

Overcoming Obstacles

By Vic Coleman

Introduction

Life is full of obstacles. They seem to multiply especially when you are close to acquiring a goal or blessing God has given you. When you are on a mission from God and the opposition seems insurmountable, press on with God, not on your own strength. God's word cannot change. If we press on and not give up, we will receive blessings and leave a testimony that will amaze others.

Scriptures for This Lesson

Nehemiah 2

Nehemiah 4

Nehemiah 6

Psalm 62:1 - 2, 5 - 8

Background

This lesson revolves around events in the life of Nehemiah, about 445 BC. Nehemiah, a servant of King Artaxerxes, hears about the condition of the city of Jerusalem. The city had been devastated and reduced to a pile of rubble, due to decades of conquest and neglect. Israel's continuous sin had caused them to be conquered and deported by King Nebuchadnezzar 70 years earlier. Nehemiah hears details of the city in ruin and the news breaks his heart. He mourns, fasts, and prays for several days. He finally prays that God would give him favor as he approaches the King to request permission to return to Jerusalem and rebuild God's sacred city.

The Obstacles

As with any major project there are obstacles to overcome. In Nehemiah's case, the obstacles seemed overwhelming; enough to discourage anyone from taking on the task. But, God had placed such a burden on Nehemiah's heart to rebuild the city that he had to act. The return of the exiles to the city was a fulfillment of God's word given 70 years earlier (Jeremiah 25:8 - 14).

Obvious obstacles were the following:

- There was no protection for the inhabitants of the city who were starting to come back. The wall around the city had been completely destroyed.
- Nehemiah had to find enough workers to complete the work.
- Food, water, shelter, supplies, and clothing had to be provided for all the workers for an extended period of time.

- They needed to have construction plans.
- Initially, Nehemiah was in Babylon, 600 miles from Jerusalem. He and his companions had to make a long and dangerous journey.

Key Point: When God ordains a project, He will provide what is needed to get it done. He may provide tangible resources, but keep in mind that He will also provide intangible resources such as courage, wisdom, special knowledge, and guidance by the Holy Spirit.

Can you think of other intangible resources that God may provide to accomplish His plan for your life or the life of someone you know?

Nehemiah was the cupbearer for King Artaxerxes. It was four months between the time he first heard about the condition of Jerusalem and the time he approached the King. As a servant, he was to keep his personal feelings to himself, no matter what his problems were. Immediately Nehemiah faced two more obstacles:

- How to approach the King with a personal problem, without being put in prison or put to death.
- Getting the King to say “Yes”.

In verses 2:1 – 2, the King’s response is very revealing. By asking, “Why does your heart look so sad...”, it shows that Nehemiah had gained some level of favor with the King. Nehemiah had obviously performed his duties well and had established a good reputation with Artaxerxes. Obviously he was someone the King felt could be trusted and someone he cared about personally. Nehemiah’s previous work performance and character established the foundation for a favorable response, well before he heard about Jerusalem’s condition. This foundation is what God used to perform His will, the rebuilding of Jerusalem through Nehemiah.

Key Point: Laying down a good foundation is crucial to overcoming obstacles. Establishing a good foundation involves: 1) a growing personal relationship with Jesus Christ through prayer and study, 2) being a man/woman of integrity, 3) working hard, 4) taking care of yourself physically, 5) getting training, skills or special knowledge, 6) establishing positive relationships with others who may assist you later on.

What kind of foundation have you laid down at work? At home? At church? Can God use it to accomplish a special goal in your life?

Another key verse is v.3. Nehemiah overcame his fear and took a step of courage/faith and told the King his concern. This could have meant his death, but the need was great.

Key Point: Sometimes we have to overcome a fear in order to overcome an obstacle. Fear may come as feelings of reluctance, being uncomfortable, or just being afraid.

Verse 4 is another revealing verse. When the King asked, “What is it you want?”, that indicated that God had opened the door to the fulfillment of His word. God had worked in the mind and heart of an unbelieving king (i.e., he did not worship Jehovah God) to give Nehemiah the favor he needed.

Key Point: Don’t underestimate God. He can work with anybody, at any time without you knowing what’s going on, to accomplish His purpose – even through the ungodly.

Can you think of a time in your life where God worked through an unsaved person to give you favor or accomplish a goal in your life?

Nehemiah’s relationship with God is revealed again in this passage by the fact that he prayed *before* he answered the king. A wise person will pray before he/she responds in a critical situation.

Just Because – Nehemiah 2:10

Verse 10 tells of how Sanballat, and Tobiah were “very much disturbed about Nehemiah’s arrival to “promote the welfare of the Israelites”. Sanballat was the governor of Samaria, just 12 miles away. Tobiah was an Ammonite (half Jew). Their opposition to Nehemiah’s arrival was probably based on seeing Nehemiah as a political threat. They might have seen Nehemiah as a new “acting governor” who could threaten their realm of power.

Sometimes you won’t find a “good” reason for an obstacle in your life. Some people will oppose you “just because”. Some people will be jealous or feel threatened by your success “just because”. Their reasons for opposition will be more personal and based on emotion as opposed to a specific problem.

Key Point: There will almost always be opposition to a movement of God. Satan does not want God to receive the glory.

More Attacks on the Work of God – Nehemiah 4

Have you ever had someone “just talk bad” about you? Spread lies? Belittling everything you do? That is what is revealed in Nehemiah 4:1 – 3. Sanballat and Tobiah seemed to be having a “field day” “doggin” the work of the Jews. What’s interesting is that upon hearing of progress of the rebuilding of the wall, they were extremely angry. The KJV version says that they “took great indignation”.

Satan hates God, and hates His children. He becomes angry at any move, blessing, or progress of God. This “great indignation” is seen in Saballat and Tobiah.

Key Point: Be aware that your successes for God will make some people jealous, angry, or resentful.

But notice Nehemiah’s prayer in verses 4 – 5, he asks the Lord *not* to blot out their sins, he wanted them held accountable for their actions. Truly ungodly or *unrepentant* people will not stop until you are destroyed. So is the case in verse 8. What’s interesting is Nehemiah’s response. He protects himself, day and night (verse 4:16, 21 - 23). Half of the men protect the project and the other half perform the work.

Key Point: Prayer (protection) must be continuous while the work of God is being conducted.

What this passage also says is that we have to be ever mindful of our unrepentant enemies. Do not show them any slack, because at the first opportunity, they will destroy you and the work God has called you to do. We have to be always alert and watchful for their deceit, words of discouragement (v. 4:12), and their underhanded plots. Do not trust your unrepentant enemies.

What are the weapons of our warfare? What is your first line of defense or attack?

Nehemiah presses on with the work of God. Verse 4:14 shows how he encouraged the people of God. He tells them to: 1) not be afraid, 2) remember the Lord who is great and awesome, and 3) fight for the ones you love. Nehemiah was fighting the battle of the mind. He was giving his people something else to think about other than the enemy and his might.

In overcoming obstacles, we must focus on the positive, the power and awesomeness of a God who loves us; who continually blesses us in numerous ways. David encouraged himself by focusing on the Lord (Psalm 62:1 - 2, 5 - 8).

Key Point: Satan’s primary area of attack against the Christian is the mind. If he can get you to focus on anything else but God, then he can keep you from receiving your blessing and God receiving glory.

Do you encourage yourself in the Lord? Why or why not? Why don’t we do it more often?

Notice verse 12 again. The Jews who came to Nehemiah were totally focused on “the problem”, i.e., on the opposition. They spoke words of defeat. Nehemiah had to reverse their thinking and take action. Since the people were speaking defeat, Nehemiah had to show them that they would be protected.

More Deceit – Nehemiah 6

After the wall was complete, Nehemiah's enemies still tried to deceive him so they could kill him. They tried repeatedly. Again, the ungodly, unrepentant mind is bent on your destruction, even after he's lost the battle. Always watch your back.

Summary

Achieving the goals of God brings glory to Him in the eyes of others. Verses 15 – 16 show that God was glorified in the midst of His enemies. Nehemiah's persistence provided an amazing testimony. So it is with us. If we press on, and are watchful of our enemies, we will receive the blessing. We will accomplish the goals of God. With God on our side, and our faithful obedience, no obstacle will stand in our way – it will crumble – we cannot lose.