

- Good morning Hope Chapel family.
- Today is one of those days that I really, really wish we could all be together.
- I started teaching a couple of weeks ago on the idea of doing transition well, because our church is entering a transition time and today is my last official Sunday with Hope Chapel (interestingly, today is actually my 400th message with our church.)
- I wish we were together to talk, hug and connect but I am hopeful that opportunity will still come before the summer is over.
- I want to do two things today.
- First, I want to finish this mini-series on transition. We will be looking at the book of Nehemiah to do so.
- Second, I want to address some personal remarks at the conclusion of the service.
- This little series on transition is because 1) our church is going through transition and 2) transition is a common experience, not just in church but in our own lives as well.
- It is how you respond that will determine how you or our church will come through this transition.
- The overall idea behind these three weeks is this: **Transition is more than an intermission.**
- Transition is not when we sit back, get passive, take a wait and see attitude or just check out to try something new. Transition is a season when we need to move. Prepare. Listen to God.
- We saw that we much pursue the presence of God in transition. He is going ahead of us and doing the hard work in the space in front of us and is preparing it for our arrival. He wants to walk with you in your transitions. His presence is a theme throughout the bible and Jesus coming to earth to be with us was so that for every transition we face, he will be with us. It will allow you to act boldly, knowing it is a season of movement.
- We saw the necessity of both grieving loss well with thankfulness and prayer, while orienting ourselves to God's kingdom priorities. Jesus came to institute these amazing kingdom priorities, which changed the game for you and for me. I challenged you last week to really live as the church.
- There is one more thing that I believe is important to ensure a transition is not simply an intermission. It revolves around action.
- Thoughts, intentions and good ideas do nothing in a transition without intentional action.
- But action without God's presence and priorities is pointless. The reason we are looking at action last is because what we do needs to be informed by the last two weeks.
- As we seek God's presence, listening to him and trusting him, he helps us deal with the loss and change and orients us towards his purposes and kingdom. THAT is the framework that sets up what the action looks like.
- **God's presence and purposes always motivate towards action.**
- Let me take you to one other big transition that occurred in the life of the nation of Israel.
- After many centuries of not following God, of warning them over and over about how they needed to orient their lives to God and his ways, Israel was allowed by God to be thoroughly conquered.
- The nation of Babylon, after a whole series of intrigue, politics and war, finally came to Jerusalem and devastated the capital city. They took away into captivity anyone who was anyone and only left the poor and marginalized to eke out an existence there. I was a desolate place and for the next 70 years, Israel, as a nation, existed primarily inside the borders of another land.

- But after 70 years, the Babylonian empire had been conquered by the Persian empire, and God began to stir something in the heart of a Jew who was an official in the empire. His name was Nehemiah. He had the ear of the king.
 - Nehemiah received some first hand information about how desolate Israel was, and particularly how their capital city was a ruin, with the walls broken down that made the nation a laughingstock to the surrounding peoples.
 - Nehemiah is so devastated by this account that he fasts, weeps, and confesses. He came up with a plan that was so audacious that he himself was terrified to put it into action. He was the cupbearer to the king and he actually asked for a leave of absence from his job so he could go to Jerusalem to rebuild the walls of a city that had been destroyed because it was rebellious. To make it even more crazy, he asked the king for money, resources and people to help him with this task.
 - God was with him and the king gave Nehemiah all he asked for.
 - When he arrived in Jerusalem, he did not tell any of the locals his plan. He simply went out one night and rode around the whole city, looking at the work that was needed to be done to restore the walls of the city and make it an inhabitable place again.
 - What Nehemiah was looking at was a massive transition.
 - He wanted to rebuild the walls around a city, make it a place where Jews could come back and live and settle and be a nation again. What he wanted to do in building the walls was the key part of a transition between being a nation in exile and a nation that was free to come back home. It could change the course of the nation or it could be an epic disaster.
 - Understand this about transition. Every transition is an opportunity to move positively or negatively. In every transition the potential exists for us to move towards God and his purposes or away. It is never neutral.
 - When a relationship ends, you can move towards God or run away in frustration.
 - When someone dies, you can lean into God's love or find other ways to feel better that have nothing to do with God.
 - When you are in financial transition, you can trust God's provision and love for you or move further from him by trying to control.
 - And when a church transitions, you can pray and seek him for what's next, or check out and move into a season of passive disengagement.
 - After doing his inspection, he went to all the local leaders.
- Nehemiah 2:17 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.*
- So they began a massive project. The story of Nehemiah is the story of how they rebuilt the walls of the city.
 - **God's presence and purposes always motivate towards action.**
 - As I read this story, I am struck by three things that are very applicable to any organization, any church, that is going through transition.

I. They acted with unity.

- Their response to Nehemiah's challenge is great. They say, "Let US start rebuilding."
- Not, "Good luck, we're behind you."
- Not, "Call me when it's done."
- Not, "It'll never work. We tried that before."
- Not, "We know nothing about building walls. We need experts."
- No, instead, they agreed that they collectively needed to be a part of this project.

- If you read Nehemiah 3, it is easy to skim over it because it is a list of a whole bunch of people and families that began to help build the wall. But that would be a mistake.
- What is utterly fascinating is that the author of Nehemiah felt it important to describe exactly who was involved in this project.
- *“Eliashib the high priest and his fellow priests went to work . . .” (v1)*
- *“Uzziel son of Harhaiah, one of the goldsmiths, repaired the next section . . .” (v8)*
- *“Hananiah, one of the perfume-makers, made repairs next to that.” (v8)*
- *“Shallum . . . repaired the next section with the help of his daughters.” (v12)*
- *Numerous times we read of “rulers” or leaders who got into the project.*
- *“Malkijah, one of the goldsmiths, made repairs . . .” (v31)*
- *“the goldsmiths and merchants made repairs.” (v32)*
- In order for this to work, everyone had to get involved. The religious and clergy. The business people. The craftsmen and tradesmen. Men and women. Parents and children. Leaders and ordinary people.
- If the majority who thought they weren’t qualified, or had nothing to offer, or it was beneath them, had not owned it, it would never have gotten finished.
- You are in this transition together. You have the same ultimate goal.

II. Everyone had something to contribute.

- We read that “the people worked with all their heart.” (4:6)
- They decided that they were in this together. They went after it. They believed that this plan was from God and so they did not relax. They actually engaged more.
- It didn’t matter if they had never done it before, they helped out.
- When there was some physical danger, those who could hold weapons to protect those who were building did so.
- We see that the people with financial means contributed to pay for the work, the materials and support the building of the wall.
- Others advocated for those among them who were being taken advantage of.
- In any transition, everyone has a role to play.
- You have resources you can give to support the church in transition. You can dedicate yourself to pray for the search team, the elders and your leaders. When the church re-gathers, you can help by working with the kids ministry, or greeting, ushering, setting up, working with sound, worship, or more.
- Your friendliness can be an asset. Your network of friends who don’t know Jesus is amazing. Your faith in God can motivate others to change. Your ability to connect can be used in a Discipleship Family.
- You have a role to play.
- What does God want you to do in and through this transition. As we come out of COVID and gather again. As a new lead pastor comes on board. How is God inviting you to participate? Where can you serve? How can you reach out? What is next?
- If you notice yourself sitting and watching and waiting, maybe that’s God’s invitation to get moving.
- Because here is the thing:

III. Every movement of God will have opposition

- Do you remember how I said every transition is a moment of opportunity? Every transition is also a moment of vulnerability.

- As Nehemiah got the people working to build the wall, it was not simply all peaches and cream.
 - This was a good thing. A big thing. And it rocked the boat. So there were those who did not like it.
 - In any change and transition, there is opposition.
- A) There will be people inside the organization who will not play ball.
 - First of all, there were some people who simply thought they were too good to get their hands dirty. It hampered the efforts.
 - Second, there were others who were more concerned about the money they were making off of their fellow Israelites than helping along.
 - Third, there were some key folks who actually tried to sabotage the work by working on their own agenda. They were sneaky and selfish and usurped Nehemiah's authority.
 - Sometimes opposition comes in the form of those who are simply trying to get you to focus on yourself and not what God is doing.
 - Don't be surprised if some of the people in our church are not thrilled with all the changes. Do not let it get you down. And if you find yourself becoming one of those people who is complaining about the state of things, or maybe not complaining but just doing your own thing the way you think it should be done, then recognize you are part of a problem.
 - Nehemiah responded to each of these by acting with integrity and trusting that God was in control. He prayed more. Trusted more. And did not remain passive.
- B) Satan will oppose growth.
 - Satan wanted to sabotage what God was doing through Nehemiah and he used two main antagonists named Sanballat and Tobiah. They were rulers of some neighboring peoples that had a vested interest in keeping the Israelites a non-entity. They did not want to see the welfare of the Jews improve.
 - First they tried to intimidate and threaten the people. Nehemiah responded by arming half of the people to work while the other half kept on building the wall.
 - Then, when they saw this wouldn't work, they tried to use fear and politics to get Nehemiah to pause the work and get distracted and when that didn't work, they planned an assassination of Nehemiah.
 - Satan will try to distract you. He will try to create problems that will cause you to withdraw. He will attempt to create conflict and division.
 - Transition is when Satan encourages you to doubt God's goodness. To keep you from seeing your role in the future. To get you discouraged. To keep you frustrated with the lack of progress. To create division.
 - Nehemiah's response is fantastic. "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?"
 - This is important work. I will not let all this stop what really matters. God is bigger than all the problems.
 - You will be tempted to be distracted. To be intimidated. To get bogged down in relational problems. Be single minded. Be purposeful.
- **Transition is not an intermission.**
 - Every transition is a time that can be a catalyst for great things, or a place for things to turn south.
 - Don't be afraid of what's new. Don't worry about the future. Just do what's in front of you.
 - We read toward the end of the book that the wall was completed in 52 days.

- This was not Nehemiah's victory. It was for all of them. They all worked. They all contributed. They all sacrificed.
- And they finished this amazing job in less than two months.
- The result? 10's of thousands of people returned to live in and around the city.
- They worshiped and re-dedicated themselves to pure living. They celebrated in a way that had not been celebrated by anyone there in their lifetimes.
- Their 52 day transition resulted in God's purposes being fulfilled and the beginning of the re-gathering of God's people.
- In our Hope Chapel transition, there is the danger for Hope to fade into insignificance. For you to withdraw. To see our influence diminish. But there is a huge opportunity to lean into God's kingdom purpose in our region.
- He wants to see people come into his kingdom just as they are and be changed.
- For young people and children know and serve him, and to settle their identity issues at the foot of the cross.
- To see the hungry fed, the marginalized welcomed and those in bondage freed.
- To see marriages and families reconciled, people delivered and illnesses healed.
- It won't happen the way it's always happened. God is doing something new.
- **God's presence and purposes always motivate towards action.**
- Be a part of this transition. Pursue Jesus. Embrace his purposes. Pick up your cross and follow him. Why wouldn't you?
- May his presence and purpose motivate you towards action.