

SERVING GOD WITH DETERMINED FAITH - 4

Persevere Through Opposition

"Don't be afraid of them. Remember the Lord, who is great and awesome, and fight for your brothers, your sons and your daughters, your wives and your homes."
- Nehemiah 4:14

Bible Truth:
Opposition to God's will and work are inevitable.

Life Impact:
Success in the work of God comes through persistence and perseverance when facing hardship and opposition.

Nehemiah 4 tells a riveting story of extraordinary hope and trust in God in the face of mounting, relentless and wicked opposition to the people of God. Sanballat and Tobiah are two key figures who stood determined to oppose any efforts to refortify the city of Jerusalem. They mocked the faithful Israelites, making light of their efforts, and sarcastically dismissing their work as entirely futile and vain (4:1-3). Immediately Nehemiah did what he regularly did in the face of distressing news—he prayed. In relatively short time, the people are able to rebuild the wall to half its height because “the people had the will to keep working.” (4:6) However, as is often the case, their initial success is met with renewed and increasing opposition. Nehemiah’s response is both inspirational and instructive as we consider what Nehemiah’s example can teach us about our own response to hardship and difficulty.

Welcome

What is the most extensive or difficult remodeling project you’ve ever tackled? What made it so complicated and/or difficult?

Word

Read Nehemiah 4:1-9.

1. How did Sanballat and Tobiah respond to the rebuilding of the wall? Why?
2. To whom does Nehemiah turn in the face of opposition (v 4)? What effect does his prayer have on the people?

Read Nehemiah 4:10-23

3. After initial success, the people find themselves susceptible to discouragement. Why? What sources of discouragement do you find in verses 10-12? How did some of the people’s attitude feed into the opposition (v 12)?
4. In what ways did Nehemiah handle these new threats (vv 13-23)? Comment on the following: “Clarity of vision requires not only that we see what needs to be done but also that we see what stands against the accomplishment of the vision.”
5. Do you have a track record of persevering in the work God gives you to do? What do you tend to do when opposition comes? How does Nehemiah’s example help you in considering your own response to difficulties?

Worship

What is one area of your life where there seems to be “so much rubble?” Use your time of worship to encourage and pray for one another in terms of the work to which God has called you. **1 Corinthians 15:58** provides a great admonition. Possible songs: 540—O For a Faith that Will Not Shrink; 539—Higher Ground; 309—In My Life, Lord, Be Glorified; 693—Heart of a Servant; 694—Servant Song.

Works

Opposition is actually good news. It might mean that you are doing something worthwhile, and the devil is pitching a fit over it. The next time you begin to feel discouraged about opposition to doing what is right, ask yourself: “Do I want my life to be comfortable, or do I want my life to count?” (Notice the attitudes expressed in passages like Acts 6:41; 14:22).

Leader's Notes – Persevere Through Opposition(Lesson Four)

Discussion:

Question 2: Through his prayer, Nehemiah changed the people's focus, off the rubble and back onto God. Either you've got a great problem or a great God. But you can't have both! Prayer is where discouraged people need to begin. The greater the opposition, the more you need to pray.

Question 3: The people faced at least three sources of discouragement: fatigue (v 10), frustration—in that they were no where near completion (v 10), and fear (v 11). Rumors of being attacked had fed on the fears of some so that they exaggerated the danger (“they told us ten times over”). Isn't just as true today, that rumors are most often spread by those closest to the enemy, and exaggerated when they are reported?

Question 4: Nehemiah changed their focus (vv 4-5), off their problems and onto God. He concentrated their fortifications (v 13), strengthening the areas where they were most vulnerable. Nehemiah also challenged their future (v 14), helping the people see that they were involved in something much larger than merely rebuilding a wall. In a real sense, they were building a future. Finally, Nehemiah consolidated their fellowship (vv 19-20) so that they would be so spread out. Discouragement often sets in when someone has gotten their eyes off the Lord, forgotten about their future, or haven't been encouraged as a result of being around other believers.

Question 4: Obstacles to God's will and work are inevitable. If any of us suffers from the illusion that if we just follow the Lord's will we may anticipate ease and freedom from distress, we can learn here what is true throughout the Bible: God's people are only prepared when they recognize and anticipate opposition.