

The Halfway Point

“The halfway stage has been reached. In all major undertakings this is often a point for critical reflection. Initial enthusiasm has worn thin and the end is not yet sufficiently within sight to encourage a final effort. Nehemiah’s leadership thus faced a crisis as sentiments [deteriorated].” H.G.M. Williamson

2 Timothy 3:12 “Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted”

Luke 14:28 “For which of you, desiring to build a tower, does not first sit down and count the cost, whether he has enough to complete it?”

Under Pressure

Mockery

vv. 1-3 – *“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?” 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!’”*

The “Cynical Genius” Effect

Mockers are often cowards, and yet they can seem so intelligent to us.

Threats

v. 11 – *And our enemies said, “They will not know or see till we come among them and kill them and stop the work.”*

Inside Cru’s HQ Great Commission Center: “Men of whom the world was not worthy.”

Doubts

v. 10 – In Judah it was said,

“The strength of those who bear the burdens is failing.
There is too much rubble.
By ourselves we will not be able
to rebuild the wall.”

Family pressure

v. 12 – *“At that time the Jews who lived near them came from all directions and said to us ten times, ‘You must return to us.’”*

Jesus also experienced pressure from his family.

*Mark 3:20-21 “Then he went home, and the crowd gathered again, so that they could not even eat.
21 And when his family heard it, they went out to seize him, for they were saying, ‘He is out of his mind.’”*

Withstanding the Pressure

Prayer

The technical name for this type of prayer is “imprecation,” meaning a cursing prayer.

v. 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. 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.”

How should a Christian think about this type of prayer?

Readiness

Nehemiah arms the men with weapons.

v. 13 – “I stationed the people by their clans, with their swords, their spears, and their bows.”

Remembrance

Nehemiah centers them on the person who can truly fight their battles.

v. 14 – “Do not be afraid of them. Remember the Lord, who is great and awesome!”

v. 20 – “Our God will fight for us.”

A trusted core

*“From that day on, half of **my servants**...”* The literal word for servants here is “young men.” These are people who are differentiated from the leaders and the rest of the people.

Personal example

Nehemiah wasn’t above fighting and working alongside his brothers and sisters.

v. 23 – So neither I nor my brothers nor my servants nor the men of the guard who followed me, none of us took off our clothes; each kept his weapon at his right hand.

Questions for Further Study and Application

1. What is the pressure you’ve faced in trying to live a godly life in Christ Jesus? How did you withstand it?
2. Why do we think mockers and critics are so smart? Why does following them get us nowhere?
3. How does readiness and prayer prepare us to withstand under the pressure of trials?
4. How does Nehemiah’s personal sacrifice, sleeping with his clothes on with a weapon in his hand, give us a picture of the type of servant leader who Jesus himself is? What would it mean for you to lead at personal cost?