

Coram Deo  
Soli Deo Gloria, Soli Deo Gracia, Soli Scriptura  
Deo Volente  
Sermon Preach at Stouffville United Church  
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# “In the Face of Opposition”

NEHEMIAH 4

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v1znC3oZKUM>

Most of us have had experience with what is called "Murphy's Law," the idea that if anything can go wrong, it will. There are many applications of it. For instance, if you try to fix something, Murphy's Law says it will take longer than you anticipated; it will cost more than you expected; it will break down before it is paid for; and someone will not like it when it is done!

We have come to such a circumstance in Chapter 4 of the book of Nehemiah. Here, Nehemiah faces severe and violent opposition to his work of rebuilding the walls and gates of Jerusalem.

We have seen that this rebuilding and reconstruction pictures for us the steps to recovery from areas of damage or ruin in our own lives. And how one person can make a difference

As we have been following Nehemiah in this great project we have seen Nehemiah's quick response to the opportunity to rebuild when asked the three questions by the King. Which upon reflection can bring clarity in our own lives as we seek to rebuild. We have also sought how Nehemiah's honest facing of this task when he got to Jerusalem resulted after a careful survey of the walls and the gates to see how much he had to repair help us understand how to do the same in our situation. And how sometimes there is a price to be paid and a debt owed to those who paid it. And how it is important to call all to do the good work. Because it is good work.

Now, in Chapter 4, Murphy's Law comes into operation. The opposition takes off its gloves, and the real battle begins.

I saw a sign on a window the other day. It stated, “I can only please one person at a day and today is not your day.” At the bottom it said, “And tomorrow ain’t looking too good either.”

In Nehemiah 4, Sanballat and Tobiah, returned with more trouble. This time, Sanballat laughed at the Jews, ridiculed their rebuilding project before it reached the halfway stage, and returned later with more trouble when the wall was near completion. His response is far different than some would expect for a believer in the face of opposition.

## I

In the face of opposition **dignify yourself.** (*Neh 4:1-5*) Nehemiah was true to himself. He didn't allow the critics or the cynics to stop him from succeeding. He stood his ground.

A man stopped to watch a Little League baseball game and asked one of the youngsters, “What’s the score?”

“We're losing 18-0,” was the answer.

“Well,” said the man. “I must say you don't look discouraged.”

“Discouraged?” the boy said, puzzled. “Why should we be discouraged? We haven't come to bat yet.” (Stan Toler, *God Has Never Failed Me, but He's Sure Scared Me to Death a Few Times*, Honor Books, 1995; [www.PreachingToday.com](http://www.PreachingToday.com))

That little boy understood. Just because things look discouraging, doesn't mean we have to be discouraged.

Nehemiah, understood that there will always be situations that would be discouraging, and that there would be people who would want to use the situation against you to tear you down.

When Apple introduced its iPhone 6 and 6 Plus, a group of workers from Teardown.com lined up at 5 a.m. at various stores in Austin to buy the devices. Then they returned to the company's offices, where engineers began disassembling the new products.

One of the analysts said, “We took a screwdriver and tore them apart. We wanted to know every detail of everything that's inside: who the supplier was for every component, wire and screw, and how much it cost to make.” Over the next 12 hours, the battery, cameras, display, materials, and electronics were analyzed and priced, after which the information was shared with Teardown.com's clients.

Those clients included tech manufacturers, financial investors looking for market trends, and resellers who wanted to know how much the individual parts cost. Attorneys used the information for patent-infringement cases, and engineering teams studied them for design ideas.

In fact, over the last 15 years, Teardown.com has broken down more than 2,000 products, including tablets, digital cameras and camcorders, notebook PCs, and gaming consoles. Every product the company has dismantled, dating back to the first digital music players and GPS devices, is stored away in the company's morgue. (Lori Hawkins, “What's a gadget cost? Teardown techies know,” *The Columbus Dispatch*, 1-28-15; [www.PreachingToday.com](http://www.PreachingToday.com))

Sad to say, there are some people who make it their primary business to tear things down rather than build people up. You have to expect it when you attempt to do great things, even when those things are being done like Nehemiah for the glory of God.

Sailors have noted that winds can be blowing in one direction, and icebergs moving in the opposite direction. How does this happen? It is because 90 % of the iceberg is below the surface; so the ocean currents are in control. The little bit above the surface is not affected by the winds.

Our conviction, our roots need to run so deep in our lives that we are steered by the current of God. We'll never amount to much or accomplish much if we allow ourselves to worry so much about what others think.

You may know that a boat trip from NYC to Albany is a very short trip, but on the first steamboat it took 32 hours. Most of the people laughed and criticized, but the inventor did not give up or back down, because he knew in his heart he was up to something good

Automobiles: when they first came out they were usually passed on the streets by horses and buggies.

The first electric light bulb when first demonstrated had to have an oil lamp on to see it because it was so dim.

The first airplane flight only stayed in the air for 59 seconds. Yet all these inventors and innovators believed in what they were doing.

Nehemiah's understood in his own way this concept. He knew that there will always be

critics, troublemakers, and faultfinders who make it their business to cause problems. He knew that there would always be people who would force their opinions on others, and impose their expectations on others. And yet he didn't give up on what he knew he was to do. Instead, Nehemiah responded firstly, by turning to God and then turning on his critics.

## II

In the face of opposition dignify yourself secondly, **discipline yourself**. *16 From that day on, half of my men did the work, while the other half were equipped with spears, shields, bows and armor. The officers posted themselves behind all the people of Judah...* (Neh 4:16-23)

Discipline is not the addition of a skill or attitude when circumstances change and things threaten; it is present, available and developed before something happens.

A mother of eight children came home one day to find her youngest five children huddled intently in the middle of the floor. She walked over to see what the centre of attraction was; and to her horror, she discovered they were playing with five baby skunks. Panic-stricken, she shouted, "Run, children, run!" And run the children did—each clutching one terrified skunk! Can you imagine five kids with skunks, all running in different directions? And the farther each child ran, the louder the mother probably shouted, causing all five to panic and squeeze their skunk; and skunks of course don't like to be squeezed!

In trying to solve the problem; the mother had created five new ones! Simply because of how she responded to the situation

In verse 10 and following they were saying, "There is too much rubble." According to verse 6, they were halfway done! But now all they can see is the garbage, not the gains; all they can see is the problem, not the progress.

Do you know? The hardest part of any task is midway through. Think about the last time you tackled a remodeling project or just your spring cleaning. At the half-way point, the place looked worse than when you started, didn't it? Trash was everywhere, and it was very easy to think, "I will never get this done."

It was the same with Nehemiah. Like him, we get part way through, and all we can see is the rubble. We get part way through, and we lose sight of the progress.

That happened even to Mother Teresa at various times in her life. In a letter to Archbishop of Calcutta, Henry D'Souza, she wrote that she had been walking the streets of Calcutta searching for a house where she could start her work. At the end of the day, she wrote in her diary, "I wandered the streets the whole day. My feet are aching, and I have not been able to find a home. And I also get the Tempter telling me, 'Leave all this, go back to the convent from which you came.'"

Well, she eventually found her home, and the rest is history. The Missionaries of Charity feeds 500,000 families a year in Calcutta alone, treats 90,000 leprosy patients annually, and educates 20,000 children every year. (Kevin A. Miller, [www.PreachingToday.com](http://www.PreachingToday.com))

But it almost didn't happen; because for a time, Mother Teresa was focused on her aching feet.

Howard Hendricks said, "Disciplined people are the people who can do what needs to be done when it needs to be done."

### III

In the face of opposition dignify and defend yourself, and finally, **defend yourself.** (*Neh 4:6-15*) Nehemiah couldn't let Sanballat and Tobiah come back with recruits to attack them without a response of some kind. He fortified the areas, armed families with swords, spears and bows, posted them to guard the wall, and rallied them.

Fighting is always the last resort and never the first instinct. But Nehemiah knew it was about being vigilant and not being militant.

Admiral William H. McRaven, a 36-year Navy SEAL veteran, gave the commencement address to the Class of 2014 at the University of Texas in Austin. He titled his talk "10 Lessons to Change the World." This is one of his lessons: "Every day during training you were challenged with multiple physical events – long runs, long swims, obstacle courses, hours of calisthenics – something designed to test your mettle. Every event had standards – times you had to meet. If you failed to meet those standards your name was posted on a list and at the end of the day those on the list were invited to – a 'circus.'

"A circus was two hours of additional calisthenics – designed to wear you down, to break your spirit, to force you to quit. No one wanted a circus. A circus meant that for that day you didn't measure up. A circus meant more fatigue – and more fatigue meant that the following day would be more difficult – and more circuses were likely. "But at some time during SEAL training, everyone – everyone – made the circus list. But an interesting thing happened to those who were constantly on the list. Over time those students – who did two hours of extra calisthenics – got stronger and stronger. The pain of the circuses built inner strength, built physical resiliency.

The Admiral McRaven concluded his talk with these words: "Life is filled with circuses. You will fail. You will likely fail often. It will be painful. It will be discouraging. At times it will test you to your very core. But if you want to change the world, don't be afraid of the circuses. (Admiral William H. McRaven, "10 Lessons to Help Change the World," Real Clear Politics, 5-22-14; [www.PreachingToday.com](http://www.PreachingToday.com))

That's good advice for all of us: "Don't be afraid of the circuses." Don't be afraid of failure. Don't be afraid of pain. Don't be afraid of the enemy.

When Nehemiah was facing the circus that was around him he reached out to God. I love Nehemiah's prayer. He said, "*Hear us, O our God, for we are despised. Turn their insults back on their own heads. Give them over as plunder in a land of captivity. 5 Do not cover up their guilt or blot out their sins from your sight, for they have thrown insults in the face of the builders...*"

It is like the old Gaelic prayer that states, "May those who love us, love us. And for those that don't love us, May God turn their hearts. And if He can't turn their hearts, may He turn their ankles so we'll know them by their limping." You think about that. Amen.