



“Pressing On” Nehemiah 6-7

Idea: To finish the work, you must press on in it.

Intro: Sir Winston Churchill was a British writer, military leader and statesman. He was twice named prime minister of the United Kingdom. We know and revere him as the one who forged alliances with the United States and Soviet Union to defeat Nazi Germany and the other Axis powers in World War II. However, in 1940, Churchill might have seemed the man least likely to lead Great Britain successfully through the traumas and challenges of World War II. Before Hitler’s invasion of Poland, Churchill’s political career had been marked by failures and a growing coalition of enemies. His childhood was characterized by unloving parents, illness, fears, and a speech impediment. Yet Churchill emerged as one of the great leaders of the twentieth century.

There may be many explanations for his extraordinary ability to lead the nation during crisis. Certainly, neither he nor the British people were distracted by petty politics or competing interests. Everyone was focused on winning the war, and every decision was passed through this one obsession. But

circumstances don't create the man; they only reveal his character. One of the qualities that Churchill possessed was a ferocious courage. This was not to say he lacked fear but rather that he did not submit to it.

“Success is not final, failure is not fatal: it is the courage to continue that counts.” – Winston Churchill

“Never give in, never give in, never, never, never—in nothing, great or small, large or petty—never give in except to convictions of honor and good sense.”
– Winston Churchill

It was this “never give in” approach that stayed the British people through the sacrifices of war and allowed Churchill to face his critics and keep to the task. Nehemiah was also such a man.

Inquiry: During Nehemiah's tenure as governor of Judah, Jerusalem was a mixture of self-interest, conspiracy, spiritual devotion, feigned religiosity, faith, and parochialism. Devoted workers as well as unprincipled people surrounded Nehemiah. With the realization that the wall was nearing completion despite the many attempts to halt the work, the focus of intimidation by Sanballat, Tobiah, and Geshem moved from the populace to their leader. They tried to lure Nehemiah away from Jerusalem in order to murder him or to charge him with sedition; they hired prophets to trap and discredit him. Yet Nehemiah held to his task. He never gave in. He courageously pressed on in the work God had called him to do. Therefore, this is the subject I want to speak to today...Pressing On.

Read Nehemiah 6.

Nehemiah shows us how to press on in the work regardless of circumstances. It is easy to quit. The ditches of life are full of great ideas and callings that were thrown out when things got too hard. I like what Winston Churchill used to say:

“A pessimist sees the difficulty in every opportunity; an optimist sees the opportunity in every difficulty.”

– Winston Churchill

Life is tough. This is reality. Therefore, the way to be successful, to win, and to finish the work God has given us to do is simply to plod on through the muck and the mire. It's been said that today's mighty oak is yesterday's little nut that held its ground. Let's look at how Nehemiah presses on through three different challenges of the work.

I. Persevering in the Face of Overt Opposition

Chapter six opens with an encouraging update on the progress of the wall (vs. 1). The work is going forward. The breaches are now closed unlike what we found in 4:7. The gates are the only things left to install. This is a great statement of progress and a realistic notation of the work that remains to be done.

Sanballat, Tobiah, Geshem, and the rest of Nehemiah's enemies realize their window of opportunity is closing, but they could still bring him down. So they change tactics and come after the governor.

A. The Plot to Kidnap (6:1-4)

At this point Nehemiah's enemies are beginning to realize that he is more than imperial appointee tasked with rebuilding a wall. They see that Nehemiah is a shrewd leader intent on reestablishing community as well as security in Jerusalem. God raised up an influential spiritual leader, and the only way to get such a well-protected citizen was to lure him from his colleagues and onto enemy territory.

The location Sanballat and Geshem suggested for their meeting was about halfway between Samaria and Jerusalem. It would have lured the governor

into the borders of the hostile territories of Ashdod and Samaria. On the surface this invitation may have seemed innocent, but Nehemiah recognized it as a thinly disguised death sentence (vs. 2).

There are three things about Nehemiah that stand out in these verses. He was:

1) Discerning

We were introduced to Nehemiah in chapter one and quickly learned that he was a man of prayer. When he learned the news of Jerusalem's condition, he immediately began to pray (1:4). In each and every situation, Nehemiah prayed to the Lord for wisdom and direction (2:4; 4:9).

Therefore, I believe it is safe to assume that Nehemiah consulted God in prayer after receiving this invitation. In the months after he learned of Jerusalem's condition, Nehemiah through prayer had been called (1:11), strengthened (2:2), equipped (2:4-9), encouraged (4:6), protected (4:15), and guided (5:1-13) by God. Now, God warned him.

Nehemiah possessed discernment, which is the ability to judge well, or more precisely the sensitivity to divine guidance and warning. This sensitivity was developed through time spent with God in prayer and His word (6:11).

2) Resolute

"You have enemies? Good. That means you've stood up for something, sometime in your life."

– Winston Churchill

The governor was a man of decided principles. He knew what he believed about the situation and responded to the request with firm

conviction (6:3). I am sure that there were some people who thought Nehemiah to be a stubborn, unforgiving, uncooperative, and opinionated man because he couldn't be swayed. The culture of this day was similar to ours today. Tolerance is praised and intolerance condemned so long as you tolerate the right things. Those in our culture will not tolerate people with firm moral and spiritual convictions. If you hold to a biblical view of sexual behavior, marriage, alcohol, drug abuse, and pro-life issues, you are quickly labeled as a bigot and a right-winger who is out of touch with reality.

This world, however, devoid of strong moral foundations needs the witness of Christ-followers who possess an informed conviction, but that conviction must be coupled with the love and compassion of Jesus.

3) Inflexible

Nehemiah had the conviction and the persistence to stay true to his convictions. The Bible tells us that his enemies sent messengers to him four different times, urging him to come to their meeting. In each occasion, he answered them in the same way (6:4). He refused to be manipulated or worn down.

Nehemiah was convinced that his work was a great work. Therefore, the work necessitated his time, energy, and presence. He would not be distracted.

Distraction is an enemy we all face. It is one of the strongest tactics Satan deploys against us. I want you to think through the things that persistently distract you from God and what He has called you to do. What are they? What

keeps you from reading and studying God's Word? What keeps you from praying and seeking God's face? What keeps you from faithfully worshiping with the church and being a part of small group? What keeps you from serving the Lord in His church? What keeps you from taking the gospel to your neighbors and the nations? Many times the answer is simply a distraction. It's the choice of a good thing over the best thing.

Nehemiah was inflexible. He was persistent in his convictions. God and God's calling upon his life were the two most important things in his life, and he refused to allow anything else to take their place.

We see these three characteristics in Nehemiah come to light through this overt opposition. Remember circumstances don't create the man; they only reveal his character.

B. The Plot to Malign (6:5-9)

Sanballat was just as persistent as Nehemiah. After being turned down four times, Sanballat decided to send his servant back to Nehemiah with an open letter his hand. This unsealed letter was virtually public property, so anyone the messenger came in contact with could read it. This is the first Facebook rant in recorded history.

Sanballat used the letter to spread rumors, cast doubt, and create speculations as to why Nehemiah was rebuilding the wall. He questioned Nehemiah's character and intentions. And he validated his claims with a supposed witness. By putting the rumors in this open letter, he tried to bully, intimidate, and manipulate the situation. He hoped the threat of King Artaxerxes hearing of them

would force Nehemiah to comply, but the governor wasn't shaken. He dismissed the charges and went back to work (6:8-9).

It is not easy to handle unjust accusations. The problem is as old as time itself, and the Bible offers some helpful insights. If your character has been falsely smeared or slandered, you need to realize that, although painful, the experience can be educative.

- 1) There is something to learn about you.
3 O Lord my God, if I have done this, if there is wrong in my hands, 4 if I have repaid my friend with evil – Ps 7:3-4a

23 Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! 24 And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting! – Ps 139:23-24

When an accusation is made, regardless how outrageous it may be, you need to honestly examine yourself to see if there is any truth in what is being said.

Throughout my years in ministry, I have had my fair share of people who either didn't like me as a person or my approach to ministry. In each case, I have tried to take an honest assessment of myself. I've learned that God often times brings difficult people into your life to be spiritual sandpaper and rub off the rough edges.

- 2) There is something to learn from Scripture.
When the malign comes, one of the best places to run is God's Word. It is there where we learn how to respond. God takes us to David's story and his running from King Saul, and we see

how he learned humility, patience, and trust. We see how he refused to lift his hand against the king even though he was not in the wrong. The Bible shows us how others have been falsely accused and abused. We see how they overcame their trials and grew in their faith.

- 3) There is something to learn about God. No matter how sad the circumstances, there is always something we can learn about God. Psalm 7 tells us that when David was troubled about allegations made against him by a Benjamite named Cush, he discovered in his emotional pain that God was his refuge (vs. 1-2), judge (vs. 3-9), and shield (vs. 10-17).

We come to the Word and see that God is faithful. He can be trusted. He will never leave or forsake you. We see that justice will prevail. We learn that God knows what is being said and done to us. We learn that He is acting on our behalf.

God has something to teach you when the times are tough, so open your Bible and read it.

Conclusion: Circumstances don't create the man; they only reveal his character. What do the difficulties that you are facing reveal about you? In recent months, there have been several unexpected tragedies hit families in our church. There have been deaths, job losses, car wrecks, illnesses, injuries, trees falling on cars, and cancer diagnoses. In each and every situation, there was an opportunity to throw in the towel and give up. I'm grateful that you didn't. Many of you used it as an opportunity to learn about yourself, to learn about God, and to grow in your faith. It reminded you that God didn't promise you an easy, carefree life as a Christ-follower. Jesus said you, *"In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world"* (John 16:33).