

Nehemiah 4:1-23

Week 4 - Prayer In the Midst of Conflict

Introduction

Start your study by praying for your group or asking someone else to pray.

? Why did you pray for the group?

Possible answers: because the handout told you to, to settle in and focus on God and his word, to better hear the Holy Spirit and open up to his leading, to thank God for our time together, to glorify God for our time together, for better learning.

? How do you think God will respond to this prayer?

Possible Answers: He'll help us focus, the Holy Spirit will work through scripture, He'll convict us of thoughts and actions that do not align with his will.

? Will your actions change because you just prayed?

Possible answers: You may be reminded of why you're at small group, you may be reminded of how to approach scripture, you may be reminded of how to treat your small group members, and you may seek the Holy Spirit's leading and be more attentive to his guidance.

Nehemiah 4:1-23 (NIV)

¹When Sanballat heard that we were rebuilding the wall, he became angry and was greatly incensed. He ridiculed the Jews, ²and 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?"

³Tobiah the Ammonite, who was at his side, said, "What they are building—even a fox climbing up on it would break down their wall of stones!"

⁴Hear us, our God, for we are despised. Turn their insults back on their own heads. Give them over as plunder in a land of captivity. ⁵Do not cover up their guilt or blot out their sins from your sight, for they have thrown insults in the face of the builders.

⁶So we rebuilt the wall till all of it reached half its height, for the people worked with all their heart.

⁷But when Sanballat, Tobiah, the Arabs, the Ammonites and the people of Ashdod heard that the repairs to Jerusalem's walls had gone ahead and that the gaps were being closed, they were very angry. ⁸They

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.

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.”

¹¹ 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.”

¹² Then the Jews who lived near them came and told us ten times over, “Wherever you turn, they will attack us.”

¹³ 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, 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 families, 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 our own work.

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 Judah¹⁷ 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.

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!”

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 as workers 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.

? In verse 2, Sanballat mocks the Jews in many ways, including by asking if they’ll offer a “sacrifice” and “finish up in a day.” He seems to be heckling them at the thought that they’d ask God to raise the wall miraculously. Do we know why the Jews didn’t request this? What can context tell us?

Possible Answers: We don’t know if or why they didn’t. However, we can observe the benefits of the previous chapter and having all of the Jews of different statuses and talents working together for

rebuilding the wall and God's glory through its recounting in scripture. We might also see God's glory worked out through the people's obedience and striving against difficult odds here.

? What was Nehemiah's response to the anger and opposition he was receiving? What is your natural response to opposition from others?

Possible Answers: He prayed to God and continued to build the wall. It did not deter him.

? How does remembering the Lord and acknowledging his power and strength lend to or take away from fighting for your own family or success?

Possible Answers: Remembering who is in control gives us perspective and hopefully helps us realize why we do what we do. We are able to act confidently knowing God's power and strength.

? Why was a guard necessary if God was in control?

[Leader's Note: Discussion on this question could bring up big questions such as "If God is sovereign, then does what we do matter?" If the discussion goes that way, use your judgment on whether to let it go or try to bring the group back on track.]

Possible Answers: God still calls us to act in our lives. He has graciously allowed our lives and what we do to matter.

? Verse 10 highlights that the Jews were tired and discouraged. What is their relief shortly after this verse? Was there relief?

Possible answers: There wasn't much relief and not a lot actually changed, but they seemed confident that God was with them.

1 Peter 5:7 (NIV)

⁷ Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.

Isaiah 41:13 (NIV)

¹³ For I am the Lord your God
who takes hold of your right hand
and says to you, Do not fear;
I will help you.

? What do these passages say about what we can do when we're feeling tired or discouraged?

? Do you have a story in which you were, perhaps inexplicably, given the “mind to work?” Please share with the group.

Possible Answers: Answers will vary.

? What does relief look like in your life? Is it always tangible?

Possible Answers: God’s strength, reliance on God’s promises, community of believers, God’s peace that surpasses all understanding

? Throughout the chapter we see that Nehemiah and the Jews continued in the face of adversity (Examples: vs 6, 15, 21) What did they believe about God that made them able to continue on?

Possible Answers: They were confident that God was on their side. They believed he was powerful, had authority, and was with them.

? What is the difference between acting then praying, and praying and then acting?

Possible Answers: When we pray, we are acknowledging God’s control and sovereignty and are refocusing our attention on God and we are able to act knowing that it is ultimately God who is still in control. We have purpose behind our actions.

? God has invited us to be a part of his redeeming work. Knowing that God is ultimately in control of people’s souls, what is our role in this work?

Possible Answers: Optional for leader to read Ephesians 2:10. Our job is to be obedient to how God is leading us and to love the people he has placed in our lives. As we are becoming more like Jesus in our walk with Him, we are called to and able to represent Christ to the people that God has placed around us.

? Looking at the passage again, what are some things we could or should be praying for?

Possible answers: Prayer for strength, as a response to adversity, and for ultimate justice - God’s will

For Discussion and Accountability

? Is there an area of your life that God is calling you to pray about and rely on him for, but also act in response?