

## Don't Take the Bait Nehemiah 6

By Dave Urbanski

Many of us personally know or at least have run into people Pastor Scott described on Sunday as "instigators."

The very word sends all kinds of images to our brains, doesn't it? They're people of chaos; they bring tension into our homes, our neighborhoods, our offices — and sadly into churches as well. It's as if they're throwing an "angry party" and coaxing and baiting others to join them. As Pastor Scott pointed out, it can be surprising how many folks RSVP those invites and join the anger party — and then before long they're thinking, "Why did I come here?"

We find Nehemiah in chapter 6 dealing with just these types of people: Instigators! But Nehemiah offers a helpful roadmap for how to NOT take their bait.

The first bait Nehemiah encounters is a distraction: He's invited by instigators to leave the wall for a while and hang out on the plain on Ono — but Nehemiah exhibits discernment (realizing "they intended to do me harm" — verse 2) and determination ("I am doing a great work and cannot come down" — verse 3). What does that mean for us? First off, practicing discernment often means saying "no" to something — even good things! And that's OK, because the Lord wants us to think ahead and prepare and have a good idea of what's coming around the bend at all times. And in verse 4, Nehemiah says the instigators made their request four times. That's some pressure! But despite it all, Nehemiah "answered them in the same manner" each time. Which shows that we need determination and single-mindedness with respect to what God has called us to do.

The second kind of bait Nehemiah faces is the specter of fear. We see in verse 5 that the instigators try a fifth time to get him to leave the wall, and did so through a doozie of a letter: "It is reported among the nations, and Geshem also says it, that you and the Jews intend to rebel; that is why you are building the wall. And according to these reports you wish to become their king. And you have also set up prophets to proclaim concerning you in Jerusalem, 'There is a king in Judah.' And now the king will hear of these reports. So now come and let us take counsel together." But Nehemiah calls out the lies in the letter and tells his readers that "they all wanted to frighten us" (verse 9) and influence the workers to leave.

Pastor Scott also pointed out Nehemiah's spontaneous prayer from the heart: "But now oh God strengthen my hands." This is the kind of request we should be bringing before God not just every day, but every moment — and such a prayer acknowledges our dependence on the Lord and keeps our humility fresh and on the cutting edge.

Nehemiah then faced a third kind of bait: Deception. Starting in verse 10, he's pressured to hide in the temple to save his life, but he refuses: "Should such a man as I run away? And what man such as I could go into the temple and live? I will not go in." Then in verse 12 we see Nehemiah exercising even more discernment, as he realizes it was a paid-for hoax to place fear in his heart. We then see Nehemiah again depending on God in verse 14, asking the Lord to remember the sin of those who wanted to make him afraid. And what was the result of Nehemiah's faith and discipline in chapter 6? The wall was finished!

In the end, we saw that Nehemiah's actions and their outcomes brought him success, and that ought to give us hope. As we serve the mission of the church — the great work it's about (evangelism and discipleship) — and we each focus on the great work God wants from us individually, let us trust in the Lord to provide us the courage and resolve to brush away the distractions that will hamper our progress, resist the sin and evil in the world, and above all love when others are hateful.