

Legacy

Part 7 – Doing a Great Work

Intro

Nehemiah and the Israelites have successfully overcome the most dangerous point of their journey – the halfway mark, where it's so easy to give in and give up. The people and Nehemiah had faced famine, lack of sleep, and threats from their enemies from all sides. No one would have faulted them for not completing the wall. But every step of the way, Nehemiah pulled the people together, changed his strategy, and lead with integrity, character, and hard choices.

What inevitably happens every single time an opponent or adversary cannot break through and squash a movement or crush the dreams of a people, that enemy resorts to attacking the leader. *Discredit, frustrate, distract, and crush the leader – eliminate the movement, effectively kill the dream.*

This played out countless times over the course of history. Show me a movement and I'll show you a leader whom opponents tried to discredit. It has happened with kings, business leaders, civil rights movements, and social advancements. And it is about to become a reality for Nehemiah.

Nehemiah

6:1-2

Now when Sanballat and Tobiah and Geshem the Arab and the rest of our enemies heard that I had built the wall and that there was no breach left in it (although up to that time I had not set up the doors in the gates), Sanballat and Geshem sent to me, saying, "Come and let us meet together at Hakkephirim in the plain of Ono." But they intended to do me harm.

At this point, the work of the wall itself has been completed [minus hanging the doors]. Nehemiah's enemies realize they have one more opportunity to stop the project. After exhausting all other avenues, his adversaries come after Nehemiah directly.

Execution Plan

The main detractors write Nehemiah a letter and invite him to meet with them. The proposed intent of the meeting – likely disguised as a joint effort for peace in the region – is ironic, since their true aim is to cause harm to Nehemiah. The Valley of Ono was a little more than 25 miles outside of Jerusalem, in a territory that was prone to hostility toward the Jewish people. Drawing Nehemiah such a distance from the protection of his people and newly fortified wall would allow this coalition to get rid of him forever.

Social & Political Optics

They attempted to put Nehemiah in a very difficult social and political situation. Surely, everyone wanted peace. If Nehemiah didn't attend the summit, the optics would be that he was not willing to discuss the topic – at worst, he might be labeled as the threat to local peace. However, if he made an appearance, it would likely be his last.

They were relentless in their effort to persuade Nehemiah to leave his post and join them.

6:4

And they sent to me four times in this way, and I answered them in the same manner.

Nehemiah knows their intentions are not for his or the people's good. Even still, Nehemiah displays a sense of decency and respect. He follows the course of typical diplomacy, communicating in the proper manner with other officials.

However, he did not allow diplomacy or the perceptions of other people to keep him from completing his most important work.

6:3

And I sent messengers to them, saying, "I am doing a great work and I cannot come down. Why should the work stop while I leave it and come down to you?"

Nehemiah's deep-seeded conviction – to follow the plan and will of God for His life – was more important than keeping the peace or making people happy. The enemy always seeks to distract us from the greater work with lesser things.

Jesus' Great Work

A similar attempt happened to Jesus after He was sentenced to death by crucifixion. The religious leaders and others began mocking Him, calling Him to *come down* from his great work as well.

He saved others; he cannot save himself. He is the King of Israel; let him come down now from the cross, and we will believe in him.

Matthew 27:42

Perform a miracle, save yourself, and we will know you are the Messiah. But saving Himself was a lesser work. Jesus' knew His greatest work would be done on the cross, not coming down from it.

Billy Graham's Legacy

This past week, the greatest evangelist [and possibly human] of the past couple centuries passed away. However, he was not always so fondly thought of. Graham's detractors have criticized him for being too liberal. More than one theologian called him *simplistic*, while evangelist Bob Jones believes Graham has done *more harm to the cause of Jesus Christ than any other living man*. President Truman even went so far as to call Graham a *counterfeit*.

Graham, though, stayed the course of God's purpose for his life – and by the end he had preached the gospel to more people in live audiences than anyone else in history—nearly 215 million people in more than 185 countries and territories; and was rated by the Gallup organization as *One of the Ten Most Admired Men in the World* a staggering 51 times.

Your Great Work

What is your *great work* in life? Are you too distracted or too busy to hear or know? What is the one thing God has given you or called you to do?

More important, what is it that's causing you to come down off the wall and suspend that work? What is it that you have allowed to divert your attention?

Here's where you have to be careful. Because your *great work* might not be what you had hoped it would be. It might not be as glamorous as what you previously dreamed. You might find yourself second-guessed and questioned at every turn.

At that point, you will be tempted to leave your post for something else that looks better and easier. You will be tempted to come down off the wall for fear of how everyone will perceive your family. Like Nehemiah, you and I must discover the specific calling of God on our lives and direct and focus our attention toward that purpose.

Focused Attention + Perseverance x God's Purpose = Legacy [A Great Work]

Everyone's legacy and great work is different. Not everyone needs to or should start a business, run a large ministry, or build something huge. It isn't everyone's story or call to be well known or accomplished for their work. Most great work [legacies] are built away from the bright lights of crowds and fame.

Mom's, it might just be raising 3 little rug-rats to become godly young men and women is your great work!

Your greatest contribution to the kingdom of God may not be something you do, but someone you raise.

Andy Stanley

Whatever your greatest contribution, it will not be easy and your opposition will not simply walk away.

6:5-6

In the same way Sanballat for the fifth time sent his servant to me with an open letter in his hand. In it was written, "It is reported among the nations, and Geshem also says it, that you and the Jews intend to rebel; that is why you are building the wall. And according to these reports you wish to become their king.

Realizing he cannot find a crack in Nehemiah's resolve, Sanballat directly assaults his character by spreading misinformation among the people. Most official letters were sealed and private, but Sanballat sends his letter unsealed and open – knowing that the letter carrier would no doubt read it along the way back. He would share it with friends who would share it with friends, and a rumor questioning Nehemiah's motives and integrity would be running rampant before Nehemiah ever had the chance to read or respond.

False Accusations & Veiled Threat

The letter goes on to claim that Nehemiah has established his own prophets that were proclaiming Nehemiah's plan to revolt against Persia and become the new king of the region. Sanballat includes a veiled threat that if Nehemiah doesn't come to his requested meeting, he and the others would report all of these things to the King of Persia [Nehemiah's boss].

I love Nehemiah's response.

6:8

No such things as you say have been done, for you are inventing them out of your own mind.

You are out of your mind! And then he prays for God to strengthen his hands.

It's like you mamma's when you are less than thrilled with your kids. *Boy, you have done lost yo' mind. Oh, Lord Jesus, bind my hands before I take him out!*

6:10-14

Nehemiah then reveals a conversation with one of the local prophets in Jerusalem who encourages him to run and hide in the temple – that Tobiah, Sanballat and the others are coming to kill him. Instead of running to hide, Nehemiah said:

6:11

Should such a man as I run away?

I am not the type of man who scares off easily. I would not have gotten this far if fear could keep me from following the will, and accomplishing the purposes, of God. And then he shows clarity in the face of fear.

And what man such as I could go into the temple and live? I will not go in.

Pride leads us to think too highly of ourselves and fear causes us to think too lowly of ourselves. But Nehemiah understood both himself and his position. The temple was not the place for a man like him to enter into. He was not a priest – the only ones allowed in the presence of God at this point in history.

I will not shrink and in fear, and I will not rise up and claim what is not rightfully mine.

When you are doing a great work for God, pay attention to whom you are listening. Even great people can give terrible [unbiblical] advice in the midst of adversity or fear. Nehemiah clearly knew the Word of God, and that a true prophet would never counsel someone to walk directly against the Word and will of God.

Nehemiah uncovers a conspiracy including several other *religious* leaders and nobles surrounding him. They had been hired in an effort to case Nehemiah to sin, as a result of fear for his life. But he remained resolved, focused on the one thing God had called [made] him for.

6:15

So the wall was finished on the twenty-fifth day of the month Elul, in fifty-two days.

Are you kidding me?!? 52 days! To complete the rebuilding on an entire wall, reconstruct and hang the gates?? And in the face of adversity, famine, adjustments to the plan, fear and doubt from within, and threats on Nehemiah's life? There is no possible way something of this magnitude could take place in 52 days...without the powerful work of God.

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6:16

And when all our enemies heard of it, all the nations around us were afraid and fell greatly in their own esteem, for they perceived that this work had been accomplished with the help of our God.

Only the work of God could achieve such a response among those who spent their entire lives denying Him. Nehemiah, and the people of God, were able to witness the nations seeing God for the very first time because of their never giving up – even when it felt as though it might cost them their very lives.

In those moments, we have a tendency to scale back what we know God has purposed us to do. Our dreams are often far too small for God's power and purpose. As Liberia's president challenged the Harvard graduating class in 2011 proclaimed:

The size of your dreams must always exceed your current capacity to achieve them. If your dreams do not scare you, they are not big enough.

Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, President of Liberia