“Fightin’ Prayers”

Life can be hard.


It surprises us sometimes.

We want life to be easy. Things to work out. Bills paid. Good health. Friendships to last. Our spouse and/or children to always love us and love God. Victory over temptation.

Part of the problem is that we forget. We forget that “The Great Controversy” is more than just a book on our shelf. It is our life. The daily battle we live in.

The Bible warns us. Jesus told His disciples that “the thief...(comes) to steal, to kill, and to destroy.” (John 10:10) We tend to skip that part of the verse and go right to “…I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly.” (ibid) We want that abundant life. We don’t want to think about having an enemy who is constantly and persistently out to destroy us. (1 Peter 5:8)

As Nehemiah and the Jews began work on rebuilding the wall of Jerusalem, they probably hoped to get to the task, have it to go smoothly, and see the walls back up and protecting the city quickly and easily.

But that’s not what happened.

As soon as they began working on the wall, their enemies became angry.

“But it so happened, when Sanballat heard that we were rebuilding the wall, that he was furious and very indignant, and mocked the Jews.” (Nehemiah 4:1) Sanballat’s attacks on the Jews are some of the same attacks we each face today as we attempt to live the lives God created us to live and do what He’s called us to do.

“What are these feeble Jews doing? Will they fortify themselves? Will they offer sacrifices? Will they complete it in a day?” (verse 2)

Attack #1: You don’t have what it takes.

Sanballat questioned the Jews ability to be able to complete the task. Our enemy does the same thing. Tempts us to believe that we don’t have what it takes. He wants us to believe that we can’t so that we won’t. Won’t accomplish what God has called us to do. Won’t stand up against temptation. Won’t reach out to others in friendship or to share Christ. But he wasn’t done.
“Whatever they build, if even a fox goes up on it, he will break down their stone wall.”
(verse 3)

**Attack #2: It won’t work.**

Next Sanballat suggests that their attempts at rebuilding are pointless because nothing they do will work or last. Even a fox will be able to knock down their walls. You don’t have what it takes and whatever you do won’t work. Sound familiar? Our enemy attempts to discourage us by convincing us that nothing we do will work. It’s pointless. We can try and try, but we won’t make any lasting difference.

Sanballat’s words didn’t make much of an impact on the Jews. “So we built the wall, and the entire wall was joined together up to half its height, for the people had a mind to work.” (verse 6) The people focused on their task and ignored Sanballat’s attacks. How were they able to keep building and believing that God would help them complete the wall? They prayed. They told God about their enemies and asked God to take care of them. (verse 4-5) Note that they prayed together, “Hear O our God, for we are despised…” (emphasis supplied) They were in this together and would pray together against the enemy.

When all of their enemies saw that the work was progressing and the walls were being restored, “they became very angry, and all of them conspired together to come and attack Jerusalem and create confusion.” (verse 7-9)

**Attack #3: Overwhelm them.**

Have you ever felt like everything was working against you? Like everything that could go wrong, was going wrong? Have you faced so many battles all at once that you didn’t know which one to fight first? Like Sanballat, Tobiah and the others, our enemy loves to overwhelm us with what feels like more than we can handle all at once.

The Jews again turn to God. “Nevertheless we made our prayer to our God, and because of them we set a watch against them day and night.” (verse 9 emphasis applied) They had people watching day and night—we, too, can persist in prayer against the enemy day and night.

The enemy is relentless. If he can’t take you out one way, he’ll try another. The Jews’ adversaries didn’t give up. They just tried a different tactic. “They will neither know nor see anything, till we come into their midst and kill them and cause the work to cease.” (verse 11)

**Attack #4: Make it subtle.**
They wouldn’t see it coming. They wouldn’t recognize it as an attack. Our enemy likes to do that, too. Attack us subtly, so that we don’t recognize the enemy. He will slowly lead us to make tiny choices that lead us away from God, but don’t seem like it at first. He will cause us to believe things about ourselves and who we are that aren’t true, but feel like the truth. And He will also subtly lie to us about God, His love and forgiveness, His grace and salvation, in ways that cause us to doubt God or doubt His forgiveness and love, without us even recognizing that it’s an attack of the enemy.

But it wasn’t just their enemies who attacked the Jews. They were also making the rebuilding hard for each other. Many were struggling to put food on the table and pay back the monies they borrowed from their leaders in order to be free. These leaders were demanding “usury” (Nehemiah 5:7). They loaned money to those coming back from captivity, taking advantage of their need while enriching themselves. The returning captives were struggling to make ends meet and rebuild the wall and their lives—and the leaders were making it even harder.

*Attack #5: Friendly warfare.*

It’s not just the attacks of the enemy that takes out our hearts. In fact, many times the attacks of friends hurt even more. Criticism. Judgement. Misunderstanding. Betrayal. The wounds of a friend cut deeply.

Nehemiah became very angry when he found out what was happening. And immediately reprimanded the leaders. “According to our ability we have redeemed our Jewish brethren who were sold to the nations. Now indeed, will you even sell your brethren?” (verse 8)

Nehemiah’s words silenced the leaders. He challenged them to fear God and to restore everything to the Jews, along with a portion of the interest they charged them. And they did.

Despite all the attacks, the Jews finished rebuilding the wall in only 52 days. “And it happened, when all our enemies heard of it, and all the nations around saw these things, that they were very disheartened in their own eyes; for they perceived that this work was done by our God.” (Nehemiah 6:15-16)

How were they able to accomplish so much in so little time despite such huge obstacles?

They fought for each other.

*Battle plan #1: Fight for your family.*

The first step in Nehemiah’s battle plan had families working together and protecting each other. “Therefore I positioned men behind the lower parts of the wall, at the openings, and I set the people according to their families, with their swords, their spears, and their
bows...do not be afraid of (the enemy.) Remember the Lord, great and awesome, and fight for your brethren, your sons, your daughters, your wives, and your houses.” (verses 13-14)

Our first battle plan, before anything else, should be to pray and fight for our family. Our sons. Our daughters. Our spouses. Those who live in our homes.

**Battle plan #2: Fight for each other.**
Next, Nehemiah assigned half the people the job of rebuilding the wall, while the other half guarded them. “So it was, from that time on, that half of my servants worked at construction, while the other half held the spears, the shields, the bows, and wore armor...” (verse 16)

Imagine how it would change our churches if we worked together like this. People praying for those who were working and serving God. People praying for SS teachers as they taught classes. People praying for those going out and giving Bible studies. A prayer team fighting for those attending an evangelistic series and praying for power and authority for those teaching. Prayer warriors consistently and persistently praying for the pastor and leaders of the church. Members praying for each other throughout the week.

Nehemiah also recognized the need for leaders to pray for the people.

**Battle plan #3: Praying Leaders.**

“...and the leaders were behind all the house of Judah.” (verse 16) The leaders supported the builders and protectors by being right there behind them. Fighting with them and for them.

Samuel recognized that as a leader he had a responsibility to pray for those God had put under his care. He considered it sin if he didn’t. “Moreover, as for me, far be it from me that I should sin against the Lord in ceasing to pray for you...” (1 Samuel 12:23) As leaders, we have a responsibility to pray for those God has called us to lead.

Nehemiah also made sure each person was armed and ready for battle.

**Battle plan #4: Believe there is an enemy and be prepared for battle.**

“Those who built on the wall, and those who carried burdens, loaded themselves so that with one hand they worked at construction, and with the other held a weapon. Every one of the builders had his sword girded at his side as he built.” (verse 17-18) They worked aware that there was an enemy set on destroying them. And they worked alert, prepared and ready for battle.

God encourages us to do the same. “Above all else, guard your heart.” (Proverbs 4:23 NIV) Peter writes, “Stay alert! Watch out for your great enemy, the devil. He prowls around like
a roaring lion, looking for someone to devour.” (1 Peter 5:8 NLT)

So the people worked. Fighting for their families. Fighting for each other. The leaders had their backs. And they were prepared and alert and watching. They knew they had an enemy and were watching for their attacks. But Nehemiah also recognized that the people could fight best when they all fought together.

**Battle plan #5: Rally together to fight for each other when the battle rages.**

“Then I said to the nobles, the rulers, and the rest of the people, ‘The work is great and extensive, and we are separated far from one another on the wall. Wherever you hear the sound of the trumpet, rally to us there. Our God will fight for us.” (verses 19-20) When one group or person was attacked, the trumpet would sound and everyone dropped what they were doing and came together to fight.

All too many of us tend to try to go it alone when we’re fighting a battle. We don’t let other people know. We don’t ask for prayer. We don’t admit that we’re even struggling. We smile and say we’re fine, even when we’re not. Too many times, we assume everyone else has it all together. We’re the only ones struggling. No one else loses the battle with temptation. No one else has a marriage that is barely holding on. No one else feels like a failure as a parent. Everyone else has a dynamic prayer life and loves studying the Bible—we’re the only one who is struggling to feel connected to a God who doesn’t seem to be answering our prayers.

That’s not God’s battle plan.

“...Encourage one another and build each other up...” (1 Thessalonians 5:11 NIV)

“Confess your sins one to another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayers of a righteous man avails much.” (James 5:16)

“I also tell you this: if two of you agree here on earth concerning anything you ask, My Father in heaven will do it for you.” (Matthew 18:19 NLT)

God longs to see us come together honestly, sounding the “trumpet” when we need others to fight for us, and praying together. Fighting for one another.

It was this battle plan that enabled the Jews to not only finish rebuilding the wall in only 52 days, but to show the world how powerful God is. “And it happened, when all our enemies heard of it, and all the nations around saw these things, that they were very disheartened in their own eyes; for they perceived that this work was done by our God.” (Nehemiah 6:15-16 emphasis supplied.)

We may not be rebuilding a wall, but we are called to rebuild lives. Our lives. The lives of
those we love. And the lives of those in our communities. God has called us to fight for each other and for those who haven’t yet committed their lives to Him. We face many of the same battles the Jews did. We can fight those battles together and complete the work God called us to do, while also showing the world how great our God is.

There is need of Nehemiah’s in the church today—not men who can pray and preach only, but men whose prayers and sermons are braced with firm and eager purpose...the success attending Nehemiah’s efforts shows what prayer, faith, and wise, energetic action will accomplish. (Ellen White, ChS, p. 177)

Summary – Just to Recap
As the people came together to rebuild the wall, their enemies also came together in an attempt to stop them:
- Nehemiah empathized with the people and pointed them to God
- The enemy didn’t want to see the people accomplish what God called them to do
- Nehemiah armed the people, put them in groups, called them together
- By working together and protecting each other, the work was finished

We, too, have an enemy out to keep us from being the person God created us to be and doing the work He created us to do. But God calls us to:
- Fight for our families in prayer
- Fight for each other in prayer
- As leaders, to pray for those God has called us to serve
- Believe that we’re living in a battle and be prepared and alert for the attacks of the enemy
- Come together to pray

Suggested children’s story:

*Share the story of Nehemiah 4—how while the people were working on rebuilding the walls, the enemy tried to stop them. So Nehemiah had the people help each other. Some would build while others protected them. They would stand guard all day long. (verse 22) Because they were spread out so far around the city, they devised a plan that when one group was being attacked, they’d sound the trumpet and everyone would rush over to help them. (verses 19-20) With everyone working together and taking care of each other, they were able to rebuild the walls in 52 days and all their enemies saw that God was with them.*

*To make it more fun, you can have the kids build a wall—but they can only use one hand and have to work together. Or to make it more realistic, have several children attempt to build a wall while others come and try to keep them from accomplishing their task. Ask them how hard it is when someone keeps trying to stop you. Then have them try again, only this time, have other children who stand guard so that those attempting to stop them can’t get to them. Then ask them how hard it was with someone helping. Point out that hard things are always easier when we help*
Fighting for Each Other

Spend the afternoon praying for the members of your church—praying together for those in attendance, but also praying for all those not there. Take your church membership list and print it off. Depending on how large it is, you may want to divide your group up into smaller prayer teams, giving each one a few of the names on the list. If your church is small, then pray together for all of the names.

You may want to create a slip of paper with each member and/or family name. You can let members know ahead of time that you will be praying for every church member and invite them to share specific requests that they would like lifted in prayer. If you receive these, include them with those names. Then encourage those praying to take home these slips and to send a short note, postcard or email, letting that person(s) know they were prayed for specifically.

It could be helpful to divide the names into several groups: active/attending members, missing members who are no longer attending because of their own choices, shut-in members who are no longer attending because of health/age, and children/youth/young adults.

Please remind people that prayer is not a time for “holy gossip.” No sharing of “concerns” or information that isn’t public knowledge.

- Begin this time of prayer, by spending time praising God—focusing on who He is. If you’re going to divide up your group to pray, begin this time together as one large group. Then separate into smaller prayer bands.
- Spend the afternoon praying specifically for every member and those attending your church. Give those praying names of members and any specific requests. Or have the slips of paper in a basket/container and have each prayer warrior draw out a name and pray for it. If there aren’t specific requests, some areas to pray for members include (see additional resource, “What do I pray about?” on page 19):
  - Spiritual growth/relationship with God
  - Health
  - Relationships—marriage, parenting, friendships
  - Finances
  - Jobs/school
  - Challenges and struggles
  - Temptations/battle with sin
  - Passion and purpose—that each one would find their way to serve God
• Pray specifically for the **missing members**—those who are no longer attending by choice:
  - Pray not only for the ideas listed about, but pray specifically for their relationship with God and with the church.
  - Ask God to heal any wounds they’ve felt inflicted by the church or church members.
  - Pray that God will give them the desire to come back to church or to find a church in their new community.
  - Pray for your church, that it will be an accepting, grace-filled church where every person, no matter where they are in their journey with God, will feel welcomed and wanted.

• Pray for the **shut-in members** of the church. This can be a difficult time in life for people. They may feel forgotten and like they have no purpose.
  - Pray for the ideas above, but pray specifically for their health.
  - Ask God to help them find purpose and passion even in their limited abilities—to show them ways they can continue to serve Him and to feel encouraged that they are making a difference even if they can’t be as active as they may have once been.
  - Ask Him to help them feel connected to Him and to the church.
  - Pray for ideas and opportunities to minister to this group of people who may have at one point been a vital part of the church and are not feeling forgotten.
  - Ask God to raise up those who will visit and care for these members.

• Pray specifically for the **children, youth and young adults** of the church. Young people are choosing to leave the church, thinking it is not a relevant part of their lives and not a way for them to make a difference (Barna).
  - While praying for the ideas above, pray specifically for their salvation.
  - Pray that God protects them from all harm—not just physical, but also emotionally, mentally, and especially spiritually.
  - Pray for a passion and love for God that will not end.
  - Pray that they experience a personal and intimate relationship with Christ and that church isn’t just a habit, but a place where they find people who truly care about them, find courage and help in their day-to-day lives, and discover ways to serve God with their unique gifts and abilities.
  - Ask God to convict you of ways that the church is failing or letting down the young people of the church and to show you ways to connect with the kids, teens and young adults of your church.

• **Specifically pray for the leaders** of your church. The enemy works extra hard to take out leaders and those serving in ministry.
  - Pray for their protection—again, not just physically, but spiritually, emotionally and mentally.
  - Pray for courage and strength as they face temptations.
  - Pray for their relationship with God—that it will always be their top
priority and that they will never be too busy for time with God, recognizing that they can do nothing without this connection.

- Pray for wisdom and discernment as they lead.
- Pray that the church will be encouraging and not critical—that even in those moments when a leader needs to be talked to about something, that it is done with much love and prayer.

- End this afternoon of prayer by coming back together and spending time in thanksgiving and praise.

**Continue to Fight for Each Other in Prayer**

There is something powerful about hearing another person pray for you—really pray for you and the things that are the heaviest on your heart. It’s also incredibly encouraging to know that others are praying for you. Let’s not just pray for each other one day a year. Here are some ideas for keeping members praying for each other throughout the year:

- Provide ways people can **share prayer requests** whenever there is a need:
  - Have a prayer request box where members can drop off specific requests. Then make sure to have people praying for those requests.
  - Include a prayer request slip of paper in the pew racks that people can fill out and place in the offering plate. Then make sure to have people praying for those requests.
  - Have a prayer request page on your website where people can submit prayer requests—and again, make sure someone is following up and praying.
  - Create a private prayer group on Facebook (make sure it’s private so that no one except those in the group can see it) for church members where they can share requests and “pray” for each other by posting a short prayer for the requests shared.

- Create a **prayer room** at church that is open on Sabbath. A place where people can go and have someone pray with them. Staff it throughout the Sabbath morning and for a short time after church. Remind people that there is someone there who will pray with them.

- Each week, **focus** on a different family/couple/single of the church for whom to pray. Encourage people to not only pray for this member(s) during the week, but to drop them a note, email, text, or Facebook post letting them know prayers are being lifted for them. Make sure to include inactive or shutin members on this prayer focus schedule, too.

- Create a **MUCK** group for your church—Mothers United in Christ for Kids. A group of moms committed to praying specifically for the salvation of children—not matter who young or old they are. Share the list of children’s names submitted with all who have committed to pray. Encourage moms to share updates and then share updates with the entire group regularly. A resource is included on page 16.
Share the resource, “Praying Like Crazy,” on page 18, with prayer warriors and encourage them to continue to pray for others.