

## Achieving Like Nehemiah - 6:1-19

We've now been studying Nehemiah longer than it took for him to get the wall built! Nehemiah 6:15 says, "So on October 2 the wall was finished—just fifty-two days after we had begun." How in the world did he get that wall rebuilt in just 52 days? After all, it took a lot longer than that to build it in the first place and it had been in ruins for a long time.

Three key things: 1. He had faith that it was God's will and that it could be done; 2. He refused to quit even when there was multiple episodes of opposition; and 3. He kept at it until it was finished.

There has been major opposition to the rebuilding of the wall. Sanballat, Tobiah and Geshem tried all different kinds of things. There was division, discouragement, and discord. But now the wall is almost finished. The only thing left to be done as we start chapter 6 is to hang the doors.

Nehemiah 6:1-4 says, "Sanballat, Tobiah, Geshem the Arab, and the rest of our enemies found out that I had finished rebuilding the wall and that no gaps remained—though we had not yet set up the doors in the gates. So Sanballat and Geshem sent a message asking me to meet them at one of the villages in the plain of Ono. But I realized they were plotting to harm me, so I replied by sending this message to them: 'I am engaged in a great work, so I can't come. Why should I stop working to come and meet with you?' Four times they sent the same message, and each time I gave the same reply."

So there are still forces working against his mission. Let's look at Nehemiah's responses to see how we can begin to achieve like him:

**1. Keep on Moving Despite Interruptions** - You keep going despite disruptions and distractions. They were trying to sidetrack Nehemiah. They said, let's have a conference. Let's get together and discuss. The place they suggested was twenty miles north of Jerusalem. What could be wrong with that? But Nehemiah said, I'm carrying out a great project and I can't go. Why should I stop the work for that? He's not willing to be distracted until the wall is finished.

The time for discussion is long past. It's time for work. Have you known people that want to talk and talk. They want to bring things up over and over. The decision has been made, but it wasn't what they wanted so they want to bring it up again. They aren't interested in doing the work or in getting the work done at all, so they want to discuss it just to stop it from getting done. That's what's happening here. Many churches never accomplish anything because they discuss endlessly and then assign it to a committee and then when the committee reports back they table it.

But there's something more happening. He says, "I realized they were plotting to harm me." They weren't just working against the project, they were working against Nehemiah. They wanted him out of there. He had the king's support, so they couldn't actually get rid of him by appealing to the king, so they were targeting him personally.

So he knows it's an effort against him and it's an effort to, at least, delay the effort.

Here's an important principle that you've heard before, but it bears repeating: **The main thing is to keep the main thing the main thing.** The reason why Nehemiah succeeded is he wouldn't let anything or anyone distract him. He kept his eyes on his goal.

**2. Keep on Moving Despite Intimidation** - They tried to intimidate and discredit him. Verses 5-7 say, "The fifth time, Sanballat's servant came with an open letter in his hand, and this is what it said: 'There is a rumor among the surrounding nations, and Geshem tells me it is true, that you and the Jews are planning to rebel and that is why you are building the wall. According to his reports, you plan to be their king. He also reports that you have appointed prophets in Jerusalem to proclaim about you, "Look! There is a king in Judah!" You can be very sure that this report will get back to the king, so I suggest that you come and talk it over with me.' I replied, 'There is no truth in any part of your story. You are making up the whole thing.' They were just trying to intimidate us, imagining that they could discourage us and stop the work. So I continued the work with even greater determination."

They challenged his motives. They said, you're a rebel. You're setting yourself up in your own little kingdom. They sent this letter unsealed. It was like a letter to the editor or passing around a letter. They wanted everybody to read it. It's meant to stir things up.

Anybody who sets big goals is going to be criticized and disparaged by people - people who generally have no real goals themselves - they're just against what others want to do. They don't want to deal with change. This happens to people following God-given goals all the time. The most falsely accused man in history was Jesus and he said in Matthew 5:11-12 NIV, "Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds

*of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you."*

They threaten to go over his head to his superior - the king - and make him look bad. They were accusing him to try to upset him but Nehemiah discerns their motive. He says, "*They were just trying to intimidate us, imagining that they could discourage us and stop the work.*" Nehemiah's not going to get caught in that trap. He's not going to start responding to intimidation and innuendo or get discouraged and quit. Probably the most difficult thing to do as a leader is to handle this kind of intimidation. The more you defend yourself, the more contention there is and the more people outside the fight think that there's a big problem. You want to give up! But Nehemiah said I'm not going to do that. He said, "*So I continued the work with even greater determination.*" He wasn't going to get caught up in an argument or give in to intimidation or allow himself to be distracted from the work.

These sorts of things leave you emotionally drained. Abraham Lincoln said, "If I were to try to read, much less answer all the attacks made against me this shop would close for business. I do my best, the very best I know how, the very best I can. I mean to keep on doing it until the end." General MacArthur and Winston Churchill both said, "We don't answer criticism. We don't respond to slander. We don't respond to accusation. If we did it would take all our time just fighting attacks." Henry Ward Beecher said, "Life would be a virtual flea hunt if man was required to run down every innuendo and insinuation about him and the misrepresentations that are uttered against him."

If you're going to be part of God's mission you've got to realize there are going to be things that distract you, try to throw you off course and there are going to be people who say things against you. You can spend your time fighting those tearing you down or you can keep working on building. Nehemiah said, I'm going to keep building. That's why, in 52 days, they built it. He would not give in.

**3. Keep Moving Despite Provocation** - If you want to be an achiever like Nehemiah you have to keep working in spite of provocation, threat or danger. First they tried to get him off track, then they tried to intimidate him, now they tried to scare him into doing something stupid. Verses 10-14 say, "*Later I went to visit Shemaiah son of Delaiah and grandson of Mehetabel, who was confined to his home. He said, 'Let us meet together inside the Temple of God and bolt the doors shut. Your enemies are coming to kill you tonight.' But I replied, 'Should someone in my position run from danger? Should someone in my position enter the Temple to save his life? No, I won't do it!' I realized that God had not spoken to him, but that he had uttered this prophecy against me because Tobiah and Sanballat had hired him. They were hoping to intimidate me and make me sin. Then they would be able to accuse and discredit me. Remember, O my God, all the evil things that Tobiah and Sanballat have done. And remember Noadiah the prophet and all the prophets like her who have tried to intimidate me.*"

Evidently Shemaiah had been a friend of Nehemiah's and he was a priest. But evidently Sanballat got to him and talked him into going against him. "Tell your buddy Nehemiah there's a plot on and the only way he'll be safe is to run and hide."

Nehemiah's response was, "*Should someone in my position run from danger?*" He would keep on working in spite of danger. Why didn't he give into this?

1. It would make him look ineffectual. He's the leader of this thing; in charge of restoring the city. If he runs and hides in the temple how's the morale of the people going to be? Leaders don't run away. Other people are watching.

2. He was too wise to be taken in. Nehemiah was a perceptive person. He realized that this wasn't from the Lord. Lots of people are ready to tell you what the Lord wants you to do. Some people say, "I think this is God's will for your life" but if you look into it you find they have no idea at all and they may have a hidden agenda. This guy had some expertise - he was a priest - and he had been friendly to Nehemiah in the past, but now he's just looking after his own interests.

Every once in a while someone will send a long rambling letter or come to my office and tell me about how we should have our church. They want this because, they say, God told them to tell me. Well, every time someone has done this, I had talked to God that morning and God didn't tell me that. If God wants to tell me, I'm open to anything. Anyone else, I need some confirmation, at least.

The real issue was that if Nehemiah had run and hid in the Temple, it would have compromised his integrity. It was against the law for anyone except the priests to be there. Nehemiah wasn't clergy he was laity. If Nehemiah had gone and hid in the Temple, he would have been sinning out of fear.

Never break one of God's laws out of fear. If the opposition can't just scare you into quitting, they may try to get you to do something to ruin your reputation and make you ineffective. Nehemiah wouldn't chicken out. He built the wall and he built it right. Archaeologists have unearthed a good part of Nehemiah's wall. It's about ten feet across with a foundation twelve feet deep. That good of a wall wouldn't have been accomplished with a leader who could be distracted, intimidated, or frightened off.

So the wall was built around Jerusalem. Verse 16 says, *"When our enemies and the surrounding nations heard about it, they were frightened and humiliated. They realized this work had been done with the help of our God."* The tables have turned. God's people had been discouraged, humiliated by their captivity. But the moment the wall is built, Jerusalem is again a fortified city. Now who's afraid?

So how do you apply this to your life? God gave us the Scriptures to *"...teach us what is true and to make us realize what is wrong in our lives. It corrects us when we are wrong and teaches us to do what is right. God uses it to prepare and equip his people to do every good work."* SO it wouldn't do to just learn what happened and what this all means. We must let it prepare and equip us.

One of the basic lessons of Nehemiah is that the right attitude among the people and, particularly, in the leadership is essential for any project. With the right attitude they were able to accomplish in 52 days what for 80 years people had been saying, "It can't be done!" When you get the right attitude and the right mission and the right catalyst and the right methods, things swing into action. What does it take to pull off a major project? What does it take to accomplish the impossible? These four things:

First, **1. An Inspired Mission.** This is primary: You need a cause; a vision; a dream; a goal; something that truly inspires you and pulls you towards that goal. You need a compelling calling.

When they said to Nehemiah, we want you to leave the wall and come out and have a little meeting with us, Nehemiah said, *"I am engaged in a great work, so I can't come. Why should I stop working to come and meet with you?"* He knows that he has "a great work" and that made him single minded. That was one of the reasons they were able to accomplish the impossible in 52 days. He kept the main thing the main thing.

Is there any great project - an overall compelling mission - that you have in your life? What motivates you to go above and beyond. What motivates you and gives you a mission, vision and purpose for your life for the rest of your life?

Until you have a inspiring mission - a significant purpose for your life, you're just existing. Nehemiah said, I have a great work! What are you exchanging your life for? Jesus said, *"What will a man give in exchange for his soul?"* When you give your time for something, you're giving your life because that's what life is made up of. You need an over arching goal in life that motivates you to keep going.

Most great people are just ordinary people who have made a compelling commitment to a great cause. That cause draws them out of themselves and makes them more than they would be on their own.

For God's people, the most inspired mission, the most compelling purpose, the greatest cause that you can give your life for is the kingdom of God. There's nothing greater that you can invest your life in. I challenge you, whether you have 5 years left or 25 or 55 or 85 years left, that you invest it in the kingdom of God.

Unfortunately many believers and a lot of churches give in to distractions. They get distracted from their mission. Don't allow that to happen.

Second, you need, **2. A Discerning Vision.** Nehemiah had a gift for discernment. Every time a trap came up, he sensed it. v. 2 they had said come out and talk with us, he said, *"They were scheming to harm me."* How did he know? He was perceptive. He had discernment. In verse 9 when they came and made the accusations of him setting himself up as king and rebelling against Artaxerxes, Nehemiah said *"They were just trying to intimidate us, imagining that they could discourage us."* He exposed their motives. When the guy said come hide in the temple, Nehemiah knew God had not sent him. He was perceptive. He had wisdom. How do you get that? James 1:5 says, *"If you need wisdom, ask our generous God, and he will give it to you. He will not rebuke you for asking."* When you spend time in the word and time with God you're more perceptive. You don't fall for everything that comes along. Nehemiah knew fear clouds our perception.

Third, you also need **3. A Devoted Prayer Life** - Nehemiah's first response to everything was to pray. No matter what happened, he prayed. That's the number one thing you do when someone comes against you. Instead of taking it out on the person, you talk in out with God. Nehemiah did not get defensive and he did not retaliate when

they started making false accusations. He just said, "It's not true" and prayed about it. If people are falsely accusing you, say "it's not true". Don't go into a long defense.

Luke 18:1 says, "...Jesus told his disciples a story to show that they should always pray and never give up." Notice "always pray" and "never give up".

Fourth, you need, **4. Determined Perseverance** - One of the great keys to success is the ability to just hang in there! Keep on keeping on! Keep on doing what God wants us to do! We all get tired in the battle, weary. Don't give up! It's a matter of courage. Courage is not the absence of fear. Courage is moving ahead in spite of your fear. If you're not afraid that doesn't mean you're courageous, you may just be dumb! You may not know how serious things are. Courage is only courage when you know there are things to fear.

Notice verse 11 says, "*They were just trying to intimidate us, imagining that they could discourage us and stop the work. So I continued the work with even greater determination.*" He knows that there's a threat here, that they're trying to intimidate him, but he wouldn't run away.

One way to know that you're feeling fear is when you have a desire to run. Out of the job, out of the marriage, out of the relationship, out of the house. I've learned that it's never God's will for me to run from a difficult situation. If I do, God will just bring another one up later on so God can teach me to face these kinds of situations. Sometimes it's time to change your tactics or your strategy - Nehemiah did that... he adapted - but you don't run. Persevere at doing what God has given you to do. Galatians 6:9 says, "... *let's not get tired of doing what is good. At just the right time we will reap a harvest of blessing if we don't give up.*" If we don't give up.

Think back and do an analysis of your life over the last few years... in what areas have forces or people worked to interrupt, disruption or distract from what you think God wants you to do? The evil one, the adversary will use all kinds of things to try to interrupt God's work - even people who have the best of motives; even good things that would otherwise be fine but in this case they're keeping you from the best. What is it that's taking up your time in life so that you don't have time for the things that are really important? What's making it a struggle to pursue that important project or idea? What's interrupting things that involve loving God and loving your neighbor as yourself. Worship and ministry. If you're too busy to worship, too busy to have devotional time - you're too busy. If you're too busy to get involved in a ministry - you're too busy. You have limited amount of time. There may be some things you need to cut back so you can make time for ministry, make time for what God wants me to do.

Are there things or people that are intimidating you? Are you being misunderstood; have your goals been criticized for no good reason. Has someone tried to provoke you or tempt you to react in such a way that it would make you look bad? No one put up with more criticism or provocation than Jesus. The Apostle Paul got more than his share as well.

We all need a cause; a vision; a dream; something that truly inspires us. We each need a compelling mission from God - something that inspires us to be more, do more, give more, accomplish more, achieve more.

Are you looking to God for wisdom and guidance so that you can discern the way things are and where to go from here. Are you staying close to God for comfort, courage, support, renewal? How is your prayer life? Is it continual and close? Are you praying up your mission and your church or are you giving up on them?

How persistent are you in doing God's will? Are you persevering? Do you just do it when it's convenient? Have you made the decision, "I'm going to follow Jesus 100% no matter what else happens, no matter what it costs, no matter what it takes, regardless of what people say about me, I'm going to do the right thing."

Those are the marks of someone who achieves like Nehemiah. That's how Nehemiah was able to do in 52 days what other people didn't do and said couldn't be done for 80 years.