

"If we want to do what matters in any domain—any context in life—we have to be able to give attention to the right things...If we can't do that, it's really hard to do anything." – Dr. James Williams (Oxford University)

Hutchison's Law: Any occurrence requiring undivided attention will be accompanied by a compelling distraction.

Recap...

Nehemiah 1 = in exile, gets word broken walls & burned gates in Jerusalem

Nehemiah 2 = praying & waiting, approaches Artaxerxes about project

Nehemiah 3 = the work of rebuilding the walls & restoring the gates begins

Nehemiah 4-5 = encountered resistance externally & internally

Nehemiah 6:1-2

1 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— 2 Sanballat and Geshem sent me this message: "Come, let us meet together in one of the villages on the plain of Ono."

- Ono was a resort area about 20 miles north of Jerusalem

Nehemiah 6:3-4

...But they were scheming to harm me; 3 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?" 4 Four times they sent me the same message, and each time I gave them the same answer.

Distraction #1: Not being where you're supposed to be

Nehemiah 6:5-7

5 Then, the fifth time, Sanballat sent his aide to me with the same message... "It is reported among the nations-- and Geshem says it is true-- that you and the Jews are plotting to revolt, and therefore you are building the wall. Moreover, according to these reports you are about to become their king 7 and have even appointed prophets to make this proclamation about you in Jerusalem: 'There is a king in Judah!' Now this report will get back to the king; so come, let us confer together."

Something is off when...

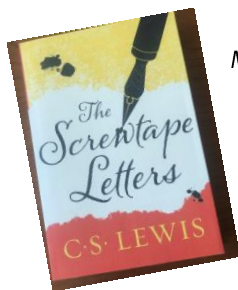
1. a source is rarely quoted ("it is reported"... "according to these reports")
2. an atmosphere of exaggeration ("plotting a revolt", "become their king")

Nehemiah 6:8

I sent him this reply: "Nothing like what you are saying is happening; you are just making it up out of your head."

Distraction #2: Losing sight of the real battle at hand





My Dear Wormwood,

"It does not matter how small the sins are provided that their cumulative effect is to edge the man away from the Light and out into the Nothing. Murder is no better than cards if cards can do the trick. Indeed the safest road to Hell is the gradual one—the gentle slope, soft underfoot, without sudden turnings, without milestones, without signposts."

Your Affectionate Uncle,
Screwtape

Nehemiah 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."

Nehemiah 6:10

One day I went to the house of Shemaiah son of Delaiah, the son of Mehetabel, who was shut in at his home. He said, "Let us meet in the house of God, inside the temple, and let us close the temple doors, because men are coming to kill you—by night they are coming to kill you."

- Shemaiah = friend of Nehemiah, son of a priest, helped with rebuilding project

Distraction #3: Using God to advance project SELF

Nehemiah 6:12-13

12 I realized that God had not sent him, but that he had prophesied against me because Tobiah and Sanballat had hired him. 13 He had been hired to intimidate me so that I would commit a sin by doing this, and then they would give me a bad name to discredit me.

Nehemiah 6:14

Remember Tobiah and Sanballat, O my God, because of what they have done; remember also the prophetess Noadiah and the rest of the prophets who have been trying to intimidate me.

Psalms 55:12-14

12 If an enemy were insulting me, I could endure it; if a foe were raising himself against me, I could hide from him. 13 But it is you, a man like myself, my companion, my close friend, 14 with whom I once enjoyed sweet fellowship as we walked with the throng at the house of God.

"The truth is that you are living in a system that is pouring acid on your attention every day... you want to read a book, but you are pulled away by the pings and paranoias of social media. You want to spend a few uninterrupted hours with your child, but you keep anxiously checking email to see if your boss is messaging you. You want to setup a business, but your life dissolves into a blur of Facebook posts that only make you feel envious and anxious...If this goes on for months and years, it scrambles your ability to figure out who you are and what you want. You become lost in your own life." – Johann Hari

This week...

- ✓ Take one minute at the beginning of each day in stillness & silence
- ✓ Take a few deep breaths
- ✓ Wrap up by whispering this prayer, *"Good morning Lord, I commit this day to you."*