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## Nehemiah 4:1-23 Participant Guide

Updated Today

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### ***Sermon Series: Revive!***

### **Nehemiah 4:1-23 *Overcoming Obstacles***

### **Small Group Participant Guide**

What are examples you know of (either in the news or in your own life) of facing or overcoming opposition? Are you inspired or discouraged by these stories? How can you identify with them?

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### ***External Opposition (Nehemiah 4:1-9)***

In verses 1-2, Sanballat throws several accusations toward the Jews. What are his jeers and what is he "really saying" behind the accusation?

In verse 3, Tobiah joins in the derision. Why do you think it is so easy for negativity and cynicism to flourish?

In verses 4-5, Nehemiah articulates a prayer of imprecation. What stands out to you in this prayer?

Verse 6 simply declares, "So we built the wall." How is this significant?

Verses 7-9 reveal that the Jews' perseverance incited the opposition toward anger. What do you see in these verses that shows how opposition unfolds and how to respond?

**Internal Opposition (Nehemiah 4:10-14)**

What are the complaints voiced internally in verses 10-12 and what are they "really saying?"

How are these complaints right? How are they wrong? What does this say about the internal opposition faced in following God?

How did Nehemiah respond to the internal conflict (in verses 13-14)? How does that apply to our internal opposition today?

**Continuing the Work (Nehemiah 4:15-23)**

This passage reveals that the plots of the enemies were foiled, and the Jews returned to their work. How did they adapt to respond to the threat of opposition?

This chapter concludes with a somber detail of the vigilance that was undertaken by Nehemiah and all of the Jews. What is the role of vigilance in the life of believers today in the context of living in a world where opposition is prevalent and perpetual?

What is your "take away" from this chapter and our time together?

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The following pages  
are for small group leaders.

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## Nehemiah 4:1-23 Leader Guide

Updated Today

### **Sermon Series: Revive!**

### **Nehemiah 4:1-23 Overcoming Obstacles**

### **Small Group Leader Guide**

#### **Prepare: Things to do before your small group gets together**

- **Think** of a time when you faced a significant challenge in an important work or effort. Who or what was behind the opposition? What was most intimidating or frightening about the opposition? How was that obstacle overcome? How did that circumstance shape your faith or your understanding about God? **Thank** God for his faithfulness, His sovereignty, and His goodness. **Ask** the Lord to guide you as you prepare, giving you His wisdom and compassion so your teaching may both instruct and encourage others.
- **Review** Nehemiah 4:1-23 to review the content of the biblical focus. **Invite** God to speak to you with a fresh application of His timeless truth. **Ask** God to give you wisdom in teaching His message of grace and restoration to your small group. **Submit** your heart to God's conviction, that you may be exhorted to experience anew the timely activity of God's Holy Spirit in your life.
- **Preview** this material and engage with God's Spirit as He guides your study.
- **Pray** for your small group members by name, asking God to reveal a meaningful appreciation for their part in the family of God. **Seek** God's wisdom in leading your small group to apply God's word to their lives. **Commit** yourself to the Lord, that you would live what you teach.

#### **To The Point - What to impart to your small group**

**Key Verses:** In the place where you hear the sound of the trumpet, rally to us there. Our God will fight for us. (Nehemiah 4:20)

**Objectives:** Through your time exploring this passage, your small group members will:

**Discuss** the opposition facing Nehemiah and the people of Israel as they rebuilt the wall.

**Identify** the ways they responded to opposition.

**Apply** the responses they undertook, using the principles to face the opposition currently confronting people.

#### **Encounter: A suggested plan for your small group experience**

#### **Conversation Starter: Opposing Forces**

#### **Say**

Life is rarely smooth sailing. Everyone faces roadblocks at some point in life. It's in every day's newspapers. For example:

- Denver Bronco quarterback Peyton Manning overcame 4 neck surgeries and the possibility that he'd never play football again to have a record-setting year and lead his team to the Super Bowl.
- Scottsdale's schools are facing tough decisions with budgetary challenges and a lack of funds.
- Christian pop artist Natalie Grant walked out of the Grammy awards because of the inappropriateness of the performances taking place.
- A Colorado high school boy was just ruled ineligible to play on his high school team even though he made the Varsity, because he has two artificial legs.

### Ask

What other stories come to your mind when that stand out to you? Where have you face opposition, or are currently having obstacles to overcome?

### Say

As we arrive at Nehemiah 4, we have seen God give Nehemiah a vision for rebuilding the walls around Jerusalem. He prayed for four months, and then God established the circumstances that made it possible for Nehemiah to proceed with the plans. God provided Nehemiah with a team of people to partner in the work, and placed them to accomplish the work. Now, we come to a place that we can all identify with in its frustrating, or even frightening circumstances: They are confronted by opposition. In reading of this gritty account, we can be encouraged about how we can react and respond when we meet opposition to the plans God is working through us.

Open in prayer for your time together.

## **External Opposition (Nehemiah 4:1-9)**

### Ask

In verses 1-2, Sanballat throws several accusations toward the Jews. What are his jeers and what is he "really saying" behind the accusation?

- *What are these feeble Jews doing? He's saying the Jews are too weak, too few, too unsubstantial to accomplish anything of significance?*
- *Will they restore for it themselves? He is saying that the Jews are not loyal to the Persians and that they're only concerned about their own welfare.*
- *Will they sacrifice? He is saying that the Jews are obsessed with the worship of their God and do not embrace the pagan, polytheistic culture of the land.*
- *Will they finish in a day? He is saying that they cannot possibly succeed.*
- *Will they revive the stones...? He is saying their resources are tragically inadequate for the purpose for which they are being used.*

In verse 3, Tobiah joins in the derision. Why do you think it is so easy for negativity and cynicism to flourish?

*Allow participants to share their insights. It may be helpful to highlight the reality that human nature is, by default, fallen. In matters where God's Spirit is leading and working among His people, outside opposition is predictable and expected. As such, it can likewise be expected that "earthly-minded" people who might not otherwise agree will unite in opposing God. This negativity is expressed toward God's people, and tends to offer shallow validation to itself from its participants, based on unreliable human logic, limited perspective, and inadequate understanding.*

In verses 4-5, Nehemiah articulates a prayer of imprecation. What stands out to you in this prayer?

*Allow participants to respond. Emphasize that this imprecatory prayer is ultimately a call to God asking for justice. It would be easy but insufficient to reduce this a prayer from Nehemiah asking God to "smite their enemies." This is ultimately a request asking God to demonstrate his power over ungodliness that mocks Him as the God who directs His children to attempt great works such as what the Jews were now doing by faith.*

Verse 6 simply declares, "So we built the wall." How is this significant?

*Allow the group to respond. Responses may include:*

- *They followed their prayer with action. They saw that they were being used by God to accomplish His work. They determined to participate in God's work.*
- *They obeyed in the face of opposition. Even though Sanballat and Tobiah had given a laundry reason of why the Jews should give up, they persevered.*
- *They worked as a team. "We." Nehemiah stood shoulder-to-shoulder with the rest of the Jews and they worked together.*

Verses 7-9 reveal that the Jews' perseverance incited the opposition toward anger. What do you see in these verses that shows how opposition unfolds and how to respond?

*Responses may include:*

- *When God's people don't fold under initial opposition, God's enemies get angry.*
- *When God's people unite, God's enemies conspire to bring confusion.*
- *The proper response to outside opposition is to pray, and to be on guard.*

### **Internal Opposition (Nehemiah 4:10-14)**

What are the complaints voiced internally in verses 10-12 and what are they "really saying?"

- *The laborers are getting weary - the work is too hard for us to physically handle it.*
- *The rubble is too vast - the destruction is too extensive for us to overcome it.*
- *The enemies are threatening - the opposition is serious and makes us fearful.*
- *Our friends say "come to us" - nobody else things we can do this either, and it'd be easier to abandon this.*

How are these complaints right? How are they wrong? What does this say about the internal opposition faced in following God?

*There is an element of truth in all these complaints, from an earthly, human perspective. However, these are all the faithless responses to the faith-oriented work initiated by God. So, they are all wrong because they do not take into account that the God who spoke the universe into creation by his spoken word, who talks about things that are not as though they are (and then they are), who makes paths straight and confounds the devious plans of man, is the God who leads and guides the Jews.*

*This opposition tells us that there is no shortage of potential internal opposition to God's plans. When people come to the end of their physical resources, they are tempted to worry. When they look at the seemingly insurmountable destruction God intends to restore through them, it can be daunting and challenging to the faith. When people look at the external opposition, it can incite fear and worry. Even well-intentioned friends, family, and allies can be faith destroyers or underminers when they seek to provide relief through pragmatic, but wholly faithless remedies rather than faithful actions of obedience.*

How did Nehemiah respond to the internal conflict (in verses 13-14)? How does that apply to our internal opposition today?

*Nehemiah wisely did not overestimate nor underestimate the external threats, and posted guards. He wisely placed them in the proximity of their own people, which reminded them that they are undertaking a work far more important than just rebuilding a wall. Then he encouraged the leaders with an exhortation to stay faithful and persevere. He brought them out of their valleys of discouragement and recast the*

*vision to strengthen them to continue.*

*We are well served to remember that we are engaged in spiritual conflict. We fight for our families. We persevere for the others who do not know Jesus. We don't just build buildings or "have church." We are undertaking work of building a lighthouse, a spiritual stronghold in a city that is largely lost. We are striving to advance God's gospel to a hurting world. We must continually remember the greater vision so we not get distracted by our limited strength, the overwhelming scope of the task, the constant opposition, or the faithless pragmatism of those who are not invested in the work of God.*

### **Continuing the Work (Nehemiah 4:15-23)**

This passage reveals that the plots of the enemies were foiled, and the Jews returned to their work. How did they adapt to respond to the threat of opposition?

*They adapted how they worked, taking up weapons as they labored. They were ready to engage in combat at every position, recognizing the seriousness of the threat against them. They did not give up. They did not flee. They persevered, with their eyes wide open but looking by faith.*

This chapter concludes with a somber detail of the vigilance that was undertaken by Nehemiah and all of the Jews. What is the role of vigilance in the life of believers today in the context of living in a world where opposition is prevalent and perpetual?

*We are called and challenged to live vigilantly today. The enemy is constantly at work to confuse us, to attack us, to compromise us, to hinder us, to destroy us. We must be workers by day and guardians by night. We must accomplish this by living in the Spirit...by walking by faith and not by sight. This is impossible to accomplish on our own, for it is exhausting. But by faith, and in a community of unity, we can persevere in obedience and see God protect, defend, and advance His Gospel.*

### **Say**

Chapter 4 is a "real-world" look at what happens when people unite to obey God and take part in His mission. It doesn't offer a Hollywood montage of uninterrupted success and prosperity. It reveals the transparent ugliness that people get worn down, overwhelmed, worrisome, and are prone to wander. Get, God has determined that wherever He casts His vision, His children will flourish. The timeless truth has encouragement and instruction for us today, in the opposition you face in your journey of faith...as a Christian and as part of what God is doing through your church.

### **Ask**

What is your "take away" from this chapter and our time together?

*Allow group members to share their insights*

Let's close in prayer:

*Invite the group to pray for one another. Pray over any needs or issues that were shared in your time together. Pray over the content discussed in your small group, highlighting the aspects that God's Spirit revealed to your group as important. Confirm your plans for your next gathering!*

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