

Series: **Godly Transitions in Life** – week 4

CDOBC – beginning on 1/8/17

Today's Title: "**Obstacles to Change**"

(Nehemiah)

*January 29, 2017 ~ passages in Nehemiah*

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**OBJECTIVE:** To help believers have confidence in God's ability to work through change  
- not our own ability.

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### *Opening Prayer*

Problems have a tendency to sneak up on you.

Over the past 3-4 months I've had a few issues related to my thyroid which was causing me to be very tired - and on a recent visit to my doctor I stepped on the scale.

For a number of years I've been around 195-200lbs.

208 lbs!!

Was the scale wrong?

No

This became a very real problem on New Year's Eve. Many of you remember Peter and Donna Wolff - their daughter Lacy got married on New Year's Eve - Congrats to the newlyweds: Jacob and Lacy Ewing.

Fortunately, I was worried about my weight - and a few days before the wedding I tried on my suit - the pants were not going to work!!

I had to get to a tailor...fast!

Problems in life sneak up on us - some faster than others.

Some problems are right in front of us...but we don't notice them - we've gotten use to them. We don't see them as problems...they just 'are'.

Turn to **Nehemiah 2** - "Obstacles to Change" - 3 obstacles & 4 solutions. Israel and Judah had been defeated first by Assyria, then by Babylon and hauled away into captivity. The prophets Haggai and Zechariah served in the generation before Nehemiah, the prophet Malachi was a contemporary and Ezra the Scribe (Ezra 7:6) worked closely with Nehemiah. In the Greek world, Socrates and Plato were contemporaries of Nehemiah.

The book of Nehemiah records events around the year 450-420 BC and it opens by telling us the problem which was causing Nehemiah great heartache: the walls of Jerusalem were in ruins and the gates had been burned and were never repaired. Jerusalem was a pile of rubble.

Nehemiah "was cupbearer to...king." Artaxerxes. (Nehemiah 1:11)

This is the Persian King Artaxerxes, and he gives approval for Nehemiah to go back and repair the walls and gates of Jerusalem and the king gives him the resources needed for the project as well (2:1).

When Nehemiah arrived at Jerusalem, he didn't announce why he was there.

In 2:11-16, under the cover of darkness Nehemiah assesses the situation. It was as bad as he had heard.

In 2:17-18 he sits down with the leaders of Jerusalem and points out the problem:

2:17 - Then I said to them, “You see the trouble we are in, how Jerusalem lies in ruins with its gates burned.”

**Obstacle #1: Unable to see the problems** 2:17-18

The people living in Jerusalem weren't bothered by the condition of the walls - at least not bothered enough to do anything about it! They had lived there for years - without walls, surrounded by piles of rubble, without any gates to the city. They were so familiar with the broken 'state' of the walls, they saw no need to change!

This happens so often...we live with problems because we don't see them as problems! They are simply the reality we are used to.

- We gain 10 lbs. over a period of months or years, and do nothing about it.
- We don't open our bible or pray unless we're in church.
- We look outside and all of a sudden the yard is full of weeds / the house is in disrepair / mold is in the corner of the shower.

Are you aware of the problems in your life, or have you become accustomed to them?

**Obstacle #2: Opposition to the changes** 2:19-20; 4:1-3

Right away - as soon as the work started, there was a group of enemies who began to oppose the changes.

*Read 2:19-20*

The best way to describe Sanballat, Tobiah, and Geshem is they are territorial warlords. The political and military control around Jerusalem at this time was a bit like the worst scenarios of the Wild West. The most powerful warlord controlled their territory.

Jerusalem's resurgence would take money out of their pocket and minimize their power and influence over the people in Jerusalem.

With the walls would come an increased sense of law and order - and this would not be good for these warlords.

We read in 4:1 that when news of the progress on the building project reached Sanballat, "he was angry and greatly enraged, and he jeered at the Jews."

Success in Gospel ministry is often met with ridicule. Ridicule and belittling comments can often bring great discouragement.

When God is at work - the forces of evil will not sit still! Satan will not simply shrug his shoulders and give territory away to the people of God!

When a church is working to refocus their efforts back to the Gospel - back to loving and serving the lost - so

they will know the love of God and hear the Gospel message - Satan will not sit in silence.

Instead of resolve, the opposition to change often halts the progress being made - which leads us to obstacle #3:

**Obstacle #3: Overwhelmed and tired 4:10**

In vs. 10 we read of another problem - the loss of energy and determination to finish the work.

It's not uncommon to become discouraged and lose motivation to keep on working.

In Judah it was said, "The strength of those who bear the burdens is failing. There is too much rubble. By ourselves we will not be able to rebuild the wall."

The mission looked impossible!

In reality, there was less rubble now than when they started...but they were tired - *and they were looking at the difficulty of the work instead of the greatness of their God!*

Change is a long process - and change can seem impossible - like an unrealistic dream.

It's easy to get discouraged at some point in the process and forget the reasons why you're changing - or it's easy to look at the change through human eyes, forgetting the spiritual power of God in the process.

Enough about the obstacles and problems of change. These are real - we experience them in our family - at work - and possibly at church.

But how do we deal with these obstacles?

What are the solutions we see in Scripture?

**Solution #1: Give an honest appraisal of the situation** 2:17-18

Give an honest appraisal of the situation.

This is what Nehemiah does when he first arrives in Jerusalem and meets with the leaders.

In his book “Good to Great”, Jim Collins calls this *confronting the Brutal Facts*. Every organization must take an honest look in the mirror and see the reality of what is - not the ideal of what you hope things are.

Church's often exist in this same blindness - oblivious to the problems which have crept in over time. Most often this is the problem of ‘inward focus’. After a period of time, a church shifts its focus from those who don't know Christ - to how we can serve those who are already here.

- They never consider how a new person views the campus as they drive into the parking lot.

- They don't realize how important it is to greet people in the parking lot and at the lobby door to give assistance as needed.
- They begin creating ministry and programs for those already in the church - the already convinced.
- They grow intolerant and frustrated with the culture around them.
- Their love for those without Christ shrivels.
- Their concern for those without Christ dissipates.
- Ineffective ministry becomes sacred - untouchable
- They practice church in a sinful state as they ignore the Great Commission.

Nehemiah brings the problem to their attention and they respond in unity and determination to accomplish the goal of rebuilding and repairing the walls of Jerusalem and the various gates.

Clarity is very important when it comes to change. Being clear and concise about the problem and the solution is vital.

For Nehemiah, the problem was clear: The city walls and gates are in ruins.

The solution was clear: We need to rebuild / repair the city walls and gates.

Solution #2: **Everyone is part of the solution** *chapter 3*

Chapter 3 is an amazing record of a diverse group coming together to accomplish one mission.

Look at the progress which is recorded:

3:1 - the Sheep Gate is rebuilt

3:3 - the Fish Gate is rebuilt

3:6 - Jeshanah Gate is repaired

3:13 - Valley Gate is repaired

3:14 - Dung Gate is repaired

3:15 - the Fountain Gate is repaired

3:7-32 - All classes of people - an extremely diverse group are all working together toward one common and unifying mission. People from different places, the wealthy and the poor, goldsmiths next to perfume makers, next to a man with many daughters, along with a group of Levites/priests. (*1 big blemish: vs. 5*)

Everyone is part of the solution!

Every believer has a spiritual gift - so they can roll their sleeves up and serve - strengthening the church.

We have something in common with Nehemiah - we have a building project. God has blessed - and with much blessing comes much responsibility!

We have multiple opportunities for you to serve - if you're not already serving.



- Welcome Ministry - new entrances we need to staff with greeters - expanded need for ushers and shuttle drivers for the parking lots.
- Next Gen Ministry:
- Nursery and pre-school expansion
- Teachers and helpers for children's classes.
- Those with music and tech abilities are needed for the children's worship time.
- Tech team for the new sanctuary and the technology in that new space - musicians and vocalists.

You have a part to play in what God is doing in this place! You're needed! Your gift - your talents and abilities are needed!

**Solution #3: Prayer followed by action** *chapter 4 & 5*

When this opposition ramps up, Nehemiah does something very wise - he prays. In 4:4-5 he prays that God would cause their enemies "to be plundered in a land where they are captives." He prays that God would see their sin and their guilt and judge them accordingly.

After this prayer we see wise action. As we know, construction projects can drag on - and Nehemiah wants to make sure the progress is experienced by everyone.

4:6 "So we built the wall. And all the wall was joined together to half its height, for the people had a mind to work."

"had a mind to work" - they were motivated.

*First*, notice they kept working - “So we built the wall”. The threats and ridicule didn’t cause them to stop the work. Quite often, when ridicule and complaints are brought up, it does stop the work. But Nehemiah and the people were focused on the mission - the mission was clear - and the ridicule from their enemies wasn’t going to derail the work.

*Second*, they finished the entire wall to half of its height. This did a couple of things. From a military standpoint, there was now a barrier for the entire city. This was not a sufficient barrier - but it was something. It also gave everyone a sense of satisfaction - they could see it now...they could imagine the finished project. Also, everyone was treated alike - the rich, those in authority, the well-known and the unknown - all of them had half the wall finished. Everyone was treated equally - no favoritism. This communicated dignity and value to all the people.

Then, in vs. 7-8 Sanballat and the other warlords are planning to attack the work - so Nehemiah once again seeks the wisdom of God through prayer.

This project had a spiritual foundation - it was more than building walls and gates.

Nehemiah prayed, and then went to work. The action was getting them to work in family groups -

vs. 13: “So in the lowest parts of the space behind the wall, in open places, I stationed the people by their clans, with their swords, their spears, and their bows.”

He made sure they were ready to defend their family - as they worked on the wall. His prayer was followed by action.

Then he got their eyes focused back on the greatness of the Lord.

vs. 14: “And I looked and arose and said to the nobles and to the officials and to the rest of the people, "Do not be afraid of them. Remember the Lord, who is great and awesome, and fight for your brothers, your sons, your daughters, your wives, and your homes.”

Never forget - Gospel ministry is a spiritual war.

Satan and the forces of evil will use every tactic at their disposal - they will do everything to bring failure to this place.

This is not a battle against flesh and blood - it's a spiritual battle.

**Ephesians 6:10-12**

“Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might.

**11**Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil.

**12** For 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.”

The battle we fight is not for a new sanctuary - new Student Center or Children's Center.

We don't fight for recognition.

We fight so Jesus will be known.

We fight because Jesus has saved us...forgiven us...and we want others to have what we have.

We fight because Jesus fought for us - and Jesus will return to bring us home - and we want to bring a big group with us!

Don't get discouraged - fight for the Gospel!

**Solution #4: Give God the glory 6:15-16**

This entire project was completed in 52 days!

Amazing!

Only one explanation for this (vs. 16b): God did it!

I wish our construction would only take 52 days!

Only one cause behind any success we have: God.

New buildings - new technology - an even better view of the mountains will not be the reason for our success.

The only success a church can have is Gospel success - the unsaved becoming saved and getting baptized - and believers growing in their faith as they serve and share their faith.

When this happens - it's because God is moving - God is active - God is drawing sinners to His salvation.

**Apply it...**

Are you ready for change? Are you eager for change?

Are these sermons soaking in?

We will be changing more than the physical campus this year. We will not change the truth or the doctrinal convictions of this church - but we will change how ministry is done.

The mission of the church - the Great Commission is our singular focus - *to reach people for Christ and help them grow in their faith.*

If a ministry is no longer effective in this mission - we will change it.

I came across a quote last week:

*“The point of change is to preserve that which does not change.”* (Managing Transitions, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition, by William Bridges, PhD, p. 107)

Do you realize change is how God grows your faith - and accomplishes His work?

2016 Report

Celebrate what God has done

Get ready to be part of what He will do!

Close in prayer