

Creating a Climate of Credibility - July 12, 2020

OPEN

I'm concerned for a bird in our neighborhood. Behind our house a woodpecker was doing a big renovation project, but it appears that he was not able to find a wife! Being successful in making a house does not mean he was successful in starting a family! Often, success also brings opposition and difficulty. We even use the phrase, "he was a victim of his own success." This is what we are going to consider from the life of Nehemiah.

As we have been discussing for the past number of weeks, to live the human experience is to encounter difficult detours. At such times the "GPS" of our lives screams "recalculating!" Yet these detours in life are a wonderful opportunity to rediscover and recommit to a *posture of dependence* upon God.

DIG

We are studying the prayers of Nehemiah. Interestingly, his name means "Jehovah comforts" and on many occasions, Nehemiah turned to God in trust and was comforted! You see, even when Nehemiah realized success, he still faced difficulty. In Nehemiah 6:15 we read that the wall around Jerusalem was completed – in fifty-two days! But even in times of accomplishment, the Christian will face opposition and will need to "recalculate"! Look how this played out for Nehemiah...please note **four attacks** that came against Nehemiah, even as he was seeing God's work come to completion.

1. The attempt to distract - vv. 1-4

This chapter of Nehemiah's story explains that some success had been achieved. The walls had been rebuilt, though the doors of the gates were yet to be installed. And it was at this point of success that the first wave of attack came against Nehemiah. Sanballat, Tobiah, and Geshem – who had opposed the work previously (see 2:19 and 4:1-2) sent a letter inviting Nehemiah to a meeting. Where was this peace? Conference to take place? At a village "on the plain of Ono" – a day's journey from Jerusalem - Ono was near the border of Samaria – the province of Sanballat.

The response is very interesting. Nehemiah recognized this as a threat of harm against himself (v. 2). However, more importantly he saw that it would distract him from the work of God – see verse 3, "Why should the work stop". Four more times messages came from these enemies, each deflected by Nehemiah. You see, when we are seeking to serve the purposes of God, distractions will always be persistent (v. 4) because the enemy of our souls is relentless. So how did Nehemiah counter the attack? He responded with certainty – he was certain of the mission which God gave him to do.

Before you put Nehemiah on a pedestal, think of what pioneer missionary J. Hudson Taylor once said, "God is not looking for men of great faith; He is looking for common men to trust His great faithfulness."

2. The attempt to discourage - vv. 5-9

At this point in the story, the tactic of Sanballat changed. Another messenger was sent with a letter that was designed to misrepresent what Nehemiah was doing. This was very crafty, indeed! Sanballat's letter claimed that Nehemiah's work at Jerusalem was to establish himself as king, in rebellion against Persia. It seemed so credible. Geshem was cited (v. 6). A counsel was offered (v. 7).

Once again, Nehemiah was able to see this slanderous action for what it was. He could see that this was an attempt to incite fear. And once again, he could see the deeper issue. This was ultimately an attempt to derail the work of God – which was rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem.

Notice how Nehemiah responded in prayer: "Now strengthen my hands!" (v. 9b) But please don't make Nehemiah the hero – God is the hero of this story. That is why, at every difficult place, Nehemiah turned in dependence upon God. Nehemiah was just a very **F.A.T.** man – he was **F**aithful, **A**vailable, **T**eachable!

3. The attempt to discredit - vv. 10-14

The third attack against Nehemiah was another plot to disgrace and discredit Nehemiah. Tobiah and Sanballat hired Shemaiah (v. 12). Posing as a prophet, Shemaiah invited Nehemiah to a secret meeting in the Temple, to expose an assassination attempt. Nehemiah could see this attack for what it really was. He recognized first that to flee out of fear was not in keeping with his walk with God (v. 11).

Secondly, Nehemiah would not compromise God's command. Not being a priest, he could not enter the Temple, so he refused. Nehemiah correctly understood that the goal was to discredit him, creating an evil report about him (v. 13). Notice therefore the content of Nehemiah's prayer in verse 14. He prayed that God would remember these enemies, according to the *evil* which they had done. Do you remember that in 5:19 Nehemiah he prayed that God would remember him for what *good* that he had done?

4. The attempt to dissuade - vv. 15-19

At this stage in the story we see the succinct statement of success – the wall was completed! (v. 15) In verse 16b we have what is perhaps the most profound and important declarations of the entire book: “this work had been done with the help of our God.” Naturally, as the first part of the verse documents, this put the enemies of Israel in their place! But what we see in the final verses of this chapter is an important lesson. With spiritual success comes the effort of those who would dissuade us further!

Tobiah had family ties to the people of Judah. Because of their allegiance to him, Nehemiah continued to be bothered by false reports of Tobiah’s virtues and letters from the man himself (v. 19). What tedium!

In the summer edition of *FaithToday* David Guretzki wrote an article: “Mixed Emotions: Our season of happy hurt and painful joy”. In it he refers to the Portuguese word “**saudade**” which means “a pleasure you suffer, an ailment you enjoy.” He writes,

Some of us have been trained, badgered even, to speak of Christian faith as those who are “happy all the day,” as one famous hymn puts it. If we are feeling pain, well then, we must be lacking in faith or failing to experience the joy Jesus gives....Worm theologians say if we aren’t constantly experiencing the pain of our sin, we must be deceived about the dark state of our hearts. Frankly both stances are impossible to live out and are theologically misguided.

Encountering both victory and struggle is the norm for the spiritual journey this side of heaven! We are going to experience “highs” when God’s work is accomplished and celebrated. Yet it is not final, because we still live in this broken world. The final, eternal victory is yet to come!

REFLECT

How are you surviving spiritual success?

Can you think of a time when God won a great victory in your life, yet it was quickly followed by more challenge and struggle?

Let us not be like Peter, James, and John who experience the transfiguration of Jesus – “let’s build a tabernacle” – see Matthew 17:1-13. There was much more to be done in the Kingdom. There is never a time to rest on one’s laurels!

C. S. Lewis put it this way, “Relying on God has to begin all over again every day as if nothing had yet been done.” (*Collected Letters of C. S. Lewis*, 2006)

TO DISCUSS...

- Are you depending upon God through prayer?

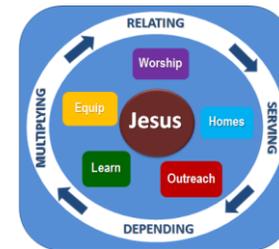
See “[Standing On Guard](#)” for summer Prayer opportunities for our church.

- Is Cornerstone focused or distracted from our mission?

Cornerstone is called to impact our world by living and sharing the life of Jesus!



- Do we help people progress through discipleship stages?



- View a thoughtful video on DMM’s from Fellowship International.

[Discipleship Making Movement](#)