

Series: rebuild

July 15, 2018

Title: Pushback

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Text: Nehemiah 4

Shaking up the Status Quo

Newton's Third Law:

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Isaac Newton's Third Law of Motion states:

To every action there is always opposed an equal reaction.

If you've ever tried to move a piano, you know true this law is: the piano doesn't want to move just because you want to put it in another room. When you tug on it or push it, the mass of the piano pushes back at you. Unless you apply *more force* than the force that keeps the piano in place, it will never budge. That's the way the world works.

Shaking up the Status Quo

The same principle applies when we set out to make changes in our lives and in our world. Perhaps you feel called to a new career. Maybe you're learning how to raise a little kid. You might have finally decided to tackle a bad habit or addiction.

Well, when you shake up the status quo, you run smack into the spiritual version of Newton's Third Law of Motion. Every new thing you try and every new idea you think will be met by an opposing reaction. No wonder it's so hard to make deep change happen in our lives and in our world!

This battle between the old and new happens in the Valley of Uncertainty that we enter when we leave the past behind and start a journey of change and transformation. Everything in the world around us – and a lot of what is still within us – will try to get us to give up the quest and go back to the old way of doing things.

To make the change, we need a force greater than the "equal reaction" of the old way of doing and thinking. We need God's New Creation power!

Pushbacks

Insult:

Nehemiah was a Jewish official in the Persian court who had taken on the task of rebuilding the walls and gates of Jerusalem. And as soon as he and the Jerusalemites started the project they encountered *pushback*. The first wave of opposition came in the form of *insults*.

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Nehemiah 4:1-3 NIV

When Sanballat heard that we were rebuilding the wall, he became angry and was greatly incensed. He ridiculed the Jews, and in the presence of his associates and the army of Samaria, he said, "What are those feeble Jews doing? Will they restore their wall? Will they offer sacrifices? Will they finish in a day? Can they bring the stones back to life from those heaps of rubble – burned as they are?"

Tobiah the Ammonite, who was at his side, said, "What are they building – even a fox climbing on it would break down their wall of stones!"

Nehemiah's response was *not* to return insult for insult. Instead, he appealed to a Higher Power:

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Nehemiah 4:4 NIV

Hear us, our God, for we are despised. Turn their insults back on their own heads.

Then he and his people went back to work, bringing the wall up to half its height.

Injury:

When words didn't stop the work, Nehemiah's enemies turned to the threat of violence:

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Nehemiah 4:8 NIV

They all plotted together to come and fight against Jerusalem and stir up trouble against it.

Once again, Nehemiah and his people refused to engage their enemies. Instead, they prayed for God's protection and set a guard:

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Nehemiah 4:9 NIV

But we prayed to our God and posted a guard day and night to meet this threat.

Infighting:

The third wave of opposition came not just from without, but from within their own ranks as well:

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Nehemiah 4:10-12 NIV

Meanwhile, the people in Judah said, "The strength of the laborers is giving out, and there is so much rubble that we cannot rebuild the wall."

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Also our enemies said, "Before they know it or see us, we will be right there among them and will kill them and put an end to the work."

Then the Jews who lived near them came and told us ten times over, "Wherever you turn, they will attack us."

It's one thing when opposition comes from the outside; it's quite another when it comes from your closest companions! Fear, discouragement, self-interest, jealousy, suspicion can destroy even the greatest renewal project from within.

Nehemiah's response was to double the guard and remind his people:

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Nehemiah 4:14 NIV

"Don't be afraid of them. Remember the Lord, who is great and awesome, and fight for your families, your sons and your daughters, your wives and your homes."

And so they "all returned to the wall, each to our own work" (Nehemiah 4:15 NIV).

A Greater Effort

Keeping the Main Thing the Main Thing:

When you get pushback, whether it be in the form of insults, injury or infighting, it's all too easy to stop making the main thing the main thing. When someone puts you down, it's tempting to take the bait and argue the point, or get discouraged and believe the other person's insult to be true. Either way, you have taken your eyes off the main thing.

The same is true when we're attacked and threatened by injury. Fear or anger come in and distract us from keeping our focus on the main thing. And isn't that the point of the pushback?

Nehemiah's enemies would have loved to get into a war of insults or an exchange of raids on each other's communities. Anything to stop people from putting one stone on top of another so that the broken walls would stand tall.

Infighting has the same effect: it keeps us from focusing on the Main Thing. We get caught up in arguing with each other or sowing fear and suspicion within our own ranks. Unity goes out the window, and with it the vision for what brought us together in the first place.

If you're going to let God work through you to make a transformation, you have to make the Main Thing the Main Thing – all the time.

A Greater Effort:

What Nehemiah and his people learned was that the more progress they made, the harder they worked. Think about building a wall: The higher you go, the higher you have to lug up stones and mortar. And the higher the walls rose, the more determined their enemies were to put a stop to this whole thing before they finished the work!

Nehemiah tells us that a great work took a greater and greater effort:

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Nehemiah 4:21-23 NIV

So we continued the work with half the men holding spears, from the first light of dawn till the stars came out. At that time I also said to the people, "Have every man and his helper stay inside Jerusalem at night, so they can serve as guards by night and as workers by day."

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Neither I nor my brothers nor my men nor the guards with me took off our clothes; each had his weapon, even when he went for water.

For every action there is an equal and opposite reaction. If you want to move things forward you need to make a greater effort than the things that resist you. And to do that you need a power greater than yourself. You need God's power to do His work of New Creation in your world. Only He can push back harder than the things that stand against Him.

So when pushback comes, don't take the bait and get caught up in unnecessary drama. Turn to the Lord and draw on His strength.

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Ephesians 6:10 NIV

Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power.

Then keep making the Main Thing the Main Thing, and watch God change your world!