

GBC Discipleship RESOURCE



Renovation: Rebuilding for Purpose

Week 06 | Responding to Opposition (Nehemiah 4:1-6)

For a brief overview of why (and how) to engage in each of these practices, you can read the Guideline For Growing on our website.

<https://www.gymeabaptist.org.au/growing/pages/guideline-for-growing>

What is a Discipleship Menu?

A discipleship menu is a selection of discipleship activities to engage in to continue the conversation that begins on Sunday throughout the week. The aim is to extend our interaction as a community of faith around activities that help us follow Jesus every single day. The activities vary from week to week (though there are some standard activities) and you are encouraged to do as many as you find helpful (like a menu; you don't need to eat everything on it!). Do them on your own (God and you), with a couple of friends (you and a few), or in a Life Group (you and a crew). The important thing is to do a few!

GBC Sermon Podcast and The Big 3 Podcast

Don't forget you can review this week's sermon on the GBC Sermon Podcast. The sermon is usually uploaded by Monday afternoon. You can also listen in to the Big 3 podcast; a weekly podcast where Matt, Jess, and Marc sit down and continue the conversation by engaging in three big questions raised by the congregation about the sermon. The Big 3 comes out on Wednesdays.

Overview

Like any great project, the rebuilding of the wall of Jerusalem faces opposition. The opposition that Nehemiah faces is varied and begins with intimidation and ridicule. Sanballat (the primary opponent in Nehemiah) and his associates mock the ability and work of the Jews – “What are these feeble Jews doing?... – even a fox climbing up on it would break down their wall of stones!” (4:2-3). The harshest criticisms are often those that contain a grain of truth to them and there is more than a grain of truth to these! A group of priest, jewellers, perfume makers, and women are attempting to rebuild a city wall using broken down stones!

What is noteworthy is Nehemiah's response; to turn to prayer. However, while we should commend his readiness to turn to prayer, the content of his prayer is more challenging! His prayer is what is known as an imprecatory prayer or, a prayer of cursing. This is not the only example in the Bible of this sort of prayer, but in the light of Jesus and his teaching and example, they present us with lots of questions. Can we pray this sort of prayer? If so, when? If not, what do we do with Nehemiah's prayer?

In brief, Nehemiah is passionate about the purposes of God and this passion comes out in his prayer. His prayer is a heart-felt cry to God for him to do something to sustain his purposes in the world. It is also worth noting that God is not bound to answer our prayers. Sanballat does not get what's

coming to him in this passage. Instead, what God does is gives the people a desire to work with all their heart on the wall; he unifies his people around his purpose!

Passages to Read

We believe that the Word of God is living and active and that reading and reflecting on it is one way we encounter God. As you read, we encourage people to ask a set of simple questions: What stands out to you? What questions do you have? What is the invitation of God to you? Who can you tell?

The readings this week are, like last week, all psalms of lament; psalms written in the face of opposition. Each of them contains an element of imprecation; a desire that God would act decisively on the psalmist's behalf. As you read, reflect on the psalmist's motivation. These psalms can be challenging to read – and we are certainly called to forgive, turn the cheek, and love our enemies – but we can bring strong feelings to God driven by a desire for God's will and purposes to be accomplished.

- Psalms 7; 10; 28; 35; 52

Questions to Reflect on

These questions can be used as the basis of a small group discussion or as journal questions. As with the rest of this menu, use the questions that are most useful for you or your crew.

1. Nehemiah is commended (and imitated) in his quickness to turn to the Lord in prayer. What keeps you from turning to the Lord in the face of opposition/hardship/difficulty?
2. Nehemiah's prayer is challenging to us because in its desire that God withhold forgiveness from Sanballat and his associates it appears to fly in the face of the example and teaching of Jesus (and we'll get to that in

a minute!). However, it is a prayer that expresses a deep and passionate commitment to God's purposes. What are you most passionate about? Or, perhaps to put it another way, what might drive you to pray a prayer like Nehemiah?

3. Jesus calls us to love and forgive our enemies, but also to work to bring the kingdom of heaven into the here and now. What tensions exist in these twin ideals?
4. In her sermon, Belinda pointed out that our prayers do not force God to a course of action. In other words, Nehemiah's prayer didn't result in Sanballat disappearing from the scene. What God does, is provide the people the strength to pursue God's purposes. How has praying about a difficult situation changed you?

A Prayer to Pray

Pray that God would lead you to a passionate desire for his purposes to be fulfilled (Even if that is not expressed quite like Nehemiah!).