

Six Marks of Lay Leadership:

Mark Number 6

“The Leader Handles Opposition” (Nehemiah 4-6)

1. The Opposition of Ridicule (4:1-6)

2. The Opposition of Threats (4:7-9)

3. The Opposition of Discouragement (4:10-23)

The criticism, insults, and threats finally took their toll on Nehemiah’s workers and discouragement set in. What caused their discouragement? They focused on their weaknesses, the rubbish of the torn down wall, their inabilities, and the enemy instead of concentrating on wall that would protect them, their families who needed their ministry, what they already accomplished, and the Lord who was great and awesome.

Chuck Swindoll tells an incident in the life of the great inventor Thomas Edison. Thanks to his genius, today we enjoy the microphone, the phonograph, the incandescent light, the storage battery, talking movies, and more than a thousand other inventions. But above and beyond all that, he was a man who refused to be discouraged. His contagious optimism affected all those around him.

His son recalled a freezing December night in 1914. It was at a time when still unfruitful experiments on the nickel-iron-alkaline storage battery, to which his dad had devoted almost ten years, had put Edison on a financial tightrope. The only reason he was still solvent was the profit from the movie and record production.

On that December evening the cry of “Fire!” echoed through the plant. Spontaneous combustion had broken out in the film room. Within minutes all the packing compounds, celluloid for records and film, and other flammable goods were in flames. Fire companies from eight surrounding towns arrived, but the heat was so intense and the water pressure so low that the attempt to douse the flames was futile. Everything was destroyed.

When Edison’s son couldn’t find his father, the son became concerned. Was he safe? With all his assets going up in a *whoosh*, would his spirit be broken? After all, he was 67---no age to start all over, thought his son. Then---in the distance---young Edison saw his father in the plant yard running toward him.

“Where’s Mom?” shouted the inventor. “Go get her, Son! Tell her to hurry up and bring her friends! They’ll never see a fire like this again!”

Early the next morning, long before dawn, with the fire barely under control, Edison called his employees together and made an incredible announcement: “We’re rebuilding!”

He told one man to lease all the machine shops in the area. He told another to obtain a wrecking crane from the Erie Railroad Company. Then, almost as an afterthought, he added, “Oh, by the way. Anybody know where we can get some money?”

Later he explained, “We’ve just cleared out a bunch of old rubbish. We’ll build bigger and better on the ruins.” Shortly after that he yawned, rolled up his coat for a pillow, curled up on a table, and immediately fell asleep” (*Hand Me Another Brick*, pages 82-83).

Nehemiah in the face of equal discouragement likewise said, “We are rebuilding.”

1. Who Gets Discouraged?

A. Leaders.

Judah, in 4:10-11, the tribe who would produce the Messiah according to Genesis 49:8-10, was spreading discouraging words. Yes, even leaders can experience discouragement. Charles H. Spurgeon had his fits of depression.

B. People with negative friends

In 4:12, the Jews who lived near the enemies were listening to these discouraging people. We know from chapter three that some of the Jews lived outside of Jerusalem. The residents of Tekoa, Gibeon, and Mizpah were listening to the naysayers and being defeated by them.

“It’s important to note that the discouraging information came from people who lived ‘near’ it. You cannot constantly hear negativism without having some of it rub off on you. If you are prone to discouragement, you can’t run the risk of spending a lot of your time with people who traffic in discouraging information” (*Hand Me Another Brick*, page 84).

2. Why Do We Get Discouraged? Notice that each of the reasons for discouragement is self-centered.

A. We focus on our weakness “The strength of the burden bearers is decayed.”

God’s people were agreeing with the ridicule of God’s enemies in 4:2: “What do these feeble Jews?” Remember Elijah wanting to die when he was physically exhausted?

B. We focus on the negatives “There is much rubbish.”

They are like the 12 spies who Moses sent to check out the land promised to them by God. Ten of the spies focused on the giant obstacles and two, Joshua and Caleb, focused on the flowing milk and honey.

Moses recounts the impact of the 10 negative spies: “For when they went up unto the valley of Eshcol, and saw the land, they discouraged the heart of the children of Israel, that they should not go into the land which the Lord had given them” (Numbers 32:9).

The result of the negative discouragement was 40 years of wandering in the wilderness of an entire generation instead of conquering the Promise Land.

C. *We focus on our inability* “We are not able to build the wall.”

They had already built the wall to half way.

D. *We focus on the opponents* “Our adversaries said.”

I want to do a soul-pouring of sorts today and I just want to begin by saying I have found my greatest enemy and that enemy is me. Yes, my greatest enemy is not the old woman in my neighbourhood who is always finding fault with me, my enemy is not my step mother, my enemy is not my boss nor my fellow staff who is always reporting me to my boss, my greatest enemy is me. You see, most times when I attend church and we are asked to bind the enemy, most times, I feel reluctant because I know I can cause myself more harm than 1000 enemies put together. I know you want to ask me how you are your greatest enemy. If you refuse to work when you are supposed to work, you are plotting your own downfall, if you have a meeting that will lead to a major contract but you don't make it to the meeting, you can't blame anybody for not getting that contract, If you are always late to work and your boss sacks you, you have no one to blame. If you are always sleeping on duty and that gets you suspended from work, no one is to blame but yourself. All I am saying is, you need to start taking responsibility for your actions instead of trading blames.

3. How Can We Deal With Discouragement?

A. *Focus on the positives instead of the negatives (4:13)*

Instead of focusing on the rubbish concentrate on the wall. “Therefore set I in the lower places behind the wall and on the higher places.”

- 1) Life is not Atlantis on Paradise Island in the Bahamas petting porpoises and riding water slides. Have you seen the commercial? Life has rubbish!
- 2) The rubbish of abusive parents, mates who walk away, ungrateful children, sin in your life, or failure in the past.
- 3) Focus on the ministry of rebuilding your life or a testimony for God. John Mark who

failed could have remained defeated because of his failure. But he rebuilt his testimony and regained the confidence with Paul.

B. Focus on your people instead of the opponents (4:13)

“I even set the people after their families with their swords, their spears, and their bows.”

C. Focus on the spiritual not your physical weakness (4:14a)

“And I looked, and rose up, and said unto the nobles, and to the rulers, and to the rest of the people.”

Nehemiah stopped the work project and conducted a brief spiritual retreat. They rested physically and were renewed spiritually.

Nehemiah speaks publicly three times to his people.

Mark Dever in *9Marks of a Healthy*

lists as the first mark: Expository Preaching. The other 8 marks flow out of the first. God’s Word gives life if you will read it and hear it.

D. Focus on the Lord and not your inability (4:14b)

“Be not afraid of them: remember the Lord, who is great and terrible.”

1. The original problem was great (1:3). Nehemiah did not focus on the great problem but he prayed to his God who was greater (1:5).
2. Now he faces another great problem but he focuses on his great and awesome God at his spiritual retreat. Nehemiah shows how his great God was already working (4:15).

Mark Dever also said, “35% of self-professed born-again Christians say they are still searching for the meaning of life---the very same percentage as for non-Christians. What good does it do for you to think you have the Word of God, if you won’t give attention to it, if you won’t read it and pray over it and put your life under it?” (page 54).

E. We must build the positives in our lives and fight the negatives.

We are both builders and battlers.

1. He Fought the Negatives

a. Nehemiah converted his work place into an armed camp. Half of his men worked and half of his men stood guard (4:16)

b. Nehemiah divided his work force into two groups:

1) Some carried a tool in one hand and a weapon in the other (4:17)

2) Others wore a sword on their side and worked with both hands (4:18)

2. He Built the Positives

Build because “The work is great” (4:19). In 6:3, the enemy wanted Nehemiah to stop his great, but he refused.

3. Fight the negatives and let God fight your battles in 4:20

A. *Focus on the positives instead of the negatives.* Not the rubbish but your ministry to your mate, children, grandchildren, friends, co-workers, members at church.

B. *Focus on your people instead of the opponents.*

I am going to build relationships with people who will encourage me and people I can encourage. God gave Elisha to discouraged Elijah. Ask God to give you a Jonathan or a Barnabas.

C. *Focus on the spiritual not your physical weakness.*

Take a spiritual retreat. Spend extra time in prayer to your Great and Awesome God and Bible study. When you are tempted to pick up the phone and spread discouragement, pick up God’s Word. Read, meditate, and pray a Praise Psalm like Psalm 103: “Bless the Lord oh my soul and all that is within me bless His holy name”

D. *Focus on the Lord and not your inability.*

List some of the ways God has already used you. Write down how God has recently shown Himself strong in your life or circumstances. That is what I did in the bulletin. “Think on these things.”

Last week I heard Tim Lee preach. His legs were blown off in the Vietnam War. He could focus on this huge negative in his life, his government who drafted him, his physical handicap or his inabilities. He doesn’t! He serves the Lord with great joy and effectiveness.