

Nehemiah: Leadership in the Contemporary Church Operation Intimidation

Nehemiah 6:1-16

Comment on Chapter 5: v7/9/12/15b/16: N's approach to highly relevant to our MP's (expenses issue/lobbying) and those in public life. In essence N stands for integrity in public life and not for making money out of others you are serving.

You commit yourself to a life of faith, you declare yourself before God and man that you are going to walk with Him regardless and suddenly, it happens! The enemy turns every gun he can on you to blast you out of the saddle to make you finish in defeat, to have you think it's really not worth it after all.

This was a well timed attack & N was not hiding in his penthouse. Even though he had been a faithful, stable and consistent leader, a plot to defeat him was underway. The attack upon N was very significant because it happened at a crucial juncture in his life. It hit when he was nearly finished with the greatest task that Jerusalem's citizens had seen in their generation. V1 tells us the attack occurred when they had almost finished rebuilding the wall. Not very long before they were ready to cut the ribbon and have a jubilant celebration, the enemy attacked.

That is so true to life! And must be one of the reasons God says to the proud person to 'be careful so you don't fall' (1 Corinthians 10:12). So often it's not the person who has almost fallen who is vulnerable. It's the person who thinks he will never fall. The Bible tells us of many such failures: when did Bathsheba come across the gaze of David? When did Jonah fall into self pity? When did Joseph receive that temptation from Mrs Potipher?

Frankly some of my most discouraging times occur on Mondays (my day off!

A Subtle Strategy: N was already planning the dedication service for the completed wall when the enemy attacked. V2f tells us the story of these subtle attacks. There were 3 different kinds, each prompted by the enemies same motive, which was to stop the project by deterring N and his men through discouragement! I think that God permitted these

tests to strengthen His servant. G K Chesterton said: Christianity has not been tried and found wanting: it's been found difficult and not tried. Many a person today sees the demands of the Christian Life and says: "You can have it; I would rather go my own way." N said 'I'm going God's way.' Then came the attack.

First of all, there was a personal request which on the surface appeared quite innocent and harmless. In fact it sounded like something he ought to do (v2: Come let us meet together). Now the word together sounds like the idea of a compatible visit. Beautiful verdant valley ONO - you need a break/ you've been laying bricks for too long....Come on up to ONO. N said "Oh no!" to ONO. I'm not coming up there, not on your life! Why the negative response: v2 "they were planning to harm me". How did he know? Difficult to explain but it's like a 6th sense given to Godly leaders. Now that doesn't mean we should live the life of a hermit but it does mean we should live a life of discernment. Discernment is a God-given quality a leader must possess - it allows you to read between the lines! In this invitation N sensed trouble. So what did he do? (Read v2b/3). To put it another way, there's a great difference between being an available man or women of God and being a puppet of the people. A great difference! Leaders need to be able to say No without explanation: that's maturity. But look at (read v4). The messages kept coming! Nice little embossed invitations with lovely printing - Request no 2/3/Final - v4 I answered them all in the same way. What a secure man! Unintimidated! And so to face another pressure tactic (read v5).

First personal requests now an open letter: not private and personal but open and public. Notice the intimidating threats in (the letter v6/7). You wouldn't come so we are letting the truth be known! We plan to expose you! You have an evil motive (revolution!) and evil method (You plan to be King!). What we are dealing with here is rumour: source is never quoted or indeed known/ and it is full of exaggeration and inaccuracy/ Christian Chinese whispers/ A rumour leads to personal hurt and misunderstanding - and its result in N's case? It hurt him - in fact, it was designed to hurt! (e.g. like the comments of the Elder Brother in Luke 15). So N was impaled on the horns of a dilemma:

refuse to go (it could be used against him: tantamount to saying he was afraid to let the truth be known!), but if he went (leave the work on the wall, play into the enemies hands). The No. 1 enemy of the truth is the tongue (not drink, drugs, poor homes, inflation, TV, or bad Church programmes): People who spread rumours invariably display a lack of wisdom. In the case of N nobody was around to witness the truth. He was simply confronted with a letter of expose that was built on a lie. N responded beautifully. If you are ever the target of gossip look carefully at v.8. Here you can learn how to handle yourself when you're under attack. For openers N calmly denied the charge and then he put the blame where it belonged! (Read v8). And in v9 he took his hurt to God. (Read v9).

It is impossible for a leader - or any other person for that matter - with a sensitive spirit not to be hurt by a rumour. Cutting remarks really hurt don't they! To those who gossip: if your tongue is a loose tongue God is going to have to deal with it. You see gossip is a major reason for disunity in God's family. The Body has no stronger muscle than the one in our mouths! I believe that every telephone/ mobile and indeed computer, ought to have written beside it the words of **Ephesians 4:29**. That verse even covers proper criticism to the right person. Our words are supposed to edify, to build up. Observe the purpose of the letter to N was to frighten him (v9). But N didn't give in. He persisted in what he knew to be the Will of God.

Isn't it interesting that when one approach didn't work, another approach was used. Enemies can be relentless! 1. They tried to stop the project by personal attack. 2. They used an open letter approach to halt progress. 3. They employed a religious-sounding (yet intimidating) warning: Run for your Life! (v10). That's a frightening thing. Can you imagine what it was like? Some night N put on his PJ's, blew out his candle, and after he had layed down, he heard a noise outside. Oh no! That's one of those guys coming to get me! Another way of reading the memo would be: "But N - these guys are coming in the middle of the night and they are going to get you. I'll tell you what, let's meet at the temple and we'll have a prayer together". You know the super pious approach - "lets pray about this together" How phoney can you get?

N's discernment was remarkable. In v11/12 he ponders /read v11 / that was so wise, but how did he know that? Again, I cannot explain it /read v12/ Wow! Here's this strong leader, committed to building the walls and a group of people hired this 'hit-man' to corner him in the temple and finish him off. N said, "I can't do that". " N they're going to come in the middle of the night and they are going to get you. And if you don't get away you have had it!" And N replied, "I can't go". Why not? Because God doesn't want me to go. Well you're a fool. No I'm walking by faith. I believe that God will protect me. Remember God had said to N: don't go! Notice v 13 (read)! Where was the sin? In yielding to an intimidating remark. It's not being intimidated but yielding to intimidation that produces sin. N said "Before God I can't give in." But why did the enemies want N to sin? /v13/ soon noisy gossips would be whispering to one another "Do you know who N is spending time with these days? Every Friday evening they're up in the temple together." N had just cause for his suspicion that rumours could very easily fly if he choose to accept this clandestine meeting at the temple. He was surrounded by people who kept the ancient postal service quite busy/ v17 /!

Now this is very practical. Tobiah was his arch enemy - an unbeliever. He hated the things of God. Inside the wall was N and a band of diligent men. But the plot thickened because T, the enemy, was related by marriage and by blood to people on the inside; there was a constant passing of letters back and forth (in front of N) about N. /v19b/ N said "I'm not giving in. You can make all the trips to the temple at night you want to but I'm not going with you. Neither you nor a 100 like you will stop progress." MISSION ACCOMPLISHED!

Now look at v 15. See what happens? What a magnificent accomplishment. "So the Wall was completed" (only 52 days!). The final bricks were laid in the midst of the one attack after another. N was on the field under fire, yet the wall went up /read v16/. That has to be the most thrilling experience in the world - to watch God come to the rescue when you have been helpless. In the midst of the incessant assault of the enemy, in spite of the endless verbal barrage, the wall was built! While the enemy blasts, God builds!

Why is this so important for today? Because it is impossible to do the will of God, to walk by faith, to pass those bricks without attack. But we are called to stand firm and remember John's counsel / 1 John 4:4 "But you dear children are from God and have overcome them, because the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world". So the Lord strengthened N through 3 severe attacks: 1 Several personal letters. 2. An open letter impugning his motives and character. 3. A warning designed to paralyse him with fear: None of them worked.

Chapter 7 records all the exiles who returned to Jerusalem and helped rebuild the wall - almost 50,00 including the servants and the singers - and so to Chapters 8-10 which next week we will see a public reading of God's word, repentance based on Holy Spirit Conviction, and in unity the Lord revives His people - so let it be Lord in our Generation!

The wall continued to go up, Because N and his workers were in the centre of God's will: they were invincible. Persistence pays rich dividends.

In 1941 Winston Churchill spoke to students at Harrow School: "Never give in, Never, Never, Never, Never give in". If honour is at stake, if a good principle is at stake, if you know you're in His Will.

NEVER, NEVER, GIVE IN!!!

Pastor David
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