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**EDINBURGH**

# Five Fights Against Faith

## Philippians 1:6

*"being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus".*

We respond to such confidence not with passivity but Faith, knowing that he can do *"More than we ask or imagine"*.

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Nehemiah achieved an incredible feat of rebuilding Jerusalem's broken walls and gates in 52 days. His example combines wonderful confidence in God's plan for his people, with personal desire, prayer and action.

Like any work of God, it was hindered by enemy activity; in particular five battles that Nehemiah had to win. These battles give us insight into the struggles that we face.

The Bible says we have an enemy. He tempted Jesus in the desert for 40 days. Peter says (1 Peter 5:8) *"Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour."* When the enemy is prowling around he's not usually found hanging out at the Scottish parliament, or on Carlton Hill! He's circling Christians who are beginning to take God at his word and building their life on it.

Those who are learning obedience to Christ and establishing his Kingdom.

## Fight no.1: Fight against Discouragement

Nehemiah 4:1-3

*When Sanballat heard that we were rebuilding the wall, he became angry and was greatly incensed. He ridiculed the Jews, and in the presence of his associates and the*

*army of Samaria, he said, 'What are those feeble Jews doing? Will they restore their wall? Will they offer sacrifices? Will they finish in a day? Can they bring the stones back to life from those heaps of rubble – burned as they are?' Tobiah the Ammonite, who was at his side, said, 'What they are building – even a fox climbing up on it would break down their wall of stones!'*

Nehemiah's enemies were deeply angered and annoyed at Nehemiah's progress. Rather than act that way they turned to a more powerful weapon; discouragement, mockery, and humour. A main enemy strategy in your life is to get you to think less of God's work in you and through you.

For a non-christian his strategy is to make the cross seem foolish (1 Cor 1), instead of the power that it is. For a Christian he will make you think less of the grace of God to be able to forgive you and help you (See Rev 12:10 he accuses Christians day and night). He will try to persuade you that nothing ever changes no matter what you do or pray.

Nehemiah resisted with a counter strategy; he Prays. He resisted:

1 Peter 5:9 *"Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that the family of believers throughout the world is undergoing the same kind of sufferings."*

## Fight no.2: Fight for Family

Neh 4:10-14

*Meanwhile, the people in Judah said, 'The strength of the labourers is giving out, and there is so much rubble that we cannot rebuild the wall.' Therefore I stationed some of the people behind the lowest points of the wall at the exposed places, posting them by families, with their swords, spears and bows. After I looked things over, I stood up and said to the nobles, the officials and the rest of the people, 'Don't be afraid of them. Remember the Lord, who is great and awesome, and fight for your families, your sons and your daughters, your wives and your homes.'*

The enemy keeps attacking. His next strategy is to wait until you're exhausted, and then he threatens your family or close community. Attack on your marriage, family, and those you care most about is an enemy strategy in your life to prevent the work of God going forward.

Nehemiah's counter strategy wasn't to leave the kids behind, but was to engage whole families in the battle! If God blesses you with a spouse or a family, then God wants you to engage together in the Christian fight of faith.

Parents, read the bible to your kids. Husbands/ wives think of things that will engage your spouse with God and in his mission. Pray together.

## Fight no.3: Fight for Unity

Neh 4:18-20

*and each of the builders wore his sword at his side as he worked. But the man who sounded the trumpet stayed with me. Then I said to the nobles, the officials and the rest of the people, 'The work is extensive and spread out, and we are widely separated from each other along the wall. Wherever you hear the sound of the trumpet, join us there. Our God will fight for us!'*

Each Builder had a sword at their side, but each builder was also available for the rallying trumpet call to help others.

The Christian life is not a lone pilgrimage. It's being part of a community of courage who respond to one another when needed. Nehemiah didn't leave people to sense when there was need, nor did he wait for God to speak to people. Instead he used a loud trumpet to make people aware of a need when it arose.

Small groups are a vital ingredient in church life. It's where we meaningfully connect to make our needs known to others, and to respond to others requests for help. When we don't belong it gives the enemy an 'in' in our lives.

## Fight no.4: Fight for Caring Community

In Nehemiah 5 the poorest members of Nehemiah's community were struggling financially and it became apparent that the rich were exploiting the poor. Nehemiah was angry and he sorted it out.

Beware of valuing tasks over people. The task will never be completed unless we care for people around us.

## Fight no.5: Fight against Distraction

Neh 6:1-4

*When word came to Sanballat, Tobiah, Geshem the Arab and the rest of our enemies that I had rebuilt the wall and not a gap was left in it – though up to that time I had not set the doors in the gates – Sanballat and Geshem sent me this message: ‘Come, let us meet together in one of the villages[a] on the plain of Ono.’ But they were scheming to harm me; so I sent messengers to them with this reply: ‘I am carrying on a great project and cannot go down. Why should the work stop while I leave it and go down to you?’ Four times they sent me the same message, and each time I gave them the same answer.*

They wanted Nehemiah to stop and chat. They kept emailing him asking for a meeting.

It's telling that kids are never bored these days. The world is full of exciting activities and entertainment options. Being single minded and focused on achieving your calling in God is a real challenge. Prayer keeps us correctly prioritised, therefore pray through the things that are important, and align yourself to God's will.

Jesus modelled this perfectly by refusing to even come down from the cross (his greatest priority was to save us).

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## Questions:

- **Confidence.** When you read Phil 1:6, why does it encourage you? Do you share Paul's feeling when you look at a) your own life b) other Christians around you?
- **An enemy.** Some Christians think too much about the devil and some too little! What are the dangers of either extreme?
- **Fights of faith.** Which of the 5 fights in Nehemiah most resonates with you at the moment (Discouragement, Family, Unity, Care, Distraction)?
- **Caring community.** In our small group, what does it look like to be a caring community more than being task driven?
- **Rallying call.** What does Nehemiah's trumpet idea teach us about a) our personal responsibility when going through difficult things in life b) our personal responsibility when others are going through difficult things?
- **Others.** Are there people currently outside of small groups who we could build into our community of care?



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