

HAND ME ANOTHER BRICK: TIMELESS LESSONS ON LEADERSHIP

Operation Intimidation

Nehemiah 6



LET'S BEGIN HERE

For months, Nehemiah led the project of rebuilding Jerusalem's walls in spite of constant opposition, both subtle and overt. As the walls neared completion (Nehemiah 6:1), threatening foes once again assailed this leader. But this time the attack was much more insidious than before—the enemy attempted to intimidate Nehemiah through several frightening plots. But because Nehemiah had developed God-given discernment, none of these plans succeeded . . . and the wall was completed.



LET'S DIG DEEPER

1. When Did the Attacks Occur? (Nehemiah 6:1)

Sanballat, Tobiah, and Geshem, the enemies of Israel, tried to trap or discredit Nehemiah again and again, with ever more creative tactics. With the ancient equivalent of a modern ribbon-cutting ceremony in sight, and as a feeling of euphoria washed over the people, their enemies began to focus their deceitful attacks on Nehemiah. They waited for a time when their operation of intimidation would be least expected. Though Jerusalem's main defense was almost ready, Nehemiah's personal defenses were about to be tested.

Because of Nehemiah's rock-solid integrity, he had successfully kept the ravaging enemies of Israel at bay when they tried to interfere with the completion of the wall through angry threats (Nehemiah 4:1–3). In Nehemiah 6, however, Sanballat, Tobiah, and Geshem gave up their pursuit of Israel and singled out Nehemiah himself for personal attack. In four separate attacks, Nehemiah's enemies set their best traps to stop him from advancing Israel's recovery. And in all four cases, Nehemiah's wise, God-given discernment delivered him, and his perseverance sustained him.



Quotable

*One of the marks
of a mature leader
is the ability to
graciously say
no without
always having to
explain why.*

— Charles R. Swindoll



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2. What Were the Attacks? (Nehemiah 6:2–14, 16–19)

In Nehemiah 6, Nehemiah carefully described the four different kinds of attacks his enemies used to try to intimidate him.

First, Nehemiah's enemies sent a personal request, intending to lure him into a trap (Nehemiah 6:2–4). Not only did Nehemiah discern his enemies' treachery, he also sensed another danger—the potential for a delay or stoppage in the work (6:3). A mature leader knows when to say no. Nehemiah sensed the cold heart behind the warm invitation, and he kept himself free from the trap with a firm no. He said it not just once but four times (6:4).

Second, his opponents circulated a public letter defaming Nehemiah's character (6:5–9). Nehemiah set a good example to follow for handling gossip: he calmly denied the charge (6:8), he put the blame where it belonged (6:8), and he took his hurt to God (6:9).

Third, they formed a subtle conspiracy, seeking to frighten him (6:10–14). Nehemiah's enemies tried to catch Nehemiah with his guard down in the place he was most likely to feel secure—the temple. But again, Nehemiah's discernment enabled him to see the enemy's snare camouflaged beneath the false piety.

Fourth, Nehemiah's greatest enemy, Tobiah, sent threatening communication (6:15–19). The wall was finally finished! The schemes of Sanballat and Geshem had been thwarted . . . but before any celebrations could begin, more opposition arose. Tobiah was busy conducting guerrilla warfare of his own with a barrage of letters designed to intimidate Nehemiah.

3. How Did the Attacks Affect the Situation? (Nehemiah 6:15)

The campaign of intimidation by Nehemiah's enemies certainly put Nehemiah's discernment to the test, impacting both his personal life and the work God gave him to do. Because Nehemiah stayed on his knees, he was able to face the threats without giving in to them or losing sight of his ultimate goal. And Nehemiah matched his enemies' commitment to harassment with his own relentless commitment to finish the wall (Nehemiah 6:15–16).



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A CLOSER LOOK

Dealing with Gossip

Let's step back for a moment and examine the underlying characteristics of Sanballat's letter—the same traits we find in all tales churned out by the rumor mill. First, the source of a rumor is often unknown. Verse 6 says, "It is reported" (Nehemiah 6:6). Who reported it? If it's a rumor, usually no one quite knows. Second, rumors are filled with exaggeration and inaccuracy. Sanballat declared that this news was being discussed among "nations," but it was likely limited to the grapevine in and around Jerusalem. Third, rumors lead to personal hurt and misunderstanding. Even though it isn't implicitly stated in these verses, whenever a person's integrity is impugned, it hurts. Rumors are designed to cause pain. Finally, rumors are employed by those whose motives are evil: "So come now, let us take counsel together" (6:7). Sanballat was still eager to arrange for Nehemiah's one-way trip to Ono.

Gossip and its close cousins, slander and libel, are all part of a large family of insidious sins that include other prominent members such as greed, envy, murder, strife, and deceit (Romans 1:29; 2 Corinthians 12:20; 2 Timothy 3:3).

Regardless of how well a leader may manage people and projects, the unseen sin of gossip can eat away at any person's credibility. And just as we wouldn't put up with murder in the workplace, so as leaders, we must shield ourselves and our people against the character-assassination that comes with gossip.



LET'S LIVE IT

Over and over again Nehemiah avoided the traps set by his enemies by exercising discernment. Without that, Nehemiah's and Israel's promising future might well have been buried in the valley of Ono. Perhaps your desire to lead effectively and efficiently has been jeopardized by a lack of discernment. Maybe you've trusted people you should have doubted or kept your distance when you should have invested. Perhaps you hired a scoundrel or overlooked the gifts and abilities of a quality employee. Developing and applying discernment in leadership is essential.

In your own experience, how does discernment play a role in determining when to say yes and when to say no? If your discernment skills are still developing, do you know one or two wise people who can help you practice discernment?



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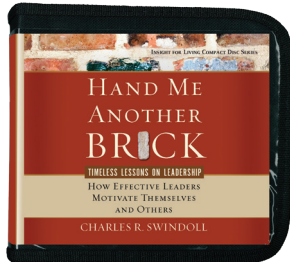
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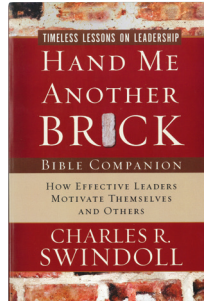
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