



“Pressing On”

Nehemiah 6-7

Part 2

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

Intro: Audie Murphy was just too small. Born in Hunt County, Texas on June 20, 1925, and raised on a sharecropper’s farm along with his ten brothers and sisters, his upbringing was anything but easy. Life was difficult in East Texas. Murphy's father, Emit, fell short on his parental responsibilities and eventually abandoned them. One year later, when Murphy was only 16 years old, his mother died. He did everything he could to feed and provide for his siblings, but eventually each one was sent to an orphanage or to relatives.

Seeking an escape from that life as well as a way to provide for his brothers and sisters, in 1942, he looked to the Marines. War had just been declared, and like so many other young men, Murphy lied about his age in his attempt to enlist. But it was not his age that kept him out of the Marines; it was his size. Not tall enough to meet the minimum requirements, he tried to

enlist in the paratroopers, but again was denied entrance. Despondent, he chose the infantry.

Following basic training Murphy was assigned to the 15th Regiment, 3rd Infantry Division in North Africa, which was preparing to invade Sicily. Everyone doubted him because of his small stature and inexperience. It was in North Africa in 1943 that he first saw combat, proving himself to be a proficient marksman and highly skilled soldier. Consistently, his performance demonstrated how well he understood the techniques of small-unit action. He landed at Salerno to fight in the Voltuno River campaign and then at Anzio to be part of the Allied force that fought its way to Rome. Throughout these campaigns, Murphy's skills earned him advancements in rank, because many of his superior officers were being transferred, wounded or killed. After the capture of Rome, Murphy earned his first decoration for gallantry.

Shortly thereafter his unit was withdrawn from Italy to train for Operation Anvil-Dragoon, the invasion of southern France. During seven weeks of fighting in that successful campaign, Murphy's division suffered 4,500 casualties, and he became one of the most decorated men in his company. But his biggest test was yet to come.

On Jan. 26, 1945, near the village of Holtzwihr in eastern France, Lt. Murphy's forward positions came under fierce attack by the Germans. Against the onslaught of six Panzer tanks and 250 infantrymen, Murphy ordered his men to fall back to better their defenses. Alone, he mounted an abandoned burning tank destroyer and, with a single machine gun, contested the enemy's advance. Wounded in the leg during the heavy fire, Murphy remained there for nearly an hour, repelling the attack of German soldiers on three sides and single-handedly killing 50 of them. His courageous performance stalled the German advance and allowed him to lead his men in the counterattack, which ultimately drove the enemy from Holtzwihr. For this Murphy was awarded the Medal of Honor, the nation's highest award for gallantry in action.

By the war's end, Murphy had contracted malaria, witnessed the deaths of hundreds of his friends and fellow soldiers, killed 240 German soldiers, been wounded three times, and become the nation's most-decorated soldier, earning an unparalleled 28 medals, including three from France and one from Belgium. Yet in May 1945, when victory was declared in Europe, Murphy had still not reached his 21st birthday.

No one in the Marines, the Army's paratrooper division, or the Army's infantry division ever thought Audie Murphy would amount to much in the military, much less become the highest decorated officer in history. Yet, he not only survived in the military; he thrived. In June 1945, Murphy returned home from Europe a hero and was greeted with parades and elaborate banquets. *LIFE* magazine honored the brave, baby-faced soldier by putting him on the cover of its July 16, 1945 issue.

What enabled him to press on in the face of such great opposition? Like Winston Churchill, Murphy possessed a ferocious courage and a "never give-in" attitude. His life reminds us that circumstances don't create the man; they only reveal his character. 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.

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. We're looking in chapters 6-7 at how Nehemiah pressed on through three different challenges of the work. Last Sunday we saw him persevering in the face of overt opposition. Today, we'll see him...

II. Persevering in the Face of Covert 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. First, they devise a plot to kidnap Nehemiah and possibly murder him (vs. 1-4). When that didn't work, they formulate a plot to malign his character and intentions (vs. 5-9). They hope to bully him into abandoning the work on the wall. Neither of their attempts succeeds though, which lead to a new tactic. They move from overt opposition to covert opposition.

A. The Plot to Intimidate (6:10-14)

Read Neh 6:10-14.

Verse 9 ends with Nehemiah asking God to strengthen his hands, which adds context to verse 10. Nehemiah's troubles were increasing and becoming more alarming, so he went to visit a man who was most likely a friend. It seems that Shemaiah was a prophet; he was someone whom the people in the community trusted to declare the will of God. Nehemiah had every reason to feel safe with a professed man of God. Possibly he wanted to share his problems and be assured of a godly man's support during such intense opposition. But the old friend became a new enemy.

The Bible tells us that Shemaiah was "confined to his home." The phrase is ambiguous, but it could mean that he had confined himself to his home pretending that he too was afraid of Nehemiah's opponents, or that he had shut himself in as a symbolic act to indicate that his own life was in danger and to suggest that both must flee to the temple. This would have created in Nehemiah a sense of connection, but it was all a sham.

Shemaiah's deception was another attempt to destroy Nehemiah's character and stop the rebuilding of the wall by painting him as a scared leader and making him a religious transgressor (vs. 11). The governor, however, quickly saw through the ruse. He realized Sanballat and Tobiah had hired the man of God (vs. 12).

How was Nehemiah able to see through the scheme? How was he able to discern what to do?

- 1) Protected through Knowledge of Scripture
Nehemiah recognized that God did not send Shemaiah through his knowledge of Scripture. He knew that the Pentateuch says only priests can go into the temple, and only at appointed

times. He asked, “What man such as I could go into the temple and live” (vs. 11)? Non-priests enter the temple on pain of death (Num 18:7). Nehemiah acknowledged that he was not a priest. He knew that if he tried to enter the temple the Lord might break out against him. This was one way he knew God had not sent Shemaiah to him. The prophet counseled him to do something that was expressly forbidden by the Word of God.

If someone tells you to do what the Bible says not to do, you know that the person does not speak for God. Nehemiah heard what the prophet said, and he responded to it on the basis of what the Bible teaches. We live in a culture that is actively working to erode the teachings of Scripture. We have seen overt opposition to the Bible, such as when lawsuits are filed against government bodies and schools to remove monuments and references to Christianity. But do we see the covert opposition to the Bible? Do we see the subtle erosion to our biblical convictions? Our culture twists the truth that God is loving and accepting of all people, and declares that because God is love He loves and accepts lifestyles that are forbidden in Scripture. Those in our culture magnify the love of God but cloak the justice of God. They tell us that we must be tolerant and accepting of others’ choices. What Christ-follower doesn’t want to be tolerant or accepting of others? Jesus demonstrated those characteristics, but not in the way our culture sees them. Jesus never required people to clean themselves up or become a certain kind of person in order to experience His grace and forgiveness. He accepted all...the tax collector, thief, prostitute,

poor, and religious. But He also never lowered the standard of God's justice against sin.

Jesus did not operate on emotion; he operated by the Word of God. We must be a people who live and stand on God's Word, or we will fall prey to the enemy's covert opposition.

2) Strengthened through Prayer

Again, we see that Nehemiah was a man of prayer. He spent a lot of his time in fellowship and communication with the Lord.

“The purpose of prayer is not to inform God of our needs, but to invite Him to rule our lives.”

– Clarence Bauman

God sat on the throne of Nehemiah's life. His constant fellowship with the Lord made him sensitive to the Lord's voice. God is constantly speaking to His children, directing, warning, and encouraging. Anytime we are led astray, it's not because God failed to warn us; it is simply because we chose not to listen.

Nehemiah's prayer life was deep and rich. His prayer in verse 14 exemplifies this. He wanted what God wanted. He desired mercy for those who repented of sin and trusted God. He also desired justice for sin and those who stood against God.

Shemaiah's intimidation failed. Next, we see...

B. The Plot to Undermine (6:15-19)

Read Neh 6:15-19.

Nehemiah and the Jews began the work on the wall in August, and they finished it in October. It only

took fifty-two days! Never underestimate what you can accomplish when God has called you to a work. The reasons we don't see more miraculous work like this is simply because people don't start doing them and don't persevere in them.

We see an amazing thing in verse 16. Everyone recognized that God had done a great work in Jerusalem, and they feared Him. Unfortunately, their fear was not coupled with repentance and faith. They still sought to obstruct His activity, so they continued by undermining Nehemiah's leadership.

Many of Judah's nobility were bound to Tobiah through marriage and business agreements. Their lust for money and their low view of Scripture resulted in a greater commitment to the Lord's enemies than the Lord's servant. These relationships provided Tobiah with good intel as to what Nehemiah was doing. These relationships gave him the upper hand in this ongoing chess match.

It is here that we might expect Nehemiah to give up and return to Susa or give in and compromise. But he never did. Instead, Nehemiah prayed, trusted, and worked. He pressed on in the face of overt and covert opposition.

Two lessons to be learned:

1) The enemy is subtle.

Behind these attacks on God's servant there stands a far more sinister enemy than Sanballat and Tobiah. These men are merely pawns in the devil's manipulative campaign to subvert God's work.

We must never forget that *“we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places”* (Eph 6:12).

Often times the enemy does not come at us with a full-frontal attack. Instead, he subtly and deceptively twists truth. He casts doubt. This is what he did in the Garden of Eden (Gen 3).

- 2) The Lord is sufficient.
In these first six chapters, we have witnessed one adversity after another for Nehemiah. However, with each one we have also witnessed God’s sufficiency.

Whatever the suffering, it is always accompanied by sufficient strength. Yes, we have a great enemy, but we have an even greater advocate...the Lord Jesus Christ.

Conclusion: Most, if not every one, who knew Audie Murphy doubted his ability to fight in the war. When they looked at him all they could see was his small stature. They couldn’t see his heart. They expected him to wash out. They thought he would either be killed quickly or desert. Instead, in the face of each and every obstacle, Murphy leaned in and pressed on. He continued in the fight and won. His testimony reminds us that circumstances don’t create the man; they only reveal his character.

Today, what kind of character do you have? When the struggles and difficulties of life begin to press in on you, how do you respond? Do you give in and give up, or do you lean in and press on? The story of each of our lives is one of trial and tribulation. In each and every situation, there is an opportunity to throw in the towel and give up. Some do, but some don’t.

Those who don't give up use their difficulties as opportunities to learn about themselves, to learn about God, and to grow in faith. 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).