

A Step-By-Step Guide For Rebuilding a Country

Three Keys to Overcome Opposition

Unedited Transcript

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Good morning, men. So, we're doing a series, A Step by Step Guide for Rebuilding a Country. The word country we are using as metaphor for country, for community, for career, for a business, for a marriage or a family, for family relationships, for yourself, whatever it is that God has given you a vision that needs to be rebuilt.

Let's go ahead and begin by doing a shout out. Today we've got the Gentlemen of the Cross. What a great name. Twelve guys. They're meeting weekly on Thursdays at 6:30 p.m. at their church, Lifepointe Ministries, in Titusville, Florida. Their leader is Wes Morrison. Gentlemen of the Cross. I wonder if you'd join me in giving a very warm and arousing Man in the Mirror welcome to these guys. One. Two. Three. Hoorah. Welcome, guys. We are so honored and glad to have you joining us. Welcome.

The series, A Step by Step Guide for Rebuilding a Country. I want to do a review quickly of what we've covered so far. We started out by the first step. What does God want you to do? We talked about starting with your burdens and then praying so that God would give you a vision through prayer. Then being determined to act even in the face of sadness and fear, which we saw in Nehemiah. The big idea was, the first step to every great outcome is to imagine its possibility. This came about through His prayer, as we said, but prayer also needs to be accompanied by preparation.

We talked about three things you'll need to get started - the right resources, plan, and team. The big idea for that session was that preparation without prayer is presumption; hence, praying for the vision. Also that, likewise, prayer without preparation is presumption. The last time we were together, creating early momentum, overcoming the inertia and getting started. Inspire by dreaming big but begin by starting small, and that every contribution's important no matter how small it is, and then always make sure that you are taking the next step in a way that's believably small. The big idea was dream unbelievably big but start believably small.

Turn in your Bibles to Nehemiah Chapter 4, if you would. Nehemiah Chapter 4, if you would. Here's the situation. You got off to a really, really good start. There's a good vision. Dedicated team. You were able to assemble enough resources to get started. Had an awesome plan. You had an early win. Everybody's feeling good. Then it happened. The resistance started. Oh, maybe it started slowly and quietly by one of your most trusted allies asking, "I'm not really sure that this plan is going to work."

Sometimes those little statements are wise and sometimes they're just destructive. Or, maybe it's that you've got that person in your family or in your community or in your church or in your country that's just a grump. It doesn't make any difference what idea you have, they're always there. They just love to

tell you and everybody else, "That'll never work. That'll never work." They're just always there. They just suck the joy out of everything you do all the time. You know them.

I've got a friend, H.B. London, pastor, he calls them joy suckers. He calls them joy suckers. He said, "You know, you just do the greatest project in the world, and then you walk out, and there they are. The joy suckers. They just suck the joy out of everything you do."

Or it may be that, so there are two kinds of resistance or opposition. One is behavioral. It's what people do. The other kind is - this is an academic piece here - behavioral, and then systemic. In other words, the system itself is seeking homeostasis or it's seeking equilibrium. The systems themselves resist change. In other words, your company, for example, you're already going full tilt, and then somebody comes along and they're suggesting you make a change, and everybody is resisting the change because "we already have too much to do."

Or you look at the political structure of our country, and you look at the system resistance that there is. There's some kind of political upheaval on the way in the United States with the election of Donald Trump, and he's just not going to do things in the old way. So there's going to be a lot of systemic disruption over the next couple years. There's going to be a lot of resistance to whatever it is that this business man - once we hired an actor to be our president and now we hired a business man to be our president. It's going to be different. There's going to be some resistance to that from the system itself. You already see that, of course, in many, many ways.

Nehemiah Chapter 4 Verse 1. We've had this great vision from a great leader. Awesome planned resources. Assembled his team. Got this early win. Verse 1 of Chapter 4: "When Sanballat heard that we were rebuilding the wall, he became very angry and was greatly incensed." This is not just some sort of mild dissatisfaction. "He ridiculed the Jews and in the presence of his associates in the army of Samaria, he said, 'What are those feeble Jews doing? Will they restore their wall? Will they offer sacrifices?'" You can just feel the sarcasm. "Will they finish in a day? Can they bring the stones back to life from those heaps of rubble, burned as they are?"

By the way, those stones weren't so bad. Nehemiah used them to build a wall that was nine feet thick, for crying out loud. It wasn't true. What he was saying here isn't even true.

Then Verse 3: "Tobiah the Ammonite who was at his side said, 'What they are building, even if a fox climbed up on it, he would break down their wall of stones.'" Yeah. A nine-foot wall. Sure. Okay, buddy, and so the resistance comes.

What we're going to talk about today in this Step-by-Step Guide for Rebuilding a Nation is the next step. Three keys to overcome opposition that Nehemiah gives us. I'm going to go ahead and start by giving you the big idea. The big idea is this: Expect opposition but trust God and take responsibility. Expect opposition, trust God, take responsibility. We see these three things here as we get into the text.

The problem that God is trying to solve by preserving this text for us and the situation that called this text into existence is the fact that there was this tremendous amount of opposition to God's good plan. The first thing we want to talk about is just expecting opposition, just coming to expect opposition. We looked at Nehemiah Chapter 4.

We already had the foreshadowing of this opposition in Nehemiah Chapter 1 Verse 10 where it said, "When Sanballat the Horonite and Tobiah the Ammonite official heard about this (his plan), they were very much disturbed that someone had come to promote the welfare of the Israelites." Some kind of behavioral resistance going on.

Who knows what their motives are? It may have been that they felt like their power was threatened. They may have felt like their prestige was threatened, their political order. Some of it's behavioral; some of it could be just systemic resistance that the political order was being challenged and so they didn't want that to happen. Or it could have been that they might have been at risk for suffering financial loss, that their little money-grubbing operations might have come under attack because of this, or at least, they felt threatened. So there's this resistance, this opposition, you see.

Then, Verse 19: "But when Sanballat the Horonite, Tobiah the Ammonite official, and Geshem the Arab heard about it, they mocked and ridiculed us." They stepped it up. "'What is this you're doing?' they asked. 'Are you rebelling against the king?' And I answered them by saying, 'The God of heaven will give us success.' We as servants will start rebuilding, but as for you, you have no share in Jerusalem or any claim or historic right to it.'" That's the situation.

Now, is this normal? Is this normal? One of the things I'm always asking - I've told you this before when I prepare a message - is there something that we learn from this text that we would otherwise never know? I'm going to turn that today, because there's something we learn from this text that is so important because it's repeated over and over and over and over and over and over again and over again in the Bible. That is that any time God sends a man, there's opposition; there's resistance.

Moses. He was opposed, the Bible says, by his own brother and sister. Moses was resisted and opposed by his people through the entire time he led them through the wilderness. Joseph was opposed by his brothers. They sold him into slavery. Jacob went to serve his Uncle Laban and served him for a long, long time, and then he changed the rules and he had to serve him for a long, long time again; and then his attitude cooled toward Jacob, it said. There was resistance, and there was opposition to Jacob. The list goes on and on and on.

David was anointed to be the king, and then he spends the next 13 years running from the spear of Saul, hiding out in the wilderness. Opposition. Resistance to the vision that God had given to him. Daniel and Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. These four young men, they were elevated from the Hebrew slaves and they were considered to be the wisest of the wise, of the bright young stars in the Babylonian kingdom.

Then the jealousy arose among the other leaders. They got a law passed and Daniel was only supposed to pray to, I get them mixed up; anyway, Daniel was only supposed to be praying to, I guess, the emperor, whatever his name was - was it Nebuchadnezzar? Somebody help me. Yeah. It says that even with that resistance, being thrown into a den of lions for not obeying the king's command. God protected him, but nevertheless, the opposition to him being a man of God.

Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. Were they the ones with the 90-foot tall, 9-foot wide gold statue that they were supposed to worship? They said, "No. We're not going to do it." They had such opposition. They had such opposition they were thrown into a fire. Another story for another day. The prophets. All of the prophets and the opposition and resistance they suffered. On and on. This is...

What we're seeing here in Nehemiah is the affirmation. We're not seeing something that's brand new that we'd otherwise never know. We're seeing an affirmation of what is normal in the kingdom of God. You look at Paul. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 16:9, "I'm going to stay on in Ephesus because a great door for effective work has opened up to me." There was much opposition. Jesus. Jesus Himself endured opposition. Hebrews Chapter 12 Verse 3. What we're seeing in this text is an affirmation of the norm. We're seeing an affirmation. Expect opposition. Expect opposition.

It's part, it's built into, because of the fall, it's built into God's laws of creation. From Genesis Chapter 3, and you don't need to turn there, but just listen to this: "Curses the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat of it all the days of your life." Resistance. From the earth itself. "It will produce thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your brow, you will eat your food until you return to the ground." We must do our work, brothers, while feeling the prick of thorns.

We see it in the Great Commission. "Go and make disciples of all people." But we go out to do that and there's what? There's blow back. There's push back. There's resistance. Why? Because not only do we have, because we have a spiritual element, the spiritual world is in conflict with the non-spiritual world. The flesh wars against the spirit; the spirit wars against the flesh. We go out to make disciples, the Great Commission, but then that's juxtaposed against this principle of the Parable of the Sower. Every time you go out and throw some seed, some goes onto the hard path, some goes into the rocky soil, some goes into the thorns and thistles, some goes into the good soil.

That's just the way God has so designed it. You can ask Him why when you get there, but that's the way He's made it. There are lots of reasons you can attribute to why opposition and resistance is built into the system, but it is. Regardless of why, it's there. If you don't expect opposition, you're going to be a very, you're going to lead a very sad life. Some of you are leading sad lives because you cannot accept the opposition and resistance that's built into creation. Can I say that again? Some of you – online – some of you are leading sad lives because you are not willing to accept God's laws of creation.

Big idea today? Expect opposition. Expect opposition. I expect opposition. I'm an idea guy, right? I run into the office. An idea every day. Or more. I've learned over the years a lot of my ideas are really stupid. They really are. So a lot of my ideas, I had this one idea. I proposed it to our board of directors.

I got all jacked up about these injured eagles that our Audubon Society right here - you know, a couple miles from here - our Audubon Society rescues these injured eagles, and names them, and you can adopt them. I just got so into that, so I proposed that we adopt an eagle in the name of each of our major donors. I ran that up the flagpole with our board of directors. Isn't that an awesome idea? They thought that was – to a person – this was 20 years ago – to a person. They thought that was the dumbest idea they'd ever heard. I still don't understand what was so dumb about that idea.

You know, ever since then, every now and then I'll come up with another idea, and I'll be trying to persuade people that this idea is something we really ought to get. There's just resistance coming back, mostly systemic resistance in our case, you know. The system is already operating at capacity. We can't make any changes. The system's resisting the change outcome, but I'm pushing this idea, pushing this idea. Finally, somebody says, "Pat, that's an eagle idea." "Oh, okay. I get it. I get it. This is not going anywhere."

I expect opposition. Now, since I expect opposition, the flip side of that is, if I have an idea that I really believe in, that I really think is a transformational idea, then I expect opposition, I expect resistance, and so the first time I roll it out, I know. The first time I roll out any idea, I know that eyes are rolling back in people's heads even if I can't see them. Even if they're trying to keep them straight focused here, I know the muscles are trying to roll their eyes back in their heads. I know that.

I don't introduce an idea for change and expect adoption of the idea the first time. I know that there's going to be resistance. Either behavioral or systemic. I just keep pounding on the idea until somebody says, "Okay, that's an eagle idea," or we decide to adopt that. Because I understand the principle of expecting opposition. Big idea. Expect it, but trust God and take responsibility.

Let's take a look at the next part of this - trusting God. Reading on in Nehemiah Chapter 4, we read down through Verse 3. Nehemiah prays. He says, "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." That would be similar to the imprecatory psalms. There's a lot of speculation about this. I do believe that this is an expression of emotion going on within the man. He was not aiming, in the kingdom of Christ, we love our enemies, right? We're called on to love our enemies.

I don't think this necessarily means that he was calling for the destruction of those people, but he was looking for a judgment against sin. By the way, in the New Testament, even though we love our enemies, we still want to see sin adjudicated and made right. Now, we want to do that through the blood of Jesus Christ and through the apology of the offender and through the criminal justice system, if it rises to that level.

Even though we're loving our enemies, we're not throwing out consequences. In the Old Testament, because they wanted consequences doesn't mean that they weren't also called on to love their neighbor. In fact, that's where the command comes from in Leviticus. I guess that was a sidebar.

Reading on. "Do not cover up their guilt or blot out their sins from your site, for they have thrown insults in the face of the builders. So we rebuilt the wall till it had reached half its height, for the people worked with all their heart." Then, if you look down in Verse 7, you see some more opposition. They were very angry and they plotted against everybody; tried to stir up trouble.

Verse 9, and this may be, it's certainly the most interesting verse in this message. I don't know if it's the most important or not but, to me, it's the most interesting. It says, in face of all this opposition, "But we prayed to our God and posted a guard night and day to meet this threat." We prayed to God and we posted a guard. There you have trusting God. We prayed to God and we posted a guard, taking responsibility.

You see this everywhere in Scripture. This is as good an example as any or as profound as any. Because it's an actual illustration and not just a theological construct. We prayed and then we posted a guard. You see the interplay between the sovereignty of God, or the fact that believing that God is in control, and human responsibility. The Bible lays down that God is sovereign and we are responsible. Lays down these two principles side by side in Scripture, without apology and, frankly, not a lot of explanation. Somehow, He is in control and we are responsible at the same time.

Moody said it this way - Dwight L. Moody, the great evangelist of Chicago in the 1850s, '60s - he said, "We pray like it is all up to God. We work like it is all up to us." Insofar as Moody was trying to get across, I agree completely, but I think we could amplify that a little bit and we could say, "We pray like it is all up to God, but we work, since we believe that God is in control, as though our work will actually make a difference." You see?

If God is not in control, you're just playing with crayons. If God is not in control, if God is not wrapping His hand around your hand to guide you and you're taking personal responsibility, I mean, when you look at the opposition and the resistance that we face, "Hey, if God does not have my back, I have reason to be afraid." I'm going to be afraid anyway just because I'm a human being; I'm a little sheep, but I have a shepherd and you have a shepherd.

That's how Nehemiah did it. He prayed. He posted a guard. Verse 14: "After I looked things over, I stood up and said to the nobles and officials and the rest of the people, 'Do not be afraid of them. Remember the Lord, who is great and awesome.'" In other words, he trusted God. "...and fight for your brothers, your sons and your daughters, your wives and your homes." Verse 20: "Whenever you hear the sound of the trumpet, join us there, for our God will fight for us." Trust God. He expected opposition, but then he trusted God. He did that through prayer. He did that by enlisting others to trust God with him, because he's a leader.

Let me ask you. What's the opposition that you're facing? What's the resistance to your dream? The thing that you want to rebuild? Do you accept it? Then if that's true, if you get to that place where you can accept it and stop feeling sorry for yourself, stop having the pity party, just accept it, you've got to work through it to get there. Okay. I get that.

It's okay to have a pity party every now and then, but after about an hour, you kind of need to get over that. If you can get it down, that pity party, of an hour, you're in pretty good shape. Now, I have pity parties that sometimes last for months. Still do. Still do. But I know that that Holy Spirit is working in my life, and I get to that point where when I do start to have a pity party, it's over in an hour. That's when I know that I'm back to where I need to be. Trusting God.

Expect this opposition. Okay? Are you doing that? Do you accept that it's part of God's creation order? Then, next, do you trust God? Do you actually trust God? Not just believe in Jesus, not just know you're going to heaven, but do you actually trust God? In the ways that Moses and Joseph and Asa and Daniel and David and Paul and Peter and the prophets and the disciples did?

The big idea today. Expect opposition, trust God, and then finally, take responsibility. Let's take a look at that. We saw already in Nehemiah 4:9, "We prayed to our God and we posted a guard" - he took responsibility. Over in Verse 16, facing more opposition, "From that day on, half of my men did the work while the other half were equipped with spears, shields, bows and armor." You see? Even the workers themselves carried weapons. So he's taking responsibility for the outcome.

Then, there was other kind of resistance going on, too. We can't talk about everything every time, but in Chapter 5 we see a lot of, so this is the external resistance, but there's also internal resistance, too. We already saw Verse, what was it, Verse 10. Look at Verse 10: "Meanwhile the pe-" - we didn't look at this - "Meanwhile, the people in Judah said, 'The strength of the laborers is giving out.'" They were getting

exhausted. They were weary. They were weary of their work. So there's something going on inside, too, creating resistance.

That's not all. It says, "...and there was so much rubble, we cannot rebuild the wall." That's what the people are saying. There's these obstacles, this resistance, this opposition inside.

Then over in Chapter 5, it says, "Now the men and their wives raised a great outcry against their Jewish brothers. Some were saying, 'When our sons and daughters are numerous, in order for us to eat and stay alive, we must get grain.' Others were saying, 'We are mortgaging our fields.'" Verse 4: "Still others were saying, 'We had to borrow money to pay the king's tax.'" Some of their sons in slavery, and then Verse 6, "When I heard their outcry and these charges, I was very angry." He had to deal with that kind of internal opposition, too.

This is the norm. He was trusting God, but he was also taking responsibility. Reading on, like in Verse 7 in Chapter 5, "I pondered them in my mind and then accused the nobles and officials, I told them, 'You are exacting usury from your own countrymen.'" Then resolved that issue. He took responsibility. We prayed. We posted a guard. I stopped the usurious interest charging practices of these private bankers in my country; and many other things that he did.

I've told you men before that the most unpredictable part of my career has been, who's going to do what they said they would do? I've never been able to predict. I have people tell me they'll do things literally with tears in their eyes. They swear that they're going to do something, and then I never hear from them again. Then I have people who look like they're barely paying attention, and they just kind of give me a little nod, and then, boom. They spend the next five years doing that thing. The most unpredictable part of my career is going to be, who's going to follow through? Who's going to do what they said they would do?

That's what taking responsibility is all about. It's taking responsibility. I think the reason that so many people do give up is because they expect the opposition. They don't accept opposition. They don't accept it as God's order, so they don't expect it. They don't, they've been so beaten down, they've been on, they've had a beat down. They had a great vision, they had all this stuff, and then the resistance came and they got a beat down. They got a beat down. Maybe it's not just once. Maybe it's twice or thrice. Or maybe it's even more. Maybe it's different areas they've had a beat down - in their marriage, with their family and their career, in the church.

Can you think of anything more vicious and evil than a church split where you have all these Christian people turning against each other? People that share bread, communion together, stood for each other at Baptisms, and then they turn against each other.

One of the most famous books of this century is a book called Good to Great. Many of you have studied it. We have built and rebuilt our ministry around books by Jim Collins and his partner. The first book he wrote was Built to Last and then Good to Great. In this book he tells the story, which I've told on many occasions. By the way, I forget where I tell my stories, so I'm sure I repeat stories all the time, but I tell the stories in New York and California and Maine and South Carolina and Asia now, and here. I get confused about where I tell them, but they're great stories. So I'm going to tell this one anyway.

Jim Stockdale was a three-star admiral, and he was the highest ranking POW in the Vietnam War. He is the person who ended up being the commander of the Hanoi Hilton where all the POWs were. He used to beat himself with a chair and cut himself with a razor blade to disfigure himself so they couldn't put him on camera and use it as a propaganda tool. Suffered immense torture. He won the Congressional Medal of Honor. Jim Collins had the privilege of talking to him one day, and he said, "How did you get through?" He said, "Well, I had absolute faith that I would ultimately prevail and be released and I was going to make sure that it became the defining moment of my life."

He pondered that for a moment - Collins did - and then he asked, "Well, you were there for eight years." Just think about that. Eight years. POW. Eight years. Just think about the last eight years of your life; all the things that have happened. Collins asked him, he said, "During your eight years, who are the people that didn't make it out?" He said, "Oh, that's easy. The optimists." Now Collins is really confused. Because Stockdale said the thing that kept him going was faith that he would ultimately prevail, and then he's saying the optimists are the ones who didn't make it out.

He said, "I'm confused. Explain that." He said, "Oh, it's easy. The new POWs would come in, and they would say, 'Surely we'll be released by Christmas. Surely they'll free us by Christmas.' And then Christmas would come and go, and they wouldn't be freed. Then they would say, 'Well, we weren't free by Christmas, but surely by Easter. Surely by Easter we'll be home with our families.' And then Easter would come, and Easter would go.

And then they would say, 'Well, we haven't been freed yet, but certainly by Thanksgiving. Certainly by Thanksgiving we'll be set free from this captivity.' And then Thanksgiving would come and go. And then they would say, 'Okay, well, this Christmas. This Christmas for sure, we'll be set free. We'll be freed and reunited with our families.' And then the second Christmas would come and go. And then they died of a broken heart."

Then Stockdale said this. He said, "This is an important lesson. Never forget it. We must never lose faith that we will ultimately prevail no matter how bad it looks, while at the same time, facing the most brutal facts of our current reality, whatever they might be." This has become known as the Stockdale paradox. An absolute belief that we will prevail in the end, while at the same time, a willingness to face the most brutal facts of your present reality.

That's taking responsibility. That's expecting opposition. That's trusting God. That's taking responsibility. That's the big idea today. Expect opposition. Trust God. Take responsibility.

Let's pray. Our Father, we thank You for these lessons from Nehemiah, these steps, these step-by-steps that we can take. It's not just glittering generalities, they're real things that we can do to rebuild the thing that You've put on our heart or the vision that someone has that we've become part of or want to become part of. I pray that You'd help us take these ideas from Nehemiah today and appropriate them, not only to our thought lives but to our actual real experiences day by day. We will give You the glory, and we will give You the praise. We make this prayer in Your powerful name, Jesus. Amen.