

Doing God's Work Amidst Opposition

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Introduction: Open your Bibles to **Nehemiah 2**. The title of our message is "Doing God's Work Amidst Opposition". Jesus said, "No man can enter into a strong man's house, and spoil his goods, except he will first bind the strong man; and then he will spoil his house" (**Mark 3:27**). When you begin to mess with Satan's territory, you can expect satanic attack. Paul said, "Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution" (**2 Timothy 3:12**). We are called to "endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ" (**2 Timothy 2:3**). If you are doing the will of God, you should expect opposition.

Remember Nehemiah got a burden to build the lives of broken people. Once that burden came, he did not immediately go to Jerusalem.

1. Nehemiah had to learn to **Wait** on God. He waited four months with prayer and fasting and mourning and weeping. O, how hard it is to wait. You know God has you in a certain pathway, and we want to make God hurry up. But we need to wait.

Charles Spurgeon said, "We shall not grow weary of waiting upon God if we remember how long and how graciously He once waited for us".

But let me give you two foundations that will hold you up while you are waiting on God.

- The first is **Ephesians 1:11** tells us that God "works all things after the counsel of His own will".
- The second is **Proverbs 3:5-6**, "Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. 6 In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths". All worry and wondering and fretting, and anxiety are a result of not trusting God. We need to wait on Him.



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2. Nehemiah also learned he had to **Pray** without ceasing. Four months he prayed. For four months, Nehemiah was doing his job, but he was constantly praying about this new burden of rebuilding the walls. He was the Persian King Artaxerxes' cupbearer. He tasted the food and drink to make sure it wasn't poisoned. Nehemiah was busy doing His job for the king, but all the while He had a burden from God on his heart to do the work of the Lord, and he was praying about it.
3. Nehemiah also needed to be **Faithful** in the littlest things. God had given Nehemiah a job serving the king, and he took it seriously. Nehemiah says in **verse 1**, "I had not been beforetime sad in his presence". Nehemiah did not simply take off once he

had a burden to rebuild Jerusalem. He stayed and served the king *joyfully*. He did what God called him to do until God showed him otherwise.

Explanation: Remember there is no way for a foreign servant to ask the king of the ancient world for anything. It was not lawful for Nehemiah to even approach the king. So the only thing he could do was wait on God, pray, and be faithful in what he was doing until God opened a door.

That brings us to our next point. The forth thing we see is that we need to...

4. Nehemiah **Expected** God to open unexpected doors. God loves broken people more than you do. Remember this is God's plan. He has control of all things. He can make something that you think is impossible become possible.

Explanation: It was a normal day in the palace. It was a familiar scene. King Artaxerxes was dining with his queen. They had just finished eating. The aroma of delicious food was in the air. Nehemiah poured them some wine and brought it to them. Nehemiah says in **verse 1**, "I took up the wine, and gave it unto the king". And as he was serving the king his wine, Nehemiah got close enough for the king to notice his face. Nehemiah had been careful not to give any hint of a burden to the king for the last four months. He clearly says, "Now I had not been beforetime sad in his presence" (**verse 1**). But now something totally unexpected is going to happen. The king and ruler of the entire ancient world was about to address Nehemiah. **Verse 2**, "Wherefore the king said unto me, Why is thy countenance sad, seeing thou art not sick? this is nothing else but sorrow of heart".

This response was so unexpected that Nehemiah confesses in **verse 2b**, "Then I was very sore afraid". Nehemiah had good reason to be afraid. If a person were overly sad in his presence the king could have them executed.

Yet Nehemiah, despite his fear, had enough faith in the Lord to communicate his burden to the most powerful man in the world at this time. Listen to what Nehemiah says in **verse 3**, "And [Nehemiah] said unto the king, Let the king live for ever: why should not my countenance be sad, when the city, the place of my fathers' sepulchres, lieth waste, and the gates thereof are consumed with fire?"

Nehemiah waited on God. He was praying without ceasing. He was faithful in the little things. And I believe he was ready for God to do the unexpected. Then it happened!

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The king approached Nehemiah with an amazing question. We read in **Nehemiah 2:4**, "Then the king said unto me, For what dost thou make request?" Wow! The most powerful man in the world was asking Nehemiah if he needed anything!

Remember, "the king's heart is in the hand of the LORD, as the rivers of water: he turneth it whithersoever he will" (**Proverbs 21:1**). King Artaxerxes is asking this foreign servant, basically a slave, "What do you want?" What is it that worth getting sad over?

Nehemiah's response in **verses 4b-5** show that Nehemiah was not only praying for the opportunity to build the walls, but that he was trusting God to open the king's

heart. Nehemiah writes, "So I prayed to the God of heaven, 5 And I said unto the king, If it please the king, and if thy servant have found favour in thy sight, that thou wouldest send me unto Judah, unto the city of my fathers' sepulchres, that I may build it."

This was an unexpected door, and Nehemiah was ready. He shared his burden with the king. I'm sure he couldn't believe it was happening. But when you are waiting on God, praying, and your being faithful in the little things, God is going to open unexpected doors!

So now the door has been opened. Everything's a go! But it's not that simple. Some people think that doing the will of God is mysticism. If you are willing then you almost don't need to be responsible. You don't need to plan or prepare. If Nehemiah would have taken that track, he never would have made it to Jerusalem.

We see this in the first century. Paul preached to the Thessalonians that Christ was coming soon. So some of the people in the congregation quit their jobs and stopped working. They were so spiritual they were just going to wait for Christ to come. Paul said, no, if a man does "not work, neither should he eat" (2 Thessalonians 3:10).

So you've got to prepare. But always remember **Proverbs 16:9**, "A man's heart deviseth his way: but the LORD directeth his steps."

- I. First, we need to be **Prepared** for to reach broken people. Are you prepared if God opens the door of service for you to go through? Nehemiah had a plan. He was praying, but he was also **planning!**
 - A. There is a **necessity** of preparation. Nehemiah thought things through. Look at how he prepared. He knew about how much time it would take to build the walls, to finish the job and return to Persia. **Verse 6**, "And the king said unto me, (the queen also sitting by him,) For how long shall thy journey be? and when wilt thou return? So it pleased the king to send me; and I set him a time." Can you imagine how he must have thought things through so much so that he was able to give the king an immediate on the spot answer?

Planning and preparation are absolutely necessary for useful service for the Lord. Some people say, well we are going to do this "by faith". **Faith is not a synonym for disorder or poor planning.** I think that can be an excuse for laziness. I've known people to surrender to go to the mission field in a missions conference who had no idea that they needed to learn the language and adopt an entirely new culture. Then they get to the field, they find out they have no aptitude or training in language and no desire to adapt to a foreign culture, and they have to go home.

We see from **verses 7-8**, that Nehemiah had thoroughly thought through things. "Moreover I said unto the king, If it please the king, let letters be given me to the governors beyond the river, that they may convey me over till I come into Judah; 8 And a letter unto Asaph the keeper of the king's forest, that he may give me timber to make beams for the gates of the palace which appertained to the house, and for the wall of the city, and for the house that I shall enter into. And the king granted me, according to the good hand of my God upon me."

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Explanation: Nehemiah's letters. Nehemiah knew that he had to have letters from the king in order to travel unhindered to Jerusalem. They were like his passport. But he also thought of the supplies he would need. Nehemiah got a blank check from Artaxerxes for lumber not only to build the walls of the city, but also to build him a house to live in.

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Let's make some applications...

PREPARATION WITH YOUR LIPS

Application: We also need to be prepared if we are going to reach out to the broken, lost people all around us. We need to be reading the Bible and living it out. We need to be constantly ready to give the Gospel to people.

Spurgeon said, "You must go into the fire if you are to pull others out of it, and you will have to dive into the floods if you are to draw others out of the water."

Do you have boldness? Paul lacked boldness—that's why he prayed for it so often.

- In **Philippians 1:20**, Paul said, "my earnest expectation and my hope, [IS] that in nothing I shall be ashamed, but that with all boldness, as always, so now also Christ shall be magnified in my body, whether it be by life, or by death."
- Paul said in **Romans 1:16**, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek."
- **1 Peter 3:15**, "But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear".
- Perhaps you are not at this time able to reach broken people with the Gospel as you want to. Why don't you take the advice of Christ in **Matthew 9:37-38**, "The harvest truly is plenteous, but the labourers are few; 38 Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he will send forth labourers into his harvest."

PREPARATION WITH YOUR LIFE

Yet it's not enough to speak the Gospel. We need to live the Gospel. There needs to be a reality of Christ's presence in us. Broken people need to see Christ living in us. We need to be living a life of holiness that includes everything about us: our words, our attitudes, from the way we comport ourselves to the way we dress, we ought to be holy people. We ought not to look like the world, think like the world, speak like the world. It is the world that is breaking people. This is a serious thing. James says "whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God" (**James 4:4**).

Nehemiah was ready for God to use him. He was a man that was walking with God, and for the last four months was in deep prayer for these broken people.

B. Now look at the **results** of preparation. And what was the result of that preparation? "...the king granted me, according to the good hand of my God upon me" (**verse**

8b). This blessing Nehemiah experienced was certainly spiritual, but it was also tangible as we read in **verse 9**, "Then I came to the governors beyond the river, and gave them the king's letters. Now the king had sent captains of the army and horsemen with me." Nehemiah had all he needed. He had the signature of the king on his letters to send him through and he had the king's army! This is amazing considering this is a foreigner, a Jew, but he is so trusted by the king.

We read **Psalm 1** this morning, and it is so true. The first three verses of the Psalm begin with preparation and end with prosperity. **Psalm 1:1-3**, "Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful. 2 But his delight is in the law of the LORD; and in his law doth he meditate day and night. 3 And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper."

- II. Finally, let me say that we ought to **expect opposition** when you begin reaching people who happen to be in Satan's territory. If you are a person with an obedient heart in love with the Savior, then you should expect Satanic attack. You should be ready for distractions, detractors, and critics. We come to **verse 10**, "When Sanballat the Horonite, and Tobiah the servant, the Ammonite, heard of it, it grieved them exceedingly that there was come a man to seek the welfare of the children of Israel".

Jesus said in **Mark 3:27**, "No man can enter into a strong man's house, and spoil his goods, except he will first bind the strong man; and then he will spoil his house." We see that the strong man in this verse is Satan. His goods are the people of this world, and his house is the world. Satan is the prince of the power of the air. The "god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not" (**2 Corinthians 4:4**). All those without Christ walk "according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience" (**Ephesians 2:2**).

Ephesians 6:12, "For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places."

When a person is following God's will, it is unusual if there is no opposition. Paul said in **2 Timothy 3:12**, "Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution."

A Christian who is setting free those who are captives to Satan is going to face opposition!

Illustration: One day John Wesley was riding along a road when it dawned upon him that three whole days had passed in which he had suffered no persecution. Not a brick or an egg had been thrown at him for three days. Alarmed, he stopped his horse, and exclaimed, "Can it be that I have sinned and am backslidden?"

Slipping from his horse Wesley went down on his knees and began interceding with God to show him where, if any, there had been a fault.

A rough fellow, on the other side of the hedge, hearing the prayer, looked across and recognized the preacher. "I'll fix that Methodist preacher," he said taking a brick and tossing it over at him. It missed its mark and fell harmlessly beside John.

Whereupon Wesley leaped to his feet joyfully exclaiming, "Thank God, it's all right. I still have His presence."

What do you do when you are afraid? You've got to love Nehemiah.

When he didn't have words to say to the king, he asked the Lord for words to say. When he faced financial problems, he got the courage to ask the king for access to the timber of the royal forest. He was both a man of faith and great courage.

Conclusion: God has some specific people He has brought to your path. Broken down people are all around us. They live in broken down situations. How can we reach them? We want to change their situation, but we must:

- Trust in a sovereign God for His timing.
- Pray without ceasing.
- Be faithful where you are.
- Prepare ourselves to be the kind of people that God will use to mend broken people
- And finally expect opposition.

Are you prepared to reach broken people? Are you faithful, praying, trusting believer? Are you ready for Satanic attack? Don't fear. He'll never leave you nor forsake you!