

SLAYING THE DRAGON OF RIDICULE
Next Steps Devotional Guide — Nehemiah 4:1-6
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Sermon Series > Nehemiah: Repair, Rebuild & Restore
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1. Growing up as a child can be both enjoyable and terrifying. Every child will experience some kind of teasing from others — their own peers and their own family. The alarm is when that crosses a line such as mocking, putdowns and bullying. Did you ever experience being mocked, hearing others give you a putdown or bullying? If so, what was that for you and how did this affect and impact you? Did you ever ridicule someone? Why did you do this and how do you think they dealt with it? Did you ever go back and apologize to them? Why or why not?
2. Take your Bible and read Jesus' words in John 15:18, John 16:2, Luke 12:51-53, Matthew 13:21 and the Apostle Paul's words in 2 Timothy 3:12 and 1 Corinthians 4:11-13. What is Jesus and Paul saying to you from these verses? Why do you think some Christians act shocked when they experience what these verses tell us?
3. Anytime we step out in faith for Jesus Christ, our spiritual adversary, the devil, will launch everything he can to stop us. Take your Bible and read Ephesians 6:10-18. We tend to get confused about who the real enemy is. What did this passage tell you who the real enemy is and why do you think we tend to see it is the person pushing our buttons as the real enemy?
4. Anytime someone has a passion to live for the glory of God, they will feel the frigid cold "icebergs" of the enemy coming at them, attempting to sink their efforts. In your sermon outline you were given 17 different descriptions of your real spiritual enemy. Read over those 17 descriptors. Which ones would you say have given you the greatest opposition, struggle, vulnerability and why? Why do you think God gives us so many descriptors of our real spiritual enemy?
5. Read 1 Peter 5:8 in your sermon outline as well as the explanation for the Greek New Testament word translated as "devour." The devil, the enemy of our soul, first, loves to operate by discrediting and destroying the worship of the One true living God as well as discrediting and destroying any Christian who seeks to bring glory to God with their life. A roaring lion is terrifying, but in the case of the devil, that is all he can do. When and where have you seen the devil operate against either you with a destructive purpose? What did that look like?
6. The devil, the enemy of our soul, second, is an intelligent, discerning and cunning villain. He has a vast communication network in the spiritual world that would blow our minds if we could see all of it. He targets Christians with amazing remarkable proficiency. Take your Bible and read 2 Corinthians 4:4 and Genesis 3:1-24. How do these passages reflect the intelligence, the discernment and the cunningness of the devil?
7. The good news is God has given us some promises about how He has and will deal with the devil. First, his power is limited by God. The devil is not omniscient — meaning he does not know everything past, present and future. He does not know how you will respond to temptation. All he has to go on is your previous track record. The devil is not omnipresent — meaning he can't be everywhere all the time. That is why he has demons, that spiritual network, to help him. The devil is not omnipotent — meaning he is not all powerful. Second, his influence is totally controlled by the sovereignty of God. This means that when people say or think, "*The devil make me say or feel it or do it*," they are lying to themselves. And third, his destruction is guaranteed. Does any of this help you? If so, how?
8. The devil, the enemy of our soul, third, unlike us, has enormous patience. Just like a good fisherman has to wait for the fish to bite the bait on the lure, the devil and his demons drop their lures into the ponds of our lives and he waits — sometimes days; sometimes weeks; sometimes months; sometimes years and if necessary, sometimes a lifetime.
 - a. One of his lures is what the Bible is found in Ephesians 6:11 — strategies. Read this passage in your sermon outline as well as the explanation for the Greek New Testament word translated as "strategies." Isn't it interesting what English word we get from this Greek New Testament word? When going to war, you have to know your enemy and be prepared. What strategies has the devil used with success with you? Read again Ephesians 6:10-18. If you symbolically did this, how would this look in your life?
 - b. A second lure the devil uses is found in 2 Corinthians 2:11 — schemes. Read this passage in your sermon outline as well as the explanation for the Greek New Testament word translated as "schemes." The devil is a master of disguises and designs. He cleverly designs the right bait on the right lure for you. Which designs have you experienced him using on you and how have you dealt with them?
 - c. Now, as we turn to Nehemiah, the lure/bait that the enemies of Nehemiah used against him was ridicule that came in the form of questions. Have you ever had someone use questions as a form of ridicule with you? What were they and how did you respond?
9. Nehemiah has 3 main opposers: Sanballat, the Moabite; Tobiah, the Ammonite; and Geshum, the Arab. If you are unfamiliar with these 3 men, please see the sermon titled, "How To Stay Motivated For God" (Feb. 26, 2023) on Southside's website under "Sermons." Who these 3 were was explained. Five explanations were given for their opposition to Nehemiah.
 - a. Read Nehemiah 4:2 in your sermon outline. The word "feeble" was used as ridicule by them against Nehemiah and the Jews repairing, rebuilding and restoring the wall around Jerusalem. "Feeble" implies not enough strength to do something. This was a form of ridicule. Why do you think they started with this one?

- b. Read 1 Samuel 17:42-43 in your sermon outline. This towering military trained giant named Goliath used ridicule against the teenage shepherd boy named David. Everyone tried to stop David from going out to face Goliath, the opposer to Israel. David went taking 5 stones — one for Goliath and 4 other stones for the 4 brothers of Goliath. Some said to David, “*He is too big to kill.*” David thought, “*He is too big to miss.*” Ha! Take your Bible and read 1 Samuel 17:45-51. Why do you think David did not give into Goliath’s ridicule and how could you use this to help you in the future?
 - c. Old Testament scholar Donald K. Campbell writes: “*The world judges everything by size, by headlines, by imposing plans, by vast advertisements; and it pours contempt upon the feeble little flock of the people of God. ‘You, with your feeble prayer meetings. You, with your silly little plan of getting people converted one by one. How can you possibly stand alongside our great economic programs in which a whole world can be revolutionized in a few years? You have no intellect; you are out of date; you have no money; you have no status. You feeble little lot!’*” What do you think is their reason behind this kind of ridicule?
 - d. When the disciples were brought before the Sanhedrin (the Jewish Supreme Court) for preaching the Gospel to be punished, an expert in Jewish law named Gamaliel spoke. Read his comments in Acts 5:38-39 in your sermon outline. Why do you think he did this? How have you challenged ridicule another was experiencing?
10. A second way Nehemiah’s opposers used ridicule against him and the Jews repairing, rebuilding and restoring the wall around Jerusalem was they attempted to convince them they did not have enough intelligence to finish the wall. Read Nehemiah 4:2b in your sermon outline. This was shrewd because Nehemiah was not a builder, but a cup bearer. When have you felt just unintelligent before the “wisdom” of the world? When have you wilted before the accusation of an intimidating professor, a wealthy relative, or a dignified acquaintance and why?
 11. A third way Nehemiah’s opposers used ridicule against him and the Jews repairing, rebuilding and restoring the wall around Jerusalem was they attempted to convince them they did not have enough faith in God to finish the task. Read Nehemiah 4:2c in your sermon outline. Old Testament scholar Derek Kidner is probably right when he rewords their ridicule against Nehemiah this way, “*Are these fanatics going to pray the wall up? Do they have any idea of what they are taking on here?*”¹ This was a very clever lure. The opposition’s point was this: “*Hey, have you forgotten that the faith of your fathers wasn’t good enough to keep these walls up? Their faith hasn’t been able to rebuild these same walls over the last 100 years. Do you think you have greater faith than they had? Do you think your sacrifices will help? Who do you think you are? You cannot and will not finish the wall.*” When have you had someone use this kind of ridicule against you — “You’re not intelligent enough” — when you are trying to do something for God? How did you respond?
 12. A fourth way Nehemiah’s opposers used ridicule against him and the Jews repairing, rebuilding and restoring the wall around Jerusalem was they attempted to convince them they did not have enough organizational skills. Read Nehemiah 4:2d in your sermon outline. Their ridicule was Nehemiah’s game plan would never bring about the completion of the wall. When have you turn down doing something for God because you do not believe you had the organization skills to do it? Remember, this is the lure, the bait from your enemy the devil!
 13. A fifth way Nehemiah’s opposers used ridicule against him and the Jews repairing, rebuilding and restoring the wall around Jerusalem was they attempted to convince them they did not have the ability to finish the task. Read Nehemiah 4:2e and Nehemiah 4:3 in your sermon outline. Warren Wiersbe in his book writes: “*Some people, who can stand bravely when they are shot at, will collapse when they are laughed at.*” Shakespeare called ridicule ‘*paper bullets of the brain,*’ but those bullets have slain many a warrior.”² Why do you think we will stand bravely in battle but collapse when we are ridiculed and laughed at? Have you ever done this? Why? Results?
 14. To slay the dragon of ridicule, you must do what Nehemiah did. First, Nehemiah knew that resentment is the result of retaliation. He did not strike back at his opposers. Why was this an effective response?
 15. To slay the dragon of ridicule, you must do what Nehemiah did. Second, Nehemiah did not go have a “pity party.” He did not pout; instead he prayed.
 - a. Read Nehemiah 4:4a in your sermon outline. When you are ridiculed, do you pout or pray? Why?
 - b. Growing up as children we heard this: “*Sticks and stones may break my bones, But words shall never hurt me.*” What a lie! Words can cut deeper than a surgeon’s scalpel. There are things people said to you years ago and you still remember it today. Wounds of the heart last much longer than bruises on our bodies. What are some of the comments people have made to you in the past that are still with you today? What would be a better way to “remember” them?
 - c. Read Nehemiah 4:4b-5 in your sermon outline. This doesn’t sound Christian today and the reason is: Nehemiah was not a Christian. He lived 400 years before Jesus. So, he responds from the Old Testament Law. In his day, to hate Jerusalem was to hate God and God’s people. But what stands out is that Nehemiah said these words to his Master, not to the mockers. Read Deuteronomy 32:35 in your sermon outline. Nehemiah was honest with God about his feelings and left it to God to settle the score. When have you done this when ridiculed?
 16. To slay the dragon of ridicule, you must do what Nehemiah did. Third, Nehemiah did not let those mocking him and ridiculing stop him. He kept working on the wall. Read Nehemiah 4:6 in your sermon outline. Is there any area of your life you have stopped doing something for God due to ridicule? What would you need to do to resume it?

¹ Derek D. Kidner, D., Tyndale Old Testament Commentary, “Ezra and Nehemiah,” p. 98.

² Warren Wiersbe, Be Determined, p. 51.