

UNITY AMIDST DISTRACTIONS

Nehemiah 6:1-3

INTRODUCTION

Ever been distracted before? Of course you have!!!

How many times have you tried to read a book, watch a movie, talk to your BFF, do your homework or listen to your parents and then all of the sudden you become distracted?

COUNTLESS TIMES!!!

This happens to people of all ages....my son is infamous for this (as most men are). Just the other day I told him to go get something out of our bedroom and he passed the TV and while doing so he noticed that Mickey Mouse Clubhouse was on and stopped and had "the gaze" at the TV. I had to yell at him three times for him to even acknowledge that I was in the same room!

Let me flip this questioning around...***EVER BEEN DISTRACTED IN YOUR SPIRITUAL LIVES?***

When Jesus was led by the Holy Spirit, in **Matthew 4:1-11**, to be tempted he was distracted!

The Bible says that "***he was hungry.***"

Now...I don't know about you but if I go for a long time without food and without ample amounts of things fried in unacceptable amounts of grease...I become distracted!

Have you ever tried to exercise, do homework, take a test or go to work on an empty stomach...it's worthless.

Multiply that by 40 days and 40 nights and what you get are distractions!

And that conniving Devil you know what he did to try to tempt Jesus Christ? He offered him a chance to eat!

Folks...Jesus Christ, God in flesh, was distracted.

Which brings me to a point that I have noticed about distractions from the life of Christ and others in Scripture: ***IT'S NOT ABOUT "IF" THE DISTRACTIONS WILL COME...IT'S ABOUT "WHEN"!!!***

Ralph told me that the theme for his retreats usually is about unity and that is great!



No greater task a church has than the task of staying together. No greater task a youth group has than the task of staying together!!!

It is my contention that the closer you are as a youth group the harder the DEVIL tries to tear you apart!!!

You ask any youth minister who knows anything about his youth group and the number one reason a youth group is not growing it is because they are not unified! And by growth I do not mean numbers per se but I mean spiritually.

That is why Paul, in **Ephesians 4:3**, commanded that the brethren there *“be diligent to maintain the unity of the Spirit!”* The word diligent in the Greek means we zealously give concern for unity!

The Devil tries to distract our unity! He does so in his different ways!

The Devil tries to distract our unity by saying the Bible is not important!

The Devil tries to distract our unity with gossip!

The Devil tries to distract our unity with peer pressure!

The Devil tries to distract our unity with pornography, foul language and other filth we get from the media outlets.

The Devil tries to distract our unity with pride, greed and all kinds of selfishness!

Friends...it is not Barack Obama who is the Commander-in-Chief of this land for long before Washington, Lincoln and Kennedy ruled this land the tempter and prince and power of this world already had a foothold.

***SO HOW CAN WE BE UNIFIED WHEN THERE ARE SO MANY DISTRACTIONS?
WHAT CAN WE DO?***

I want to take you back about 2500 years ago which was about 500 years before Christ came.

Jerusalem...DESTROYED!!! The once proud city who ruled the world and had immeasurable amounts of wealth are now servants to another kingdom.

That kingdom is Babylon...then Persia. Israel has no identity!

To give you a picture of what is going on with the Israelites we get a glimpse in **Psalm 137:9** (a psalm written in Babylonian captivity) where it says that the Babylonians would take the babies of the Israelites and smash them on the rocks!!! And it continued not for months but for decades!



Talk about distractions!

Imagine someone coming into Murfreesboro, Tennessee and destroying everything...MTSU....gone...Walter Hill church building...burned! Your house....obliterated! Then to add insult to injury....they kill many of your friends and many of your family members. Then the remaining people are sent off to a foreign land.

Then you are forced to be slaves...again! Keep in mind...it is all your fault for not being faithful.

This is the world of Israel about 2400 years ago....

This is the world of a guy by the name of Nehemiah...

I do not have time to set everything up for you but we are going to learn three things from Nehemiah. There is much more to learn but three things will absolutely help us in our efforts to be unified in distractions. This is not a lesson to help you avoid distractions because inevitably we all will be distracted by something.

BODY - TURN TO THE BOOK OF NEHEMIAH

Point #1—When Distracted...LOOK UP!!!

Look at Nehemiah 1. Nehemiah saw that the great walls of Jerusalem were destroyed and everything in front of his eyes were consumed. Look at 1:4...

Nehemiah 1:4 *As soon as I heard these words I sat down and wept and mourned for days, and I continued fasting and praying before the God of heaven.*

When was the last time we sat down and mourned at some of the things going wrong in our churches?

When was the last time we sat down and prayed because of the distractions going on in this country?

So before the work even began Nehemiah offers a beautiful prayer to God! But he prays because he is still in Xerxes control in Persia so he needs to go back!

Why do you suppose he did that? Because there were so many things that were no under his control so he put his trust in someone who could control it!

Nehemiah 2 we see Nehemiah is sent to Judah...GOD ANSWERS HIS PRAYER...and he inspects the walls and decides it is necessary to build the walls. Nehemiah 3 the people are organized to do the work that was ahead of them. All of this is done because Nehemiah prays!!!



What about you? How often does your youth group meet together just to pray? Do you guys have prayer services? Are there any prayer vigilantes in the group?

James 5:16 ¹⁶ *Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working.*

1 Thessalonians 5:17—*Pray without Ceasing!!!*

Acts 4 is a beautiful story how Peter and John preached with boldness before Annas and Caiaphas (the same ones who had Jesus killed by the way) but in **verses 23-31** they prayed earnestly for God to let them continue to preach with boldness....GOD ANSWERED THEIR PRAYER!!!

Warren Wiersbe comments, *“Too often today, believers gather for prayer as though attending a concert or party. There is little sense of urgency or danger because most of us are not comfortable with our Christian walk”* (*The Bible Exposition Commentary*, NT Vol. 1, p. 418).

That’s powerful.

I find it helpful that when you are distracted and the unity of your group is at stake, to fall on your knees and look up!

When Jesus, in my opinion, was most distracted at the Garden of Gethsemane was when he prayed the most!

WHEN DISTRACTED...LOOK UP!!!

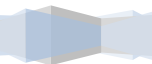
Not only that...

Point #2—When Distracted...Build UP!!!

Two names that Nehemiah would probably want to forget and they are Sanballat and Tobiah....Read with me Nehemiah 4:1-3...

Nehemiah 4:1-3 *Now when Sanballat heard that we were building the wall, he was angry and greatly enraged, and he jeered at the Jews. ² And he said in the presence of his brothers and of the army of Samaria, “What are these feeble Jews doing? Will they restore it for themselves? Will they sacrifice? Will they finish up in a day? Will they revive the stones out of the heaps of rubbish, and burned ones at that?” ³ Tobiah the Ammonite was beside him, and he said, “Yes, what they are building - if a fox goes up on it he will break down their stone wall!”*

Truth is...we all have our Sanballat’s and our Tobiah’s don’t we? They try to tell you that what we are doing is stupid!



They try to subvert the message of Christianity. They try to oppress the message of glad tidings!

Somehow it discourages us! We lose hope! Nehemiah had a cure for this...

Nehemiah 4:4-6 ⁴ *Hear, O our God, for we are despised. Turn back their taunt on their own heads and give them up to be plundered in a land where they are captives.* ⁵ *Do not cover their guilt, and let not their sin be blotted out from your sight, for they have provoked you to anger in the presence of the builders.* ⁶ *So we built the wall. And all the wall was joined together to half its height, for the people had a mind to work.*

Notice Nehemiah said, “we” built the wall...of course...after much prayer!!!

Our job as we maintain the unity of the Spirit is to build each other up when we are facing distractions. The fancy word for that is called EDIFY!!!

Romans 14:19 *So then let us pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding.*

Our youth groups need to be so unified that it becomes both a hospital for sinners and a sanctuary for saints. Amidst all of the distractions it is our youth group...when unified...that lifts us up!!!

But as we have seen before...things keep trying to tear you down!

Point #3—When Distracted...STAY UP!!!

This is where I want to spend the remainder of the time with you this morning.

Sanballat, Tobiah and Geshem did not stop there. They plotted again in 4:7-8 to overthrow Nehemiah. But they kept on going. Then in chapter 5 they had to battle hunger and sleeplessness...but they were able to overcome that. And then this happens in Nehemiah 6:1-2

Nehemiah 6:1-2 *Now when Sanballat and Tobiah and Geshem the Arab and the rest of our enemies heard that I had built the wall and that there was no breach left in it (although up to that time I had not set up the doors in the gates),* ² *Sanballat and Geshem sent to me, saying, "Come and let us meet together at Hakkephirim in the plain of Ono." But they intended to do me harm.*

Just like Satan did to the devil they are trying to do to Nehemiah and that is catching them at a weak moment.

They have tried every trick in the trade, every scheme on the menu and nothing has thwarted them so they are going to get Nehemiah to get off the wall...and meet him in the plain of Ono.

Ono is right...



You ever been set up to do something you know you shouldn't do? Ever been asked to go to a place you know you shouldn't go to!!! Maybe it was that guy who offered you some alcohol...maybe it was the girlfriend or boyfriend who wanted to go too far...or maybe it was that buddy of yours who wanted you to watch that movie you know you should not watch!

It does not matter...we all are plagued with distractions and people trying to take us away from our task! So many people trying to break our unity!!!

How did Nehemiah deal with this distraction...How did Nehemiah address the situation?

Before we read this I want you to mark this in your Bibles...it will change your lives!!!

Nehemiah 6:3 *And I sent messengers to them, saying, "I am doing a great work and I cannot come down. Why should the work stop while I leave it and come down to you?"*

Did you catch that? "I am doing a great work and I cannot come down!"

Nehemiah utters these words of concentration, courage and conviction!!! He is saying...I am not going to let you take control of this situation...God has blessed me and I know I am doing the right thing so I will not listen to you.

It sounds like what Peter said when Peter was charged by the Jews not to say anything about Jesus...Peter responded: "*Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge, for we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard*" (**Acts 4:19-20**).

It sounds a little like what Joshua said when he gave the people of Israel an ultimatum by saying, "*And if it is evil in your eyes to serve the LORD, choose this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your fathers served in the region beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD*" (**Joshua 24:15**).

Friends it is time we stick together as a youth group. It is time we make the most important thing the most important thing! We cannot serve two masters so we must serve God almighty! It is time we look at the distractions this world throws at us and with one accord look at them in the face and scream, "I am doing a great work and I cannot come down!"

So when you feel like giving up look the Devil in the eyes and say, "I am doing a great work and I cannot come down!"

When you are in the valleys and have lost loved ones look at the darkness and say, "I am doing a great work and I cannot come down!"

When friends try to sway you from the faith scream on the mountain tops, "I am doing a great work and I cannot come down!"



When there are more questions to your faith than answers yell with the trumpets of Zion,
“I am doing a great work and I cannot come down!”

When you succumb to temptation and feel hopeless overcome it and proclaim, “I am
doing a great work and I cannot come down!”

When Distracted: Look up, build up and stay up!

Cups Illustration!

“I am doing a great work and I cannot come down!”

