

life groups

NorthStar Church

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July 15 & 16, 2017
Build It! Part 3
Nehemiah 2, 4, & 6
Overcoming Opposition

Main Point

In everything you attempt to build, there will be opposition. But God will give us the wisdom we need to overcome any opposition. All of us in some way are building something.

Scott gave us 5 Biblical Tips to prepare for and overcome opposition. Read through the following with the references and discuss the points within you group.

1. Expect false accusation (2:18-20)

Even Jesus was falsely accused during His ministry. When have you been falsely accused? How did you feel? What did you do? As Scott pointed out, don't feel the need to defend yourself, but be prepared to share the source of your calling!

2. Do everything within your power and ability to combat the opposition, but ultimately trust in God. (4:6-9)

You have heard it said to pick your battles carefully. Are there times when someone has opposed you or something you're doing that you need to turn over to God? How do you know when to say something and when to walk away?

3. Rally the people you lead to unite at the weak links. (4:11-13)

The weak links are the places where you feel weak, inadequate or unprepared. How could you apply this principle to your life? (leaders: do not spend a lot of time here)

4. Help people to see the bigger picture. (4:14)

Scott pointed out that it was not just a wall they were building...they were building a city, their people, their culture, etc. Why is it true that if you are dealing with opposition that seeing the big picture is important and how does it help? What is your big picture? Marriage? Family? Business? Missions?

5. Refuse to give in to distractions (6:1-9)

Our lives are filled with distractions! They are used by the enemy as strategic attacks. Maintaining focus can be very difficult. What distractions do you experience? How do you stay focused through these distractions?

Prayer

Matthew 5:10-11 Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven. Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you

because of Me. Jesus also told us to pray for our enemies. Are there people around you that you need to lift to the Lord right now? Do not name these individuals out loud. As a part of your prayer time offer a few moments of silence for each person to pray in their head and heart for the person they need to, then continue on with other prayer requests.

Commentary

NEHEMIAH 6:1-14

6:1. Nehemiah was not taking credit here for rebuilding the wall singlehandedly. He was only speaking from the viewpoint of the enemies who understood that stopping the work would mean stopping Leadership always involves stress. Here Nehemiah's personal danger added to his stress, but he was able to confront it, trusting the Lord and continuing to work toward the God-given goal.

6:2. Nehemiah's enemies first attempted to lure him outside the city with a pretense of peacemaking. "Ono" was about seven miles southeast of Joppa. It may have been in neutral territory between Judah and Samaria, although the references to Jews living in Ono (see Ezra 2:33; Neh. 11:35) make it more likely that it was in the extreme northwestern part of Judah. It was evidently not difficult for Nehemiah to determine from past experience that "they were scheming to harm" him.

6:3-4. A more foolish leader bloated with his own importance might have convinced himself that this was an important opportunity to take time out from construction for diplomacy. Nehemiah's answer was polite but firm and somewhat ironic, since leaving the work was the very object of their overtures. These men repeated their invitation "four times," which shows their desperation to halt the work. Repeated temptation can also weaken one's resistance. Nehemiah stood firm and was careful not to let the opposition divert him from his main purpose.

6:5. On their next attempt, they tried a different motivation to get Nehemiah to respond. An open letter can be a vicious way to attack a leader. If Sanballat had been interested in reconciliation, he could have gone to Jerusalem. But now he and Geshem dropped their pretense of friendliness and tried to spread rumors that would damage the work. This strategy was very subtle; on the one hand, it could have diverted Nehemiah from his purpose. On the other hand, the rumors, if left unchecked, could affect public support and bring down the wrath of the Persian king on the Jewish community. After the events of Ezra 4, when similar reports resulted in a Persian decree to stop the work, this seemed to be an excellent plan.

6:6-8. The reported rumors were serious accusations. Jerusalem had a history of rebelling against controlling empires. A strong wall around Jerusalem would have made rebellion more viable. No doubt some of the Jews were remembering the prophecies of restoration of the Davidic kingship; some commentators think Nehemiah was a descendant of David, although there is no biblical evidence that he was. Knowing the accusations to be lies, Nehemiah was able simply to deny them and continue the work.

6:9. Nehemiah recognized the psychological warfare of the enemies. The same verb translated "frighten" in v. 9 is repeated again in vv. 13,14,19, where it is translated "intimidate" (lit., "to make afraid"). The different forms of opposition in this chapter were all intended to instill fear in Nehemiah and his helpers so they would not continue the work. The words "but I prayed" are not in the Hebrew text but are added to identify the clause "now strengthen my hands" as a prayer to God.

6:10. Nehemiah's enemies would not give up but kept trying different strategies. Some people within the Jewish community were not in favor of the building project; so Sanballat and Tobiah tried to use them against Nehemiah's leadership (see v. 14). Nehemiah accepted Shemaiah's invitation to see him, thinking he was a true prophet. But Shemaiah had sold out to the opposition. He used his influence to undermine Nehemiah. If

Shemaiah's father, Delaiah, is the same one mentioned in 1 Chronicles 24:18, then Shemaiah was a priest and had special access into the temple. Nehemiah could not enter legitimately.

6:11-12. Nehemiah "realized that God had not sent" Shemaiah. He was able to discern that Shemaiah was a fraud. Shemaiah's proposal constituted a subtle temptation. Nehemiah was sensitive to do God's will. He did not want to be closed to what could have been God's message through a prophet. How then could he discern whether or not the message was from God (and how can we)? His two questions in v. 11 indicate the answer: (1) "Should a man like me run away?" This show of fear, and even cowardice, would be a lack of trust in God and would undermine the confidence of the people in his leadership. (2) "Should one like me go into the temple to save his life?" It was not lawful for him to enter the temple. According to Deuteronomy 18:20 and Isa. 8:19-20, if a word that claims to be a prophecy from God is in contradiction with what God has already revealed, we should be suspicious of it.

6:13-14. The strategy to "discredit" the leader is a subtle one and is common today. Against such attacks we can again learn from Nehemiah's decision to do what was right and leave the outcome to God. Thus he again prayed that God "remember Tobiah and Sanballat ... the prophetess Noadiah and the rest of the prophets" who were opposed to his leadership and opposed God's work. Vengeance was left to God (see Deut. 32:35; Ps. 94:1; Rom. 12:19).