



SHARING SCRIPTURE

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Nehemiah

For use: Oct. 6 - 12

Texts: Nehemiah 1-2; Deuteronomy 7:9; Psalms 23:1-6; Numbers 23:19

20% of businesses fail in their first year, there's a 0.03% chance of getting into the NBA, and less than 1% of the global population are millionaires, cites writer Reece Robertson in his article "Bet on Yourself, Not the Odds: How to Succeed Even When the Odds Are Against You." He writes that many people give up and end up on the wrong side of those statistics before they even try to reach their goals. A defeatist attitude can lead to a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Instead of focusing on the downside and risks, he suggests that exploring the upsides can help people realize their dreams. He quotes Elon Musk, who says, "If something is important enough, even if the odds are against you, you should still do it."

Robertson shares some key points to overcoming seemingly overwhelming odds to reach lofty goals: Don't worry about odds and statistics, and forget about needing to predict the outcome. Instead, make definitive decisions anyway. Don't wait until the odds are in your favor to act, but act to raise your odds. Ultimately, the only way to live an uncommon life is to live it in uncommon ways. Scott Belsky is quoted by Robertson as saying, "When 99% of people doubt you, you're either gravely wrong or about to make history." [1]

Nehemiah must have had his moments of self-doubt when he saw both the great need in Jerusalem. He saw the overwhelming odds against ever rebuilding the city wall and restoring God's temple service there. Two groups of exiles had already returned to Jerusalem with the goal to rebuild the fallen capital city, yet the work seemed to be hopelessly bogged down with no progress toward success in sight. Should Nehemiah go? If so, what should he do? What is the realistic possibility of success?

When God called Nehemiah to provide the necessary leadership to jump-start the project, Nehemiah felt totally inadequate to the task—even as he accepted the challenge. Instead of focusing on the downsides and risks involved, he turned to the source of success: prayer. Nehemiah's prayer, as outlined in Monday's lesson, is a model of powerful, effective prayer that is still applicable today.

God answered Nehemiah's prayer by giving him a strategy for success. Through the wisdom granted him by God, Nehemiah determined to research the situation and then hold his plans close to his vest to prevent his detractors from discouraging the people.

He inspired his coworkers by turning their attention to God's power, and how God had led Israel through challenging times in the past. Armed with this divinely inspired strategy, Nehemiah set out to make history.

~Chuck Burkeen

[1] <https://medium.com/swlh/bet-on-yourself-not-the-odds-how-to-succeed-even-when-the-odds-are-against-you-d0a6024012ba>

For Reflection

Connecting: Gather your group around a table and spin a pencil on it (like spin the bottle). The person to whom the pencil points will tell about the greatest challenge they have faced in life, and how they met that challenge. Do this for three or four different people, depending on how much time you have.

Sharing: Put yourself in Nehemiah's situation—planning to meet with a large group of people you do not know and then try to motivate them to accomplish a seemingly impossible task. How would you prepare for this?

1. I would read up on effective leadership strategies
2. I would put together a team of people who share the same goal so that I wouldn't have to tackle the task alone
3. Pray, then pray some more
4. I would not make any plans; I'd see what I find when I get there then go with my instincts
5. I would talk to others who have faced similar challenges to find out what they learned so I can hopefully avoid their mistakes
6. Other:

Applying: Has your church ever had a vision for a magnificent project or ministry that they gave up on because it seemed too overwhelming? What would it take to rekindle a fire to take the task on again? Resist the temptation to ask: Is it realistically possible to achieve that goal?

Valuing: What is going on in your life right now that only God can deal with? Claim the fact that our God is the God of the impossible, and lay it out in prayer, believing that God can take care of this situation for you.

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