

Dealing with Distractions



READ: Nehemiah 6:1-16

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.

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."

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.

¹⁰ Later I went to visit Shemaiah son of Delaiah and grandson of Mehetabel, who was confined to his home. He said, "Let us meet together inside the Temple of God and bolt the doors shut. Your enemies are coming to kill you tonight." ¹¹ But I replied, "Should someone in my position run from danger? Should someone in my position enter the Temple to save his life? No, I won't do it!" ¹² I realized that God had not spoken to him, but that he had uttered this prophecy against me because Tobiah and Sanballat had hired him. ¹³ They were hoping to intimidate me and make me sin. Then they would be able to accuse and discredit me.

¹⁴ Remember, O my God, all the evil things that Tobiah and Sanballat have done. And remember Noadiah the prophet and all the prophets like her who have tried to intimidate me.

¹⁵ So on October 2 the wall was finished—just fifty-two days after we had begun.

¹⁶ When our enemies and the surrounding nations heard about it, they were frightened and humiliated. They realized this work had been done with the help of our God.

REFLECT: What is the difference between interruptions, distractions, and rest? How can that help us be best prepared for the work God called us into?

Interruptions: An interruption is a temporary pause in the movement we are making towards completing our goal.

Distractions: A distraction happens when an internal or external stimulus leads us to stop our productive work and divert our attention elsewhere.

Breaks/Rest: Is an intentional break in our usual routine to gain greater strength, peace, and clarity.

Interruptions	Distractions	Breaks/Rest
Momentary pause in reaching our goal	Diverts attention away from goal	renewed clarity of goals and priorities
Driving example: Stoplight (awareness)	Driving example: Cell phone text (takes away awareness)	Driving example: Stopping & turning off the engine (enhances awareness)
Compassion driven	Fear driven	Boundaries driven
Opportunity for transformation	Opportunity for confusion and loss	Opportunity for inner peace & renewal
Serving others orientation	Self-serving orientation	Spirit-filling orientation
Pattern of preparation	Pattern of addiction	Pattern of renewal

Q: How did Nehemiah handle the distractions in his work when other leaders tried to divert his attention towards their fears?

"I am engaged in a great work, so I can't come. Why should I stop working to come and meet with you?" ... I replied, "There is no truth in any part of your story. You are making up the whole thing." 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. Nehemiah 6:3,8-9 (NLT)

Note the way NIV translates Nehemiah's words (6:9)... They were all trying to frighten us, thinking, "Their hands will get too weak for the work, and it will not be completed." But I prayed, "Now strengthen my hands."

Take a moment to jot down some areas you want God's strength right now...



Jesus . . . wants us to see that the neighbor next door or the people sitting next to us on a plane or in a classroom are not interruptions to our schedule. They are there by divine appointment. Jesus wants us to see their needs, their loneliness, their longings, and he wants to give us the courage to reach out to them.

Rebecca Pippert, *Out of the Saltshaker & Into the World*

Dietrich Bonhoeffer petitions every Christian to stop and allow for interruption — to cultivate a disruption theology, as it were.

Q: Where is God creating interruptions in your walk with Him?

Q: In what ways are you preparing for God's holy interruptions in your life?

Respond & Apply: Individual & Small Group Discussion Guide

Note what Henri Nouwen and Bob Goff learned...

"A few years ago I met an old professor at the University of Notre Dame. Looking back on his long life of teaching, he said with a funny wrinkle in his eyes: My whole life I have been complaining that my work was constantly interrupted, until I discovered that my interruptions were my work." H.N.

"Loving people the way Jesus did, means living a life of constant interruptions. Bring it!" B.G.

Q: How have interruptions been beneficial in your life?

Read the Nehemiah 6 passage below: What are some of the ways you/we have experienced God working in and through you/us as we've kept our focus on Him and His purpose for us?

So on October 2 the wall was finished—just fifty-two days after we had begun. When our enemies and the surrounding nations heard about it, they were frightened and humiliated. They realized this work had been done with the help of our God. Nehemiah 6:15-16

Revive, Rebuild, Restore: Moving Forward with God's Vision

January 15 – Overcoming Opposition & Discouragement (Neh. 4)

January 22 – Restoring Right Relationships (Neh. 5)

January 29 – Dealing with Distractions (Neh. 6)

February 5 – Where Do I Fit In? (Neh. 7)

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