

A Mind to Work; Nehemiah 4:6

- I. Work
 - a. Work seems to be a 4-letter word today.
 - b. People are (or are not) looking for jobs that pay the most yet have the least amount of work.
 - i. As a young airman, I was often a close boundary sentry.
 - ii. I walked the boundary (fence line) of buildings or aircraft crucial to the Air Force's mission.
 - iii. The job was one left to the lowest-ranking airmen.
 - iv. We were supposed to walk the boundary for 45 minutes and then take a 15-minute break inside the entry control point.
 - v. In the early days of my career, I would often walk for 15 minutes and take a 45-minute break in the ECP (especially on cold Alaskan winter nights).
 - vi. As a flight sergeant, I would show up to conduct a post-check and would find the close boundary sentry in the ECP ("I was on my 15-minute break").
 - vii. I cannot remember (out of the 15 years I was a flight sergeant) when the sentry was walking the fence line when I showed up.
 - c. It is accurate to say that many people today don't have a "mind to work."
 - d. Nehemiah reminds us that working for God requires zeal and diligence.
- II. Opposition
 - a. Here is a little bit of history.
 - i. Babylon's final siege of Jerusalem and the captivity of the Israelites was in 589 BC.
 - ii. Persia took Babylon captive in about 539 BC.
 - iii. Cyrus the Great released the Israelites from captivity around 538 BC.
 - iv. Ezra completed rebuilding the temple around 516 BC.
 - v. Nehemiah completed rebuilding the wall around 444 BC.
 - vi. The Israelites had been back in Israel for about 90 years.
 - vii. It took them 22 years to rebuild the temple and 94 to rebuild the wall.
 - b. Israel faced opposition while rebuilding the wall.
 - i. Nehemiah 4:1–3 (ESV) ¹ 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!"
 - ii. The people who had moved into the area did not want Jerusalem rebuilt; they did not want to see Israel regain its former glory.
 - iii. Nehemiah set guards to keep the people safe (notice the progression).

1. Nehemiah 4:9 (ESV) ⁹ And we prayed to our God and set a guard as a protection against them day and night.
 2. Nehemiah 4:16 (ESV) ¹⁶ From that day on, half of my servants worked on construction, and half held the spears, shields, bows, and coats of mail. And the leaders stood behind the whole house of Judah,
 3. Nehemiah 4:17–18 (ESV) ¹⁷ who were building on the wall. Those who carried burdens were loaded in such a way that each labored on the work with one hand and held his weapon with the other. ¹⁸ And each of the builders had his sword strapped at his side while he built. The man who sounded the trumpet was beside me.
- c. We face a lot of opposition in our work as well.
 - i. Canada and England have enacted laws that prohibit prayers (verbal or silent) in front of abortion clinics.
 - ii. Several people have been arrested and charged.
 - iii. “Police tell Catholic woman ‘Praying is an offence’ as she is arrested for second time for silently praying in ‘exclusion zone’ outside abortion clinic.” ¹
 - iv. Reading the Bible in public has been labeled hate speech.
 - v. Governments established “safe places” or “exclusion zones” prohibiting religious discussions.
 - vi. We face opposition everywhere we turn.
 - d. Just like Nehemiah and the Israelites, we must continue the work.
 - i. Nehemiah turned to God in prayer: there are 14 recorded prayers of Nehemiah in the book.
 - ii. Nehemiah 6:9 (ESV) ⁹ For they all wanted to frighten us, thinking, “Their hands will drop from the work, and it will not be done.” But now, O God, strengthen my hands.
 - iii. It was a simple prayer but a strong prayer.
 - iv. He encouraged the people to be firm and trust God.
 - e. Work with zeal and diligence in the face of opposition.
- III. Impossible
- a. Nehemiah describes the wall of Jerusalem as broken down, and the gates were burned with fire.
 - i. He says (in 2:14) that there was no room for the animal he was riding.
 - ii. The wall and the gates lay in rubble.
 - iii. The task would seem almost impossible to complete.
 - b. Nehemiah names 38 people and 42 groups of people that worked on the wall.
 - i. The job must have seemed impossible for the people.

¹ Elly Blake, Daily Mail News, <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-11830349/Moment-Catholic-woman-arrested-second-time-silently-praying-outside-abortion-clinic.html>, [accessed: May 24, 2023].

- ii. Nehemiah 2:18 (ESV) ¹⁸ And I told them of the hand of my God that had been upon me for good, and also of the words that the king had spoken to me. And they said, “Let us rise up and build.” So they strengthened their hands for the good work.
 - iii. In the face of the impossible, they had courage (*strengthened*)
 - iv. They became firm in their resolve; their hearts were set (hardened) to complete God’s work.
 - c. How often do we wilt in the face of what we think is impossible?
 - i. We quit, give up, our knees weaken, and we stumble.
 - ii. We allow other people to exert influence and change our course.
 - iii. That course change is often wrong.
 - iv. We must remain strong when faced with tasks that we think are impossible.
 - v. Jesus responded to a rich young ruler who walked away from him with an illustration of a camel and a needle.
 - vi. Matthew 19:23–26 (ESV) ²³ And Jesus said to his disciples, “Truly, I say to you, only with difficulty will a rich person enter the kingdom of heaven. ²⁴ Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God.” ²⁵ When the disciples heard this, they were greatly astonished, saying, “Who then can be saved?” ²⁶ But Jesus looked at them and said, “With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.”
 - vii. We must remember that we can do all things (within God’s will) through Christ, who strengthens us (Philippians 4:13).
 - viii. Paul talks about being content in all situations, rich or poor, hunger or plenty, need or abundance.
 - d. Work with zeal and diligence in the face of an impossible task.
- IV. A Mind to Work
 - a. Colossians 3:23–24 (ESV) ²³ Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, ²⁴ knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ.
 - b. Work hard for Jesus in the face of opposition.
 - c. Work hard for Jesus in the face of the impossible.