

Why Small Community Matters

Nehemiah 4: 7–20

Nehemiah tells the story of a generation of builders in Old Testament times. They rebuilt the broken walls of Jerusalem, God's chosen dwelling in that old covenant.

Today, Jesus is building his church! It's His people, His family, His community. He is building a community all over the world that is both very large (often seen in the Bible, gathering in large numbers) and also very relationally authentic (often gathering and doing life together in smaller community).

Footballers need two feet to play. As followers of Jesus we need to value both God's Big Community and God's Small Community in our lives.

Acts 2:46+47 shows how this worked:

Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favour of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

So how do these two things work together? What does it look like to do small community within big community?

Nehemiah 4: 7–20

When Sanballat, Tobiah, the Arabs, the Ammonites, and the Ashdodites heard that the repairs of the walls of Jerusalem were going so well—that the breaks in the wall were being fixed—they were absolutely furious. They put their heads together and decided to fight against Jerusalem and create as much trouble as they could. We countered with prayer to our God and set a round-the-clock guard against them.

But soon word was going around in Judah,
The builders are pooped,
the rubbish piles up;
We're in over our heads,
we can't build this wall.

And all this time our enemies were saying, "They won't know what hit them. Before they know it we'll be at their throats, killing them right and left. That will put a stop to the work!" The Jews who were their neighbors kept reporting, "They have us surrounded; they're going to attack!" If we heard it once, we heard it ten times.

So I stationed armed guards at the most vulnerable places of the wall and assigned people by families with their swords, lances, and bows. After looking things over I stood up and spoke to the nobles, officials, and everyone else: "Don't be afraid of them. Put your minds on the Master, great and awesome, and then fight for your brothers, your sons, your daughters, your wives, and your homes."

Our enemies learned that we knew all about their plan and that God had frustrated it. And we went back to the wall and went to work...

Then I spoke to the nobles and officials and everyone else: "There's a lot of work going on and we are spread out all along the wall, separated from each other. When you hear the trumpet call, join us there; our God will fight for us."

God's community always faces opposition. You will always find resistance when you value it!

They were exhausted
They were under pressure from outside
They were discouraged (by their own conversations)

Opposition is countered by Small Community. He didn't rally people to the project vision or show them the blueprints again. He changes tack. He puts them in family groups behind the lowest points in the wall (the most exposed places) and he gives them weapons.

Why Small Community helps

Family is the place we feel most ourselves. Family know us and we know them. No pretence. We don't put people on pedestals and call them brother or pastor (unless you forget their name!)- it's the place of honesty, acceptance and trust, where there's nothing to hide.

Family is the place we can best resist the vulnerabilities to enemy attack. The exposed places were covered by family.

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.

Who does he look for? Those outside of the safety of community. We sometimes hear of people "paddling their own canoe", or "ploughing their own furrow", or "marching to the sound of their own drum"- but the bible would see such behaviour as foolish! Life in community is where we find strength.

Nehemiah speaks to the families: "Fight for your brothers and sisters, your mothers and fathers, sons and daughters. What a picture of small community in church! Who are you fighting for?"

Family is the place we get most equipped. Paratroopers 6 months, Fighter pilots 2 years. Nehemiah gives swords and spears to all ages on day one! Jesus has given us gifts and weapons on day one of our Christian life. Family is the place we best learn to use them. The

model of New Testament church is that leaders exist to train God's people to do the work of ministry in and out of church. Pastoring, caring, encouraging and releasing gifts, holding one another to account- all happens in family groups.

But there's also a trumpet! A rallying call for all the small groups and families to say- let's come together, let's fight!

Small community in isolation is still vulnerable to attack from elsewhere unless it connects with the bigger vision.

In the book of Acts, alongside their meetings in homes, there would be public prayer meetings to call everyone together as needed.

Small community in the bible wasn't insular, but invited others in. e.g. Paul and Priscilla and Aquila. Small community reaches out as well as connecting in.

Questions

- **Opposition.** In Nehemiah 4 they faced exhaustion, pressures and discouragement. Which of these are you feeling most vulnerable to right now?
- **Being yourself.** How do we build small community that allows trust and authenticity to grow?
- **Fighting for your family.** Do you know the names of everyone in your small group? What could we practically do to "fight for one another" in these coming weeks?
- **Getting equipped.** What gifts can most flourish in small community? How can we call these out of one another.