A Season of Rebuilding
Building a Future with Focus

- Church we are officially in week three of this incredibly important series that I believe if we actually catch will take us into a mighty God focused future. There is massive spiritual significance to what we are casting. We are casting vision, we are developing strategy to see this vision come to fruition. Because God has fruit for us here!

- 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.

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!

- The last two weeks we have gone over two building blocks necessary for a church seeking vision, committed to the future. Because we will be a church absolutely committed to the future! We must be! And those two building blocks were prayer and unity. 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!

- And of course not only are we to be praying but we are to be unified! It is absolutely imperative that we are a team, that we are united as family. 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 saw the people unified under the vision of rebuilding 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 through prayer and unity God will do the same here! That He will do more here in this community through us as Purpose Church in months than has happened in years!

- 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!

- Now today we are going to move on to the next building block needed to build for the future in this season of rebuilding and that building block is…

Building Block 3: Focus

- This building block is so incredibly important and yet so incredibly easy to lose! If we are going to be utterly committed to the future, which is my prayer and my heart for the us as a body, we can't have multiple visions, multiple agendas, multiple competing directions we are trying to go! We must be a church that is focused! We must be fixed on the vision God has given us!

- The enemy of focus is distraction, and my goodness is distraction so very easy. Church I know you are aware how easy distraction is! It is so easy to get distracted as a church, even with things that seem good. But, when we deviate from our God given vision for other plans, other passions, even other visions or focuses, they are distractions! No matter good they seem or look. We have to stay focused on the vision always!

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."

- If we are to be a church committed to the future we must also be committed to not getting sidetracked! I know churches and christians that go their whole lives spiritually sidetracked by every distraction that comes. Again they could be distractions that seem good but if they don't take us toward the vision of: helping people from every generation and situation find Jesus and then through Jesus find purpose, if they don't take us closer to making disciples, to knowing Christ and making Him known, it's a distraction! ***We cannot afford to be spiritually sidetracked!***

- Trust me I understand our world is full of distraction. In fact this may be bold to say as I'm a rather younger man but I would venture our world is more

distracted than any other point in history. We carry a device literally made to distract us, our phones. And honestly when I don't have my phone then I'm distracted because I'm looking for my phone.

We've happily adopted an addiction to distraction.

- Our current culture is one that has been led straight into addiction to distraction. We can watch one video on YouTube and then fall into a rabbit hole for hours. We can think we are scrolling Facebook for only a minute but then it melts away into a whole afternoon. We are not only surrounded by distraction but we are programed to love distraction. Trust me I love it myself! But then in church we even find ourselves distracted.

- Of course the obvious is true we allow our phones and others to distract us during worship a time our eyes should be fixed on The King giving Him all we have. But even deeper than that we allow ourselves to be spiritually distracted. We get fixated on what some pastor down the street is doing rather than what we are doing. We try to inject our own plans into God's plans. ***We live constantly and perpetually spiritually distracted, and distraction will certainly lead to destruction.***

Distraction Leads To an Inability to Build The Future God Has For Us

- When we are deep in distraction, deep in the bondage of bitterness because we are too distracted by the actions of someone else, the past that has hit us, the comments on a Facebook post, any distraction that tries to divert your attention, you will not build the future God has for you, for this church. ***How can we build a future when our eyes are anywhere but the future and how God wants us to get there?***

- Listen not a single person in this room, not a single one, no church in the whole world, not a one can loose focus on God's vision for their life or church body and find a better future through the loss of focus. No one! Far too often our hearts are set on earthly things instead of the heavenly realities of what truly matter, Christ and the vision Christ has given us to achieve!

Colossians 3:1-4: "If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. 2 Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. 3 For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. 4 When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory." ESV

- This says it clearly, as children of God, which we are right? If we have accepted Christ it's time we operate with the mind and focus of Christ, our minds are not to be on the things of earth, those are all distractions when it comes to life and mission of a Christ follower who is committed to building a future, a God future! It even goes on to list sinful distractions that come in and try to pervert our vision.

- Gossip, anger, resentment, unforgiveness, greed, slandering others, all of those things are distractions that for some reason too many of us children of God walk in and live in. We are supposed to get rid of those things! We must! It goes on to say in verse 10…

Colossians 3:10: "Put on your new nature, and be renewed as you learn to know your Creator and become like him." ESV

- Our new nature is a life of fixation and focus on Christ, Christ crucified, risen again, ascended to the right hand of the father and focused on His greatest command and mission of the great commission that is essentially God reworded in my spirit for our strategy to the future God has for us.

If our goal is to be a church building a supernatural future we must be a body of individuals putting on the new nature of Christ daily renewed that removes distractions and is absolutely fixated and focused on Christ and our Christ mission and vision!

- But you are probably thinking to yourself Pastor are you a little distracted and unfocused right now? Aren't we supposed to be looking at Nehemiah? Well we certainly are! Throughout this whole series we are using the scriptural example of Nehemiah and today we are going to see how Nehemiah handled a lack in focus or tried to maintain focus. So today we are in chapter 6 of Nehemiah. We are going to start by reading the first 15 verses of this chapter hold on tight I know it's a lot of verses but we can do this!…

Nehemiah 6:1-15: "When word came to Sanballat, Tobiah, Geshem the Arab and the rest of our enemies that I had rebuilt the wall and not a gap was left in it—though up to that time I had not set the doors in the gates—
2 Sanballat and Geshem sent me this message: "Come, let us meet together in one of the villages on the plain of Ono." But they were scheming to harm me; 3 so I sent messengers to them with this reply: "I am carrying on a great project and cannot go down. Why should the work stop while I leave it and go down to you?" 4 Four times they sent me the same message, and each time I gave them the same answer. 5 Then, the fifth

time, Sanballat sent his aide to me with the same message, and in his hand was an unsealed letter 6 in which was written: "It is reported among the nations—and Geshem says it is true—that you and the Jews are plotting to revolt, and therefore you are building the wall. Moreover, according to these reports you are about to become their king 7 and have even appointed prophets to make this proclamation about you in Jerusalem: 'There is a king in Judah!' Now this report will get back to the king; so come, let us meet together." 8 I sent him this reply: "Nothing like what you are saying is happening; you are just making it up out of your head." 9 They were all trying to frighten us, thinking, "Their hands will get too weak for the work, and it will not be completed." But I prayed, "Now strengthen my hands." 10 One day I went to the house of Shemaiah son of Delaiah, the son of Mehetabel, who was shut in at his home. He said, "Let us meet in the house of God, inside the temple, and let us close the temple doors, because men are coming to kill you—by night they are coming to kill you." 11 But I said, "Should a man like me run away? Or should someone like me go into the temple to save his life? I will not go!" 12 I realized that God had not sent him, but that he had prophesied against me because Tobiah and Sanballat had hired him. 13 He had been hired to intimidate me so that I would commit a sin by doing this, and then they would give me a bad name to discredit me. 14 Remember Tobiah and Sanballat, my God, because of what they have done; remember also the prophet Noadiah and how she and the rest of the prophets have been trying to intimidate me. 15 So the wall was completed on the twenty-fifth of Elul, in fifty-two days." NIV

- Wow what a campaign of distraction that was raged against Nehemiah here during a time where the vision was almost fulfilled! Things were going amazing! The wall was almost done! In fact the wall is pretty much fully rebuilt except for the doors! So as far as building project goes thats pretty much done! But it shows here in this distraction that no matter how far in the vision how well it is executed, the devil will never let up!

- The devil is going to try and find ways to tear us down, break apart our unity, rob our focus, make us stop praying with faith, any chance he gets he will wage spiritual war with us! Especially when we are effectively focused on the vision and living it out!

- ***The devil will certainly find what distracts you, what makes you stuck in the past and not the future and use it to distract you!*** And in this case the devil is using these three stooges, Sanballat, Tobiah, and Geshem. Now I want to give you a little background on these men. They didn't just show up here,

they have been trying to stop Nehemiah since chapter 2. But their people have even more history with the Israelites as a nation.

- Sanballat is a Horonite, which means he is from Horonaim a city of Moab, so ultimately he is a Moabite. Then we have Tobiah who scripture says is an Ammonite, both groups of people God drove out of the Promised Land for The Israelites. When we trace these lines back they go all the way back to Abraham and his nephew Lot.

- Both the Moabites and Ammonites were descendants from Lot: one son Lot had was named Moab and the other was Ben-Ammi, giving birth to these groups of people. The three of these men were regional governors serving under the King of Persia and they employed many plots to get rid of Nehemiah!

Generations after Israel had first possessed the Promised Land, some of their old enemies were back, seeking to keep Jerusalem in ruins.

- Just last week we read how these same men threatened violence on the builders and Nehemiah just armed everyone with spears and weapons and they continued to build but here we see another tactic. Instead of the threat of war they used the threat of peace. They sent a message to get together, they are coming under the guise of building bridges and yet Nehemiah knew their intentions. We even find out just a few verses later that Tobiah was related by marriage to one of the nobles in Jerusalem, so Nehemiah was even getting pressure to go to this peace talk.

Nehemiah 6:17-19: “Also, in those days the nobles of Judah were sending many letters to Tobiah, and replies from Tobiah kept coming to them. 18 For many in Judah were under oath to him, since he was son-in-law to Shekaniah son of Arah, and his son Jehohanan had married the daughter of Meshullam son of Berekiah. 19 Moreover, they kept reporting to me his good deeds and then telling him what I said. And Tobiah sent letters to intimidate me.” NIV

- Nehemiah knew it was a plot to harm him and halt what God was doing in this rebuilding season. And really more than anything it was a distraction from the vision. ***They said meet at Ono and Nehemiah said “Oh No!”*** Yes that may be a bad joke but the Bible wrote it for me so I had to say it. I say all that bring you the point, Nehemiah found success through God because he never lost focus.

A Vision will Only Succeed if We Never Loose Focus!

- Nehemiah did not allow others to take away the focus he had for the mission and vision of rebuilding God gave him. Just as we cannot allow any distractions to come between us as a body and the mission God has given to us. Distractions will come in many forms. We may not have people literally plotting to bring us physical harm. But the past can be a distraction, allowing ourselves focus solely on what we have been and not where we are going.

- There may be a time we face distraction via opposition by our community, there may even be times we face opposition from each other with disagreements. The focus is the vision and when we stay focused it makes it easy to see what aligns with our vision and what is only a distraction. Remember a distraction isn't always a bad thing but rather a thing taking us in a direction different than our strategy and God given vision!

- The beautiful thing is we know with this vision of: helping people from every generation and situation Find Jesus and then Find Purpose in Jesus captures the heart of God because God's heart is the souls of people, the needs of people, regardless what they are going through, what their culture or background is, and how old they happen to be! When we are focused on vision it makes saying no easier because we can ask immediately does this further the vision or does it distract from it?

We as a church we need to be so vision-focused we won't do anything unless it furthers the vision!

- And this morning we are going to look at Nehemiah for an example of focus! We are going to learn three things about focus, and these three things are applicable to each and every one of you! These lessons on vision and focus from Nehemiah are absolutely true regardless of where you are applying them in your day to day life and they certainly are true for moving forward as a church!

1.) We Must Focus on Passionate Pursuit of The Vision

- If we aren't actively pursuing the vision, and I mean active pursuit, intentional pursuit the vision will quietly fizzle and disappear! If we aren't intentional about our focus we will certainly fall into the trap of mission drift. What do I mean by that? I mean we will slowly but inevitably drift away from the vision, the mission, the strategies, God gave to us in prayer and seeking.

- Mission drift, vision drift it is so incredibly common! It's the reason why we all with the best of intentions start every new year with a new resolution and most often it's very similar to the resolution we had the year before or the year before that. The same reason why by January 15th or so we almost all fall away from the goals we made January 1. It's why fad diets are so common, we go in cycles of diet to no diet then to another diet. We drift in our goals, our vision, our personal missions because guess what? Following a vision and a mission is hard!

If you don't know the vision for your life you are going to get swallowed and burnt out by things you should have said No to.

- Until you actually know what your vision is you will drown yourself with trying to do good things to find it. And before you know it you are saying yes to everything and then find yourself all over the map and burnt out so quickly! I've seen churches do the same exact thing. The vision isn't clear, the mission isn't clear so they are doing any ministry they can, essentially shooting Holy Spirit darts at a Kingdom of God Dart Board. The Church ends up going nowhere because there is no direction.

Proverbs 29:18: "Where there is no vision from God, the people run wild, but those who adhere to God's instruction know genuine happiness." THE VOICE

- I know I've basically read you this verse for a month straight now but let me say it to you like this ***"where there isn't focus on the vision the church is rendered useless"*** I'm sorry if that seems too harsh but it is in fact the truth. The devil knows how important it is is for our eyes to be fixed, our focus to be clear on the vision. We need to do the God things not the good things. ***And I want our church to be effective and we will do that with a laser focus that prioritized and pursues the vision of families from all walks of life finding Jesus and then living out their purpose as disciple makers!***

- This is so important for our families as well. I may not be a parent yet but I've seen families that prioritize other activities and make the wrong thing their yes. I've seen parents prioritizing sports over church, students missing out on services, gatherings, missions trips, devotions all for a silly game. I don't hate sports but is the sport worth the price of raising a child who no longer sees God as a priority?

- That's your choice to make but my "Yes" is God and His House and Presence. My yes is going to be a close relationship with Him and raising children who

when choosing between a sport, a performance, a trip, will choose God not the sport or activity. I don't want to deprive my children of experiences but I want them to desire God above it all! We must pursue God above all and in turn as a church vision above all!

You decide your Yes, but as The Pastor I'm making the Yes of this Church: doing everything possible to reaching the hurting souls of Ottawa County from every situation of life and ever generation of life for Jesus and His purpose! That church, is our yes and we will pursue it with all we have!

- In Nehemiah chapter 6 here we see to me one of the best surefire ways to avoid mission drift, and it illustrates this very point. When Nehemiah received the letters wanting to meet and talk look at his response:

Nehemiah 6:3: "so I sent messengers to them with this reply: "I am carrying on a great project and cannot go down. Why should the work stop while I leave it and go down to you?"" NIV

- Like Nehemiah we should be so busy doing the work of the Lord when distraction comes, when the devil tries to tempt us with shifting our yes, or leaving the building effort, we simply stay busy in The Work of The Lord. Nehemiah was so busy working for God he wasn't tempted to stop. We should be so in love with doing the work of the Lord, with pursuing the vision, no distraction will take us away!

- When we are in constant pursuit of the vision we can avoid so much, the devil though will keep trying. When we are too busy with The Lord and we don't go meet him he will then try to come to us. So secondly like Nehemiah not only should we be passionately in pursuit of vision we also…

2.) We Must Passionately Focus on Protecting Our Character

- Nehemiah's enemies didn't like Nehemiah and they were frustrated with what he was getting done for God, so since they couldn't deceive him they figured well let's discredit him. So instead of the tactic of intimidating him, since that didn't work they would accuse him. We see in chapter 6 they wrote this letter and had it taken to Nehemiah, unsealed.

Nehemiah 6:5-9: "Then, the fifth time, Sanballat sent his aide to me with the same message, and in his hand was an unsealed letter 6 in which was written: "It is reported among the nations—and Geshem says it is true—that you and the Jews are plotting to revolt, and therefore you are building

the wall. Moreover, according to these reports you are about to become their king 7 and have even appointed prophets to make this proclamation about you in Jerusalem: 'There is a king in Judah!' Now this report will get back to the king; so come, let us meet together." 8 I sent him this reply: "Nothing like what you are saying is happening; you are just making it up out of your head." 9 They were all trying to frighten us, thinking, "Their hands will get too weak for the work, and it will not be completed." But I prayed, "Now strengthen my hands."" NIV

- Why would it have been sent unsealed? Such an interesting thing to do. I imagine it was so anyone and their brother could read it so that accusation against Nehemiah would spread. In Hebrew culture when you look it up with the letter being open it was read to the public, and that was of course intentional. It reminds me of Facebook.

- There are a lot of people trying to make fun of churches, damage the name of Christ and they can accuse and say whatever they want, post whatever they want. Because we all know and the devil knows it too: it doesn't have to be real to do damage. It just has to get out there. But Nehemiah's character remained true. Since this tactic didn't work Nehemiah's enemies even paid off a so called prophet.

Nehemiah 6:11-13: "But I replied, "Should someone in my position run from danger? Should someone in my position enter the Temple to save his life? No, I won't do it!" 12 I realized that God had not spoken to him, but that he had uttered this prophecy against me because Tobiah and Sanballat had hired him. 13 They were hoping to intimidate me and make me sin. Then they would be able to accuse and discredit me." NLT

- This so called prophet was trying to get Nehemiah to sin and disobey the temple structure outlined in God's Law and then they could discredit him. I can tell you folks if someone be it a Pastor or someone claiming to be a prophet, if they say to go against God's word it's not of God. Unfortunately that is all too common today. The Bible is clear on something and people will say it doesn't apply to us today and we need a new Word. But God's Word is true and eternal.

- Church we can't compromise our obedience, Nehemiah knew it was vital to the vision to the future to his relationship with God. You don't sin, and you don't compromise on sin we must be obedient. And we can't try to change The Word of God or it's stance on sin, that will certainly destroy our future. But we must also focus on our integrity to the Word.

We must protect our integrity and character so we can better shine the character, holiness, and love of God!

- Now there is one last lesson on focus I want us to learn from Nehemiah this morning and this is…

3.) We Must Passionately Focus on Praying and Asking For Focus

- This may sound silly church but if we want to stay on vision, on mission we must constantly pray and ask God to allow us to stay focused on the mission and vision. Sounds simple but my goodness it is so vital.

- When you look at Nehemiah the man had an awesome prayer life. The man prayed like crazy! We can all take a lesson from him and increase our prayers. Especially in regards to praying to God to increase our capacity to focus on our vision for the future. We see so many examples of him praying and asking God for help. If we want to focus we need to cry out to God and ask for help with focus! Because by nature we are creatures who get distracted. It's in our human nature. But God can supernaturally help and equip us to stay focused! The second half of verse 9 of this chapter is the perfect example:

Nehemiah 6:9: "They were all trying to frighten us, thinking, "Their hands will get too weak for the work, and it will not be completed." But I prayed, "Now strengthen my hands."" NIV

Nehemiah 6:9B: "But I prayed, "God, make me strong."" NCV

- He prays God strengthen my hands. In the New Century Version he prayed and asked for God to make him strong. In the same way we must pray to be focused! We must be praying God strengthen my focus. Keep me on target! You can get many things from the book of Nehemiah but to me one of the biggest takeaways is Nehemiah used prayer as his method of keeping and staying focused. They came after him with threats, with accusations, with false prophesy trying to get him to sin and through it all he prayed and through his prayers he remained focused on the vision and mission.

- If we want Purpose Church to have the future I fully believe God wants us to have, if we want that we've got to get used to praying: "God keep me focused!" God keep me on track, God keep me on point!" We've got to be laser focused on the vision and mission God has for us!

- If we want an even more perfect model for staying focused than Nehemiah than we can look to Jesus. Jesus is not only the author of our focus, the giver and keeper of focus but He is the perfect model as well. Jesus was the most focused man to ever live, He was God in flesh but He was still the definition of focus. Everything He did was for the cross, the resurrection, for the mission, the future.

- In Luke chapter 9 on His way to the cross it describes His focus, He is about to pass through a Samaritan village that ends up rejecting Him so He goes elsewhere but look at how He is described:

Luke 9:51: "As the time drew near for him to ascend to heaven, Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem." NLT

Resolute Definition: full of purpose, determined, and unwavering

- Jesus didn't falter, He knew His purpose and He overcame every temptation and distraction, He was focused! Even on the night before the cross Jesus experienced anguish and in that moment He prayed!

Luke 22:42-44: ""Father, if you are willing, please take this cup of suffering away from me. Yet I want your will to be done, not mine." 43 Then an angel from heaven appeared and strengthened him. 44 He prayed more fervently, and he was in such agony of spirit that his sweat fell to the ground like great drops of blood." NLT

- If even Jesus needed to pray to better align with the will of The Father how much more do we? We daily need to pray for focus to better align with the mission and vision God has for us. We must be determined and unwavering and since we are human and we will waver in those moment we must ask and pray for more focus. Less distraction.