

Intro (Section Header)

Series on our values.

Easy to drift from what is most important.

This is our 3rd value we are looking at. So far we've covered.

- Transformed by the Gospel
- Living a life of Worship

Today we are looking at being Committed to Community.

Going to be reading through portions of the book of Nehemiah to unpack what this means.

If you grew up in church or grew up in the South we kind of feel like that box is checked.

Of course we are committed to church.

But, If we polled the room we might end up with a spectrum of what that means.

I go to church Christmas and Easter, OR

I go “enough” to be considered committed.

Can I challenge us all today on a mindset that commitment is more than showing up on Sunday for an hour.

Sure, showing up is a big part of it, but it is a lot more than sitting in a service and putting money in a bucket.

When we talk about commitment we are talking about putting God's Kingdom [church community] first b/c we are putting God first.

Our level of commitment to God's church has to be informed and motivated by the Gospel.

When Jesus taught us to pray it wasn't ...

"God meet my needs!" ... "Oh, and your kingdom come and will be done and all that stuff..."

We need our minds and hearts shifted:

Start with "Father in Heaven ... YOU BE EXALTED ... YOUR KINGDOM COME // YOUR WILL BE DONE ... ON EARTH like heaven."

... "OH! and give us our daily bread [what we need] ... so that we can be used to advance your kingdom."

This is priority in prayer comes from a heart that loves God.

And when we love God we love what He loves.

Commitment to Community Comes From A Heart That Loves God and His Church Above Everything.

Nehemiah 1:1-4

The words of Nehemiah the son of Hacaliah.

Now it happened in the month of Chislev, in the twentieth year, as I was in Susa the citadel, 2 that Hanani, one of my brothers, came with certain men from Judah. And I asked them concerning the Jews who escaped, who had survived the exile, and concerning Jerusalem. 3 And they said to me, “The remnant there in the province who had survived the exile is in great trouble and shame. The wall of Jerusalem is broken down, and its gates are destroyed by fire.”

4 As soon as I heard these words I sat down and wept and mourned for days, and I continued fasting and praying before the God of heaven.

Nehemiah was a busy guy with an important job. Kind of like a staffer at the White House.

But his heart loved God and God's people above everything else.

This love put God first and God's Kingdom first.

He wanted to know how things were going.

Not for the sake of knowledge.

When he hears the report that things aren't going well he responds how someone with love would respond.

[PARABLE: Got a call "Hayley in accident." → Coming to hospital ... AFTER ... Finish writing a few emails ... get my workout in ...] [??? love ???]

This news about God's people being in trouble jacked Nehemiah up.

He wept & mourned for days.

The closer we move to God's heart the more we feel what he feels for His people.

When Paul was persecuting the church. Jesus, from heaven, knocked him off his donkey and asked, "Why are you persecuting ME [not the church]?"

To love the church is to love Jesus. To hurt the church is to hurt Jesus.

So it makes sense how Nehemiah responds.
He was picking up God's heart for His people.

When God's church has captured our hearts we care about how she is doing.

This isn't always easy b/c the church is far from perfect.
We are a people in progress.
God is refining us ... building us ... strengthening us.

Just because God is on our side doesn't mean we don't suffer our share of trouble and shame.

But like Nehemiah that shouldn't make us give up hope.

It doesn't say he just wept and mourned for a few days and then went back to work.

Nehemiah 1:4b “... I continued fasting and praying before the God of heaven.”

Why fast and pray? Why not start making a plan already Nehemiah?

If you study this whole book you realize that Nehemiah didn't plan then pray for God to get behind it.

He prayed and then planned.

Prayer wasn't just for the plan. Prayer was part of the plan.

One pastor says prayerlessness is our declaration of independence from God.

“I got this ... God I don't need your help or wisdom or direction.”

But being a people that run to prayer first is affirming the truth that ...

God Is Committed to Building and Strengthening His Church.

What happened as a result of his prayer and fasting ...

Nehemiah 2:6-9

And the king said to me (the queen sitting beside him), “How long will you be gone, and when will you return?” So it pleased the king to send me when I had given him a time. 7 And I said to the king, “If it pleases the king, let letters be given me to the governors of the province Beyond the River, that they may let me pass through until I come to Judah, 8 and a letter to Asaph, the keeper of the king's forest, that he may give me timber to make beams for the gates of the fortress of the temple, and for the wall of the city, and for the house that I shall occupy.” And the king granted me what I asked, for the good hand of my God was upon me.

9 Then I came to the governors of the province Beyond the River and gave them the king's letters. Now the king had sent with me officers of the army and horsemen.

I love this story because Nehemiah points forward to the work Jesus and the Holy Spirit do to advance God’s kingdom through growing and strengthening the church.

The King sends Nehemiah to do the work of renewal with all the power, authority, and resources to get it done.

If that sounds familiar to you ...

Jesus, our King, sent the Holy Spirit to His church.

He has all the power, authority, and resources to build and strengthen the church.

We have to remember that God is committed to strengthening and building his church.

While some of us are guilty of doing the work without God.

Some of us are guilty of not doing anything.

“God you got this! You’re the builder, you don’t need me.”

While that sounds humble ... it’s just not true.

God Uses His Church To Build and Strengthen His Church

Nehemiah 2:17-18

17 Then I said to them, “You see the trouble we are in, how Jerusalem lies in ruins with its gates burned. Come, let us build the wall of Jerusalem, that we may no longer suffer derision.” 18 And I told them of the hand of my God that had been upon me for good, and also of the words that the king had spoken to me. And they said,

“Let us rise up and build.” So they strengthened their hands for the good work.

Nehemiah starts with some honesty.

Things are bad and we got some work to do.

But then he tells them the good news...

I've come with the King's authority, power, resources ...
let's do this!

When we hear the good news of our King Jesus and his
plan for his church ... we step up.

We don't look at our weakness and limits.

We look to the King's power, authority. Who resources us
with everything we need.

We get empowered, bold, courageous ... “Let's rise up!!
Let's build!”

That is the other part of this. Nehemiah didn't try to do this
on his own.

He brought everyone into the work.

It's not the pastor's job to do all the work.

Our jobs as pastors is to equip you to do the work of the ministry.

Ephesians 4:11-12

11 And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, 12 to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ

God builds his church through everyday people.

Jesus gives to his church [y'all + me] these various gifted men and women to equip the saints.

[not entertain the saints]

What we've done is turned them into entertaining spiritual superstars.

Do you want someone to equip you or entertain you?

I have to be honest. It's easier to entertain than to equip.

There is a lot more fame and money in being entertainers.

Equippers have to get off platforms and into the mess of people's lives.

Entertainers use people to build their platforms.

Equippers use their platforms to build people.

Entertainers say "Stand back and watch me."

Equippers say "Let's do this together."

This a place where we say, "Let's do this together!"

There response was passionate "Let's rise up and build!" //
our response ... should be passionate ...

But it also should be realistic.

It says they "strengthened their hands for the good work." → They readied and resolved themselves for what was ahead of them.

Jesus said, "Anyone who puts their hand to the plow and then stops isn't fit for God's kingdom."

There is a real cost to discipleship. It is work, but it is good work!

It would be great if church work were relegated to:

- **eating potato salad at potlucks.**
- **Coming an hour on Sunday and putting money in the bucket.**

That doesn't sound too hard. "Where do I sign up for that?"

But ministry isn't eating potato salad (unless it's really nasty).

Ministry can be hard work ... b/c its caring for people. It's getting in their lives and being real.

It means that we don't commit to community in order to be served.

Building and Strengthening Takes A Humble Community That Serves Side-By-Side.

Nehemiah 3:1-5

Then Eliashib the high priest **rose up with his brothers** the priests, and **they built** the Sheep Gate. They consecrated it and set its doors. They consecrated it as far as the Tower of the Hundred, as far as the Tower of Hananel. 2 And next to him the men of Jericho built. And **next to them** Zaccur the son of Imri built.

3 The **sons of Hassenah built** the Fish Gate. They laid its beams and set its doors, its bolts, and its bars. 4 And **next to them** Meremoth the son of Uriah, son of Hakkoz repaired. And **next to them** Meshullam the son of Berechiah, son of Meshezabel repaired. And **next to them** Zadok the son of Baana repaired. 5 And **next to them** the Tekoites repaired, **but their nobles would not stoop to serve their Lord.**

What do we see?

People working together side-by-side.

That is how God is building his church.

We aren't meant to come and consume.

Not “What can the church do for me?” ... “What can I do for God and His church?”

When we don’t see that following Jesus is a life of service we act like those nobles.

We don’t stoop to serve.

Become too important and proud.

My time, interests, responsibilities, needs are too important to put God’s kingdom first.

And church people know how to mask not serving in spiritual speak.

I don’t feel “called” to that. [sing solos / not clean toilets]

There are certain ways we want to serve.

Nehemiah 3:15

Working on the King’s Palace and pool! [Sweet job!]

“Where were the people working next to them?”

Nehemiah 3:14

[v14] The Dung Gate.

Nobody wants to repair the Dung Gate.

[so many inappropriate puns!!!]

But it had to be fixed!

We want the cool work, or the fun work, or the easy work.

Nobody wants the Dung Gate!

Guess what though ... if no one fixes the Dung Gate ... everything starts to stink like “you-know-what”. + everyone starts getting sick.

We are going to start caring A LOT!

Sometimes serving looks like getting to fix the King’s palace.

Sometimes serving looks like getting your hands dirty fixing the dung gate.

Either way it’s not about us. It’s for God and for the good of the church.

Service isn’t always easy.

The work of building and strengthening the church isn't always smooth and simple.

Sometimes it's b/c we lack of humility.

But, it's also because ...

There Is An Enemy Committed To Stopping The Building And Strengthening Of God's Community.

Nehemiah 4:6-8

6 So we built the wall. And all the wall was joined together to half its height, for the people had a mind to work.

7 But when Sanballat and Tobiah and the Arabs and the Ammonites and the Ashdodites heard that the repairing of the walls of Jerusalem was going forward and that the breaches were beginning to be closed, they were very angry. 8 And they all plotted together to come and fight against Jerusalem and to cause confusion in it.

From the very start of the walls being repaired these characters were doing whatever they could to stop the work.

How does this relate today?

We have to realize that when we push back against darkness, darkness is going to push back.

Ephesians 6:11-12

Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil.¹² For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.

Satan is a real spiritual being that stands opposed to everything Jesus.

He hates Jesus, he hates Jesus' people.

He knows his rule over this present darkness is coming to an end.

But he isn't going down without a fight.

Jesus called him the ruler over this present darkness.

His schemes have been consistent through church history.

He discourages through persecution inside and outside the church.

Sanballat and company laughed, mocked, and threatened.

Our culture moment today seeks to silence us and move us to the margins of irrelevance.

They mock and laugh and jeer at our faith.

In other places around the world there is real physical persecution of the church.

[More Christians martyred in 20th century than the previous 19 centuries]

However, the church can often be its own worst enemy.

Confusion / discord is evidenced when we quarrel, fight, “devour each other”.

This doesn't produce unity or strength. It makes people want to tap out and give up.

Nehemiah 4:10

In Judah it was said, “The strength of those who bear the burdens is failing. There is too much rubble. By ourselves we will not be able to rebuild the wall.”

That is exactly where Satan wants us to be.

“It’s too hard ... it’s too much ... we can’t do it ourselves.”

Maybe that’s you? You have tapped out or want to tap out.

Your strength to do this community thing is failing.

What can you do? Is there hope?

YES!

Nehemiah 4:12-14

At that time the Jews who lived near them came from all directions and said to us ten times, “You must return to us.” 13 So in the lowest parts of the space behind the wall, in open places, I stationed the people by their clans, with their swords, their spears, and their bows. 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.”

We Are A Community Committed To Fighting For Each Other.

The church needs to do more fighting FOR each other.

A rumor was floating around that some people in Judah were feeling worn out and ready to stop the work.

These guys heard it and were persistent to get them help.

That is love!!!

It took 10 TIMES!!! But finally on the 10th time they were heard.

When we feel weak and weary we need to let people know.

It shouldn't be the vague whispers of the rumor mill.

Put up your hand!!! “I NEED HELP” **[Trust / Vulnerable]**

This beautiful and strong picture... Soldiers surrounding them, protecting them, having their back.

We are a community that helps and fights for each other.

How? taking time to pray for and with each other →
[explain].

encouraging and admonishing each other with the
gospel.

If, Hayley puts up her hand “I need help”. Which is going to
be more effective?

(a)[watching a movie together] OR

(b)[5 minutes of me praying for/with is going to do much
more].

It’s not like we are Clark Kent ... “let me fix this.”

We rally around people to point them to the real superman
... Jesus!

We remember the Lord who is great and awesome.

We Are A Community Built and Strengthened On the Victory of Jesus.

ASK BAND TO COME UP

We started this whole thing off with remembering that God is committed to building and strengthening his church.

He was so committed that he obtained it through the blood of Jesus, His only Son.

Jesus won the war.

He defeated the power of sin and death.

You can come to church services and do all the right things ... that doesn't mean your saved and part of God's church.

You have to believe that Jesus died for your sins. You have to repent [turn from sin and run to Jesus].

If you've never repented and believed in Jesus. Invite now.

COMMUNION

Going to take communion in a moment.

We are remembering what Jesus did for his church.

We are his blood bought community.

This is a victory meal!

We remember He is alive and reigning over us from heaven.

One day he will return and the fight will be over.

We will no longer be a people at war. Just perfect peace.

In the meantime we have a confidence that nothing will prevail against Jesus' church.

As we stand firmly fixed in the gospel so we can stand committed to community.

PRAY