

**SHARING LIFE AT FIRST BY DR. BOB BENDER ON MARCH 26, 2017**  
**“OPPORTUNITY AND OPPOSITION” FROM NEHEMIAH 4:1-9**

How many of you have heard of Murphy’s Law? If anything can go wrong, it will—right? Some other ancillaries of it are: Nothing is as easy as it looks; everything takes longer than you think and costs more than you plan. A day without a crisis is a total loss. The other line at the supermarket or bank always moves faster and when you change lines, the one you left moves even faster. Inside of every larger problem are a series of smaller problems struggling to get out. Ninety percent of everything is crud. The chance of the bread falling with the peanut butter and jelly side down is directly proportional to the newness of the carpet. No matter how long or hard you shop for an item, immediately after you buy it, it will be on sale somewhere else cheaper. Any tool dropped while repairing a car will roll underneath to the exact center. The repairman will never have seen a model quite like yours before. You will remember that you forgot to take out the trash when the garbage truck is two doors away. The light at the end of the tunnel is the headlamp of an oncoming train. Do you know what Mrs. Murphy said about her husband? “And he is the optimist of the family!”

When Igor Sikorsky was 12, his parents told him that competent authorities had already proved human flight impossible. He went on to build the first helicopter. In his American plant, he posted this sign: “According to recognized aero technical tests, the bumblebee cannot fly because of the shape and weight of his body in relation to the total wing area. The bumblebee does not know this, so he goes ahead and flies anyway”<sup>1</sup>

Nehemiah would have this sign posted above his office door which is our big idea of the message: **The greater the project, the greater the opposition. The greater the person, the greater the determination.** Albert Einstein said, “Great spirits have always encountered violent opposition from mediocre minds.” Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 16:9, “For a wide door for effective service has opened to me, and there are many adversaries.”

Nehemiah was engaged in a great project—rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem. Everything seems to be going well until chapter 4 of his autobiography <read text>. What started out as opposition from two now became opposition from many (v. 7). Chapter 4 uncovers **Appearances of Opposition:**

**Anger (4:1, 7).** Jerusalem would threaten Sanballat’s control of the regional trade route and compromise his revenue stream. So, he joined his former enemies in concert to fight Nehemiah. When people run out of logic, they revert to anger. You no doubt have had people angry at you when their basis in fact was weak.

**Mockery (4:2).** After each rhetorical question, his cronies probably roared with laughter. Satan often uses ridicule against those who take a stand for the Lord. “Christians are a bunch of hypocrites!” Your commitment to Christ threatens their evil lifestyles.

**Threats and Intimidation (4:8, 11).** Small bands of terrorists could sneak in and pick off a few of the people working on the wall. So, like the terrorists today, the threat put the Jews under psychological pressure. Satan still uses threats and intimidation to oppose Christians. “If you don’t keep quiet about the boss’ actions, you’ll get fired.” “If you discipline your children as Scripture directs, the state will take them away from you.” “If you write a paper in defense of the Christian faith, you will flunk the class.”

**Discouragement and Exhaustion (4:10).** Apparently, this was a discouraging proverb that circulated among the workers at this point. The people were wearing out and the piles of rubbish didn't seem to be diminishing. They had lost their earlier heart for the work that had resulted in the wall rapidly being built to the halfway mark (4:6). Satan knows that the halfway point in any work is the most effective time to strike. They felt like quitting. Ever felt that way?

**Negativism (4:12).** Criticism and mockery came from the enemy without. Negativism came from within. These people were not involved in the work of rebuilding the wall. They lived near the enemy and were exposed to negative attacks on the work. They were hearing threats and they didn't know firsthand what God was doing in Jerusalem. Invariably, negativism comes from professing Christians who live near the enemy and are not involved in the Lord's work. Such negativism is the enemy of faith. "There are giants in the land. We were like grasshoppers in their sight. There's no way that we can take the land" (Num. 13:28-29, 31-33). If Nehemiah had listened to these prophets of doom, he never would have finished the wall.

**Fear (4:14).** Fear is the cumulative effect of all of the above factors. Nehemiah saw their fear and exhorted them not to be afraid. Satan uses fear to paralyze God's people and keep them from attempting anything significant for the Lord. Maybe it's a fear of failure, rejection, or conflict. Leaders create conflict when they try something great for God.

So, these were the aspects of opposition that appeared to Nehemiah and his crowd that he had to deal with. What then was his response? How then should we respond in the face of opposition? We see three specific responses to opposition or aspects of an **Attitude of Determination**. What's your AQ (Attitude Quotient)?

**Determine to have a heart to pray (vv. 4, 9).** Often when we face opposition, our first response is to get angry and hit back or defend ourselves. But our first response should always be prayer. Send in the first responder to crisis—God in answer to prayer. John Bunyan observed, "You can do more than pray after you have prayed, but you cannot do more than pray until you have prayed." Prayer reminds us that God is sovereign, even over those who are attacking us. He has allowed this trial for a reason. In prayer, we submit our hearts to our loving heavenly Father and acknowledge our trust in Him. Ask, Lord what do you want me to pray?

**Determine to have a mind to work (v. 6).** Although there was a slight pause while Nehemiah organized the militia, they didn't abandon the work to chase down the enemy. They didn't allow the enemy's threat to get their focus onto other issues. There is a principle of life that says, "Don't let others run or ruin your life." They just kept building the wall and pretty soon the enemy was outside looking up, instead of looking straight across at them over the wall. Both the sword and the trowel are necessary, but the reason for the sword is so that we can use the trowel. We defend the faith with the sword of God's Word so that we can build His kingdom with the trowel. To get sidetracked neglecting building up of lives is to forget our goal. See Ecclesiastes 10:12 and 1 Corinthians 2:16. Ask, Lord what do you want me to think? Give me right thinking.

**Determine to have a spirit that fights (vv. 9, 14).** Finally, Nehemiah reminded them; "Remember the Lord who is great and awesome, and fight for your brothers, your sons, your daughters, your wives, and your houses." The people were discouraged because they had gotten their focus onto the enemy's threats, the piles of rubble, and all the work left to do. Nehemiah rightly directed their focus back to the Lord Who is great and awesome and to the things that were at stake if they yielded to the enemy, namely, their families.

Now, Nehemiah's prayer did not make the enemy go away; instead, the enemy upped their threats. Prayer doesn't mean that you ignore the enemy's threats or pretend that they don't exist. Nehemiah was vigilant to arm the workers and post guards around the clock. He also put into place a warning system so that wherever the trumpet was blown, the workers would quickly rally there to defend their families and the city. The workers were ready to defend the city at any hour. Vigilance! Jesus calls us to watch and pray. Ask, Lord what do you want me to do? See Judges 3:1-2.

Historian Will Durant observed; "Rome remained great as long as she had enemies who forced her to unity, vision and heroism. When she had overcome all her enemies, she flourished for a moment and then began to die."<sup>2</sup> Opposition kept Rome strong. Opposition keeps us strong.<sup>3</sup>

What is this? (Show pic of an airplane attitude indicator). This is a picture of an attitude indicator from an aircraft. This gyroscope is an indication of the plane's relationship to the horizon. If you change the plane's attitude, you change its altitude. Life lesson from aviation—**Your attitude determines your altitude.** Your attitude is life's one thing. Your attitude is the single string. Notice the insert in your bulletin the brief narrative on Attitude by Charles Swindoll in this regard <read>. William James said, "By changing the inner attitudes of our minds, we change the outer aspects of our lives."

Proverbs 18:14 says, "The spirit of a man can endure his sickness, but a broken spirit who can bear it?" "But you don't know how badly others have hurt me?" Was Helen Keller hurt because she was blind? Was Beethoven hurt because he was deaf? Was Thomas Edison hurt because he only had 3 months of schooling? Was Abraham Lincoln hurt because he was raised in poverty and lost many more elections than he won? Was Joni Erikson Tada hurt because she is a quadriplegic? Was Jackie Robinson hurt because he was black in the white baseball world of the 50's? Was Paul hurt because of the thorn in his flesh? Was John hurt because he was in exile? Was Joseph hurt because he was falsely accused? Was Daniel hurt because he was in the lion's den? Was Job hurt because he lost everything? These people overcame tremendous obstacles with life's one thing and single string—a positive attitude. And so can you!

Which song characterizes your life— "Make the world go away" and "Raindrops keep falling on my head?" Or "It's a beautiful day" by U2? When you wake up each day is it "Good Lord, it's morning?" Or is it "Good morning, Lord?" See Proverbs 20:27 and Philippians 2:5ff. Your attitude determines your altitude. Attitude has no remote; you have to get up and change it yourself!

Your attitude determines your age. How old would you be if you didn't know the year you were born in? You are as old as your doubts; as young as your faith. You are as old as your frown; as young as your smile. You are as old as your fear; as young as your fortitude. You are as old as your cowardice; as young as your courage. You are as old as your mental noise; as young as your peace. You are as old as your despair; as young as your hope. You are as old as your sorrow; as young as your joy. As long as the recording chambers of your heart receive messages of beauty, hope, joy, and courage, you are young. When your heart is covered with the cobwebs of negativism, criticism, bitterness, and unforgiveness, you have grown old. We need the attitude of Caleb, "I am 85 years old today. I am still as strong today as I was 40 years ago. Give me this hill country" (Joshua 14:10-12).

Your attitude determines your accomplishments. Could Nehemiah and his helpers have built the wall without an attitude of prayer? Could Moses have led the children of Israel without his attitude of humility? Could Abraham have birthed a nation without an attitude of faith? Could Paul have shaken two continents without an attitude of fortitude? Could Joseph had become prime minister of Egypt without an attitude of faithfulness? We need the attitude of Paul, “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me!” (Ph. 4:13).

Your attitude determines your actions and reactions. Someone hits me and I hit them back. Someone hurls bitter words my way and I react in like manner. We are not to react in the same way we are acted upon. Don’t let the losers in life pull you down. Don’t let a defeated person defeat you. Your reactions are showing! We need the attitude of Jesus, “And while being reviled, He did not revile in return but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously” (1 Pt. 2:23). Attitude is like a pregnancy; no matter how long you hide it, it will come out! It reveals itself especially when you are bumped in life.

We cannot determine how many years we will live, but we can choose what those years will bring. We cannot control the beauty of our face, but we can control the expressions on it. We cannot control life’s difficult moments, but we can choose to make life less difficult. We cannot control the negative atmosphere of the world, but we can control the atmosphere of our hearts and minds. Let’s not try to control the things we cannot; let’s control the one thing we can—our attitude. Let’s embrace life’s one thing and life’s one string we have—our attitude.

An elevator was full and a man began humming. One passenger was irritated at it and said, “What makes you so happy?” He responded, “Well, sir; I ain’t never lived this day before!” I visited Ray Yeakley in the hospital this week. He is one of our VIPS—Volunteers in Partnership—who works in the sound booth. He is fighting cancer. He showed me a cap he wears and on it were these words, “Blessed by God.” Now that’s what I am talking about—life’s one thing and one string.

And so this week, when opposition rears its ugly head, then we must be doing something right. We will fly high with life’s one thing even if we only have one string left to play—our attitude of a heart to pray, a mind to work, and a spirit that fights and never gives up no matter how great the opposition without and within. Let’s embrace the attitude of Nehemiah— “Let us arise and build no matter the opposition.”

<sup>1</sup>*Encyclopedia of 7,700 Illustrations*, by Paul Lee Tan, Assurance Publishers, p. 945.

<sup>2</sup>“Bits & Pieces” Publication, 9/87.

<sup>3</sup>Portions of this message were taken from a message by Pastor Steven J. Cole—<https://bible.org/seriespage/lesson-4-responding-opposition-nehemiah-41-23>.