Subtle Seductions - Nehemiah

Discussion Questions

1. This week, we studied Nehemiah's life and one specific temptation he faced. Nehemiah had a clear mission from God: to rebuild the walls around the city of Jerusalem. His enemies did not want him to complete his mission, so they consistently tried to distract him. The temptation to be distracted is universal and affects all of us. Take a moment and discuss with your group how this temptation affects you. What are your most common distractions?

2. Nehemiah 6: [1] Sanballat, Tobiah, Geshem the Arab, and the rest of our enemies found out that I had finished rebuilding the wall and that no gaps remained—though we had not yet set up the doors in the gates. [2] So Sanballat and Geshem sent a message asking me to meet them at one of the villages in the plain of Ono. But I realized they were plotting to harm me, [3] so I replied by sending this message to them: "I am engaged in a great work, so I can't come. Why should I stop working to come and meet with you?"[4] Four times they sent the same message, and each time I gave the same reply. The first type of distraction that Nehemiah receives is what I call, a basic distraction. This is anything that attempts to divert our focus away from the important work God calls us to. A good example of a basic distraction might be a sudden urge to check social media on our phones or an unexpected interruption at work. What are some of the basic distractions that you face?

I love how Nehemiah responds to the basic distraction. **"I am engaged in a great work, so I can't come. Why should I stop working to come and meet with you?"** I believe, that the more clearly we understand the great work that God is calling us to, the easier it is for us to stay focused. Do you agree? What in your life might you call the great work God calls you to?

3. After Nehemiah successfully stays focused, his enemies get craftier in their attempt to distract him. **Nehemiah 6:5 The fifth time, Sanballat's servant came with an open letter in his hand, [6] and this is what it said: "There is a rumor among the surrounding nations, and Geshem tells me it is true, that you and the Jews are planning to rebel and that is why you are building the wall. According to his reports, you plan to be their king. [7] He also reports that you have appointed prophets in Jerusalem to proclaim about you, 'Look! There is a king in Judah!' "You can be very sure that this report will get back to the king, so I suggest that you come and talk it over with me."** Clearly, Nehemiah's enemies are trying to use fear as a motivation to distract him from finishing the work that God has given him. I called this type of distraction a fear-based distraction. This is an attempt to divert attention that is accompanied by fear or anxiety, making the distraction more likely. This type of distraction is more difficult to overcome. Fear, anxiety, and worry distract us from the great work that God is calling us to. Some examples of fear-based distractions might include an overwhelming fear of failure. Perhaps you believe that you are not personally able to volunteer in a ministry because you are unworthy or unequipped to do God's work. What might be some examples of fear-based distractions in your life?

I love the way Nehemiah responds to this attempt at distraction. **Nehemiah 6:8 I replied, "There is no truth in any part of your story. You are making up the whole thing."[9] They were just trying to intimidate us, imagining that they could discourage us and stop the work. So, I continued the work with even greater determination.** What are your thoughts about Nehemiah's response? Share about a time when you faced a distraction or an obstacle, and your response was to work with even greater determination.

4. The third distraction that Nehemiah faces involves religion. He goes to see a prophet who is confined to his home. It turns out that Nehemiah's enemies had paid this prophet to distract him with a false prophecy. Take a moment and read **Nehemiah 6:10-13**. What are your thoughts on this passage?

This third type of distraction I call a religious distraction. This is an attempt to focus on a mindless religious practice instead of pursuing a genuine relationship with God. Nehemiah could have mindlessly accepted the words of a prophet, but because of his genuine relationship with God, he was able to discern the lie. This is still very relevant for those following Christ today. It is easy for us to fall into mindless religious practices, checking boxes of religious activity that distract us from pressing into a genuine relationship with God. Does this distraction apply to your life? Talk about a time when you mindlessly went through the motions of a religious practice. How do you think someone pursues a genuine relationship with God?