

Committed in the face of opposition

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To me, one of the most interesting moments in sports is the free throw in a college basketball game. There is so much going on there. Look at the picture. You've got the player, and he's got a job to do. He's got to get points on the board. No other players on the defense can mess with him right now, but still, he's clearly got opposition, doesn't he?

He has thousands of people who are trying to stop him from doing his job. They're yelling. They're talking. They're distracting. They've got the Fatheads there. I think Buddy the Elf is up there. The cast of The Office is there. They went old school with Saved by the Bell. Mario Lopez is there. They are all there to come against this one player to prevent him from putting points on the board.

When the free throw is done, it's not just the fans anymore. Now there is an active defense, right? He has opposition that doesn't want him to score. But even with the opposition, he's got a job to do. He's got to stay focused and committed to putting points on the board. When people come against him, he can't give up. He can't roll the ball to them and walk off the court. He's got to expect opposition, right?

We expect it in sports, but you and I should expect it as well, not just when we're playing a game. We should expect it in our lives.

Here's the point this morning: opposition is real. Sometimes there are going to be people in your life who are just trying to distract you from doing what God's called you to do. Other times, there is forceful opposition in your face trying to pull you away from what God has for you. We're all going to face those moments. Sometimes it's going to be so tough that we don't feel like we can go on.

Do not be mistaken. Even when we are doing what God has called us to do, when we are living in a way that we know is honoring to Him, there are going to be moments when our life is not smooth, when our circumstances get challenging, and sometimes when people just flat-out oppose us, maybe even come after us.

In those moments, when the temptation is to turn around and go back, when the temptation is to shrink back to avoid that opposition, we see in Scripture, as we continue our series in Nehemiah, that we're supposed to stay locked in and committed even in the face of opposition.

If you're taking notes this morning, that's our title: "Committed in the Face of Opposition."

If you've got your Bible, open with me to Nehemiah chapter 4. We're going to be looking in chapters 4, 5, and 6. As you're opening your Bible, I want you to think back to Nehemiah chapter 2. He's got this burden on his

heart for the spiritual well-being of the people in Jerusalem, this burden on his heart that the name of God would be lifted high. So he goes back to the city to do a great work for God.

Immediately, as he gets there, listen to what he runs into in Nehemiah 2:10:

But when Sanballat the Horonite and Tobiah the Ammonite servant heard this, it displeased them greatly that someone had come to seek the welfare of the people of Israel.

— Nehemiah 2:10

Think about Nehemiah in this moment. He's prayed up. He is clearly sent by God to seek the welfare of the people of God. This is a great thing. From the very beginning of this great work that God's called him to, he runs into people who make it known that they are opposed to what he's doing and they're going to try to stop him.

Why would anyone be opposed to Nehemiah seeking the welfare of the people? Why would that make someone angry? It's very simple. This wall that God was calling Nehemiah to build was going to restore justice and goodness to the people. It was going to provide protection for the people. It was going to allow proper worship to happen in the temple once again. It was going to be a place where the city and the people could flourish again.

Sanballat and Tobiah, the enemies of God, were not interested in that. They were about exploiting weakness for their gain, not protecting the vulnerable.

I want you to see there is a very clear distinction in how believers and nonbelievers here view the world. I want you to understand that, because there are going to be moments when you just need to understand that you're going to have opposition when you're doing the right thing, when you're living in a way that honors the Lord.

When that happens, you've got to remember that this is a worldview issue. Paul writes about it in the New Testament in 2 Corinthians 6:14. He says:

What partnership has righteousness with lawlessness? Or what fellowship has light with darkness?

— 2 Corinthians 6:14

It's a rhetorical question, and the answer is that there is no partnership between the two. There is no fellowship there.

For Nehemiah, from the very outset, the enemies of God are opposing the people of God. In chapters 4 through 6 this morning, we're going to look at those specific moments of direct opposition. We're going to see how Nehemiah stayed committed in the face of opposition, how he stayed locked in and focused on what God called him to do.

We're actually going to start in chapter 6 because, as he faces opposition, you get a great insight into the mindset of Nehemiah as he goes about doing what God called him to do.

Look at chapter 6, starting in verse 1. The Bible says this:

Now when Sanballat and Tobiah and Geshem the Arab and the rest of our enemies heard that I had built the wall and there was no breach left in it - although up to that time I had not set up the doors in the gates - Sanballat and Geshem sent to me, saying, "Come and let us meet together at Chephirim in the plain of Ono." But they intended to do me harm.

— Nehemiah 6:1-2

Nehemiah's enemies see that the wall is built. The gates aren't quite set yet. They ask him to come out of the city. They've got one more shot at stopping Nehemiah here. They ask him to come out, but he knew it was a vulnerable place. He wasn't foolish. He's got godly wisdom.

I want you to see how he responds in verse 3:

And I sent messengers to them, saying, "I am doing a great work and I cannot come down. Why should the work stop while I leave it and come down to you?"

— Nehemiah 6:3

He said, "I'm doing a great work." If you take notes in your Bible, underline that, circle it, star it. Understand that he realized he was doing a great work.

Verse 4 says they asked him to come out four more times, and every time, he said no. He answered them in this way every time: "No, I am doing a great work." That's it.

Have a God-Sized View of the Work

If you want to learn how to stay committed when times are tough, if you want to learn how to stay committed when you face opposition in your life, even when things get hard, here's the first point: Have a God-sized view of the work. Have a God-sized view of what God has called you to.

Look at Nehemiah. He doesn't say, "I'm busy." He doesn't say, "I've got a prior commitment," or, "Oh, man, I'm sorry. I'm all tied up." He was very clear. He said, "I'm doing a great work."

He understood that what he was doing for the Lord mattered in a major way, regardless of what anyone else thought about it.

Think about why the work was great. It was because God had called him to it. It was a work that was going to lift high the name of God. It was going to highlight the promises of God, and it was going to lead people into proper worship of God once again. That's what made the work great.

Honestly, the world around him, these enemies and more, had a completely different view. Remember who Nehemiah is. Nehemiah is a wealthy man. Nehemiah left a very comfortable job in the palace with close proximity to the king.

Where did he go? He went to what a lot of people back then would have called a broken-down city on the edge of the empire. It just didn't make sense from the outside looking in to a lot of people. But to Nehemiah, absolutely, it made sense. He had a God-sized view of the work. He knew it was a great work to glorify God.

When others tried to pull him away, he didn't just say, "No," or, "I'm busy." He said, "I'm doing a great work for the Lord."

Can you say that? Can you say, "I am doing a great work for the Lord"?

Think for a minute. How do you measure greatness? Greatness isn't determined by visibility, popularity, or scope. Greatness is determined by purpose. Here, the work is great because the purpose is to honor God and to bring glory to Him and Him alone.

God has called every single one of us to a great work, to many great works. I want you to hear me this morning. You are called to great works every single day when you wake up before God.

Your consistent, faithful presence in your marriage, if you are married, is a great work that God's called you to. That's Ephesians chapter 5.

Consistently loving the people God places in your life and taking care of the needy among you - I'm telling you right now, that is a great work God has called you to. It's in Matthew 22 and Luke 10. That is a great work.

If you are raising your kids to know and love Jesus, or if you are in a church family that has a bunch of kids and you are helping those parents raise their kids to know and love Jesus, know that is a great work God has called you to. It's Deuteronomy chapter 6.

Showing up to serve the people nobody else notices is a great work. That's Philippians chapter 2.

Raising your kids to be Fightin' Texas Aggies - listen, I'm going to surprise you. That is not a great work. It's not a great work. It's a good work. It's not a great work.

I want you to think for a minute about the difference here, because life is busy. So many times we get pulled away from the great things of God to focus on lesser things. So many times we miss out on great works because they're tied up with good works.

Do you understand the difference? God has called us to great things, to live in a way that's going to bring glory and honor to Him in all things. When the enemy comes, when people try to distract us, we've got to have a God-sized view of the work. We've got to be able to zoom out and say, "Listen, we are called to do something great here, but we cannot come off the wall."

When we're rooted in that conviction about these great works God has called us to day in and day out, it becomes very hard to be drawn away. That's how we stay committed. That's how Nehemiah stayed up on that wall.

Listen, we have an enemy too. His name is not Tobiah. His name is not Sanballat. But spiritually speaking, we have an enemy: the devil. He is actively working against us in our world today.

So often his strategy isn't just outright destruction. His strategy with believers and with the church today is distraction that leads us down a road to destruction. He knows that if he can get you off that wall, if he can get me off that wall, if he can break our focus from the great works God has called us to, the momentum of the

work breaks. The people in our lives see that broken momentum and begin to lose heart too. The work stalls.

Nehemiah knew that. So what did he do? He stayed on the wall.

Think about the great works of your life that God's called you to. Make this personal. If you're taking notes, write them down. If you're not taking notes, just think for a minute. What great works has God called you to?

If you're a Christian, a follower of Jesus, you know it is a great work God has called you to make disciples, to invest in the spiritual well-being of other people. That's a great work you're called to every single day.

If you're married, we went over that. Ephesians 5 says to love your spouse that way. That is a great work God has called you to every single day.

To love your neighbor as yourself is a great work. It brings glory to God. You're called to it every single day.

Pointing the kids in our church family to Jesus, whether they're your kids or not, is a great work.

Write those down. Think about this. Have a God-sized view of the work God has called you to.

As a church family, we've done that. We've written it down just to bring clarity and focus to this great work God has called us to. You can go out in the lobby or look up on the wall and see it written down.

Number one, we know God has called us to the great work of making disciples. Matthew 28 is the Great Commission. Jesus said:

Go therefore and make disciples of all nations.

— Matthew 28:19

It's a great work God has called us to as a church.

We know God has called us to love our community. Matthew chapter 22 is called the Great Commandment. Jesus called every single one of His followers, His children, Christians, to love our neighbors as ourselves. That's a great work God has called us to as a church family.

We know God has called us to the great work of strengthening the church, investing in and strengthening the believers and local congregations, the church Jesus laid down His life for. That is a great work.

We continually pray that God would give us, collectively and together as a church family, a God-sized view of the work He's called us to. That's where everything in this NEXT initiative came from. Every one of these projects, as we look into the next chapter of our church, is about doing what God called us to do and having a God-sized view of it.

Adding space here, renovating space at our Champions campus - it's about making disciples, loving our community that's not yet here on our campus, strengthening the church, a Magnolia campus, foreign missions overseas, and a digital outreach ministry. All of that is for the glory of God and the spiritual well-being of people.

Our prayer is that God would continue to unify us as a church family, giving us a God-sized view of the work so that we could stay committed even when distractions come.

We learn here that as we walk into anything with a God-sized view, God's going to give us what we need to see it through. Nehemiah doesn't waver. He doesn't second-guess. He doesn't come down. He has a God-sized view of the project.

Have a Realistic View of the Enemy

Second, if we want to stay locked in despite obstacles, we must have a realistic view of the enemy. Nehemiah had an enemy, didn't he? He had a realistic view of what was going on.

Sanballat and Geshem sent to me, saying, "Come and let us meet together at Chephirim in the plain of Ono." But they intended to do me harm.

— Nehemiah 6:2

Nehemiah knew who they were and what they wanted. He knew what they were about. They had publicly declared it in chapter 2. They said they were going to oppose him at every single turn.

Then, a few verses later in Nehemiah 6:10-11, a prophet comes to him and says, "Hey, Nehemiah, you're in danger. You need to run and hide. You need to come and get in this room here in the temple. That's the only place you're going to be safe."

Here's the problem: Nehemiah knew that room in the temple was reserved for the priests, and God had forbidden anyone else from going in there. For him to go in there would be actively living in sin against the Word of God. He had a realistic view of what was going on.

Listen to his response:

And I understood and saw that God had not sent him, but he had pronounced the prophecy against me because Tobiah and Sanballat had hired him. For this purpose he was hired, that I should be afraid and act in this way and sin, and so they could give me a bad name in order to taunt me.

— Nehemiah 6:12-13

Here's what Nehemiah does in both cases: he refuses the invitation, and he keeps working. Why? He's doing a great work.

He knows who these people are. He knows what they're about. They want him to stop living in a way that honors God.

For you and me, if we're going to have a realistic view of people, of what they're saying and what they're doing, we can very simply evaluate their words with Scripture. We can go to God's Word and see how what they are telling us lines up with the Bible.

If you have people close to you who are giving you advice, saying, "Hey, it's okay to be selfish and take care of yourself first and not really worry about the people around you," what do you say to them? You tell them that's

wrong. That's not what Scripture says.

If you've got people in your life saying, "Hey, you're a little bit too vocal about your faith. Maybe you should tone it down. You don't need to talk to people about Jesus and what's going on in their lives. You could tone it down. That's a private matter, right? Let them figure it out for themselves," what do you tell that person?

You say, "That directly contradicts what Jesus said. When it comes to what you're saying and what Jesus is saying, I'm going to go with the words of Jesus every single time."

What about the people in your life who give you this advice? They say, "Hey, you know what? I see what you're doing. I see how you're living. You're spending a lot of your free time helping other people. You're spending a lot of your resources making sure other people are taken care of. Some people think you're crazy, but I say keep going because I think it's a good thing."

What do you tell those people? You say, "Thanks for the encouragement," because they're speaking truth to you straight from Philippians chapter 2:

Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves.

— Philippians 2:3

We can open our Bibles and see with clarity. When we face opposition, conflict, or tough moments, we can turn right here for a realistic view, and we can respond in a biblical way.

When someone tries to pull you away from a godly work, reject the invitation and keep on working. Don't be deceived. Don't listen to ungodly advice, no matter who it comes from.

Notice that Nehemiah has this realistic view, but it doesn't make him hostile toward his enemies. It doesn't make him paranoid. It doesn't make him consumed with them.

Sometimes, when people oppose us, talk badly about us, or do unkind things to us, we get so wrapped up. We get our minds focused on them. We dwell on them - who they are, what they're saying, what they're doing, and their little actions. We just get so focused on them.

Nehemiah doesn't do that. He rejects it, and he keeps on doing what God has called him to do. He identifies the threat, refuses the invitation, and gets back to work. He's not suspicious of everyone. He doesn't write lengthy responses on social media blasting people or telling the whole world what people have done to him.

No, he just saw clearly, and he kept building. He continued to live in a way that honored the Lord.

Have a Disciplined View of Your Fear

Third, if you want to stay committed in the face of opposition like Nehemiah, have a disciplined view of your fear.

There are some scary things Nehemiah and his people were facing. If you look in chapter 4, verse 11, it says:

And our enemies said, "They will not know or see till we come among them and kill them and stop the work."

— Nehemiah 4:11

That's scary.

At that time the Jews who lived near them came from all directions and said to us ten times, "You must return to us."

— Nehemiah 4:12

Their enemies are threatening to kill them. The Jewish people who didn't come with Nehemiah but lived in the area around the city and were familiar with these kinds of threats came in. It says that ten times they were begging Nehemiah, "You've got to get out of here. The enemy is coming. They are coming for you. You've got to run."

Look at his response in Nehemiah 4:14:

And I looked and arose and said to the nobles and to the officials and to the rest of the people, "Do not be afraid of them. Remember the Lord, who is great and awesome, and fight for your brothers, your sons, your daughters, your wives, and your homes."

— Nehemiah 4:14

This is it. Look at what he says first: "Remember the Lord."

What is the Lord? The Lord is great.

What else is the Lord? The Lord is awesome.

This is an eyes-up moment in Nehemiah where he says, "Hey, listen. The temptation is to look at all these people around us, all the trouble, and everything that could go wrong." He says, "Don't look at everything that could go wrong. Look at the Lord. Remember the Lord. The Lord is great. The Lord is awesome."

He doesn't give himself a pep talk. This is not just a positive-thinking kind of thing. He's not thinking back to past victories or his own strength. This is a focused and intentional redirecting of his mind and his thoughts to the greatness of God.

We all dwell on something. In those still, quiet moments, our minds go somewhere. In those intense, pressure-packed moments, our minds go somewhere.

Nehemiah is dwelling on who God is. Our God is great. Our God is awesome. Nehemiah is dwelling on what our God is capable of. He's dwelling on what our God has promised. That's it.

I want you to see that dwelling on the character of God doesn't make the threats disappear. What it does is put the threat in its proper proportion, because whatever the threat is, it is smaller than our God.

With his eyes on the Lord, dwelling on the character of our God, he's not paralyzed with fear. He moves forward with wisdom, and he organizes his people in a way that allows them to protect one another and continue to glorify God.

Look at what he does in verse 16:

From that day on, half of my servants worked on construction, and half held the spears, shields, bows, and coats of mail. And the leaders stood behind the whole house of Judah, who were building on the wall. Those who carried burdens were loaded in such a way that each labored on the work with one hand and held his weapon with the other.

And each of the builders had his sword strapped at his side while he built. The man who sounded the trumpet was beside me.

And I said to the nobles and to the officials and to the rest of the people, "The work is great and widely spread, and we are separated on the wall, far from one another. In the place where you hear the sound of the trumpet, rally to us there. Our God will fight for us."

— Nehemiah 4:16-20

Understand, the guards are posted. Men are ready to defend their families and their homes. The weak places in the wall are identified and reinforced. They're not ignored, and they're not feared.

Those moments when you're afraid suddenly become opportunities to trust our God.

Let me ask you a personal question this morning: What is it that you're most afraid of right now? In your life right now, personally, what are you most afraid of?

Think for a minute. Where are the weak places? Where are the weak places in your life, the areas of your life where you know you are exposed? Don't look away from them. Name them before God in prayer, and then reinforce them. Get the right people around you.

Think for a minute. Where are you vulnerable to sin? Where is that crack where the enemy is trying to weasel into your life to get you to sin, to get you focused on sin or sinful things?

Identify it. Bring accountability into your life. Bring in people who will fight with you, people who will fight for you against temptation.

Where are you most likely to doubt the goodness of God? Where are you most likely to doubt the promises of God? Let other believers in. Bring this up. Don't ignore it. Identify it. Speak it out. Bring other people onto the wall with you who will encourage you in your faith in those moments.

Follow the example here. Be disciplined. Trust God. Keep going, because you have a heavenly Father who loves you, a God who is great and awesome and more powerful than whatever it is you're facing.

Keep Talking to God

Finally, Nehemiah stays locked in because he just keeps talking to God. He just keeps praying.

When you face obstacles, and you will; when you face opposition, and you will; when people talk about you, and they will; when people try to distract you from the great works of God in your life, and they will - how do we get around that?

We have a constant practice of prayer in our lives.

Look at some of these prayers Nehemiah prays:

Hear, O our God, for we are despised.

And we prayed to our God and set a guard as a protection against them day and night.

But now, O God, strengthen my hands.

Remember Tobiah and Sanballat, O my God, according to these things that they did.

— Nehemiah 6:14

There's a constant theme throughout the book of Nehemiah. It started in chapter 1, where we talked about prayer being the foundation of everything. Because that's the foundation of Nehemiah's life, every time he faces opposition, do you know what he does?

He prays, and he keeps working.

He knows God has called him to a great work, so he prays, and he keeps going.

Every day, you and I get to wake up with the incredible privilege of being invited into this great work with God. We're going to be distracted. We're going to face opposition. There will be seasons of life when people directly come against us because we're living in a way that honors the Lord.

In those times of struggle, here's the key: we pray. Just keep moving.

That's what happens throughout chapters 4 through 6. He prays short, honest, immediate prayers, and then he goes on. The threat comes, and he prays. People slander him, and he prays. People gossip and say mean things about him, and he prays. A false prophet tries to deceive him, and he prays. His enemies try to kill him, and he prays. His hands get weak and his body is tired from doing the work, and he prays.

They're quick, in-the-moment prayers. One sentence. Read them all. They're one sentence at a time.

You can do that right in the moment with the Lord. You don't have to close your eyes and bow your head for the prayer to count, right? You can keep your eyes open and keep moving, praying to God and asking Him to step in during the moments when you need it most.

Here's what we see those prayers do: those prayers continually free Nehemiah to keep working.

Think about this. Prayer releases the problems from his hands and puts the problems in the Lord's hands. That's trust.

Here's what that trust means: Nehemiah is trusting God with the outcome, not trying to manage it on his own. Because of that, when problems come, he doesn't spiral out of control. When people talk, and they talked, he doesn't have to defend his reputation. He doesn't have to get online and respond to every little thing.

He can just keep building the wall because he knows he's doing a great work and God has called him to it.

When you come to those challenging moments, stay committed to the great work. Pray, and keep going.

Collectively, as a church family in the season we're in, that's what we want to do. We want to pray and keep working on the great things God has called our church to do.

As a staff, I want you to know that our staff team has been praying for this next chapter in our life for over a year. Our life group leaders and deacons were brought into this NEXT initiative back in August, and they have been praying for what's next for almost half a year now. More and more people joined along the way throughout the fall. Our entire church family has been praying for this next chapter since the beginning of the year.

Listen, it's a big work, but it is a great work because it's about the glory of God and the spiritual welfare of people.

Next Sunday is Commitment Sunday. It's a great Sunday of worship where we're going to collectively bring those first and best offerings before the Lord to get these projects off the ground. We're going to bring our three-year pledges, our commitments. We're going to lay them before the Lord, and we're going to trust that God will make a way for us to do what He has called us to do.

This week, I want to encourage you to be praying for a sense of unity in your family. Be praying for a sense of unity among our church family as far as how God would have us participate.

In the days of Nehemiah, it took everyone working, right? You go back a few chapters and see every family, one next to the other, doing what they could to move the vision forward. As our church family moves forward, it's going to take every one of us as well, working together with a God-sized view of what's next.

Let's move forward into what's next together with a God-sized view of the work He's called us to.

Would you pray with me this morning?

With your heads bowed, I just want you to focus for a minute on the great works God has called you to every single day. God's invited you to join Him in this great work: the great work of making disciples, the great work of loving your spouse, the great work of raising your kids to love the Lord their God with all their heart, soul, and strength, and the great work of loving your neighbor as yourself.

You know God has called you to these great works because the purpose behind all of them is to bring glory and honor to Him and Him alone.

Ask God to give you a God-sized view of the work He's invited you into every single day.

If you've been distracted by good things and missing out on the great things, if you've been distracted by good things and forgetting how important some of these small-in-scale things are, if you've been forgetting that these small things are really great things before God, ask God to give you that renewed sense of purpose for the great things He's called you to every single day.

I want to invite you to pray for our church family as well. Collectively, right now where you're sitting, pray that God would give us a spirit of unity and that God would give us a God-sized view of what's ahead of us.

Pray for next Sunday, that it would be a morning of worship when we can step into what's next together.

In just a minute, I'm going to pray. We're going to stand, and we'll sing one last song. As we do, our pastors and prayer partners are going to be down here at the front.

If you've got a prayer need in your life related to this, to having a God-sized view of what's going on, maybe there's something else going on in your world, or maybe you're ready to trust Christ. Whatever it is, our pastors and prayer partners will be here. We'd love to pray with you and over you.

Heavenly Father, we love You so much. God, we thank You that You've invited us. Every day, we get to wake up living in this relationship with You with this incredible sense of purpose.

Give us a God-sized view of what You've called us to. Lord, help us to know how important it is because You have called us to it, and help us to respond accordingly.

Father God, we love You, and we trust You. It's in Your name we pray. And everybody said, "Amen."