

### Get Ready! To Serve . . . Neh 1-4

So there's this guy named Neh who in Persia (formerly Babylon, now modern day Iraq) about 440 BC

He's there because 150 years earlier, his people, the Jews were overthrown by the Babylonians, and hauled off to Persia

Now Neh has a great job – he's the cupbearer for the king (tastes the drink, serves, etc)

Hears news that Jerusalem is in ruins – no wall, no gates, no temple, few people

Tears him up; So he asks the king to go back to his homeland, rebuild the walls, re-establish his people

The king is like – great, more taxes, have at it; So he does

The book of Neh is the account of that story, including the successes, struggles, and opposition he encountered

Neh is a perfect example of someone who served in the *right* way, with the *right* heart, for the *right* reasons

Based on his example, there are at least 4 ministry commitments I believe every single one of us should make

So turn to Neh with me – looking at the first 4 chapters (not reading, but highlighting)

As we embark on a new ministry year with all the opp's you'll see out at the Ministry

Expo, I want to encourage you to make the most of it, by making these commitments your own, starting with this . . .

#### MY MINISTRY COMMITMENTS:

##### **I will not ignore the need to serve (1:1-11; 2:11-20)**

- Contrary to popular belief, opp rarely knocks – you have to look for it

Neh started by asking about what was going on in Jerusalem – 1:2

You should do the same – find out what's going on around here

*Ask* about the various ministries; Look around like Neh – 2:11-13

Figure out what's needed and what's not by talking to those involved

Don't ignore the need by expecting the ministries/opp's to come to you – go look for them

Another way to pay attention to the need is to . . .

- Keep a soft heart

Neh had a soft heart – so soft that he wept because of the plight of God's people – 1:4

Sometimes that's difficult, isn't it? To keep a soft heart for ministry

The burden is heavy at times; People are difficult

There's a tendency to let it become more of a drudgery than a joy

Or, if the need is out of sight, out of mind, it's easy to be calloused or numb to it

If you have a soft heart to serve and minister to others, you'll either be busting out with joy because of all God is doing in our church, or weeping for a lack of it

- In either case, pray often for the needs

Neh prayed *day and night* – 1:6

It was constantly on his mind/heart, and he was constantly bringing it to the Lord

Ask God to show favor on your ministry and service

Ask him to bless the work of your hands – 1:11

Are you ready to make that ministry commitment? Have you already? If so, check the box

Right after the service go out to the Ministry Expo, find out what's going on, and don't ignore the need

### **I will do whatever it takes to serve (2:1-10; 4:15-23)**

For many, that starts with a change of attitude

It's the first key to doing whatever it takes to serve

#### 5 Keys to doing whatever it takes to serve:

##### 1. Change your attitude

Neh didn't criticize those who needed help in Jerusalem

"Let 'em help themselves, big babies"

He didn't complain that he was the one in captivity – they should be helping him

More of us need to take JFK's approach and . . .

Ask not what your church can do for *you*, but what *you* can do for your *church*

##### 2. Change your priorities

Neh had a dream job – good work environment, easy hours, benefits, retirement plan, etc

But instead of putting his job first, he put ministry first

I'm *not* saying you should jeopardize your job for the sake of ministry

I *am* saying that the things of God should come before the things of man

Things of eternal consequence should take precedence over things of temporal consequence

I'm saying that without forsaking your responsibility to put food on the table and

provide for your family, you should put ministry first wherever/whenever you can

Instead of living to *work*, you should work to *live*, and *live* to serve

##### 3. Overcome obstacles

Neh had some massive obstacles in his way – the king, safe passage, and materials

Obstacles that any reasonable person would have looked at and said, nope, can't do it

But Neh wasn't deterred by the size/number of obstacles

Nor did he suffer analysis-paralysis trying to figure out how to get around them

Instead, he leaned into the problems and met them head on

The first of which was risking his life just by bringing a downcast face into the presence of the king, not to mention speaking his cause – 2:2

He could have had his head served up on a platter

He didn't stop there – he asked for letters and an escort to secure safe passage, and he got permission to use the king's forests for lumber (2:5-8); Unbelievable

All because of his boldness and charisma, right? Wrong!

2:8b – *the king granted me what I asked, for the good hand of my God was upon me*

Neh was able to overcome obstacles to ministry because God's power/favor was on him

When you trust God to help you serve in the strength he provides, there is no obstacle too big to overcome

##### 4. Be flexible

Fast forward to when Neh was in Jerusalem and building the walls, and their enemies threatened – Read 4:16-17

Had Neh and the workers not been flexible to make the necessary adjustments, the work likely would have been stopped by an attack

Doing whatever it takes to serve includes making adjustments along the way

Sometimes unforeseen circumstances in life throw a wrench in your ministry, and you have to be flexible to do whatever it takes to serve

Sometimes the ministry itself changes, and you have to be flexible to respond – maybe changing your role, or the time required, or the day you meet

## 5. Work hard

4:6 – *the people had a mind to work*; 4:21 – *they labored at the work*

Not only that, some of them pulled double duty – they wore their swords and carried burdens at the same time (4:17)

Doing whatever it takes to serve, requires hard work

Hold nothing back – that’s what God told the Israelites when they were escaping from

Egypt (Ex 10) – don’t withhold anything from serving the Lord

We can stop and rest from the work of ministry in heaven, forever

Until then, hard work in the name of Jesus is the order of the day

Are you ready to check that box and make that commitment? If so, do so now, and then follow through after the service

The third ministry commitment exemplified by Neh and the workers, is . . .

### **I will always fulfill my role in serving (3:1-32)**

As you read ch3, you see person after person, group after group, accomplishing a task and fulfilling a particular role in rebuilding the wall – 3:15-20

That’s a great picture of ministry – many people, working together, doing different things, over a long period of time, to build the kingdom of God (the church)

No role was insignificant then; Same is true now

Every person is needed; Every role is important

It takes many different kinds of people, with many different gifts, to build a church

The key is fulfilling *your* role because there’s no room in ministry for lone-rangers or prima donnas

### • Ministry is for team players

The landscape of churches and para-church organizations is littered with men and women who want to do their own thing, their own way, by themselves

There’s no unity in that; No fellowship

Here at Harvest, we’re about reproducing servant-leaders, not lone-rangers

Team players, not prima donnas

Which means . . .

*Work with others* – don’t do things by yourself that you could/should do with others

Don’t miss the opp for increased unity by going it alone, even when you can

You say – “there’s nobody else to work with; I’m it”

If that’s the case, *invite* others to work with you; Twist their arm

If you have friends who aren’t serving, and they call Harvest their church home, they should be sick and tired of hearing you ask them to serve with you

*Work yourself out of a job*

Always be looking to reproduce yourself by passing on the knowledge and skills necessary to fulfill your role

*Submit to your leader* – if you can’t submit/follow someone else’s lead, you can’t play

You’ll do more harm than good

\*When we first started this church we were close to desperate at times for more help on our Set-up and Tear Down teams

Remember one guy in the first month who made it clear he did not want to serve on the Set-up Team, because it was below him

He spent more time trying to change everything we did, than setting things up

Fortunately for us, and unfortunately for him, he only lasted about a month because the team leaders held the line, refusing to let him take over and do whatever he wanted. He was a thorn in the flesh because he wasn’t submissive, he refused to fulfill his role, and he wasn’t a team player

Thankfully, that’s been a rarity around here

Don’t be like that; Commit to always fulfilling your role in serving

Can you check that box? Don’t plug in or sign up if you can’t

Not only will you bring your leader to tears, but you’ll grieve the HS

Finally, my 4<sup>th</sup> ministry commitment . . .

### **I will not quit in the face of opposition (4:1-14)**

#### • Opposition comes in all shapes and sizes in ministry

Some will be angry at you, some will plot against you, some will attack you

Sanballat (one of the governors of a province near Jerusalem) went from displeasure at the appearance of Neh (2:10), to despising him when the work started (2:19), to being *angry, greatly enraged, and very angry* when it progressed (4:1,7)

Note the sarcasm in 4:1-3 (read it; everybody’s a comedian)

Why all the hate? Why the anger?

Any time God’s plan collides with man’s plan, anger will result

Any time Satan is forced to relinquish his domain, people under his sway will be mad

Any time you bring the HS into a situation, you risk bitterness among those under conviction for sin

Whatever shape or size the opposition comes in, don’t quit

#### • Instead, *pray* for protection and *prepare* for battle – 4:8-9

Cry out to God for help; Prepare by hiding God’s word in your heart . . .

Trust the HS to give you the words to speak . . . soft words that turn away wrath, as opposed to harsh words that stir up anger (Pr 15:1)

#### • Don’t be afraid – 4:14

Don’t be afraid; Remember who you serve – God; And why you serve – to glorify him, bless others, and build his church

And don’t quit in the face of opposition

\*I ran across part of a message by Martin Luther King, Jr. this week

While MLK was not perfect, he exemplified this commitment to ministry as well as anyone in our day

Having done more than any other single person in the 1960’s to confront our racial prejudice, he did not *quit* in the face of opposition

I want to read you the last couple paragraphs of a message he gave at Ebenezer Baptist Church in Atlanta, 2 months before he was killed; Listen to what he says . . .

*If any of you are around for my funeral, and want to say something . . .*

Are you ready to make this commitment?

Are you ready to plug into ministry and say – “I will not quit in the face of opposition?”

If so, and if you’ve checked the other boxes as well, you’re well on your way to a fruitful year/life of ministry, serving the Lord

**Pray**

