

Icebreaker:

Nehemiah motivates the people in 4:14. Who's the greatest motivator you know and why?

Read Nehemiah 4 and discuss:

1. Sanballat mocks the Jews in verses 1 and 2 and calls them "feeble." We often find that "sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me," does not ring true. Was there a time when name-calling or mocking hurt you?
2. Who has been the biggest critic in your life? How have you dealt with that critic or criticism?
3. Does Nehemiah's prayer in verses 4 and 5 make you uncomfortable? Have you ever prayed like this? What are the good parts and bad parts of praying like this?
4. Are you able to honestly voice your specific prayer requests to God like Nehemiah's prayer? If not, what keeps you from voicing these requests: fear, unanswered prayer, discouragement, something else?
5. Which gives you more concern: external threats or internal fears and fatigue? Why?
6. Near the end of the chapter (verses 15-23), how do the people handle the work and the threats? When is it good to multi-task and when is it not?
7. Which do you tend to do with all your heart? Work, worry, worship, or warfare? Why?

Prayer:

As you pray for one another, please pray for the following needs in our church family:

prayer requests

- > Prayers of healing for Theresa Beardsley, Ron Bell, John Lindenschmidt, and Jamie Jones.

There is an old proverb that says "pray and act." In chapter 4, Nehemiah and the Jews both pray and act. When faced with internal fears or external threats, we can pray, we can act, or we can do both. Also in chapter 4, Nehemiah motivates the people to pray and act with passion (verses 4-6 and verse 14). When we are passionate about something that God is calling us to do, it is easier to meet challenges with both heartfelt prayers and effective actions.

1. Words do actually hurt. When we are hurt by words or name-calling, we need to be able to address it without retribution, but with grace and honesty. Our words have power and God calls us to use our words for good and to lift others up.
2. One way to combat criticism in our own hearts and minds is to know the truth of who we are. We are people who belong to God, created in His image, saved by grace, made for a purpose, made to do good works which God has prepared for us (Ephesians 2:8-10). Sometimes criticism has some truth in it. Sometimes criticism is not truthful at all. We can ask God to help us discern truth in criticism.
3. Nehemiah asks God to turn their insults against them and for his enemies' sins not to be forgiven. He prays against them. What's good? His emotion, passion and giving specific requests are good. What's not so good? He prays for his enemies' sins NOT to be forgiven. Forgiveness is God's choice, not Nehemiah's. Whether people are "given over as plunder" or defeated is God's area, not ours. Yet in difficult times, God can handle our emotional prayers. God can hear our pain or fear underneath our requests.
4. Help your group see that it is ok for people to pray from the heart. Throughout scripture and often in the Psalms, people "cry out" to God with their fear, anger, and concerns as Nehemiah does. You can encourage your group members to really pray from their hearts and let God have all of who they are, even the "not so nice" parts.
5. Any big project can be tiring and presents obstacles. Discuss which are harder: internal or external challenges, even fear or fatigue. Focus on God's purposes for your team or yourself, and add your prayers to Nehemiah's for God to help you overcome the obstacles.
6. The Jews accomplish their jobs by multi-tasking. They carry a sword in one hand and carry materials in the other hand. Some were guards by night and workers by day. Multi-tasking might be necessary to get a job done in hard seasons of life and effective. Long-term it may be defeating as it can lead to fatigue and errors.
7. Hopefully the alliteration of the "W" words is a lighter way to end your group. The Jews were worried about their enemies and war, tired of the work, and wanted to pray and worship. Where do you spend most of your time? What are God's priorities for our time and thoughts?