

Enemies and Endurance Nehemiah 6:1-19

“Haters gonna hate” – that’d be an appropriate heading for this chapter. Nehemiah receives a number of personal attacks here. **So if you have had a horrible week, this chapter is for you!!**

He not only encounters many trials, but by God’s grace he is also able to **endure and press on in this mission**. Remember the **“long obedience in the same direction”** idea? Here is yet another illustration of that important principle for the Christian life.

In about two weeks, October 31, it will be the 500th anniversary of the reformation – that is 500 years since Martin Luther, the monk who discovered the gospel of grace, nailed his 95 theses to the Castle Church door in Wittenberg, in protest to the church’s message and ministries. Luther and other reformers changed the world in many ways.

In 1934, an African American pastor named Michael King of Georgia made a trip to the Holy Land, and then to Berlin for a pastor’s conference. While on his journey to Berlin, this pastor became so impressed by the life and work of Martin Luther, that he changed his name from Michael King to Martin Luther King. His **five-year-old son** was also first named Michael, but his father changed his son’s name also - to Martin Luther King Jr. (Metaxes, *Martin Luther*)

Both of these Luthers were reformers, restorers, leaders...

- Martin Luther of Germany brought about a **theological revolution**, restoring our understanding of salvation by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, for the glory of God alone.
- MLK Jr. brought about a **social revolution**, defending the dignity and rights of every image bearer of God.

Both men are heroes.

And both men faced fierce opposition personally.

- **MLK Jr. was eventually assassinated.**
- **Martin Luther wasn’t assassinated but was a wanted man for much of his life.** He even hid in the Wartburg castle for a while. He took on an **alias (Junker George) and altered his appearance**. Even more than the physical threats, Luther spoke often of the opposition he encountered **with the devil**. While it may be a fanciful myth, Luther reportedly threw his **inkwell at the devil, and the stains are still present in the castle – which is where he translated the NT into German**. His famous hymn “A Mighty Fortress” poetically and powerfully describes **the reality of spiritual warfare, the presence of enemies, but also the faithfulness of God and His unstoppable purposes.**

Nehemiah was also a reformer; a restorer.

And in chapter 6 we see him facing *personal opposition*.

We have considered **opposition** for now three consecutive weeks.

- **Nehemiah 4** – opposition through **threats** and **ridicule**. Nehemiah deals with it through prayer and practical security measures.
- **Nehemiah 5** – **internal opposition**. Nehemiah deals with it by addressing the matter directly, publicly, biblically, and by setting a proper example.
- **Nehemiah 6** – Opposition directed at Nehemiah **personally**.
 - In chapter 6, the enemies are trying to “sack the QB.” Nehemiah is a target.
 - If you can knock the QB out of the game, then you can usually win the game.

If you have a *holy ambition* – attempting to do something great for the good of people and the glory of God – you too can expect opposition.

These enemies in Nehemiah are evil.

J.I. Packer: “Nehemiah’s narrative of opposition to the building of the walls should be understood in terms of Satan’s hidden hand of hatred to the work of God.”

Chapter 6

How might we endure the schemes of the enemy? We find several lessons and encouragement from this chapter. Perhaps the overarching one is this:

Nehemiah doesn’t cave into the fears of the enemy because He fears God more.

His “Great and Awesome God” grants him strength, wisdom, and resolve to endure.

There are four schemes I want us to look at – they were all **fear tactics**.

- The verb “**frighten**” (v 9) is repeated again in verses **13, 14, 19**, (“to make afraid”).
- The schemes of the enemy were intended to intimidate Nehemiah, just like the enemy wants to do to us as well.

Nehemiah shows us that by fearing God supremely, you can view all other fears rightly and press on faithfully.

- “**Grace has taught my heart to fear, and grace my fears relieved.**”
- “the good hand of God is upon him” (grace), and that enables him to handle these fears.
- Matthew 10:28 – that’s who you should fear.

Scheme #1: Deception (6:1-4)

“Let’s lure him to a *meeting*.”

V1 – They are relentless.

- The wall is going up – everything but the gates built. So this is an important time.

V2a – “Come meet us in the plain of Ono” (20 miles N of Jerus.)

- They move from taunts to **political intrigue**.

- “Let’s hold a political conference, a summit.”
- It must have been tempting since it was a lush area – nice place to retreat, and get away from the work of the city... “I am a big shot, who gets to meet w/ the big shots”
- Satan is a master deceiver

Nehemiah’s Responses (2b-4)

1. Discernment

V2b: Nehemiah says “oh No” to Ono! Why?

- He is **discerning**. He’s not mindless. He detects the enemy’s intentions.
- Throughout this book, you find him using great wisdom.
- Trusting in God doesn’t mean it’s okay to be clueless!
- **Where does this discernment come from? He fears God. He prays. His mind is full of Scripture.** He’s not careless (Prov 14:16)
- Nehemiah knew their **intentions were malicious**: “They intended to do me harm.” (2b)
 - Who knows what they wanted to do to Nehemiah? Kidnap him? Assault him? Kill him? This is not innocent meeting.
 - You really can’t teach this; every good leader has great instincts.

2. Focus

3-4: How many of you know these people? Nehemiah doesn’t give in to pushy people.

- **He stays focused.**
- **He sends a messenger — how would you like to have that job?! “These guys want to kill me, go send them this message.”**
- **“I am doing a great work and I can’t come down” (3)**
 - This is what every mother of little kids wants to say multiple times per day!
 - How many of you think Nehemiah is being rude? Doesn’t that sound arrogant? “I’m busy.” “I’m doing important work.”
 - He is busy. It’s true. It’s got more important things to do.
- **4 Times He says No! He is resolved. He keeps his eye on the ball.**

Application: Say “Oh no” to your Ono!

- Say no to **temptation** and the things that will **divert** you from your calling.
- Re temptation, remember Titus 2 - grace teaches us to say “no.”
- Re your calling, notice how Nehemiah remains focused.
 - **There’s a difference in being available to people, and being a puppet of people.**
 - There’s a difference in being a servant of God for the good of people, and being a people pleaser.
 - **Chuck Swindoll: “One of the marks of maturity is the ability to say “no” without explanation.”**
 - **Spurgeon: One blind eye, one deaf ear**
- It’s essential to stay focused on biblical priorities. .

- Paul to Timothy: “No soldier gets entangled...” Later he tells him to “Avoid foolish controversies and irrelevant babble”
- Jesus: “Everyone is looking for you...Let us go on to the next towns, that I may preach there also, **for this is why I came out.**” (Mark 1:38). “The Son of Man came to seek and to save that which was lost.” (Luke 19:10; Luke 4:18)
- Focus on your priorities.
- **You have to live out of conviction, not guilt!**
 - Conviction comes from God and guilt from people. Do not live out of guilt.
 - **Teenagers** – you will deal with a lot of peer pressure. How will you live? To please people? Will you allow the wrong crowd to influence you? Guys, when the cool kids are tempting you to try this or try that -- will you live out of a conviction to glorify God? **Ladies, what will you do when that smooth guy starts singing Ed Sheeran tunes to you, “I’m in love with the shape of you.” Cave in? Stand firm?**
 - **Say No, to Ono.**

Scheme #2: Slander (6:5-9)

“Let’s spread false reports about his motives.”

They attack Nehemiah’s integrity, his character next.

They play “political hardball.”

V5: “Open letter” – This meant that everyone had access; it’s a **smear campaign**.

- It was like a blog and a website that someone has devoted to assassinating someone’s reputation.

V6 – “It is reported among the nations.” **It sounds so official!**

- “according to the reports” – **What reports? A Keebler elf?**

6b: They’re accusing him of **treason, of rebelling against the king.**

- This is a big deal – **if you want to keep your head!**
 - Cf., Jer 23:5-6; Isa 9:6-7 – expectation, but Nehemiah had no aspirations for it
- Matthew 5:11-12:** ¹¹ “Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you **falsely** on my account. ¹² Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.”

V7: – the report continues, “You even have prophets!”

7b: So, “now let us take council.” Manipulation, threats, fear mongering.

Nehemiah’s Responses (8-9)

When false reports are spread about you, there’s not a lot you can do except deny them and pray. We submit ourselves to God and press on.

1. He immediately denies the rumors (8-9)

- He simply refutes them. He says, “This is not reality.”
- **Let this be a lesson: Believe nothing until you hear the source.**
- Rumors are filled with exaggerations, which are normally fueled by someone’s fear.
- “Nehemiah’s building the wall, now he’s going to build an army and kill the king.”
- Rumors lead to deep, personal hurt.
- Don’t play the rumor game. Guard your tongue. Speak to the source

He knows why they’re spreading these lies: to intimidate. To cause the work to cease.

2. He prays: “Strengthen my hands.”

- **Nehemiah prays all through this book!**
- **He prays, “Strengthen me!” not “Change this situation!” And God obviously did.**
- **Chandler: Praying before he goes in his house after a long day at the office...**
- **God never told us that following Jesus would be easy, but he does promise to empower us and strengthen us.**
- **We will face opposition for living a godly life (2 Tim 3:12), and we all share a common enemy (Eph 6:10ff). We go to battle in the Lord’s strength with the Lord’s weapons.**
- Paul prayed that the Ephesians would be strengthened in the “inner man” (Eph 3:14ff)
- Paul to Timothy, **“Be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.” That’s where strength comes from.**
- **Acts 4:29: “And now, Lord, look upon their threats and grant to your servants to continue to speak your word with all boldness.”**

Piper, *The Roots of Endurance*

- Charles Simeon, a lifelong friend of contemporary William Wilberforce, was appointed as the vicar at Holy Trinity Church in Cambridge in 1782. But the congregation didn’t want him. He was met with great opposition. **For about ten years, some of the members of the church locked the church pews, and stayed away from the services.** He put some chairs out on occasion, and people removed the chairs. He visited the people regularly. They didn’t let him preach the evening service (which they had authority over) **for twelve years.** Despite the opposition, Simeon (single his whole life), remained for **fifty-four years.** He eventually won the hearts of his people, and left a legacy of faithful expository preaching and a passion for global missions. He told a friend once, **“We must not mind a little suffering for Christ’s sake.”**
- How did he endure? He was patient in tribulation, and constant in prayer.
- A friend lived with him for a few months and describes Simeon’s devotional life: **“Simeon invariably arose every morning, though it was the winter season, at four o’clock; and, after lighting his fire, he devoted the first four hours of the day to private prayer and the devotional study of the Scriptures.... Here was the secret of his great grace and spiritual strength. Deriving instruction from such a source, and seeking it with such diligence, he was comforted in all his trials and prepared for every duty” (Moule, p. 66)**

That's the secret. When the center goes – your own devotional life – everything goes, and you will not endure.

Scheme #3: Religious Conspiracy (6:10-14)

“Let's have false prophets threaten him and discredit him.”

10a – Shemaiah is a prophet - who apparently used to be a trustworthy preacher otherwise Nehemiah wouldn't have entered his house. He's confined to his bed, probably as an illustration of God's people in fear or Nehemiah who is in danger. (According to verse 14 there are more prophets involved in this ruse).

10b – Shemaiah's message: **“Let's meet in the temple, they're going to kill you.”**

- How many of you would be like, “Okay. Enough. I was fine with the whole, “Let's meet in Ono” and your smear campaign, but now you're going to kill me?”
- **“I'm just a cupbearer – Why is there a contract killer after me?”**
- Would you be ready to **fight or flight?**
- “Let's throw down, or give me a milk shake because I'm taking a nap.”

Shemy wants Nehemiah to go inside the temple. Why is this a problem for Nehemiah?

(1) Nehemiah has work to do. It's almost finished!

(2) Nehemiah isn't priest. This would be a sin.

- And they think if they scare him, he will do it.
- **King Uzziah tried this and God struck him with leprosy. (2 Chron 26:16-21)**

Nehemiah's Responses (11-14)

1. Courage (11)

- **“Should a man like me run away?” This would show a lack of trust in God.** It would show cowardice. It would discredit him as a leader.
- over and over we are told to “not be afraid” in Scripture.
- But why? It's **because of who God is.**
- “Don't fear him who can kill the body, but him who can throw the whole body and soul into hell.”

2. Faithfulness to Scripture (11b-13)

- He knows what Scripture says – it would be a sin. It would give him a bad name.
 - **Nehemiah fears sinning more than dying.**
 - **He fears offending God more than the threats of people.**
- **Test everything by Scripture!**
 - **Don't believe everything you hear. You need a filter!**
 - He knows that this is a false prophet because he knows Scripture.
 - You have to know it to follow it. **Don't believe everything a person says who “has a word from the Lord” but that word contradicts what the Scripture plainly says!!!**

3. Prayer in light of who God is (14)

- He says, “God deal with them.”
- Vengeance is left to God (cf. Deut 32:35; Ps 94:1; Rom 12:19).
- He trusts in God to remember his good deeds (5:19), and to execute justice on those who are opposed to God’s plans (6:14)
- This is why Nehemiah does what he does - it’s not for approval. He doesn’t want to be on Oprah. He doesn’t necessarily like construction. He’s seeking to glorify God!
- Nehemiah is living with a proper fear of God.
 - It is the beginning of wisdom (Prov 1:7), and the end of wisdom (Eccl 12:13)
 - Colossians 3:22-23

Scheme 4: Internal Pressure (6:15-19)

“Let’s work from within the community”

V15: Mission Completed!

- This had to be thrilling for all to see.
- These ordinary people, in the face of opposition, rising to build this wall in just 52 days.
- But we must notice **how anti-dramatic it is!**
- It’s a dude summary. “We built the wall.”
- The bigger challenge to building the wall, was building the people! That’s what we will begin looking at next week.

15b: The people were “**afraid**” – that is, they stood in awe, and were perhaps nervous about the implications of it. If these people can do this in 52 days, what might this mean for us?

V16: How was it done? “with the help of our God.”

- Nehemiah knows where the credit goes. What a contrast in Nehemiah and Nebuchadnezzar (Dan 4:30ff)

The Enemy Doesn’t Stop! (6:17-19)

Tobiah causes problems all through this book. He’s there until the end (ch 13).

Here, it seems that he (1) had a profitable trading agreements with the upper class in Jerusalem, and (2) was linked with the wealthier families by marriage.

19: Nehemiah is aware that these letters were intended to arouse more **fear**.

But again, here’s the key for Nehemiah: He fears God more.

“Grace has taught my heart to fear, and grace my fears (plural) relieved.”

What fears do you have? God is greater.

Application

If you *lead* anything, you too will face pressure -- constantly.

- Only leaders really know what this is like.
- If you run a business, a school, a home, a church, you know the kind of pressure and sacrifice it brings - time, money, bearing the offenses of others.
- You will be criticized for not doing things you tried to do, and for doing things you didn't do! (Wiersbe)
- My first church. I quickly learned that ministry wasn't just work; it was warfare.

Nehemiah aware, he's discerning, he's resolved to persevere in the face of the enemy's plots. Chapter 7 shows us perseverance... He doesn't stop with the walls, but now focuses his attention on repopulating Jerusalem.

Summary of Nehemiah Chapters 1-6

What have we learned so far about having a holy ambition?

- 1. Opposition is inevitable.** Attempt anything for the good of others and the glory of God and you will face it.
- 2. Sacrifice is inescapable.** It's quite obvious but you need to see how hard these people worked! Holy Ambitions involve great sacrifice.
- 3. Teamwork is essential.** Nehemiah didn't build alone, but with others.
- 4. Prayer is effectual.** All through this letter, he is praying! Let us learn from this. His humility, his perseverance were directly tied to his prayer life.
- 5. God is invincible.** "Great is thy faithfulness" hangs over Nehemiah. And that's our story isn't it – not "great is my faithfulness," but great is His faithfulness. Nehemiah knows who is God is!

So here we are in chapter 7 now. This Invincible/Faithful God is preserving His people.

As you glance at the names, it's important to note that a repopulated Jerusalem with pure Jews is significant because from them will come *the One who will crush the head of the Serpent*.

In the fullness of time, God sent forth His Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those under the law that we might receive adoption as sons. (Gal 4:4ff)

Jesus's life and ministry wasn't easy though, was it?

At every turn the Lord Jesus was met with opposition!

- As a baby, Herod tried to kill him
- He was rejected in his home town
- He was accused of being a law-breaker.
- He was put under surveillance
- His own family thought he had lost his mind
- He was the subject of all kinds of rumors and gossip
- He was openly slandered
- He was accused of being a fraud
- He was accused of being in league with the devil
- He was unjustly incriminated

- He was betrayed and abandoned by his closest friends
- He was publicly ridiculed
- He was beaten and tortured
- He was put to death

The closer he got to finishing the mission, the greater the opposition became — the greater the fears became — as he fell to the ground anticipating the horrors of Calvary.

Because Jesus endured and triumphed, we can endure our oppositions... Because he overcame, our greatest fear has been removed... In his strength, we endure all the other fears the enemy wants to throw our way...

Hebrews 12:1-3

³Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted.

Consider the Savior. Go to him in the midst of warfare. We endure through him.