

Building Through Opposition

I. Announce:

- A. Welcome to those watching online.
- B. Slide1-6 Me: Men's. Camp Out. Roh Prayer. WSS Conference. Beyond the Trip. Church Prayer.
- C. Slide7a Prayer: The saint who advances on his knees never retreats.

II. Slide7b Intro: Building Through Opposition

- A. The Devil was having a yard sale, and all of his tools were marked with different prices. There was *hatred, jealousy, deceit, lying, pride* - all at expensive prices. But over to the side of the yard on display was a tool more obviously worn than any of the other tools. It was also the most costly. The tool was labeled, **DISCOURAGEMENT**. When questioned, the Devil said, *"It's more useful to me than any other tool. When I can't bring down my victims with any of the rest of these tools, I use discouragement, because so few people realize that it belongs to me."*
- B. Now, the opposition really intensifies in our story.
 - 1. Theme: God's work will often face *resistance*, but His people can keep *building* with prayer, courage, and vigilance.
 - 2. Big Idea: Opposition does not mean we are outside God's will; sometimes it is evidence that the work matters.
- C. The chapter seems to move in 4 clear sections ...

III. Slide8a 1. WHEN OPPOSITION RIDICULES (1-6) *laughable, mock, taunt.*

- A. 1 Now when Sanballat heard that we were building the wall, he was angry and greatly enraged, and he jeered at the Jews. 2 And he said in the presence of his brothers and of the army of Samaria, *"What are these feeble Jews doing? Will they restore it for themselves? Will they sacrifice? Will they finish up in a day? Will they revive the stones out of the heaps of rubbish, and burned ones at that?"*

3 **Tobiah** the Ammonite was beside him, and he said, “Yes, *what they are building - if a fox goes up on it he will break down their stone wall!*” 4 (prayer) Hear, O our God, for we are despised. Turn back their taunt on their own heads and give them up to be plundered in a land where they are captives. 5 Do not cover their guilt, and let not their sin be blotted out from your sight, for they have provoked you to anger in the presence of the builders. 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.

B. **Setting: Samaritans** (vs.2): Almost 300 yrs before Nehemiah’s time, the Northern kingdom of Israel was conquered, and *most* of the people were carried away captive (722 bc). Sargon of Assyria repopulated Israel with captives from other lands. (1/2 breeds, racially impure). Sanballat the *Horonite* was *gov of Samaria* (from a Elephantine Papyrus found). 400 yrs later, the Jews and the Samaritans still hated each other (Jn 4:9)

C. Sanballat and Tobiah begin with mockery.

1. The enemy does not have to destroy the work if he can *discourage* the workers. - So, they belittle the people, the work, and the possibility that anything meaningful could come from their efforts.
2. *What are these feeble Jews doing?* Their goal is **psychological** before it is **physical**. [they want **discouragement** to stop the work, before **force** is ever necessary]

D. **Slide8b** Nehemiah does not get pulled into a public argument. He **Prays**, and the people keep **building**. [*The saint who advances on his knees never retreats.* Jim Elliot]

1. (4,5) **Nehemiah’s prayer** resembles the *imprecatory psalms* (a spoken curse).
 - a) Remember that Nehemiah was praying as a **servant of God** concerned for the **glory of God**. He was not requesting personal vengeance, but official vindication for God’s people.
2. (vs.6) **Is the key:** So we **built** the wall...for the people had a mind to work. Pray & get back to work.

E. **Slide8c** Thomas Carlyle called **ridicule**, *The language of the devil*.

1. A strong point here is that **ridicule** is often **most effective** when it confirms what we already **fear** about **ourselves**.

2. **The Jews** probably did feel weak. **The wall** really was broken down. **The job** really was enormous. **But weakness** did not disqualify them from **obedience**.

F. Slide9a *When **God's people** attempt to do **God's work in God's way**, there will be opposition.* Q: What's your thoughts on this statement? [there often is opp]

1. Slide9b Q: When you face opposition, how do you know when it's from **the enemy**, or a "*natural*" consequence of **your actions**, or from **God Himself**?

a) Sometimes we **cannot** identify the source with certainty because the categories can overlap. **Joseph's brothers** acted wickedly, **yet God** worked through their actions for good. **Paul's "thorn"** was called a messenger of Satan, **but God** used it to produce humility and dependence.

(1) Slide9c **So** the most important question may not be, "Where did this come from?" **but**, "How is God calling me to respond faithfully?"

IV. Slide10a **2. WHEN OPPOSITION BECOMES THREATENING (7-9)**

A.7 But when Sanballat and Tobiah and the Arabs and the Ammonites and the Ashdodites heard that the repairing of the walls of Jerusalem was going forward and that the breaches were beginning to be closed, **they were very angry**. 8 And they **all plotted together to come and fight against** Jerusalem and to **cause confusion** in it. 9 And we **prayed** to our God **and set a guard** as a protection against them day and night.

B. The ridicule turns into anger and conspiracy. The enemies begin planning an attack.

C. (7) The threat was that they'd attack from every side: North (Sanballat/Samaria) South (Arabs) East (Tobiah & Ammonites) West (Ashdod).

D. I love Nehemiah's response in vs. 9, *And **we prayed** to our God **and set a guard** as a protection against them day and night.*

1. That is such a healthy picture of faith. They **prayed**, and they **posted a guard**. Prayer did not replace responsibility, **and** responsibility did not replace prayer.

- a) **Faith** is not passive. **Trusting** God does not mean ignoring the danger in front of you.
- b) There is a beautiful tension here between dependence on God and practical wisdom. Sometimes Christians create a false choice between “trusting God” and “making a plan.” **Nehemiah does both.**

E. **Slide10b** Where are you tempted **either** to pray without acting **or** act without praying?

V. **Slide11 3. WHEN OPPOSITION GETS INSIDE US (10-14)**

- A. 10 **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.”
 11 And **our enemies** said, “They will not know or see till we come among them and kill them and stop the work.” 12 At that time **the Jews** who lived near them came from all directions and said to us ten times, “*You must return to us.*” 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. 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.**”
- B. Now the biggest danger is no longer Sanballat **outside** the wall; it is discouragement **inside** the people.
 - 1. Judah says, “*The strength of those who bear the burdens is failing. There is too much rubble.*”
 - 2. *That may be one of the most relatable verses in the chapter. *They are tired. They are surrounded by unfinished work. The rubble is everywhere.*
 - a) Sometimes the hardest part of a calling is **not** the **beginning**, **and not** the **end**.
 It is the **middle**, when the excitement has worn off **and** the rubble is still there.
 - 3. **Slide12a** Nehemiah responds by reminding them who God is: **Do not be afraid of them. Remember the Lord, who is great and awesome.**
 - a) That phrase is **the spiritual center** of the chapter.

- b) Direct your attention toward **the Lord**. The Greatness of God helps us overcome... *our fear of man*. **Slide12b** [**Fear** grows when we *stare at the enemy*. **Courage** grows when we *remember the Lord*]

C. Notice Nehemiah does not pretend the danger is small. He makes God big!

1. Then he reminds them what they are fighting for: *your brothers, your sons, your daughters, your wives, and your homes*.
2. That makes this deeply personal. They are not merely building stones. *They are protecting a community and preserving a future.*

VI. Slide13 4. WHEN THE WORK REQUIRES WATCHFULNESS (15-23)

A. 15 When our enemies heard that it was known to us and that God had frustrated their plan, we all returned to the wall, each to his work. 16 From that day on, half of my servants worked on construction, and half held the spears, shields, bows, and coats of mail. And the leaders stood behind the whole house of Judah, 17 who were building on the wall. Those who carried burdens were loaded in such a way that each **labored on the work with one hand and held his weapon with the other**. 18 And each of the builders had his sword strapped at his side while he built. The man who sounded the trumpet was beside me. 19 And I said to the nobles and to the officials and to the rest of the people, “The work is great and widely spread, and we are separated on the wall, far from one another. 20 In the place where you hear the sound of the trumpet, **rally to us there. Our God will fight for us.**”

21 So we labored at the work, and half of them held the spears from the break of dawn until the stars came out. 22 I also said to the people at that time, “Let every man and his servant pass the night within Jerusalem, that they may be a guard for us by night and may labor by day.” 23 So neither I nor my brothers nor my servants nor the men of the guard who followed me, none of us took off our clothes; each kept his weapon at his right hand. [The Sword & The Trowel]

B. From this point on, they **build** with one hand, **and** hold a **weapon** with the other.

1. Half the people work; half stand guard. **Even the builders carry swords.**
2. The picture is not primarily about **aggression**. It is about **alertness**.

a) They refuse to stop building, **but** they also refuse to be naïve.

C. **Sword**

1. *What instrument, tool, or weapon are your hands very comfortable with?*
[Guitar, needle/thread, gun, hammer job site, nunchucks]

2. **How** did we get comfortable w/these? (using them often)
3. How are you with **wielding the Word of God?** (it works the same, get comfortable w/it!)

D. Trowel

1. **What** is your part of the wall to build for His kingdom? (for some, it's building *children's sp lives* in CK? For others, it's building His kingdom in a hard access country?)

E. That makes for a great leadership principle: Mature faith is both **constructive** and **watchful**.

1. The church is called to build up, encourage, disciple, serve, and advance the gospel. But we also stay awake to *discouragement, temptation, division, false teaching, and spiritual attack*.

F. (19) Where did Nehemiah plan to be if a fight broke out? *rally to us there*.

Learn much of a leader here. *He was a leader who served & a servant who led.*¹

1. Then (vs.20) gives another major statement: *Our God will fight for us*.

G. Slide14 That is the balance of the whole ch: We work. We watch. We pray. God fights. - or we can summarize the chapter w/4 words: *Pray. Build. Watch. Remember*.

VII.Slide15a **CHRIST CONNECTION**

A. Spiritual warfare in Ephesus: (Acts 19:11-) This is why the book of Ephesians contains a substantially higher concentration of **warfare terminology** than in any other epistle by Paul. [eg. Unusual miracles/handkerchiefs. 7 Jewish exorcists; to show Christ's power over *disease, demon-possession, & magic*] - Eph. 6:12 NLT *For we are not fighting against flesh-and-blood enemies, but against evil rulers and authorities of the unseen world, against mighty powers in this dark world, & against evil spirits in the heavenly places*.

1. We are also called to **labor** while recognizing that **our struggle** is not merely **human**. Paul tells us to *be strong in the Lord* and to *take up the armor of God*.

¹ Warren Wiersbe

B. **Slide15b Jesus Himself** continued His mission in the face of *ridicule, threats, rejection, and ultimately the cross*. [opposition never diverted Him from the Father's work]

1. God had **one Son without sin**, **but** He never had **a Son without trial**.

(Wiersbe)

C. **Closing challenge:**

1. What has God called **you** to ***keep building***, **even though** opposition has made you tired? (your marriage, your health, broken relationship w/adult child)

a) Maybe the issue is **not** whether the work is hard. Maybe the question is whether **God** has asked you to keep going!

b) **Don't confuse resistance with a stop sign**. Sometimes **resistance** simply means, **Keep building!**

D. **End:** What a great picture Nehemiah gives us: Having our **sword** girded at our side, a **tool** in our hand. Having a **mind** to work, eyes **watching**, our ear **listening** for the trumpet of any emergency (like *Jesus' Return*), **and** a **heart** to work together w/others.

E. **Slide15c Alan Redpath** explained why the Jews were successful: The people had... **A mind** to **work** (6). **A heart** to **pray**. (9). **An eye** to **watch** (9). **An ear** to **hear** (20).

F. Keywords: opposition, watchfulness,