

Bible Studies for Life for March

29: Hang in there

March 16, 2009

“I’m on a new diet!” How many times have you heard someone say that? Then weeks later you ask the person, “How is the diet going?” The response back is “Not so good.”

At first the dieter is all gung ho, eating healthy and exercising. However, time goes by, distractions occur, enthusiasm diminishes and the weight-loss plan, once again, becomes an unsuccessful attempt.

Nehemiah and the volunteers are close to having the walls of Jerusalem repaired. The project is in its final days, but the opposition still is trying to distract Nehemiah. Will Nehemiah hang in there and complete what God has asked him to do, or will he listen to the opposition and give up?

Chapter 6 of Nehemiah provides instruction in how to hang in there and complete what one has set out to do, whether its a new diet, or better yet, a ministry the Lord has called one to.

Avoid distraction (Nehemiah 6:1-9)

Tiger Woods is walking the fairways of the PGA Tour once again after being away due to injury. When Woods is on his “A” game, he is unstoppable. But I have noticed something that will stop him before hitting a shot—noise coming from the gallery as he addresses the golf ball.

To help the golfers avoid this distraction of noise, tournament officials are always close by holding up signs. The “Quiet Please” signs are raised as the golfer prepares for his next shot.

One would think a person who has heard the call of God could not be

distracted from accomplishing God's plans. Contrary to that thought, anyone is prone to being distracted. When we as believers take a step of faith to follow God's guidance, we should expect potential distractions. It would be helpful if when those distractions occurred someone held up a sign saying, "Stay the course."

The opposition is desperate because they see the project of rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem is near completion. Sanballat and Geshem send Nehemiah a message. The message asks Nehemiah to leave his post of supervising the building project (v. 2) to meet them in a village some 20 miles away. Their hope was, by getting the leader away from the project the volunteers would discontinue their work.

Nehemiah "sent messengers to them with this reply: 'I'm carrying on a great project and cannot go down. Why should the work stop while I leave it and go down to you?'" (v. 3). Four times he received the same request to meet with them. He told them no each time.

The fifth time Sanballat sent a more detailed message explaining why they want him to come. "It is reported among the nations—and Geshem says it is true—that you and the Jews are plotting to revolt, and therefore you are building the wall. Moreover, according to these reports you are about to become their king" (v. 6).

The opposition is attempting to discredit Nehemiah's character. They are trying to turn Nehemiah's followers against him by accusing him of using them so he can become king after the wall is rebuilt.

What did Nehemiah do concerning this attack on his character? When problems occur it is easy for us to pray asking the Lord to get us out of the situation. Notice what Nehemiah prayed for, "Now strengthen my hands" (v. 9). He prayed for the courage to continue to be strong in his responsibility of finishing the wall. When we pray for strength, God always answers.

Ignore nay sayers (Nehemiah 6:10-14)

Nehemiah's closeness to the Lord in prayer gave him eyes to see through each scheme the opposition planned.

Sanballat plotted against Nehemiah again by hiring Shemaiah to trick God's anointed.

Shemaiah offered Nehemiah protection within the closed doors of the temple. Nehemiah would need this protection because Shemaiah said, "men are coming to kill you—by night they are coming to kill you" (v. 10).

This suggestion of finding safety in the temple would have been a violation of religious law. Laymen and eunuchs were not allowed in the inner temple.

Shemaiah's plan was to discredit Nehemiah. Nehemiah was aware of this plot, "He had been hired to intimidate me so that I could commit a sin by doing this, and then they would give me a bad name to discredit me" (v. 13).

As Christians, we must not listen to those who want to discourage us in our efforts to step up and serve God. We must be obedient to the call and leave the outcome to the Lord.

See the work to completion (Nehemiah 6:15-16)

In the summer of 1996, three Baptist churches in the Magnolia area—First Baptist, Walnut Springs and Woodland Place—teamed together for a mission trip to Harlingen. The construction team had five days to complete its assignment.

An empty slab was awaiting the crew upon arrival. The goal was to begin building a parsonage and complete it to a particular point, so the next team could carry on. What a joyous day it was on the fourth day when the project

coordinator declared, “We are finished, we are in the dry.”

Nehemiah experienced a glorious day when he reported the wall was completed (v. 15). Nehemiah, despite hearing from so many that it could not be done, was determined to finish. The wall was completed in an amazing 52 days.

When God’s people stay focused on completing a task, the enemies of God take notice. “All the surrounding nations were afraid and lost their self-confidence, because they realized that this work had been done with the help of our God” (v. 16).

The example from Nehemiah is to “hang in there” and see projects to the end. Do not let the size of the job or the length of time required to finish it discourage you. With God’s help, it can be accomplished.