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Nehemiah 6

Ever Changing, Never Changing Part 17

"Patient Perseverance"

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When we face outside opposition from others – when people malign us, attack us, lie about us, etc. – what is the proper way to respond? Oftentimes we think that the only two options are flight or fight. But there's another option that Nehemiah modeled for us: patient perseverance. In today's study from Nehemiah 6, Pastor Gary shows us three important things that Nehemiah did when he was under personal attack.

Sanballat, Tobiah, and Geshem

1. Conflict from without is the focus of Nehemiah 6.
2. Nehemiah 6 is about the neighbors of the Jews, who don't like them, their rebuilding project, or their God!
3. Conflict from without came in the form of their opposition and adversarial conduct.
4. Sanballat, the Horonite, was from a town in Moab,
 - a. Moab was a region east of the Dead Sea, in what is modern-day Jordan.
 - b. The Moabites were perennial enemies of the Jews, which helps explain why Sanballat was so vehemently opposed to the Jews and the rebuilding project.
 - c. He was an official of the Persian Empire, which was north of Israel.¹
 - d. His name in the ancient Acadian language, means, Sin gives me life.
 - i. Sin was the name of an ancient god of Mesopotamia.

¹ It's believed he was the governor of Samaria.

- ii. Sin was the moon god that Mohammed chose from among the 360 gods the Arabs worshiped.²
- iii. Mohammed called this god, the supreme god or Allah.
- iv. This is the origination of the symbol of Islam, which is the crescent moon.

5. Tobiah was an Ammonite.

- a. Amon was east of the Jordan River, in what is modern-day Jordan.
- b. Tobiah was an official of the Persian Empire.
- c. The Ammonites were also perennial enemies of the Jews.
- d. Tobiah is a Hebrew name, which means, my God is good.
- e. Tobiah married a Jewish woman.
 - i. **Nehemiah 6:18** - “... was the son-in-law of Shecaniah son of Arah, and his son Jehohanan has married the daughter of Meshullam son of Berekiah.”
 - ii. Tobiah’s son also married a Jewish woman.
- f. We learn from ancient history that after the Jews successfully rebuilt Jerusalem, Tobiah went back to Amon, where he built a temple for himself.
- g. The tomb of Tobiah was found near this temple.

6. Geshem was an Arab.

- a. Geshem was most likely the chief of the Arabs, who lived in the territory south of Israel.
- b. His name means, rainstorm.

7. These men schemed to harm Nehemiah.

- a. **Nehemiah 6:2** - “Sanballat and Geshem sent me this message: ‘Come, let us meet together in one of the villages on the plain of Ono.’ But they were scheming to harm me.”

8. These men tried to frighten the Jews.

- a. **Nehemiah 6:9** - “They were all trying to frighten us, thinking, ‘Their hands will get too weak for the work, and it will not be completed.’ But I prayed, ‘Now strengthen my hands.’ ”

9. These men tried to intimidate Nehemiah.

- a. **Nehemiah 6:13-14, 19** - “He [Shemaiah] had been hired [by Sanballat] to intimidate me so that I would commit a sin by doing this, and then they would give me a bad name to discredit me. Remember Tobiah and Sanballat, O my God, because of what they have done; remember also the

² Seventh century AD

prophetess Noadiah and the rest of the prophets who have been trying to intimidate me... Moreover, they kept reporting to me his good deeds and then telling him what I said. And Tobiah sent letters to intimidate me."

10. These men tried to discredit Nehemiah.

- a. **Nehemiah 6:13** - *"He had been hired to intimidate me so that I would commit a sin by doing this, and then they would give me a bad name to discredit me."*

Nehemiah's Example In The Face Of Opposition – Pray

11. **Nehemiah 6:9** - *"They were all trying to frighten us, thinking, 'Their hands will get too weak for the work, and it will not be completed.' But I prayed, 'Now strengthen my hands.'*" (Emphasis added)

12. "You can do more than pray, after you have prayed, but you cannot do more than pray until you have prayed." – John Bunyan^{3 4}

13. Nehemiah's prayer was just four words: "Now strengthen my hands."

14. Pastor Gary said, "It's not the length of your prayer; it's the strength of God's reply."

15. Prayer was David's response to those who wanted to kill him.

- a. **Psalm 86:14, 16** - *"The arrogant are attacking me, O God; a band of ruthless men seeks my life – men without regard for you... Turn to me and have mercy on me; grant your strength to you're your servant and save the son of your maidservant."*

16. Pastor Gary said, "When Nehemiah prayed, he didn't pray, 'God, encourage me.' He didn't pray, 'God give me wisdom [about] how to handle [this] situation.' He didn't pray, 'God, get my enemies!' He prayed, 'God, give me perseverance.' "

17. Nehemiah's prayer was for God to give him the ability to finish the work that God had called him to do.

18. Jesus prayed for his enemies, even while he hung on the cross!

³ http://thinkexist.com/quotes/john_bunyan/

⁴ <https://www.christianhistoryinstitute.org/magazine/article/john-bunyan-the-man-preacher-and-author/>

19. Pastor Gary said: "Prayer reminds us that God is sovereign, even over those who are attacking us. [God] will help us [when] we pray and seek him. [We will] see his wonderful work in our lives, [when] we seek him first."
20. **Matthew 5:11-12** - "*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.*"

Nehemiah's Example In The Face Of Opposition - Stay

21. **Nehemiah 6:2-4, 11** - "*“Sanballat and Geshem sent me this message: ‘Come, let us meet together in one of the villages on the plain of Ono.’ But they were scheming to harm me; so I sent messengers to them with this reply: ‘I am carrying on a great project and cannot go down. Why should the work stop while I leave it and go down to you?’ Four times they sent me the same message, and each time I gave them the same answer... But I said, ‘Should a man like me run away? Or should one like me go into the temple to save his life? I will not go!’ ”*
22. Nehemiah was steadfast and unwilling to give in to the attacks from his enemies.
23. Pastor Gary said: "Opposition, antagonism, the maligning, the lies, will serve - if you aren't careful - to get you off-point, [and] get you outside [of] the will of God. [You] will end up not doing what God wants you to do, [in order] to address all of the stuff that isn't worth your time. Let God defend you!"
24. Don't waste time trying to defend yourself against all of the things people say about you, because you'll move off-point if you do.
25. Four times they came after Nehemiah, and each time his response was to stand firm.
26. **Nehemiah 6:10-12** - "*“One day I went to the house of Shemaiah son of Delaiah, the son of Mehetabel, who was shut in at his home. He said, ‘Let us meet in the house of God, inside the temple, and let us close the temple doors, because men are coming to kill you – by night they are coming to kill you.’ But I said, ‘Should a man like me run away? Or should one like me go into the temple to save his life? I will not go!’ I realized that God had not sent him, but that he had prophesied against me because Tobiah and Sanballat had hired him.”*

27. Nehemiah was in a difficult situation because he didn't know whom he could trust.
28. There may be times when you need to retreat, particularly when your life is in danger or the potential for violence is present.
- a. Paul faced a situation in which his life was in danger, and he retreated.
 - i. *Acts 9:23-25* - "After many days had gone by, the Jews conspired to kill him, but [Paul] learned of their plan. Day and night they kept close watch on the city gates in order to kill him. But his followers took him by night and lowered him in a basket through an opening in the wall."
29. Pastor Gary said: "I don't want anybody to misunderstand what I'm saying... If you are some dangerous situation just tough it out. Just stay there. I'm not talking about that. What I am talking about is general opposition and general conflict, and general disagreements that people get into from time to time. What I am challenging us to do is to stay put. Don't bail. Don't bail on your marriage. Don't bail on your kids. Don't bail on your friends. Stay put. Do you know why a lot of people like to retreat? Because retreating is easier than resolving. Nobody wants to deal with the mess. Nobody wants to deal with the conflict. Nobody wants to deal with the strife. A lot of times people just take the easy way and they leave. Retreating is sometimes easier than resolving. But, retreating never [solves] anything. In fact, sometimes [retreating] just compounds the problem."
30. When the Israelites left Egypt and came to the Red Sea, they were had Pharaoh's army behind them and the Red Sea in front of them, and they didn't know what to do!
- a. What they did do was complain to Moses and declare that it would have been better for them to stay in Egypt as slaves!
 - b. *Exodus 14:13-14* - "Moses answered the people, 'Do not be afraid. Stand firm and you will see the deliverance the Lord will bring you today. They Egyptians you see today you will never see again. The Lord will fight for you; you need only to be still.' "
31. When you run or retreat, you rob God of the opportunity to display his might in your life.
32. Patient perseverance should be our response.

Nehemiah's Example In The Face Of Opposition -Obey

33. **Nehemiah 6:13** - “*He had been hired to intimidate me so that I would commit a sin by doing this, and then they would give me a bad name to discredit me.*”
34. If Nehemiah had entered the temple, he would have sinned, because he was not a priest.
 - a. **2 Chronicles 26:16-21** records the account of King Uzziah, who took upon himself the role of a priest, and God’s judgment against him.
35. We are not responsible for the behavior of others, and how they might mistreat us, but we are responsible for the ways we react.
36. **Acts 24:16** - “*So I [Paul] strive always to keep my conscience clear before God and man.*”
37. We are responsible for our life, character, and integrity, before God.
38. We must persevere through opposition.
39. **Nehemiah 6:15-16** - “*So the wall was completed on the twenty-fifth of Elul, in fifty-two days. When all our enemies heard about this, all the surrounding nations were afraid and lost their self-confidence, because they realized that this work had been done with the help of our God.*”

Discussion Questions

1. Review the introduction to the study guide with your group to provide the appropriate background.
2. Read **Nehemiah 6:1-14** to provide the foundation for this study.
3. Share examples of times when you made prayer your first line of defense.
4. Read and discuss the John Bunyan quote Pastor Gary shared. (See #12 above)
5. Spend time talking about times when you knowingly or unknowingly allowed someone to cause you to veer from God’s direction in your life.
6. How have you robbed the Lord of an opportunity to work in your life when you’ve run instead of being patient and standing firm?

7. What are some of the ways you can discern when you are not getting godly counsel?
8. How has the Lord worked in specific ways during times when you prayed, stayed, and obeyed?
9. Close your time in prayer as the Holy Spirit leads.

* Unless noted, all Scriptures quoted are from the New International Version (NIV 1984).