council's talking now of how we can further build a discipleship culture, arming our people with the weapons of spiritual warfare.

What's your weak spot? Because your weak spot becomes my weak spot (elaborate). Most likely it has to do with the gate you're repairing. Where do you fall easy prey to lies & temptation. When we study Jesus' temptation we see he was tempted by what was relevant to him. If you want to tempt me to have dessert, don't give me mint chocolate chip ice cream, rather pralines & cream & I'll fall prey to your evil wiles. Satan knows what you like. Jesus was tempted with power. I'm tempted with pride & comfort. What about you? I was with someone recently who refuses to drink when they feel down since they they rely on it. Others know when they enter into certain conversations they'll be tempted to pride & superiority - they avoid those. Someone else gets despairing when they're not in the Word, so they get in the Word with others every day. Where do you need an armed guard in your life? And, if you don't pray & prepare, ask yourself how that derails the church in our Kingdom work together. The question is, are you in a discipleship relationship?

Nehemiah 4:14b-15 - I stood up and said to the nobles, the officials and the rest of the people, "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." 15 When our enemies heard that we were aware of their plot and that God had frustrated it, we all returned to the wall, each to his own work.

Don't be afraid, fight - nothing to fear, but fear itself - Jesus has overcome the world! Nehemiah reviews the spiritual resources available, calling people back to Truth, keeping their hands to the plow. How do we call each other back to Truth? It's a question of discipleship. Jesus needs you to follow, listen to Truth & be called back to it. God places & works through disciplers & leadership like Nehemiah who can lead you to the watering hole, but can't make you drink! You have to do that yourself. Spiritual formation happens when we allow others the freedom to lead us back to drink of Christ's Living Water - when we allow the Word to govern our hearts. (The Water Gate - 1 Cor 10:13 - the Temptation of Jesus in Matt. 4 - Jesus fends off attack with Scripture). Paul writes in 2nd Tim 2:8 when Timothy was in Ephesus under pressure, "Remember, Jesus Christ, risen from the dead!"

Nehemiah 4:16-18 - 16 From that day on, half of my men did the work, while the other half were equipped with spears, shields, bows and armor. The officers posted themselves behind all the people of Judah 17 who were building the wall. Those who carried materials did their work with one hand and held a weapon in the other, 18 and each of the builders wore his sword at his side as he worked. But the man who sounded the trumpet stayed with me.

Working with weapons in hand. Nehemiah maintains readiness & organizes the Body into places which will enable them to move forward - we do the same, identifying & developing those who serve in leadership, moving things around to make our Body



stronger & more impenetrable to attack. Calling each other to spiritual development, logistics & ministering to our children together. The image of the Christian working while ready for spiritual battle - it's like the title of Charles Spurgeon's newsletter, *'The Sword & The Trowel'*. It's our responsibility to strap on the sword & take up the trowel. Will you willingly answer the call when the trumpet's blown? No one can lead if you don't follow - God's enabled & gifted you for ministry & given you the tools for work & defense, there are tasks at hand - but we must take them up utilizing the two P's of discipleship; Prayer & Preparedness.

Nehemiah 4:19-20 - 19 Then I said to the nobles, the officials and the rest of the people, "The work is extensive and spread out, and we are widely separated from each other along the wall. 20 Wherever you hear the sound of the trumpet, join us there. Our God will fight for us!"

Maintaining readiness - the Church working together to battle sin & hardship; relying on God. He'll fight for us. With openness, vulnerability & trust we run to each others aid. Speaking Truth. Fending off attack. We run to the aid of the Body when the trumpet's blown. Engaging in prayer ministry over each other. Doing the menial tasks before us in preparing this service for people, or in Kingdom Opportunities with our Community Groups. Opening our hearts to each other asking help to defend & rebuild. The question really is, are you being discipled & discipling someone?

Nehemiah 4:21-23 - 21 So we continued the work with half the men holding spears, from the first light of dawn till the stars came out. 22 At that time I also said to the people, "Have every man and his helper stay inside Jerusalem at night, so they can serve us as guards by night and workmen by day." 23 Neither I nor my brothers nor my men nor the guards with me took off our clothes; each had his weapon, even when he went for water.

They didn't even take off their clothes! Always ready, praying continually in all circumstances, giving thanks to God in all situations! Aware, walking with Jesus, coming back to him, leading each other back. Sometimes the work of the Kingdom doesn't allow for much rest. Ministry often comes in waves. Jesus was in the boat to rest & the people ran to the other side to meet him. Yet there were quiet times of refreshment in his ministry too. We've built in plenty of time of rest & refreshment for leadership & others. In childcare we serve so that one person isn't overburdened. We don't dump things on people last minute because, "I don't feel like it today." We're responsible to finish our tasks...since, though menial, they are spiritual.

Like Nehemiah's situation, Jesus was woken from sleep in the boat to minister. People constantly tugging, pulling & requesting things from him. *They want food, he's tired & says to his disciples, 'You feed them'*. Discipleship, emulating Jesus in ministry to one another. Building each other up in the faith - it's the model of Christ (The Twelve).

When rebuilding the gates & walls of our lives & community, opposition will come! How do we face it? By prayer & preparedness individually & communally. Not giving up the



work, but facing life with a trowel in one hand & sword in the other. Aiding each other through practical discipleship & communal spiritual formation. If you're not in a Community Group, try one this week. Or, at the very least, download the sermon & read the discussion questions & other material at the end & begin to think on these things.

**Community Group Leader Questions:**

1. Are you naive to spiritual attack? If so, how can you foster spiritual acuity in this area?
 1. Do you recognize that what may seem like the normalcy of life; sick kids, car accidents, headaches, tiredness, negative thoughts, the accusatory words of others, etc., can all qualify as spiritual attack? That Satan may be trying to hold you back from something which God has called you to?
 2. How can you use Scripture to battle against these things? Think of some verses (like 1 Corinthians 10:13) which may help you.
 3. Is your first reaction to events or struggles to pray?
 1. And do you do that in a victorious voice, knowing that God is battling for you?
 2. Or do you simply moan and complain?
 3. How can you pray more effectively?
 4. How can you pray Truth from the Scriptures to do so?
 5. Do you elicit prayer from others for you?
2. Are you in a Discipleship Relationship?
 1. What does that look like?
 1. Take a look at the following pages together (*print out a copy of pp9-10 for everyone in your group*), and start to imagine what it would be like if Six:Eight were a small army of Disciples who disciple others? The following pages seeks to define for us the practicalities of what it means to disciple someone.
 2. Have you ever been in such a relationship? If so, what did it do for you? If not, what could it do for you?
 3. What holds you back from entering into deeper discipleship with others? Insecurity? Fear? Apathy? Busyness? How can you pray the Holy Spirit to bring you out of these things to be an effective disciple of Jesus?



making disciples

When we think of developing disciples we can use the acronym: IRTDM. Look through these steps below & prayerfully consider what's involved in discipleship & think how important it is that we fulfill Christ's final command; that it begins to be our first concern - Matthew 28:18-20:

¹⁸Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

Remember, Jesus spent time with the 12 disciples, doing life with them & building them up in the faith. He focused his efforts on 3 specifically; Peter, James & John, with John being the beloved. This is not to say that he showed favoritism, rather he was building disciples & focused his efforts on the few instead of the many. Those who would respond, and whom had the passion, character & desire to go further. In his humanity, he was but one man.

As Jesus identified & disciplined others, we are called to do the same in the verses above & many other places in Scripture; we're called to emulate him in discipleship ministry. The steps below are a way to think through this process. The challenge is for each one of us to identify 1 person we can disciple as Jesus disciplined The Twelve. IRTDM is typically used as a leadership development tool - however I've changed that language for our purposes. Some of these people will develop into leaders, but we're not called to make leaders, we're called to make disciples.

1. **Identify** - To see potential in others
 1. We look for...
 1. Passion for Jesus
 2. Desire to Grow (teachable spirit)
 3. People who embrace Scripture & its values
 4. God's leading (who's he leading you to?)

2. **Recruit** - Inviting someone to step up to following Christ more deeply - *"Pattern after me...as I imitate and follow Christ"* (1 Co 11:1 Amplified)
 1. Cast vision for the future, "What can Jesus do in & through you?"
 2. Encourage them as to what Jesus can do & what you see as potential for the future
 3. Discuss the commitment it takes to pursue spiritual formation

3. **Train** - empowering people with tools & vision - *"So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip his*



people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up” (Ephesians 4:11-12)

1. The Basic Discipleship Loop (basically they watch you do ministry, and are invited into that process until it becomes ministry for them)
 1. You disciple them
 2. You disciple another while your disciple helps
 3. They disciple someone while you help
 4. They disciple someone alone & discuss with you

4. **Deploy** - releasing someone into ministry with a new level of freedom
 1. Help them develop...
 1. A clear vision, as well as set expectations & goals

5. **Monitor** - keep caring, coaching & encouraging - *“They keep watch over you as those who must give an account” (Hebrews 13:17b)*
 1. Keep accountable to goals & vision
 2. Ask tough questions
 3. Give pastoral care (People are more important than production)

DISCIPLESHIP CULTURE:

We would like to see our church develop a more robust discipleship culture. So look for...

- (1) who God is placing on your heart,
- (2) No need to make it a formal awkward thing, just...
 - (1) begin to pray for this person on a regular basis.
 - (2) Begin to pursue & spend time with them.
 - (3) Intentionally bring up spiritual issues.
 - (4) Discuss where they are in their walk.
 - (5) Pray with & for them.
 - (6) Allow them into your heart & struggles as well.
 - (7) And prayerfully identify ways in which they can begin to move forward in the faith, challenging them where possible.

Remember, nothing happens without intentionality - we’ve all been called to be disciples of Christ, and to disciple others. Be cognizant, God doesn’t call you to something to which he will not empower & equip you, and that He believes you have something to give to the lives of these people! He works even through our weakness!