How to Succeed in Any Ministry Work

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[0:00] Nehemiah 4.

Nehemiah 4. You know, one of the things that I think is interesting to think about in the book of Nehemiah is and though through a number of different situations, the wall has been destroyed, the temple destroyed, and they've had to rebuild it, it is worth noting that they're not rebuilding from scratch.
They are still building upon the foundation of those who have come before them. I think there's something we ought to think about with that. As we continue in our church just to labor, to work, and to minister, and to serve our community in our church, while we are working extremely hard and want to until Jesus comes, we're not ever building from scratch.
We are the recipients of those who have come before us, who served and who sacrificed and who have poured into our church.
The wall is being rebuilt, but not everybody helped. We looked at that last week. If you go to chapter 3, verse 5. Next to them, the Toccoites repaired, but their nobles would not stoop to serve the Lord.
[1:36] Not everybody helped. There's a sense of that in every single church. My hope and my prayer is that is something in our church that we would work hard to strive that we're all doing our part.

Not everybody has the same role to play. Not everybody needs to play the same role, but people need to be faithful with what God has given to them and trusted to them. The influence that you have. The resources that you have.
The gifts that you have. The wall is being rebuilt, but not from scratch. The wall is being rebuilt, but not everybody helps. And the wall is being rebuilt, but not everybody's happy about it.
That's true in ministry too. Not everybody's always happy about growth. Not everybody's always happy about change. Now, I do need to say, just to be honest with you, that I literally don't think there is a church anywhere, at least not that I'm familiar with at all, that handles change and flexibility as well as you do.
And I don't want us to ever take that for granted or to be careless with that, but one of the realities that most churches have to deal with are people who just are so stuck to what has always happened that they love the way it's been more than they love the opportunity in front of them, and that's just not true of you as a congregation.
[3:04] I don't take that for granted or lightly. But sometimes it's people within the church that they don't like change, but sometimes it's those outside of the church that don't like when good things are happening, and certainly our enemy does not like any time there's a church that is preaching the Word, the world and the enemy around us brings opposition and brings obstacles and tries to discourage people in the work.

That's true in our world. That was certainly true in Nehemiah's world as well. Which brings us to Nehemiah chapter 4. As we look at Nehemiah chapter 4, I want you to make note first that when it comes to doing the work God has given, we should expect opposition.
Expect opposition. Nehemiah chapter 4 verse 1. Now when Sanballat heard that we were building the wall, he was angry and greatly enraged, and he jeered at the Jews.
The first thing about opposition I want you to see is that it came in the form of mocking. And I'm actually, I mean, I always love when our youth are in here on Sunday nights, I'm especially thankful in God's providence they're here for chapter 4, because I think what we see in chapter 4 is a really helpful word for our teenagers, for all of us for sure, but for our teenagers, absolutely.
It is the mocking of the opposition that's kind of the first strategy. He was angry at us, he was enraged, and he jeered at the Jews.

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[4:47] Now up until this point, things in the story have gone pretty well. Nehemiah heard about the condition, he was heartbroken, he prayed and wept and fasted for these four months, and then he goes to the king, and the king has favor towards Nehemiah, the king lets him go, he sends the letters he needs to get his supplies, he makes the journey, he goes and looks at the situation, he rallies the group to do the work.

And up until this point, it's been a pretty good work. I don't want to say peaceful, because there's a lot of work and challenges, but there hasn't been widespread opposition.
But now that the work is taking place, you can just expect it, opposition comes. Sanballat's the governor of Samaria, his jurisdiction is there over that area of Jerusalem, so he's not at all happy that the king of Persia has allowed Nehemiah to come back and do this work, because it's encroaching on his territory.
So just know this, when you are aligned with the work of the Lord, you are at odds with the world. You just need to know that.
When you're aligned with the work of the Lord, you are going to be at odds with the world. And maybe you think to yourself, well, couldn't I just serve the Lord?
[6:19] Can't I just do what's right? Can't I be obedient to Him? Can't I be obedient to Him? And have the world like me too? Because after all, you're a nice person, you want to do what is right, you're not trying to cause trouble.

Can't you serve the Lord and have the world admire you? And that would be a rare exception that you ever see that. Because to be faithful to the Lord God has to include being clear that Christ is the only way to heaven.
You can go to high school and be a nice, compassionate person and be well-liked by everybody. But as soon as you get clear on the gospel and the exclusivity of salvation in Christ, as soon as you say that you can love people and care for them, but call sin, sin, the admiration of the world begins to go away.
And so you've just got to make a choice. Am I going to be aligned with the work of God? Or am I going to seek to cultivate the admiration of the world?
It says they jeered at Nehemiah. Well, they jeered at Jesus too. Mark 5, verse 40, they laughed at Him. When He put them all outside, He took the child's father and mother and those who were with Him and He went in where the child was.
[7:59] This is the account of where Jesus heals Jairus' daughter and takes her hand and says, Talitha cum, which is say, little lamb arise. But what were the crowds doing? They were laughing at Jesus.

They mocked Nehemiah. They mocked Jesus. And you know, we can sit here and pretend on a Sunday night that mocking doesn't affect us, that we don't care what the world says, but the truth of the matter is, it hurts, doesn't it?
It does. It hurts to be left out. It hurts to be called names. It hurts to be ostracized. It hurts to be labeled.
It's never an excuse for us to be disobedient. But there's a reason why the enemy has as one of his chief weapons the mocking of God's people because for many people, they don't stand up even to that form of persecution.
So if you want to be faithful to God, expect opposition. Just expect it. Just know that that's part of what comes with it.
[9:19] And then take up your cross, deny yourself, and follow Jesus. Verse 2 says, He said in the presence of His brothers in 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?
You just hear the taunting, the jeering, the mocking. Who do these feeble Jews think they are? They're going to pick up these stones.
Look how demolished they are. Look how burned they are. Look how in shambles everything is.
Now, as you look at chapter 4, verses 1 and 2, this is Sanballat who has heard what's happened. It is Sanballat who is angry. It is Sanballat who is jeering at the Jews. And it says in verse 2, He said in the presence of His brothers and the army of Samaria. How do the Jews know what Sanballat says to the army of Samaria?

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[10:31] Well, He says it with every intention they would go and spread the word and pass it on so that the Jewish people would fill this chorus surrounding them all around that your enemies oppose you.

He's not saying this to be secretive. He's saying this to get it out there. He wants this to reach the ears of the Jews so they would feel the sting of the mocking to be intimidated to instill doubt and despair in their hearts.
The jeering continues in verse 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.
Something as small as light as a fox if it climbs up the stones it's going to tear the whole thing down.
Who do they think they are? We read last week about who was building.
It wasn't a bunch of professionals. Goldsmiths. Perfumers. A man and his daughters. And the jeering and the mocking says, look how terrible the situation is.
[11:43] They're not going to be able to do this. Even if they are able to rebuild the wall it's going to be so feeble, it's going to be so unsound that it will just come tumbling down. There's not just mocking.

There's mocking from all sides. Look at verse 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.
Watch this. Sanballat who was governor of Samaria that's to the north. The Arabs that's to the south. the Ammonites that's to the east.
Ashdod that's to the west. You see what he's just done in the way he's described this? The opposition is coming from north, south, east, and west.
They're surrounded. The mocking, the anger, the jeering from all directions. Sometimes you get upset or frustrated or frustrated and you say something like, man, I feel like everybody's against me.
[12:57] That's what's happening here in EMI 4. They're surrounded on all four sides. Judah is surrounded by those who are opposed to the work that they're doing. Verse 8, and they all plotted together to come and fight against Jerusalem and to cause confusion in it.

These groups who it would not have been unordinary for them to not like each other and to fight with each other, instead decide that they have a common enemy in Nehemiah and his people.
So they rally together to say, let's surround Jerusalem and let's let the mocking and the opposition, the jeering, swell up all around them.
And so they plotted together. And they wanted to come and bring confusion upon Jerusalem.
Teenagers, opposition is not a strange thing for the people of God.
It's not an unusual thing when Christians are persecuted. That's the norm. And you need to be ready for that. It's one thing to stand on a sunny night in front of people who know you and love you and care for you and to lead us in praise and have people sing with you.
[14:12] And it's a wonderful thing. I love you and respect you and I'm so thankful for the way you serve and the way that you minister. And I don't take it lightly at all. But do understand what you do on Sunday night as you lead us in worship as great and worthy as it is.

This is pretty easy. What's much harder is to go to your middle school and to go to your football team and to go to your dance team and to go to your high school and to go to your college, university, and to go to your job and say, I believe the Bible and I follow Jesus and whatever that means, it means.
That's much harder. But that's not a strange thing. That's the norm. And moms and dads or teenagers ought to have examples of what Christian courage looks like from watching us.
We've got to see that in us. And so, don't look at opposition and assume that's a sign that you've somehow lost favor with God. Opposition's the norm when people are doing kingdom work.
Sometimes there's something that you try to do in ministry or maybe it's something you're trying to do in teaching or discipleship, evangelism, whatever it may be, and you face opposition and you so quickly think, well, this has been hard.
[15:42] I guess God's not in this. Don't think like that. Opposition's the norm. Just expect that when you get on track with what God is doing, that mocking's going to come.

That opposition's going to come. Don't conclude from that that you're doing the wrong thing. We expect opposition. Second thing, as we are doing the work of the Lord, we're looking tonight at the

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theme of how to succeed in spiritual work.
First, we expect opposition. Second, we express dependence. Express dependence. Look at verse 4. Hear, O our God.
What does Nehemiah say when his enemies are angry and mocking him?
When his enemies spew words of hatred and opposition, what do the people of God say? Verse 4, here's their response. Hear, O our God.
[16:54] They do not reply by talking back to their enemies. They reply by talking to their God. That's a lesson we need to learn.

You don't need to repay evil with evil. You don't need to repay hatred with hatred. You don't repay mocking with mocking. When people oppose you, when people come against you, when people attack you, when people jeer you, you don't need to talk back to them.
You talk to your God. Specifically for teenagers, if somebody is unkind to you, someone is hurtful to you, I know it's so tempting to want to retaliate.
It's so tempting to want to text your friends what this person said. Can you believe they said this? It's so tempting to want to go on some social media platform and say some cryptic kind of thing where you hope people kind of ask you, well, what's that about?
Listen, you don't need to talk to your opponents. When you are opposed, you just talk to God. Let your first response be to pray to your God.
[18:13] The psalmist said, you are God in heaven. Here am I on earth. I will let my words be few. Let your words be few. As the opposition comes, the people of God don't respond with returning the jeering and the opposition.

They just talk to God. Keep going in verse 4. 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.
Harkening back here to the book of Genesis. 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. And then go to verse 9.
That's what we looked at this morning. Here's the dependence that's expressed. And we pray to our God and set a guard as protection against them day and night.
I won't spend much time here. We looked at this in great detail this morning. But do be reminded that our prayer and our obedience goes hand in hand.
[19:19] We are to be a praying people, a prepared people, an obedient people. Dale Ralph Davis, one of my favorite Old Testament commentators, said it this way.

He said they avoided both the sin of panic and paralysis. As the opposition was coming, as the insults were coming, as the mocking was coming, the people of God here avoided both being panicked and running around in a fit and being paralyzed with fear because they were being opposed.
They avoided both the temptation to do nothing and the temptation to think that everything depends upon them. They just prayed and they posted a guard.
They trusted God and they did what wisdom would do. When you're opposed, when you're persecuted, when you are mocked, however the events that's being described in chapter 4, and those kinds of things happen to you, however big or small they may be, you don't need to run around trying to defend yourself.
You don't need to run around trying to get back at the people who are talking about you. You don't need to run around and try to repay their evil with evil. Just pray and be wise.
[20:54] Pray to your God. God, post a guard. Avoid the temptation to do nothing and just to sit back. You ought to be faithful and obedient with what you're called to do, but certainly avoid the temptation to panic and be frightened.

If you have done what God has called you to do, there is nothing to be afraid of. And as we studied this morning, there's a tension that we live with here.
There's a tension. You've got to pray for God's safety, but you post a guard. Nehemiah had a heart to pray and he had a heart to walk in wisdom.
And this is how the people of God are to live if we are going to succeed at doing spiritual work. We expect opposition. The world's going to be against it.
Our enemy's going to be against it. And we express our dependence upon God. And we express our dependence upon God by praying to Him first.

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[21:57] Speaking to Him first. We need to be prayerful and we need to do what wisdom would tell us to do.

So, schools just started a couple weeks ago. In a few weeks, most of our students will have their first round of tests. And I'll tell you what would be foolish. What would be foolish is to not study for your tests.
Show up. Have your teacher hand the test to you and decide now is the time to become a prayer warrior. Pray. That's great. But you needed to have set a guard on the wall.
You needed to have studied. You needed to have done what wisdom would do. You need to be wise in your decisions and wise in your preparation.
Not instead of being prayerful, let's always make our first response to pray to the Lord. But as you pray to the Lord, do what wisdom says to do. To not study for your test and to sit back and say, God, I just want to pray that I would make an A on this test.
[23:05] Why would God reward your laziness that way? Why would God reinforce you not being a good steward of what He's entrusted to you? So instead, what would a wise student do?

He'd pray. He'd thank the Lord for teachers. Thank the Lord for parents who are helping him. Thank the Lord for time. Thank the Lord for a clear mind. Thank the Lord for the opportunity to learn.
And then he would post a guard on the wall. He would begin to study. He would begin to read. He would begin to prepare. He would begin to memorize. And when you do well on that test, let your first thought be the word of thanksgiving for the Lord who has blessed you and allowed you to prosper in the way that you have.
That's how the people of God live. We pray, we prepare, and we give praise to God. That's the way Christians are to live.
So when we're doing spiritual tasks, number one, we expect opposition, number two, we express dependence, number three, we encourage faithfulness. Verse six, there's faithfulness to a shared commitment to work.
[24:20] So, we built the wall. This may be my, I don't know, this is a top three or four verse in the Old Testament to me.

I love Nehemiah four, verse six. You've got threats, you've got mocking, you've got the taunts, you've got them saying if a fox climbs up, it's going to all come down.
Verse six, or verse five, we prayed. Verse six, so what do we do next? We built the wall. They were mocking you, and what did you do about it?
You prayed to God, and then you went to work. They were opposing you, north, south, east, west. They were surrounding you with their threats, and so what did you do? You talked, and then verse six, I just love the casualness of this.
So, we built the wall. You better not build the wall. Anyway, so we built the wall. I love the way that's delivered.
[25:26] Right in the face of threats and opposition, mocking and jeering, we just did what God called us to do. We just went right back to the very work God has called us to do.

Teenagers, just do what God's called you to do. Somebody mocks you for your faith, you take it in, you don't respond in a mocking way back to them, pray to God, and go back to your work.
Go right back to building the wall. You're sharing the gospel with a friend, and somebody mocks you for your faith, pray to God, go right back to sharing your faith.
You spend your spring break going on the Passion Mission trip, and people at your school say, what is wrong with you? Why are you spending your spring break going and serving people, and going and singing about Jesus, and going and using your hands and feet?
Don't you know you ought to be having more fun than that? What's wrong with you? Don't mock them back, don't argue with them back, pray to God, and get ready for your mission trip.
[26:44] Just get back to building the wall. I mean, our time is short. We don't have time to get discouraged. We don't have time to get distracted. We've got work to do.

We've got children to raise, we've got people to teach, we've got disciples to make, we've got people to share the gospel with, we've got mission trips to take, we've got sermons to deliver, we've got discipleship groups to meet, we've got ministry to do.
We don't have time to be worried about what the world says about us, so we're building our wall, and someone in your family mocks you for it. Build the wall.

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So you're building the wall, and somebody in your office mocks you for your faith. Take a deep breath, and go build the wall. We don't have time to be discouraged and distracted by people.
I don't mean by that in any way that we don't love them, or care for them, or pursue them. Of course we do. I'm just saying, if you expect opposition, and if you've expressed your dependence upon the Lord, then we encourage faithfulness with each other, and just say, look, I know that hurts when somebody says that.
[27:55] I know that stings when somebody speaks to you that way, but just talk to God about it, and get back on the wall, take up your tools, and let's keep building. That's how the people of God accomplish spiritual tasks.

We encourage faithfulness. Let this be true of you. Somebody mocks you. Somebody torments you. Somebody jeers at you. Somebody threatens you.
Let your mind go to Nehemiah 4, verse 6. So we built the wall. When your family says, I don't know why you go to church.
I don't know why you're a believer. I don't know why you prioritize gathering with God's people. Why don't you miss church more often and go with us to this thing or that thing or when your friends at school try to get you to do other things.
And why are you going to church on Wednesday nights? My goodness, you already went Sunday morning. You don't need to go to church on Wednesday night. Come hang out with us. It's more fun. What are you doing to go to church on Wednesday night? Just stop. And pray to God and you build your wall.
[29:10] And don't let the discouragement and the jeering and the mocking of those outside bring you down. We also encourage faithfulness to overcome internal weariness.

It's not just the voices from the outside. Look at verse 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. This always happens, doesn't it? There is excitement. There is joy.
There is unity. There is energy. But now, those stones are getting pretty heavy. And fatigue setting in. And the opposition is getting louder.
And now, it's not just the voices out there. It's the voices inside the camp saying, this is too much. Spiritual work demands that we overcome internal weariness.
[30:17] At the same time, we're still dealing with external threats. Verse 11, our enemy said, they will not know or see till we come among them and kill them and stop the work.

At the time, the Jews who lived near them came from all directions and said to us ten times, you must return to us. So in the lowest part of the space behind the wall in open places, I stationed the people by their clans and their swords, their spears, and their bows.
Swords were used in combat. Spears were used for stabbing. Bows were used for long distance, long range fighting. This has gone from mocking and taunting to people inside the camp growing weary to the opposition going from we want to make fun of you to we want to kill you.
you willing to do God's work? You willing to take up your cross and follow Jesus no matter what happens?
You may never have someone who threatens your life, but you better be ready whatever it is. He says, here's what we're going to do.
[31:37] We're going to stay organized and we're going to stay ready. And whether it's mocking or threats of killing us, whether it's internal or external, we will keep building the wall.

Verse 14, and I looked and arose and I 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.
This is what leaders do. Leaders point their people back to Jesus over and over and over. Keep your eyes on Christ.
Keep your eyes on the Lord, the goodness and the greatness of our God. As you are training up your children, you've got to keep them over and over again remembering the great and awesome God that we serve.
when you're raising your teenagers and they're doing really good and making spiritual progress and they struggle and they go through some seasons where they're not doing as well, then they pursue the Lord, then they go through seasons they struggle again.

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[32:48] You've got to keep reminding your teenagers to keep their eyes on Jesus. You've got to keep reminding your class, keep your eyes on Jesus. You've got to keep reminding those that you're discipling, keep your eyes on Jesus.

Godly leaders don't convince people to keep their eyes on them, they help them keep their eyes on Jesus. Look at me, Paul says, only in so much as I can direct your attention to the Lord.
Imitate me as I imitate Christ. That's what he says. And so we've got to keep the people encouraged, not with silly, trivial, worldly ways of fake energy.
We rally the troops by reminding them that our God is great and our God is glorious and what he has called us to do is worth it because it's his name for which we serve, not our own.
Verse 14 goes on, and fight for your brothers, your sons, your daughters, your wives, and your homes. We want to encourage faithfulness in the family.
[33:55] encourage people to be faithful husbands and wives, faithful mothers and fathers, faithful sons and daughters.

How do you do spiritual work? You expect opposition, you express dependence, you encourage faithfulness, and then fourthly, and finally, you execute wisdom. Take wisdom and live it out.
Verse 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.
They just kept working. Verse 16, from that day on, half of my servants worked on construction and half held the spear shields, bows, and coats of mail, and the leaders stood behind the whole house of Judah, 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. How's that? How prepared are they?
[35:03] They've got a tool to build the wall, and they've got a weapon to fight the enemy. They're ready to go. They've prayed to God, and they've posted a guard.

They're ready to serve, and they're ready to battle. Under God's sovereignty, it may be that this is a day where we build the wall. This may be a day where we fight for our lives.
Whatever God brings, He's sovereign we're not, but we'll be prepared to live in wisdom whatever He brings our way. They had a heart to build, and they had a hand to fight.
Now, be careful here. we don't fight against flesh and blood as the church. We fight against principalities and rulers of the air. We are engaged in spiritual battles.
So, we've got to be ready with our hands to serve, and with our knees to pray. Ready with our mouths to sing praise to God, and ready with our mouths to refute error when false teaching tries to creep in.
[36:19] Verse 18, each of the builders had his sword strapped at his side while he built. The man who sounded the trumpet was beside me, and I said to the nobles and the officials and the rest of the people, the work is great and widely spread, and we are separated on the wall far from one another.

In the place where you hear the sound of the trumpet rally to us there. Here it is, our God will fight for us. This is where their confidence came.
This is where they lived in wisdom. They said, our God will fight for us. They trusted in God and, what? Posted a guard.
Our God will fight for us and, keep that weapon at your side. This is how you live in wisdom. God will do submit yourself to the sovereign care of God and you do what wisdom requires.
One man put it this way, the promise of God's activity and superintendence is never a signal for inactivity or passivity on our part. Verse 21, so he labored at the work and half of them held the spears from the break of dawn until the stars came out.
[37:40] 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.

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 ready for anything all the time.
This is how spiritual work gets done. Ready for anything all the time. We posted a guard and we prayed to our God day and night.
We had our tool to build and our weapon to fight. And we stayed ready all the time. Perseverance and tenacity under the sovereign hand of God's providence is how spiritual work gets done.
God's people, pray, prepare, and plod. Keep moving. Stay faithful.

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[38:55] People may mock you. Stay faithful. People may threaten you. Stay faithful. Friends may forsake you.

Stay faithful. When God's called you to build a wall, and you start to hear all the opposition, all the threats, you take it in, you pray, and you get right back to building.
prayerful, prepared, and plodding along, not distracted, not discouraged, never wavering.
What God has called you to do, do with all your might. and sometimes it's fairly easy, and sometimes it's really fun, and sometimes it's exhausting, and often lonely.
what do you do when you're doing what God's called you to do, and there's no one around to help, and your friends are mocking, and your co-workers are jeering, and the enemy's attacking, you pray to your God, and you build the wall.
[40:40] Be tenacious in your obedience, unflinching, immovable, while reminding yourself daily, only God can bring the victory.

So, we've got to remind ourselves, and we've got to remind each other often, that it is God who is great and awesome.

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