

BIBLICAL STICK-TO-ITIVENESS

Nehemiah 6:15-7:73

Nobody who watched **1988 Summer Olympics** from Seoul, Korea will ever forget **Greg Louganis'** diving in that competition.

James Boice introduces our passage, recalling that victory.

Louganis was used to obstacles. Born illegitimately, adopted by a supportive family; yet he always fought sense of not belonging.

He was shy and, in high school, thought he was retarded.

He achieved sense of self-worth in diving. Seoul was hard. He was almost 30, oldest of the divers. Most divers were imitating him, including difficult 3 ½ reverse somersault tuck, he invented.

This dive is so difficult it killed a Soviet diver in Canada in 1983.

Russian struck head on diving platform and died a week later.

In Seoul, Louganis quickly won the springboard competition.

During trials for platform competition, his head hit the platform on dive that killed Russian. He made finals due to earlier scores; everyone wondered if he'd dive well; defeat fierce competition.

Contest came down to final dive, Louganis' reverse somersault.

His chief competitor, a young Chinese diver, was leading.

Back arched and knees flexed, Louganis launched himself high into the air, curled into a ball, and spun backward toward the crystal blue water 33 feet below. The dive was sensational;

he won the platform competition by a fraction of a point.

"You did it, buddy!" his coach exclaimed.

The 2008 Olympics have a similar story: Michael Phelps exciting accomplishments—especially his last second lunge to victory!

What a thrill to tackle a hard task; keep at it until you achieve it!

That's STICK-TO-ITIVENESS—drive to see TASK COMPLETED

Nehemiah's stick-to-itiveness pays off.

His commitment to do God's will brings success.

OBSTACLES TO DOING GOD'S WILL:

EXTERNAL => Focus on enemies

Get your eyes off God Focus on the enemy

INTERNAL => Focus on one another

Distracted by division—mistreatment—lack of love

PERSONAL => Focus on ourselves

Deception => leads us away from what God wants

Intimidation => scares us out

HOW DO WE OVERCOME THE OBSTACLES OF LIFE?

In spite of obstacles, Nehemiah remains faithful and persistent; he accomplishes the task God gave him.

Nehemiah's stick-to-itiveness, his commitment to do God's will and finish what God called him to do, brought success.

Winston Churchill delivered the message to the Harrow School:

"Never give up! Never, never, never, never. Never give up!"

Eugene Peterson, *A Long Obedience in the Same Direction*:

"Our attention spans are conditioned by 30-second commercials. Our sense of reality has been flattened by 30-page abridgments. It isn't difficult to get a person interested in the gospel; it's difficult to *sustain* interest. Millions of people make decisions for Christ, but there's a dreadful attrition rate.... Anything, even news about God, can be sold if it's packaged freshly; but when it loses its novelty, it goes on the garbage heap. There's a great market for religious experience; little enthusiasm for patient acquisition of virtue, little inclination to sign up for a long apprenticeship in holiness."

C.S. Lewis, *Screwtape Letters*: [Screwtape, senior devil, counsels Wormwood, junior devil]: “The long, dull, monotonous years of middle-aged prosperity or middle-aged adversity are excellent campaigning weather. You see, it’s hard for these creatures to persevere. The routine of adversity, the gradual decay of youthful loves and hopes, the despair of ever overcoming the chronic temptations with which we have again and again defeated them, the drabness we create in their lives, and the resentment we teach them – provide opportunities of wearing out a soul.

These are temptations **Nehemiah learns to resist.**

He recognizes the importance of hanging in there.

Of sticking to the job until its done.

Not letting any detail distract them from achieving God's will.

COMPLETION OF RECONSTRUCTION 6:15-7:73

Just because the walls are up, and the building in place doesn't mean Nehemiah's job is done.

In fact, it 's just beginning!

Building the wall only took 52 days!

Spiritual reconstruction took the next 20 years!

Seven lessons we'd be wise to learn:

It's hard passage to preach from.

3 out of 4 commentaries I use for ideas to communicate the message of Nehemiah to life skip this section.

Older, devotional commentaries allegorize it to death.

Every detail is given some exotic, mystical meaning.

Nehemiah'd be surprised to hear our ideas from his book.

Yet, careful use of figurative application has value for us.

I want to indulge in a bit of that with seven observations:

COMPLETION OF WALL 6:15-19

Due to Nehemiah's commitment to task and careful administration, the job's completed in 52 days.

Cyril Barber: "His was the faith that moves mountains. His confidence in God gave him courage to plod on in spite of the clouds of opposition that gathered around him."

Nehemiah doesn't allow observers to give him credit.

1. NEHEMIAH MAKES SURE EVEN THEIR ENEMIES

REALIZE THAT GOD DID IT! 6:15-16 *So the wall was completed on the twenty-fifth of Elul, in fifty-two days.¹⁶ When all our enemies heard about this, all the surrounding nations were afraid and lost their self-confidence, because they realized that this work had been done with the help of our God.*

HE GIVES GLORY TO GOD

He makes sure GOD gets glory, NOT MAN!

Boice: "Why do so many people acknowledge God and even pray to Him regularly and fervently on their way up the ladder of success, but once they reach the pinnacle they forget their religion and regard success as their own achievement?"

Nehemiah remembers God even after achieving initial goal.

Seeing that God fights for Israel discourages the enemy.

How can *they* oppose what *God* favors (Rom. 8)?

2. NEHEMIAH DOESN'T ALLOW SUCCESS TO BLIND

HIM: ENEMIES ARE STILL IN THE CAMP! 6:17-19

Pennsylvania Dutch: "*We grow too soon old, too late smart!*"

"The Devil knows more by being old, than by being Devil"

Satan changes strategy. He no longer opposes a physical wall with physical enemies. He uses more subtle attack:

Internal enemy: compromise; letting down guard!

Nehemiah is alert to the strategy; ready to deal with it.

God's people sympathize with enemy of God's will.

Many in Judah are bound by oath to Tobiah.

They're making friends with the enemy!

Tobiah hasn't gone away. **6:17-19** *In those days the nobles of Judah were sending many letters to Tobiah, and replies from Tobiah kept coming to them.¹⁸ For many in Judah were under oath to him..."¹⁹ "they kept reporting to me his good deeds and then telling him what I said. And Tobiah sent letters to intimidate me."*

He's sending letters to the people.

He plants informers everywhere; relatives and loyalists bound to him; apparently, wealthy and influential people in town.

They're doing PR for Tobiah, to get Nehemiah to trust him.

They're praising the wicked (Prov. 28:4)

When that doesn't work, he sends intimidating letters.

Enemies within the camp are loyal to God's enemies.

Nehemiah has to **get God's people to eliminate compromise** (friendship) with the enemy infiltrating their camp.

To accomplish that, he has to place a godly example before them – one they can imitate!

CHARGE FOR LEADERS 7:1-4

3. NEHEMIAH DELEGATES THE WORK TO FAITHFUL

PEOPLE 7:1-2 *After the wall had been rebuilt and I had set the doors in place, the gatekeepers and the singers and the Levites were appointed. 2 I put in charge of Jerusalem my*

brother Hanani, along with Hananiah the commander of the citadel, because he was a man of integrity and feared God more than most men do.

Nehemiah assigns two faithful men—Hanani, and Hananiah—to take charge of military and security operations.

Job requirement: "a *faithful* man"—man of integrity.

He fears God exceptionally. He stands out.

Nehemiah commits the ministry to others. (2 Tim. 2:2)

It's time to bring others into picture as leaders

—additional examples worth imitating.

God's people must protect selves against enemy attack—Not *dwell* on it, but be *ready* for it

4. NEHEMIAH WARNS GOD'S PEOPLE: BE VIGILANT.

He sets standards to protect them from enemies.

7:3 *I said to them, "The gates of Jerusalem are not to be opened until the sun is hot. While the gatekeepers are still on duty, have them shut the doors and bar them. Also appoint residents of Jerusalem as guards, some at their posts and some near their own houses."*

Nehemiah sets standards to protect the city.

He establishes a guard, led by trustworthy watchmen;

He keeps gates locked, so enemy can't penetrate God's people and destroy what God has built.

5. NEHEMIAH OBSERVES THAT GOD'S PEOPLE ARE LIVING OUTSIDE THE FORTIFIED PLACE.

They're living without defenses outside city.

He urges them to move in; to take advantage of city God provided for their protection **7:4, 73**

Now the city was large and spacious, but there were few people in it, and the houses had not yet been rebuilt.... 73 The priests, the Levites, the gatekeepers, the singers and the temple servants, along with certain of the people and the rest of the Israelites, settled in their own towns.

Though city's secure, people aren't occupying fortified place.

Most are living outside walls of defense God provided.

God has provided "walls" for our protection.

God's people must learn to live within protective walls He has given to protect us from enemy attacks.

They prefer life outside walls—they're defenseless out there!

COLLECTION OF GENEALOGIES 7:5-69

Census is taken to discover who returned from exile.

Begins with original leaders. 5-7

Proceeds to mention other groups that came with them 8-69

Some are of uncertain descent 7:61-65

They can't prove they're God's people by birth-descent.

This isn't serious until it's discovered that some are priests.

They can't function unless they demonstrate pure line of descent. There must be ritual purity from contamination.

RITUAL => REALITY

Ritual purification symbolizes reality God requires.

God requires purity among His servants.

These leaders can't function until the Urim and Thummim is used by the priest to determine God's selection.

6. NEHEMIAH INSISTS THOSE WHO MINISTER IN THE HOLY PLACE MUST BE PURE. 7:61-65

God calls us to unquestionable purity. *“The following came up from the towns of Tel Melah, Tel Harsha, Kerub, Addon and Immer, but they could not show that their families were descended from Israel...⁶⁴ These searched for their family records, but they could not find them and so were excluded from the priesthood as unclean.⁶⁵ The governor, therefore, ordered them not to eat any of the most sacred food until there should be a priest ministering with Urim and Thummim.*

The line had to be untainted and unquestionable.

What's true in lineage and ritual is an object lesson to Israel of the high standard of holiness God demands.

CONTRIBUTIONS FOR WORK 7:70-72

Records are kept of contributions for the Lord's work in the city.

Some, including Nehemiah make sacrificial commitments.

7. SACRIFICIAL GIVING IS AN INDICATOR OF OUR COMMITMENT TO GOD. 7:70-72

Some of the heads of the families contributed to the work. The governor gave to the treasury 1,000 drachmas of gold, 50 bowls and 530 garments for priests.⁷¹ Some of the heads of the families gave to the treasury for the work 20,000 drachmas of gold and 2,200 minas of silver.⁷² The total given by the rest of the people was 20,000 drachmas of gold, 2,000 minas of silver and 67 garments for priests.

**Commitment to God affects our wallet,
as well as our lifestyle!**

CONCLUSION OF WORK 7:73 *The priests, the Levites, the gatekeepers, the singers and the temple servants, along with certain of the people and the rest of the Israelites, settled in their own towns.*

When the job's done, each goes home to his town.
They still don't possess city God restored for them.

APPLICATION TO OUR LIFE TODAY:

*Spend some time **MEDITATING** on these 7 observations.*

HOW ARE WE DOING IN STICK-TO-ITIVENESS?

ARE WE FAITHFUL AND PERSISTENT?

*Which of these principles do **WE** need to develop?*

Fathers? Are we modeling biblical stick-to-itiveness?

*Are **WE** teaching our families to hang in there to
accomplish what God wants **US** to do?*

*What does God want **US** to do about it?*

*How will **YOU** respond to God's prodding?*