A Season of Rebuilding
Building a Future with Unity

- Church we are in the second week of this exciting future building and casting series! I firmly believe God is going to do something miraculous here! God has big plans for this body of believers for this church! I'm committed and I firmly believe God is committed to supernaturally building a future of ministry and effectiveness that is abundantly more than we could ever imagine. But I want to remind you we must fix our eyes on the things to come, we can't lose our focus and fixation on what God is doing!

Proverbs 4:25-27: "Look straight ahead, and fix your eyes on what lies before you. 26 Mark out a straight path for your feet; stay on the safe path. 27 Don't get sidetracked; keep your feet from following evil." NLT

- Despite it being so, so, easy to let our eyes get sidetracked from the future, we must remain forever committed to the future, and to God's plans for us! We must gather together on one focus, on one mission, one vision, one strategy so our minds are concretely fixed on what God is doing in us, through us, and for us. We must have unified focus! Because God blessed us with a strategy for the future!

Isaiah 61:4: "They will rebuild the ancient ruins and restore the places long devastated; they will renew the ruined cities that have been devastated for generations." NIV

- This season isn't at all about physical buildings, not about rebuilding our property or anything superficial like that, this is profound and spiritual, God is rebuilding our church through the mission and strategy God has given us. I believe we are entering a season, and not a short season but a long season of God's Favor through this rebuilding, through this commitment to focusing on the future!

- We are believing for souls, for families, for people from every generation, so grandparents, parents, aunts, uncles, siblings, children, all ages, from every walk of life, every life situation. And when we believe for families like this we aim to be built into a church that is willing to truly love people. To come beside people in their darkest, messiest situations, that we as a body love people enough to trudge into the muck and mire of where people have found themselves by chasing their flesh and the world.

- And we do so for people from every ethnicity, every culture, every age, every stage of life. And we aim to do all of this simply to advance the kingdom for generations to come, to radically change Zeeland and Ottawa county, to be a place of spiritual refuge and spiritual rehabilitation, restoration, deliverance, and discipleship.

- Remember we talked about last week: we are called to a be a people who aren't afraid to ask God, people who truly pray to God! We need to have the boldness, the audacity to ask God for big things! Because every Godly thing is birthed and sustained by prayer. Which was the first building block we talked about last week.

- I introduced the meat of this series, which will be seven necessary building blocks we as a church will need to build the future, to make this happen and of course the first, the very foundation is ***prayer.***

- We must be a praying church because ***that prayer will make us aware, give us a burden for our community, and make us open to actually engaging with the needs of those around us! We must be praying!*** I can't emphasize that enough! We must to learn to ask for big things, we need the audacity to ask! We must ask! I'm going to be asking for big things because remember…

James 4:2B: "…you don't have what you want because you don't ask God for it." NLT

- There is roughly 308,459 people in Ottawa County so there is plenty of harvest to reach and I'm asking big! So should you! Every single generation of people, from every situation of life, I want us to minister and spread the love and gospel to! It's a big ask, but we can't be afraid to ask! It's huge and only God can do it and we cannot be afraid to ask!

- Now this morning I'm very excited to dive further into Nehemiah and the next building block we must have if we are going to be a church committed to building the future, and it is so extremely vital. Without it we aren't who God made us to be. This next building block is…

Building Block 2: Unity

- Before we get too far into Nehemiah let's read what happened next in chapter two, we saw the ask, it was a big ask, and Nehemiah had the faith to ask, just as we are going to have the big faith to come to God with the big ask! But let's see what happens next:

Nehemiah 2:13-18: "By night I went out through the Valley Gate toward the Jackal Well and the Dung Gate, examining the walls of Jerusalem, which had been broken down, and its gates, which had been destroyed by fire. 14 Then I moved on toward the Fountain Gate and the King's Pool, but there was not enough room for my mount to get through; 15 so I went up the valley by night, examining the wall. Finally, I turned back and reentered through the Valley Gate. 16 The officials did not know where I had gone or what I was doing, because as yet I had said nothing to the Jews or the priests or nobles or officials or any others who would be doing the work. 17 Then I said to them, "You see the trouble we are in: Jerusalem lies in ruins, and its gates have been burned with fire. Come, let us rebuild the wall of Jerusalem, and we will no longer be in disgrace." 18 I also told them about the gracious hand of my God on me and what the king had said to me. They replied, "Let us start rebuilding." So they began this good work." NIV

- We see Nehemiah asses exactly where the city is, when looking to rebuild and build a future we must be honest in our assessments, we must look at the reality. And as we do that we then look through God's eyes of vision toward the future God has for us. But we must be honest about the here and now. Nehemiah sees the walls and realizes there is fixing and growing that needs to be done.

- I've got to tell you church you can't fix a problem you won't admit actually exists. We must be honest that yes we are in a season of rebuilding, yes we need God to supernaturally move, yes we need God to change our hearts. Yes, we need God to supernaturally provide, yes we need the miraculous! To see direction and change all moving towards the future we must be honest with ourselves and know there is a lot of room for God to grow, stretch, and mold us!

- I want to highlight what Nehemiah said in verse 17-18: Nehemiah gathers the people and he says: **"Look at the trouble we are in, God's hand is on me for this season, come let us rebuild."** He was honest in telling them where they are but inspired the vision of where to go. And we will come to see the amazing accomplishments these people made, together.

- Amazing things happen when we all gather together under a single vision in unity and strive to build a God honoring future together! In Nehemiah we see Nehemiah conveyed the reality of the situation but also the vision for the future and the people unified under this amazing purpose and through that unity they

rebuilt the wall in 52 days! ***They did in 52 days what hadn't of been done in 70 years!***

I believe this happened so effectively, so efficiently, so supernaturally, because the people were unified! They were together! Our future certainly will be built on prayer but it also won't happen without complete unity and togetherness.

- Today I want to focus on the relationship between vision and unity. We can have vision and not be unified and go nowhere, or we can be unified without vision and achieve nothing. But I know God wants to see and I want to see a unified church with vision that boldly and powerfully marches toward the vision and future God has for us! Because the vision God gave Autumn and I for this city and county is too big for us to do alone, we need all of you and all of us need each other! I can't do it alone. You can't do it alone. Not a single one of us can, but boy together things can happen! Supernatural things! God's purposes for our lives, for this church are too big for one person to achieve alone! We must be a unified front to build a future!

We must be a Team To Build a Future!

- God gifted us one another to pursue vision with, God gifted me as your Pastor vision but each and every one of you are a gift to me as teammates and family to chase vision with! ***We see in scripture some massive visions! God gave Moses the vision of an exodus, of free captives. God gave David the vision of a temple, God gave Nehemiah the vision of the walls being built once more. But listen, God didn't call any of these men or give these men vision to do it alone. Vision requires community unified together as a team!***

- Of course we see this all throughout the Bible, we see many examples of unity and assembling a team but I think the best team builder was Jesus! Jesus used people to take the message out and He assembled a great team to spread the gospel and champion the gospel after the ascension, we see this team being formed at the start of the gospels. We see in Matthew after Jesus is tested in the wilderness, after He found out His cousin John was put in prison, Jesus left Nazareth and lived in Capernaum and from there we read about Him calling the first four members of the team.

Matthew 4:18-22: "As Jesus was walking beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon called Peter and his brother Andrew. They were casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. 19 "Come, follow me,"

Jesus said, “and I will send you out to fish for people.” 20 At once they left their nets and followed him. 21 Going on from there, he saw two other brothers, James son of Zebedee and his brother John. They were in a boat with their father Zebedee, preparing their nets. Jesus called them, 22 and immediately they left the boat and their father and followed him.” NIV

- Jesus painted this vision for the future that was so compelling that these brothers were willing to follow. Jesus said I will make you fishers of men, of souls! What a compelling vision! The same calling and vision we chase after today! Jesus even reworded it as the great commission before His ascension. But like Jesus we have to communicate our vision, and then chase after that vision as a team, united, together! Thing thing about a God vision is…

1.) A God Vision Unites Everyone and Requires Everyone’s Giftings

- The vision of reaching people of every generation and every life situation and helping them find Jesus and then their God given purpose is designed and birthed to not only direct us and guide us to God’s future for us but it is intended to unite us together under one banner and purpose for the future and mission! I believe we can learn from Nehemiah how to do that. How to allow our vision to not only unite us but unite us with our community.

- If you read chapter three of Nehemiah it is such an amazing read if you are looking for it. To the average reader it can be not as amazing, because it is just describing who built what, what family or people worked on what part. But then you think in terms of it bringing families together under the cause of a vision for the future. It’s a perfect representation of how the church should be in soul winning and Kingdom building. Let me read you a few verses and you will get the idea.

Nehemiah 3:1-4: “Eliashib the high priest and his fellow priests went to work and rebuilt the Sheep Gate. They dedicated it and set its doors in place, building as far as the Tower of the Hundred, which they dedicated, and as far as the Tower of Hananel. 2 The men of Jericho built the adjoining section, and Zakkur son of Imri built next to them. 3 The Fish Gate was rebuilt by the sons of Hassenaah. They laid its beams and put its doors and bolts and bars in place. 4 Meremoth son of Uriah, the son of Hakkoz, repaired the next section. Next to him Meshullam son of Berekiah, the son of Meshezabel, made repairs, and next to him Zadok son of Baana also made repairs.” NIV

Then jump down a few more verses…

Nehemiah 3:17-21: “Next to him, the repairs were made by the Levites under Rehum son of Bani. Beside him, Hashabiah, ruler of half the district of Keilah, carried out repairs for his district. 18 Next to him, the repairs were made by their fellow Levites under Binnui son of Henadad, ruler of the other half-district of Keilah. 19 Next to him, Ezer son of Jeshua, ruler of Mizpah, repaired another section, from a point facing the ascent to the armory as far as the angle of the wall. 20 Next to him, Baruch son of Zabbai zealously repaired another section, from the angle to the entrance of the house of Eliashib the high priest. 21 Next to him, Meremoth son of Uriah, the son of Hakkoz, repaired another section, from the entrance of Eliashib’s house to the end of it.” NIV

- And let me tell you the whole chapter reads exactly like this. This family worked on this, so and so worked on this, then they worked doing this and so on and so on. Maybe it’s just me but that lights a fire for unity in me. I guarantee you all these families and people may not of agreed on everything. Some may have wanted the Fountain Gate to look different than others, some maybe wanted a different color somewhere right? But despite it all they unified and worked, they all put their hands to work.

- That’s what the church should look like! Any given Sunday we should be able to come together and say, yeah this is who I won to the Lord this week. See that person over there thats who Donna won to The Lord, that other person that’s who Barb won to the Lord. Thats who Johanna brought to hear the gospel. Or even wow see thats the person Robert helped with a situation and showed the love of Christ to this week. We all should be unified working together to future the Kingdom. It’s not a one person effort it’s everyone. ***Could you imagine if our every Sunday’s read like this chapter of Nehemiah?***

- I can tell you children of God the vision of Purpose Church has room for everyone to participate and not only is there room for everyone but it needs everyone and only thrives with everyone participating! Reading through this chapter you can literally count, I counted though my math could have been off but 39 different names of individuals working on this rebuilding effort, but that’s just individuals, there are also 42 different work crews with undefined amounts of people in the crews all listed and working together here.

- The diversity is also so amazing. Listen it includes priests in these builders, what do pastors and priests know about building? I can tell you from my example and experience I don’t know much! But they were there apart.

- Merchants, city guards, goldsmiths, perfume makers, all sorts of people. It even says a man was working with his daughters. It was so diverse. It unified so many under this effort. Just as in The Kingdom of God here at this church there is room for everyone to come together and use their talents, giftings, anointings, trades, all to further Gods will, see people ministered to, saved, and set free. There is room for you, and this vision needs you!

- I stop and think why this chapter is here, and for me I think its so beautiful and valuable to see. It's a reflection of the unity under vision for The Kingdom we should all have. But also I think the beautiful, encouraging, thing too is it shows God sees us! God notices our sacrifices and efforts for ministry and The Kingdom. It shows no gift or act of service in the Kingdom is too small or obscure it all reaches God's heart. God notices who partners, but God also notices who doesn't participate. Look at verse 5:

Nehemiah 3:5: "The next section was repaired by the men of Tekoa, but their nobles would not put their shoulders to the work under their supervisors." NIV

You know another thing about a God given vision is…

2.) A God Vision That Unites Requires Willingness

- God sees our hearts and sees if we are willing to partner, join the team of the vision, the family of vision bringers or if we are just observers who never join in. God notices every person who will join the team but also the folks who just watch. I want to challenge all of us. As we build and blaze trails forward into the mighty future God has for this church, this city, this county, this region, ***don't be an observer, be a participant***. As we walk into the future God has and we look back on what God has built through us you will cherish what God did through you, but that requires doing, being apart, building.

- This vision that I know is of God that was birthed in prayer and will be sustained by prayer it has room for every gifting and person to unite under but it has no room for personal agendas. And the unfortunate thing is there will always be opposition to vision, and attacks on the unity required to achieve vision. In Nehemiah's case that certainly came in chapters 4 and 5.

- Those around, like the Ammonites, the Arabs and some others from the outside heard about the rebuilding and they were angry they wanted to fight against Jerusalem and stir up trouble. And through prayer and literally half

holding spears and the other half working they kept building. Attacks from the outside where coming.

- But even worse than physical attacks were the attacks against the unity from the inside in chapter five. The enemy will always try to destroy unity because we know we are most effective when we are united!

Ephesians 4:3: "Make every effort to keep yourselves united in the Spirit, binding yourselves together with peace." NLT

- Our vision will be built when we are together, and in Nehemiah's case the wall was built with unity but some inside attacks were happening. Here is some context into what is going on.

Nehemiah 5:1-5: "Now the men and their wives raised a great outcry against their fellow Jews. 2 Some were saying, "We and our sons and daughters are numerous; in order for us to eat and stay alive, we must get grain." 3 Others were saying, "We are mortgaging our fields, our vineyards and our homes to get grain during the famine." 4 Still others were saying, "We have had to borrow money to pay the king's tax on our fields and vineyards. 5 Although we are of the same flesh and blood as our fellow Jews and though our children are as good as theirs, yet we have to subject our sons and daughters to slavery. Some of our daughters have already been enslaved, but we are powerless, because our fields and our vineyards belong to others."" NIV

- There were inside attacks and agendas that robbed the people of the unity and was destroying the effort. There was a large number of Jews who came back to Jerusalem with nothing, they were poor and because of this they had to borrow from other Jews who were rich. They were charged interest and many couldn't pay the payments. They had to sell their homes, land, and children into slavery.

- Despite The Old Testament Law strictly not allowing these practices people were selfish and didn't care about their unity they had agendas and cared about themselves and their comfort and excess. This was leading to a rapid breaking down of the team unity that was fostered through the vision, mission, and work. Nehemiah quickly stepped in, because in a God vision and work we have to be proactive and extremely protective of our unity and togetherness as a team! Look at Nehemiah's response in verse 9:

Nehemiah 5:9-12: “So I continued, “What you are doing is not right. Shouldn’t you walk in the fear of our God to avoid the reproach of our Gentile enemies? 10 I and my brothers and my men are also lending the people money and grain. But let us stop charging interest! 11 Give back to them immediately their fields, vineyards, olive groves and houses, and also the interest you are charging them—one percent of the money, grain, new wine and olive oil.” 12 “We will give it back,” they said. “And we will not demand anything more from them. We will do as you say.”” NIV

- We see here from the authority Nehemiah held and his commitment to unity from a place of integrity, how truly important it is to live the vision with integrity and selflessness. Just like Nehemiah we must be committed to integrity and selflessness in our pursuit of vision! And in that selflessness we must be utterly dedicated to protecting the unity of our church and family at all cost! Nehemiah lived it. He put others first all to protect unity!

3.) A God Vision That Unites Requires Us to Protect Our Unity with our Lives

- We’ve got to live it out, we must be so committed to protecting each other and our unity with one another we will sacrifice our own comfort, our own plans, our own preconceived ideas and thoughts all to protect each other and our connection to one another. Nehemiah did just that. He became the governor of Judah for twelve years. And in that time he was allowed special treatment because of that position. But Nehemiah cared less about his comfort and more about protecting the unity of the people.

Nehemiah 5:14-16: “Moreover, from the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes, when I was appointed to be their governor in the land of Judah, until his thirty-second year—twelve years—neither I nor my brothers ate the food allotted to the governor. 15 But the earlier governors—those preceding me—placed a heavy burden on the people and took forty shekels of silver from them in addition to food and wine. Their assistants also lorded it over the people. But out of reverence for God I did not act like that. 16 Instead, I devoted myself to the work on this wall. All my men were assembled there for the work; we did not acquire any land.” NIV

- Nehemiah wasn’t going to allow anything to hurt the people and break down the unity that was built. He knew for the rebuilding season and for the sake of the future he had to protect the unity of the people no matter what. We must have the same passion for protecting our unity. It doesn’t matter if opinions

differ, if we disagree, we don't fight for ourselves and our opinions to win we fight to keep unity to do the work God has called us for! The building of the future!

- It is imperative when we pray this vision, when we pray and ask for all the situations and generations of our community that we also pray for unity, we must fight for it. If we as a church aren't unified as a body we will never build the future God has for us. And I mean truly a family, a group who are devoted and radically loving and supporting one another. Its necessary for the future of this church.

- And we must remember the motivation when we seek after our vision, remember vision brings unity as we unify under the goals and purpose God gave us but we must always remember the motivation. The last verse of chapter five to me gives us a wonderful glimpse into Nehemiah's motivation.

Nehemiah 5:19: "Remember me with favor, my God, for all I have done for these people." NIV

- He did it for the people, the spiritual wellbeing of the people. The wall was important because it was God's city and he did it unto God but the wall reflected the people. Ultimately Nehemiah wanted to see God's people closer to God again because he loved them. We want to bless and impact Zeeland not just to regrow this church. Not because I want the COG of Cleveland to look good but because my God told me in Matthew 28:19 to go and reach the world around me.

- Because Jesus loved people enough to die and I need to love people enough to want to see them in Heaven. Blessing people, loving people, operating with the heart of Christ for people that's the motivation. And thus we unify under the mission of every situation and generation because we are supposed to truly love and care for people! We genuinely should love Zeeland and Holland and Ottawa County! The goal of the vision is to spread The Love of Jesus!

- And when we get unified on the same page about this: that blessing people with love and generosity in the grace of God is a win, and so amazing and our calling then we will unify as a team that can build a future. I want us to be that team! And the key to having a team that can build a future through God is being unified in love for one another. Church we must genuinely love each other. And not superficially but genuinely love each other.

- Church a vision is birthed and sustained with prayer, that is a must. But another must is unity! We must also chase after unity, we simply must!

<u>Colossians 3:14: “Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds us all together in perfect harmony.” NLT</u>

- Loving one another brings us in harmony. When we each have our own plans and we aren’t clothed in love for one another not only are we not in harmony we are all chasing different directions and we will be ineffective. But love and unity makes us actually effective in our call and vision as a body. Let me word it another way, we’ve been looking at Nehemiah and his efforts to rebuild the walls, well unity itself is a strong wall for us as a church!

4.) Unity is a Fortified Wall That Protects and Sustains Us

- The enemy will do anything to break us apart. Because the wall of unity is so strong, it not only protects us but gives us the ability to weather the storms of ministry and life into the future. In reading the book of Acts you can see that when the devil tried to attack the church from outside with persecution all that caused was mobilization and effective gospel spreading. The church grew rapidly! Because they were unified!

- So the devil figured out to try to tear apart the church from the inside. Be it the attack on pitting Jew versus Gentile in an age of the covenant being for all, people lying about the amount of money, and not giving properly, the devil would do anything to rip apart the believers from the inside. It still happens today we see church split after split over the silliest things. Because they aren’t dedicated to love.

- How did the early church sustain and fight these attacks? Through their bonds of love and connection with each other. When they heard of attacks they supported each other with prayer and love. We survive, we thrive, we march forward by being connected in Godly friendship together, we are spiritual family and when we behave as such no matter what the world or the devil throws at us we are victorious through God and through our support of each other!

- Going back to chapter three of Nehemiah the beautiful chapter showing all the different people unifying and working for the wall. It’s a tough read because of all the names but there is a phrase that appears almost twenty times and it’s the phrase: “***Next to him”.*** That work on the wall was so difficult, so hard, but they were supported together, they were together, they were always in close proximity to each other in unity. We need to always be ***“Next to each other” we must be committed to unity and closeness.***

- As we chase this vision in the coming years there will be so many challenges the work will be difficult, there will be attacks but when we chase after what sustains us, the unity Christ called us to. Gifted us with. When we seek to truly be next to each other in working the vision and doing life we can overcome and see the future, as we build it together with Christ at the center!

5.) Like a Fortified Wall Unity Must Be Built

- Unity like the strong wall of protection it is takes effort, it takes time, it takes work. It is work to build the type of unity and love we are called to walk in as a church. Some churches in their whole existence never put in the work to build the strong wall of unity we must have and are called to have, but not here! Here we will build the wall of unity!

- On the cross Jesus purchased our unity, He brought Jew and Gentile together as one, all of us are one bought and purchased in the blood. But God calls us to work to keep it as a body of believers. Its a hard work, it takes reconciliation, it takes dying to your needs for the sake of another. But we are called to this work. To this effort. To truly being unified together as a family, a team, as one body. We must do the work to build the wall of unity!

- There is a future to build and a world to save, we must do this church! I don't care if this wall of supernatural unity takes ten years it's worth it and I will always pursue it! We must! Jesus knew the importance and even prayed it. Jesus cried out for us to be one, to be unified together, bonded and connected as a Christ centered family! Let's look at that prayer:

John 17:20-23: "I am praying not only for these disciples but also for all who will ever believe in me through their message. I pray that they will all be one, just as you and I are one—as you are in me, Father, and I am in you. And may they be in us so that the world will believe you sent me. "I have given them the glory you gave me, so they may be one as we are one. I am in them and you are in me. May they experience such perfect unity that the world will know that you sent me and that you love them as much as you love me." NLT

- Jesus prayed such a powerful call to unity to connection, a call for us to be one, Jesus says for us to be so unified, so together that through our love and unity in one another the world will know Jesus was sent to this world and how much God loves the world.

- Jesus prays we are to be one as Jesus was one with the Father, that's about as unified as you can get, I can't think of a more power analogy for unity and connection than saying we are to be as united as Jesus is with The Father, two Godheads of the trinity!

- Church together with the work and help of The Holy Spirit we can build this new future, the future God has ordained for us! If and only if we build and work for that new future together in unity through The Holy Spirit. This morning as we talk about the strong wall of unity we must remember this was purchased on the cross.

Matthew 26:26-28: "While they were eating, Jesus took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to his disciples, saying, "Take and eat; this is my body." Then he took a cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you. This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins." NIV

- We only know reconciliation with each other because first Christ reconciled us to God. Today we remember, we can only draw near to each other if we are drawing near to Him.