

# BOOK 2 - Nehemiah 7-13

# Book of NEHEMIAH

LIFE GROUP STUDY

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# BOOK 2 - Nehemiah 7-13

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# BOOK 2 - Nehemiah 7-13

## How to Use This Study

Each week contains three devotions meant to be done individually on three different days throughout the week. The truth statements of the three devotions each week can be combined to make one truth statement which will be the foundation for discussion in Life Group on Sunday. For each devotion you can follow the steps below:

**Step One | Read the Text:** The text is given in the top right hand corner of the first page of each devotion.

**Step Two | Read the “Story” and the “Truth” sections:** These are designed to help you summarize the text and highlight one truth about God found in the text.

**Step Three | Answer the first set of “Stop & Think” questions:** These questions are crucial for life transformation. Take a minute to reflect. This part is crucial!!!

**Step Four | Read the “Instruction” section:** This applies the truth in just one or two ways.

**Step Five | Answer the second set of “Stop & Think” questions:** This set of questions are designed to cause you to examine your own life for sin - failure to live in light of the truth.

**Step Six | Respond to God through prayer by “Praising & Thanking Him,” “Confession” and “Requests”:** God’s Word initiates our response. This section is a time of structured prayer in which we praise and thank God for who He is, Confess our sins, and present our requests for His transforming work in our lives.

### Tips from the Author

- 1) Do the devotions on three different days
- 2) Write out your answer to the questions and responses in prayer either in the book or in your own journal.
- 3) Study the Gospel of Matthew on the off days following the same process as found in the book. A suggested reading plan can be found online at [Forestville.org](http://Forestville.org) or at the Life Group table at Forestville Baptist Church
- 4) Read one of the following books as we go through the book of Nehemiah: *The Pursuit of God* by A. W. Tozer, *Knowing God* by J. I. Packer or *Small Faith, Great God* by N. T. Wright

## WEEK 5 PART 1



## NEHEMIAH 7:1-4

### Nehemiah appoints leadership

#### Story: Nehemiah Selects Leaders

Six long months had passed since Nehemiah presented his requests to king Artaxerxes (2:1-8), and in that short time, Nehemiah and the people had watched God provide, protect and strengthen them. Where rubble and brokenness once laid, the completed, strong, new wall now stood. Some might have seen the work as completed when the wall became whole again, but Nehemiah knew that God had a plan not just for a strong wall but also for a strong people whom He would raise for the glory of His name!

With a passion to see God's people living out the purpose for which He set them apart from all other nations, Nehemiah's work continued. The wall had been built but the infrastructure of the city still needed restoration. Few homes stood in the rubble, and the population of the city remained extremely low. Recognizing the need for leadership, Nehemiah appointed Hanani and Hananiah to lead the city. These men stood out from the masses because they possessed integrity of character and fear of God. On the basis of these characteristics, Nehemiah judged them to be qualified, and to them he entrusted the responsibility to lead.

#### Truth: God astounds His people

In this passage, seeing the truth about God requires a little extra work. In instances such as this, we are wise to ask, "Why did Nehemiah do what he did?"

Imagine yourself conducting an interview with Nehemiah about the days he led the restoration project. You get to

this event when he selected leadership and the interview proceeds:

**You:** Why Hanani and Hananiah? Of all the men you could have chosen, why did you choose them?

**Nehemiah:** I could trust them. I could give them responsibility and know they would make wise decisions and conduct themselves rightly.

**You:** What made you so confident?

**Nehemiah:** They knew God. They feared Him. They knew His awesomeness and His steadfast love. I had seen them worship; truly, they have seen Him. Surely, they have spent time in His presence.

**I will bring them back to this place, and I will make them dwell in safety. And they shall be my people, and I will be their God. I will give them one heart and one way, that they may fear me forever, for their own good and the good of their children after them... I will put the fear of me in their hearts, that they may not turn from me. – Jer. 32:37-40**

I am certain the interview would go this way, for Nehemiah knew that wisdom begins with the fear of God, and the fear of God comes through seeing, beholding and knowing Him. Nehemiah understood that behavior and the knowledge

#### Stop & Think

Do you know someone who possesses a great awe and reverence toward God? Who is it? What about him/her makes you think they properly fear God?

Do you fear God? What evidence in life suggests you fear Him?

of God could not be separated. To know God is to fear God and to fear God is to obey God. Remember how Nehemiah attributes his own correct behavior to the fear of God, "The former governors... laid heavy burdens on the people. But ***I did not do so, because of the fear of God***" (Neh. 5:15). Also notice how Nehemiah connected the people's disobedience to their lacking the fear of God, "The [taking of your fellow Jews as slaves] that you have done is not good. ***Ought you not to walk in the fear of***



**God?"** (Neh. 5:9). God produces right living by producing proper fear of Him in those who know Him.

*The fear of God is the animating and invigorating principle of a godly life. It is the wellspring of all godly desires and inspirations.*

- Jerry Bridges.

### **Instruction: Know your leaders and entrust responsibility to those who fear God**

As a college student, I spent hours filling out job applications, going to interviews and anxiously waiting for a response. In some for or another, each job listing communicated a set of qualities or skills that the employer desired to see in the applicant. These expectations could always be placed in two categories - necessary and preferred. Often in the necessary category of expectations were qualities such as reliable transportation, high school diploma, capable of lifting fifty pounds and at least two years of experience. If these necessary requirements were not met, the person would no longer be considered for employment even if the applicant possessed many other desirable qualifications.

Like the potential employers of my college days, Nehemiah also identified a couple of necessary requirements for those to whom he would entrust the important work of the kingdom - 1) the fear of God and 2) faithful obedience to His instruction. Just as Nehemiah, the church must be careful to apply the same standards and expectations of those to whom they give responsibility. Unfortunately, the church often chooses leadership based on how well they play the keyboard, entertain and inspire the congregation or organize large and small events. Sometimes we entrust our children to leaders not knowing whether they fear God or not. Instead we deem them qualified because they have served in Sunday School for 15 years. A church moves into dangerous territory when they entrust responsibility to deacons who spend little time in quiet and private presence of God with His Word open in front of them. A church opens itself to destruction when it elects pastors who yield to popular opinion, the path of least resistance or the trail around controversy. To fear God and walk in His ways will always be unpopular, always be exposed to resistance and always be marred in controversy. The men and women despised and rejected by the world and even the religious should be

the ones esteemed and elevated by God's people. Let us be careful in selecting and appointing those who lead ministry in the body of Christ. Let us choose men and women who have a history of fearing God and serving him faithfully.

### **Stop & Think**

Which pastor and/or deacon do you know best? Are you confident he fears God? How do you know?

How have you sought to know your leadership? How have you failed to seriously consider the spiritual condition of your leadership? Have you just assumed that your leadership live in close awe-filled fellowship with God?

### **Respond with Praise and Thanks**

**Take a Moment:** Praise and thank God for giving you and awe and reverence for Him. Then thank Him for the men and women in your life who demonstrate the fear of God.

***Example:** Father, thank You for opening my eyes to see Your glory, majesty, power and wonder. In Your presence, I am filled with awe and wonder. Thank You for the pastors and deacons you have given to our church, who walk in intimate fellowship with You. Thank you for filling their hearts with gospel fear of You rather than man. Thank you for the way they lead us not according to the wisdom of the world but in accord with your instruction and command.*

### **Respond with Confession**

**Take a Moment:** Confess to God your failure to know your leadership and your judgment of them based on something other than their fear of God.

***Example:** Father, if I am honest, I really do not know my pastors and the other leadership of the church. I joined the church without ever consider the personal character of the leadership. Instead, I based my decision on the quality of "worship," the encouragement of the sermon, and the friendliness of the small group. Sadly, I have been at the church for years, and I do not have a close relationship with any of the pastors. I have blamed this on the leadership for not reaching out to me, but truthfully I have not sought to know them at all.*

### **Respond with Requests**

**Take a Moment:** Ask God to give you a desire to know your pastors and leaders. Ask Him to raise up more men and women who fear Him. Then present any other requests you have.

***Example:** Father, Give me a desire to know my pastors well enough to know they fear you. Forgive me for trusting leadership based on performance or history rather than their awe and reverence for you. Forgive my carelessness. Give me wisdom to discern those who fear you and those who do not. Continue to raise up even more men and women who find joy in fearing You.*

## WEEK 5 PART 2



## NEHEMIAH

7:5-65 & 11:1-2

Nehemiah calls the  
people to seek the  
kingdom

### Story: Nehemiah calls the people to seek the kingdom

When God's patience with Israel's sin ran out, He poured out His wrath. He destroyed Jerusalem, and He scattered the people into foreign lands. However, even in the midst of His wrath, God spoke through His prophets, "I will restore the fortune of Jerusalem, and I will reestablish my kingdom. In the Holy City I will once again dwell with my people and they with me." This promise has always come with a call, "Return to me. Trust me, and follow my instruction."

By faith in this promise, Nehemiah left his home and wellbeing in a foreign land to pursue the kingdom of God. Amazingly, God worked through Nehemiah, and in just fifty-two days the wall of the city had been restored. This work of God was certainly cause for celebration and greater faith in God's promise, but God had not just promised a strong wall. He had promised a strong city. Knowing and believing this promise, Nehemiah gathered the people, organized them by family and then called them to do what he had done - trust God and move to the city. Through the casting of lots, one tenth of each of the families was selected to uproot their families, leave their homes and relocate to the ruins of Jerusalem. They did so not because Jerusalem had better schools, work opportunities or social advantages. They did so by faith trusting that God would do as He promised. They sought the future realization of the kingdom over their present comfort trusting the sovereign and loving God could do and would do what he had promised.

**And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.**

– Ez. 36:26-27

### Truth: God aligns His people

God has been and continues to create a community led by individuals who fear His Name and consisting of people who prioritize His mission over their own interests. When Nehemiah heard from Hanani about the needs of the people and the condition of God's holy city, he put his own life and comfortable career on the line so that he could go seek the kingdom of God and the good of His people. This abandoning of self to seek the kingdom was not a special requirement for leaders, but a call Nehemiah extended to the whole of Israel.

While the kingdom seeking of Nehemiah and the people might be inspirational, it serves as a pointer to a much greater demonstration of kingdom seeking as seen in the work of Jesus Christ. He humbled Himself laying aside His riches to become poor. He laid aside His authority to become a servant. He set aside his glory to become homeless. He left the fellowship of His Father to walk through death alone. He did all of this and much more, for the sake of God's kingdom. He endured all this to see the

people of God rescued and restored for the glory of God.

As Christ, the people of God are those who adopt His thinking and His way of living. This radical distinction between the self-seeking world and the kingdom-seeking others-focused people of God comes not through their effort, work or self discipline. Instead, this overriding concern for the kingdom of God and His people springs forth from the love of God poured out in their hearts. Through the Spirit, God is creating a people whose lives are united in seeking the kingdom for the fame of His great name!

### Stop & Think

How has God's aligning you with His mission affected your family? Your relationship with the church? The way you approach work/school? Your use of free time?

**Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but he emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death on a cross... to the glory of God the Father. - Phil. 2:3-11**

### **Instruction: Call others to seek the kingdom of God**

God aligned Nehemiah's heart with His own, and as a result God's vision and mission became Nehemiah's vision and mission. The vision and mission became

the principle on which Nehemiah acted and called others to act. Decisions were made with a particular goal, God's goal, in view as the priority. Nehemiah did not ask, "How will I be affected? How will this benefit me?" Or, "Which option will cost the least and benefit the most for me personally?" Nehemiah exchanged these questions for a different set of questions, "What is God's end and vision for His people? What needs to occur for God's vision to become reality?" And, "What can we do to move forward toward His goal?" He not only thought this way for himself, but he also led others to do the same.

As in Nehemiah's day, God calls his people to abandon their own lives and kingdoms to pursue His. Too often God, His Word and His church have been understood as willing help and assistance in one's own pursuit of the "American dream." If your marriage is struggling, do not worry, for there is a class on Wednesday night teaching you how to have a fulfilling marriage. Is addiction slowing you down? No problem, we have a men's and a women's program on Thursdays. Do you feel lonely? We have that covered too! Just join one of our many small groups. We have one full of people your age with similar lifestyles and experiences so you do not feel uncomfortable in a room of people who do not understand you. Do you not like loud music and large crowds? Thankful-

ly, we have an alternative worship service that will surely meet your need and preferences.

Unfortunately, in an attempt to survive and be relevant in a consumeristic culture, the church has reduced itself to a peddler of goods and services. Rather than calling people to abandon their lives for the sake of seeking God's kingdom, we present God and His people as useful tools ready to be used for the advancement of their own little privatized kingdoms. As a result the church has become full of uncommitted, self-centered church attenders.

### **Stop & Think**

Can you think of three people who are not seeking God's kingdom? When is the last time you called them to abandon their own lives to pursue God's glory?

### **Respond with Praise and Thanks**

**Take a Moment:** Praise and thank God for patiently aligning you and those in your church with His purpose and mission.

***Example:** Father, You are worthy of my seeking. Your glory is worth my pursuit. Thank you from turning me away from myself and aligning my desires and goals with those of Your kingdom. Thank you for the men and women You sent to call me to follow you.*

### **Respond with Confession**

**Take a Moment:** Take a moment to confess to God your failure to call others to die to self and follow Jesus.

***Example:** Father, there are many around me who live for themselves both in and outside the church. I have failed to call them to the mission of Your kingdom. Sometimes I am afraid of being confrontational. Other times, I am afraid calling people to "die to self" might not go over well. Other times, I know I am not seeking Your kingdom my self. Forgive me for not boldly declaring Your gospel and calling the hearers to respond.*

### **Respond with Requests**

**Take a Moment:** Ask God to give you opportunity and boldness to declare the gospel and call others to seek the kingdom.

***Example:** Father, give me eyes to see the opportunities I have to share Your good promises and call them to respond. When I call people to follow You, align them with Your kingdom's purposes and practices. Continue to align my desires, thoughts and actions with Yours, and continue to raise up a people who seek Your kingdom both locally and globally.*

## WEEK 5 PART 3



## NEHEMIAH 7:66-73

The people make an investment

### Story: The people make an investment

As Nehemiah counted the people by family, something became very clear. The people of Israel were small. Just 42,360 people remained in and around Jerusalem. By no measurement were they great. God had promised to cut the great nation of Israel back to almost nothing, like a lumberjack would cut back a tree to a stump, and God had succeeded. Those who had returned were nothing more than a remnant. Even those who opposed them from the outside noticed their feebleness and willingly reminded them of their insignificance. From a human perspective to think a great nation would come from the small remnant and broken city would have been foolish. But the people of God followed their leader, Nehemiah, who knew the great God of heaven for whom nothing is too difficult. Acting by faith in the person of God rather than by measurement of their own potential, the people invested in the work. By faith, they invested in an abandoned city, a small people and a troubled community. Nothing in them or around them suggested an investment of any kind would be wise, but the people set their minds on the things unseen rather than the things that were seen. With the knowledge of God as their foundation the people invested when it would make no sense to invest.

### Truth: God assures His people

In Nehemiah's day, God assured His people by calling their attention to how He

**The LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for his treasured possession, out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth. It was not because you were more in number than any other people that the LORD set his love on you and chose you, for you were the fewest of all peoples,<sup>8</sup> but it is because the LORD loves you and is keeping the oath that he swore to your fathers... - Deut. 7:6-8**

chose them not because they were great or had potential but because He loved them. He reminded them of how He conquered Pharaoh and brought them out of slavery. He reminded them of how He sustained them in the wilderness, how he patiently withheld His wrath and how He brought them into the land flowing with milk and honey. He reminded them that even when He demonstrated His wrath and anger toward them He did not destroy them; instead, he spared a remnant and brought them back to their homes. These acts of God assured Nehemiah of God's ability and His willingness to do for Israel what He had promised.

Today God assures His church by calling us to look at Jesus. If God did not even spare His Son, what then could possibly

### Stop & Think

Can you identify two difficult situations you face?

How does knowing the greatness of God's love and power displayed at the cross and resurrection help you in the midst of difficulty?

separate us from His love? If the grave could not hold Jesus, what is too hard for Him? Just as in the days of Nehemiah, we live in a broken world full of reasons to doubt God's love and power, but amid all this God says, "Look at the cross! There My love is on display. At the cross there is the proof that I will do all I promised. At the cross there is all the evidence you need to know I am trustworthy. Do not live based on your present situation. Act in the assurance that I have overcome the world."



## Instruction: Invest in the seemingly hopeless

An obvious characteristic marks those who place their faith and assurance in God. They invest in the seemingly foolish. The wife assured of the love and power of God faithfully invests her time, energy and love into a broken marriage rather than abandon her husband for a more promising future with someone else. The parents assured of the love and power of God faithfully invest fifteen minutes after dinner to teach their children the Word of God trusting that He will act. The teenager convinced of the promise of God strategically risks his reputation to invest his lunch at school in the student shunned by the popular crowd. The retired couple convinced God will raise up a people from every nation invests their savings and ten of their last fifteen years taking the gospel to an unreached people group in the remote areas of Asia. If God will not act Sunday morning through the preaching of His Word, it would make sense for all of us to stay home and enjoy the day off.

But, if God will powerfully and lovingly act this Sunday, would we not be wise to invest a couple of hours.

Those assured of God's promise will invest in the seemingly foolish. They will

*Faith is not a general trust in something-or-other or someone-or-other; it is looking at our situation and our own frailty in the light of who God is and what He has done for us. Hope in the same way, is not a vague optimism: it is looking at the future in the light of the same God and what He has promised to do for us. – N. T. Wright*

befriend the outcast. They will bring up the gospel to those who seem the most opposed to it. They will give to the church regularly. They will invest in relationships that offer no foreseeable benefit to themselves. Why will they do this? They will do it trusting God will work. They do it trusting God will trans-

form. They do it confident that God's kingdom will move forward knowing that nothing is too hard for their God.

## Stop & Think

Can you think of one area, situation or relationship in which you should be investing more time, money, energy, etc., for the sake of the kingdom? Examples: A younger mom in your small group? A lost colleague? Starting a ministry to take care of widows at the church?

What will investing in this way cost you?

## Respond with Praise and Thanks

**Take a Moment:** Praise and thank God for His love and power.

**Example:** *Father, thank You for the cross of Christ that serves as a constant reminder that we are loved with steadfast love. Thank You for the resurrection that proves Your magnitude of Your power. Thank You for constantly reminding us of Your love and power as you feed us, clothe us and sustain us. We have every reason to be confident in You as we seek the advancement of Your kingdom.*

## Respond with Confession

**Take a Moment:** Confess to God your lack of faith and failure to invest the time, energy and resources He has entrusted to you for His kingdom's sake.

**Example:** *Father, each and every day so many opportunities to invest for Your kingdom's sake pass by. Yes, You have given me financial resources, time and energy but I am reluctant. I have a hard time trusting that an hour drinking coffee with a younger man will be worthwhile. I am reluctant to invest in a small group because last time I was hurt.*

## Respond with Requests

**Take a Moment:** Ask God to assure you of His power and love so you will confidently invest in the seemingly hopeless.

**Example:** *Father, assure me of Your love and power, so that my faith might grow. Give me enough assurance that I will confidently invest not only in those places where I can see how You could do something great, but also in those situations and people in which transformation seems unlikely and even impossible. Remind me nothing is impossible for You. Strengthen my hands and feet to invest in Your work trusting you will produce something amazing!*

## WEEK 6 PART 1



## NEHEMIAH 8:1-8

The people stand in  
the presence of God

### Story: The people stand in the presence of God

Once the people of Israel had settled into the homes, all the men, women and children able to comprehend the teaching gathered with a unified desire to hear Ezra the priests read to them the Word of God. With an attentive and excited crowd ready to listen, Ezra climbed onto a wooden platform and began. As he read from the Book of the Law of Moses - Genesis to Deuteronomy - more than a dozen other godly leaders assisted the crowd in understanding what had been read and its practical implications for their daily living. The reading of the Law and the praise of the "LORD, the great God," stirred the hearts of the people leading them to affirm what they had heard. The hearing of God's relationship with His people and His dealing with them throughout their history led them to bow in humble worship.

### Truth: God's Word makes Him known and experienced

When the people of God heard the Word of God, they entered the presence of God. This can be seen by the way they respond with worship, lifted hands, bowed heads, broken spirits and joy-filled praise. Yes, man can manufacture these activities, but that does not negate the genuine response produced by the revelation of God in His Word. When God desires to fellowship with His people, He speaks. When He invites them to sit in His presence, He commands them to listen. This has been true

*To read the Bible is not merely an exercise in intellectual comprehension; it's an opportunity to stand before the King of the universe. It's an opportunity to encounter Him. God communes through communication.*  
- Jonathan Leeman

throughout all the Scriptures and continues even today.

When God interacted with Adam and Eve, he did so by speaking. When He revealed Himself to Moses, He did so by "proclaiming His name." When he pursued His people, He did so by speaking through a prophet to whom He had given His words. In the New Testament, God clothed His word in flesh and dwelled with man. To meet with God is to hear God's Word. Because of this, the writers of the Psalms demonstrate both

**Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son... He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of His nature... Therefore we must pay close attention to what we have heard... - Heb. 1:1-3 & 2:1**

### Stop & Think

Can you remember a time when you certainly felt the presence of God? Where were you? What feelings did you experience?

What role did the Word of God play?

an intense love for God and an intense love for His word. God's people can enter His presence and experience His majesty because He has chosen to speak to them.

### Instruction: Gather together to encounter God

*Why do you go to church?* I am afraid those in the church come for all the wrong reasons. We come for advice. We come for encouragement. We come to worship. We come to be instructed. We come to obey. We come to give.



Yes, most the time those who gather as the church will participate in such activities, but the church makes a huge mistake when these activities are the reason for gathering rather than the product of their gathering.

In Scripture, God's people gather with one purpose – to enter His presence. The people of God gather with a desire to see, behold and know God. They come to be dumbfounded by the majesty and glory of the great and awesome God of heaven. They come to be satisfied with a glimpse of His beauty and splendor. They come to stand amazed at His wisdom and in awe of His love. When the purpose for gathering becomes to see and know God, the gathering will take on several characteristics.

1) The hearing of God's Word becomes primary. If we are not careful, the hour and a half we spend will be filled with what we do. We will sing. We will pray. We will testify. We will announce. We will perform. These activities will be present in a gathering of those who see God, but they will be secondary. Our first and primary activity will be listening, hearing and seeing as the messenger of God proclaims the Word of God.

2) God will be the topic. Increasingly the church has swallowed the lie that the Sunday sermon should be "practical and relevant." When they say, "Give us something relevant," they mean, "Tell us what to do." Discussing God, His ways and His character seems impractical, a waste of time and completely irrelevant to our marriages, our raising of children, our self-esteem issues, our problems, our hurts and our efforts to achieve the American dream. But a church who gathers to meet God will grow intolerant of sermons that say little to nothing about God, His Son, and His Holy Spirit.

3) Our activity will become a response. The more I study God's Word, the more I am confused as to why we structure our "worship services" so that they begin with our activity. Rather than gathering to hear the Word of God trusting it will produce within us the proper responses of praise, thanks, confession and requests, we gather to offer our praise and worship before it has been shaped, purified and ignited by a fresh view of our Creator. God initiates our activity by bringing us into His presence through the preaching of His Word. Let us come first primarily to hear and secondarily to respond appropriately.

## Stop & Think

How faithful are you to your church's time of cooperate worship?

How should expecting to meet God on Sunday morning change the way you prepare to attend? How should it change the way you participate?

Would you say your church makes meeting and encountering God the purpose of cooperate worship? Why or why not?

### Respond with Praise and Thanks

**Take a Moment:** Praise and thank God for inviting us into His presence through the preaching of His Word.

***Example:** Father, thank You for inviting us into Your presence. Thank You for Your Word which powerfully brings us into Your presence so we might behold Your glory and be satisfied with Your beauty. Thank You for sending us men who know Your Word and faithfully declare its truth accurately.*

### Respond with Confession

**Take a Moment:** Confess to God your failure to attend cooperate worship ready to encounter God

***Example:** Father, forgive my failure to attend cooperate gatherings to encounter you. If I did, I would listen to the sermon ready to hear you glory proclaimed rather than advice for my marriage or counseling for my grief. If I expected to encounter you, I would certainly be more faithful to attend, for what could be better than to stand in Your presence. If I expected to encounter You each Sunday, I would spend more time preparing my own heart and mind so when I arrive to meet you I might do so with clean hands and a pure heart.*

### Respond with Requests

**Take a Moment:** Ask God to speak powerfully when the church gathers. Ask Him to bring His people into His presence. Ask Him to cause His people to stand in awe and fear as they see Him.

***Example:** Father, when we gather as a church, speak powerfully through Your Word so we might behold You. Show us Your glory and initiate our responses of praise, thanksgiving and confession. Give us a sense of seriousness as we prepare to gather as Your people, in Your presence under the preaching of Your Word. Let us be a church that elevates the preaching and hearing of Your Word to its proper place.*

## WEEK 6 PART 2



## NEHEMIAH 8:9-12

The people weep in the presence of God

### Story: The people weep in the presence of God

As Ezra and the men taught and explained the Word of God, something strange happened; the people of God wept. Hearing the Word of God, the people come face to face with Him, and as they began to encounter the Holy and Righteous God, they naturally became aware of their guiltiness, sinfulness and corruption. As their understanding became clear, they saw themselves as they truly were - condemned before God the judge. They deserved death. They deserved condemnation. They had no defense before Him. There was no hope. God had given them a choice to obey and have life or to disobey and have death. All of them chose death.

As they heard and understood the Word of God, they could only weep over their desperate condition. God would save the righteous, but there was none among them. They wept from hopelessness. They mourned. They mourned so much that Nehemiah and Ezra had to tell them to stop! They instructed the people not to weep for that day, the first day of the seventh month, had been set apart by God as a day of rejoicing. Rather than mourning, the people should have been eating Rib-eye steaks, drinking wine and enjoying God's provision. They were to share with those around them, for God was the source of their joy.

### Truth: God's Word produces great humility

We have all seen one of those movie scenes when one of the characters franti-

*Man is never sufficiently touched and affected by the awareness of his lowly state until he has compared himself with God's majesty.*

– John Calvin

cally attempts to rescue one he loves. We watch him as he works tirelessly to administer CPR and other first aid techniques refusing to believe it is too late. Sadly however, the character eventually realizes what the audience already knows - the one he loved had passed. In spite of all his efforts, he could not revive her, and no matter how long or how hard he tried the outcome would be the same. Hope was lost. Once he realizes his work is in vain he weeps uncontrollably. He mourns. As long as he thought there was hope he could hold back the tears and keep going, but now he knows

**For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account.**

– Heb. 4:12-13

### Stop & Think

When was the last time you saw God break a proud and hard hearted man or woman and bring them to a place of brokenness over their sin and guiltiness? What role did the Word of God play?

Maybe you were not moved to tears, but when did God last bring you to a place of desperation in His presence? How did you respond?

the truth. This confrontation with the truth produces tears. The giving up of hope leads to weeping.

Right preaching, teaching and understanding of God's Word has a similar effect. God's Word comes in and shatters our self-righteousness. It shows us that we are not "OK." In His Word God reveals Himself as the Holy Judge whose just wrath burns hot against those who disobey and oppose Him. This truth will cause all who see their sin clearly to tremble in fear, for each will stand before Him and give account. The Word of



God crushes the arrogant and proud and stops the mouth of every man. His Word exposes our sinfulness and our certain destruction. The advancement of God's kingdom begins when God uses His Word to break the proud hearts of His people.

### **Instruction: Teach the Law lawfully**

We know that Ezra and the leaders taught the law correctly because it led the people to desperation and hopelessness rather than vain commitments and empty promises of obedience. Throughout the Scriptures, many taught the Law, but few taught the Law "lawfully" and in accord with the gospel as the apostle Paul wrote to Timothy. God gave the Law to expose sin. He gave the Law to bring condemnation, to reveal and make clear that "no one is righteous." When we use the Law incorrectly we leave the impression or thought that those who hear can keep it. We say stop lying. Stop cheating. Stop being hateful. Forgive. Do not covet. Do not lust. We attempt to convince our hearers that

they have failed, and then we compel them to make a commitment to do better, to try harder and to fail less often. In all of this, we miss the point and deceive our hearers. The point of the Law is to show that we cannot keep the Law. We cannot obey. We cannot escape judgement. Even if God were to give us a second chance, we would fail again. Sin is what we do. When the Law is used lawfully, the hearers are brought not to a place of renewed commitment but to a place of giving up.

**Now we know that the law is good, if one uses it lawfully, understanding this, that the law is not laid down for the just but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and sinners... in accordance with the gospel of the glory of the blessed God with which I have been entrusted.**

**– I Tim. 1:8-11**

## **Stop & Think**

In your experience, when you hear the commands of God taught by others, do you find yourself compelled to give up and cry out for mercy or to try harder to keep the command next time?

As you teach God's commands to others, how do you intentionally use the Law to expose their sin and urge them to cry out to God rather than to attempt to keep it in their own strength?

Can you think of a time you have used the Law to be judgmental or stir up obedience in others by creating fear in them?

## **Respond with Praise and Thanks**

**Take a Moment:** Praise and thank God for exposing your sin and for breaking your hard heart.

***Example:** Father, You are so holy, just and righteous. Before You no one can stand and live without being consumed by Your wrath. Thank You exposing my guiltiness. Thank You for taking my heart of rebellion and replacing it with a broken and contrite spirit. Thank you for piercing my heart with Your Word.*

## **Respond with Confession**

**Take a Moment:** Confess your failure to use God's Law in accord with His gospel both in Your own life and the lives of others.

***Example:** Father, rather than reading Your commands and being humbled, I arrogantly hear Your Word and commit in vain once again to keep Your commands better moving forward. Rather than being driven to cry out for mercy in light of my guiltiness, I rise up to attempt to obey in my own strength yet again. In a similar way, I encourage those I try to disciple—my wife, my children and others— to rely on their own strength to perfect themselves. Rather than using the Law to drive them to your grace and mercy, I use it as a measuring stick to separate the truly committed from the hypocrites.*

## **Respond with Requests**

**Take a Moment:** Ask God to continue to use His Word to expose the sin in your heart. Ask Him to teach you how to use the Law to bring others to a place of crying out for mercy and grace.

***Example:** Father, use Your Law to expose my sin. Increase the clarity with which I see my own sinful self. By exposing my sin, drive me to your mercy and grace. As I raise my children, disciple my friends and lead my wife, let me use the Law to lead them to Your mercy. Teach me to use your Word to bring those around me to a place of hopelessness before you. When we cry out to You for mercy, answer us!*

## WEEK 6 PART 3



## NEHEMIAH 8:13-18

The people rejoice in  
the presence of God

### Story: The people rejoice in the presence of God

On the first day of the seventh month, the people wept and mourned over their condemnation before the LORD. This weeping met the command from the leaders to rejoice and celebrate. At first, the command to rejoice might seem strange, just as commanding a woman who just learned of the cancer within her to be happy and celebrate might seem odd. But the strangeness of the command to rejoice dissolved on day two as the people gathered once again to hear the Word of God.

Through the hearing of God's Word, the people learned of the Feast of Booths. During the feast which would last eight days, the people were to live not in their homes but in tents as a memorial of the forty years the Israelites spent in the wilderness. They had lived in the wilderness for forty years because of their rebellion and lack of faith. Rather than trusting Him and entering the Promised Land, the people doubted and would not follow God. In response, God led them into the wilderness for the forty years so that all those over twenty years of age would die. Thankfully, in mercy God chose not to abandon His people or completely destroy them. Instead, he spared the next generation. He provided manna to eat. He provided water to drink. He kept their clothes from wearing out. He gave them shelter from the sun. He sustained them. This sparing and sustaining work of God's grace and mercy were marked by the observance of this feast,

and as they read of the feast in the Law, they were reminded why they could rejoice. Yes, they were guilty, but God had made them a promise. In the past, He had spared them. In the past, He had sustained them. In the past, He had taken them from being a poor, wandering collection of immigrants into a mighty nation for His glory. As they remembered this, the people could rejoice with great rejoicing even before things began to physically change. They could rejoice in hope, knowing God had once again spared them as a remnant, and just as He raised up the insignificant group of wilderness dwellers, He would be faithful to raise them up as well.

**If you, O Lord, should mark iniquities,**

**O Lord, who could stand?**

**But with you there is forgiveness,**

**that you may be feared.**

– Ps. 130:3-4

### Truth: God's Word produces great rejoicing

For those listening to Ezra, the Word not only brought condemnation through the Law, but it also revealed God's love through the remembrance of His saving work. While dreadful news of their condemned state and good news of God's

### Stop & Think

When was the last time God filled your heart with joy in cooperate worship? Over what did you rejoice?

What role did the Word of God play in your experiencing such joy?

love came to them through the slaughtering of innocent animals, the keeping of feasts and the remembering of God's past faithfulness, the knowledge of our sinfulness and the love God's love comes to us through the preaching of the Gospel. In the Gospel, we see the depth of our wickedness and magnitude of our sin in the work of Jesus on the cross. Our sin is so outrageous, so offensive and so worthy of wrath that God had to pour it out completely on the perfect and innocent one! Thankfully, however, those who see their wickedness and mourn may also see the glorious love of Jesus on the cross as He willingly and lovingly substituted Himself in our



place, so we might live. He took our sin, so we might have His righteousness. He took our death, so we might have His life. He took our curse, so we might have His blessing. God turned His back to Jesus, so He might turn His face toward us. Yes, the Word of God brings His people low in humility and sorrow, but His Word then elevates them to inexpressible joy in their Savior, Jesus Christ.

**Truth: Remember God's work by being baptized and observing the Lord's Supper.**

In the Old Testament, the people of God observed many feasts and rituals that filled up the calendar, but once Jesus came and died as the fulfillment of all the Law, He instructed the church to observe just two formal reminders: 1) Baptism and 2) The Lord's Supper.

1) Baptism. When a believer experiences baptism, He is submerged under water and then raised up again. The going under water pictures first the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ, the Savior of those who believe. The act of baptism also pictures the individual's "death to sin, the burial of the old life, and the resurrection to walk in newness of life in Jesus Christ." The baptism of all

who enter the church serves as a frequent reminder that our salvation comes by God and Him alone. He died so we might live. He rose so that we can be confident one day that we will rise with Him from the dead also.

2) The Lord's Supper. To observe the Lord's Supper, the people of God gather for a meal. As they break the bread, they do so remembering that Jesus willingly had His body broken in their place. As they drink from the cup, they do so remembering that Jesus' blood was shed as the atoning sacrifice for their sins. This remembering renews the church's repentance of sin as they remember Jesus died so they might be freed from sin. This memorial also renews the church's faith as they remember that by His death alone do they have hope of forgiveness and resurrection from death. Those who participate are also renewed in the commitment to the church as the broken bread and wine remind the great cost Christ paid for the church.

Remembering the saving work of God in Jesus Christ could not be more important. Often the gospel is seen as an entry in the church rather than the power by which God brings about transformation over the life of the believer. If we

are not careful to remember the work of Christ on the cross, we will soon stop relying on God's work and begin to rely on ourselves (Gal. 3:1-3).

## Stop & Think

Have you been baptized? When? Who baptized you?

Often in the Baptist Tradition, churches observe the Lord's Supper only a few times a year. How do you regularly remember the saving work of Jesus in your own life? When is the last time you intentionally thought about your sin before God and His work of salvation?

## Respond with Praise and Thanks

**Take a Moment:** Praise and thank God for sending Jesus to save you from the wrathful judgment of God.

*Example: Father, You know the wickedness of my heart. Before You I am condemned. Against You and You alone have I sinned. Only by the blood of Jesus am I forgiven. By His blood Your just wrath has been satisfied. He took the curse of my sin so I could have the blessing of His sinless life. Thank You for revealing Jesus as my Savior! In Him, I have great joy!*

## Respond with Confession

**Take a Moment:** Confess to God your failure to remember His saving work in your life on a regular basis, whether you have failed to observe one of the reminders He has commanded or you have failed to remember with regularity.

*Example: Father, for some reason I have failed to follow Your command and be baptized. I cannot remember the last time I participated in communion. My failure to observe these reminders really point to a lack of remembrance of Your salvation. I am so familiar with the story of the cross and resurrection that rarely do I set aside time to remember and reflect on the Your great saving Work.*

## Respond with Requests

**Take a Moment:** Ask God to teach you the discipline of stopping to remember His saving work in your life.

*Example: Father, teach me to meditate on Your great salvation. Do not let the good news of the cross become so common in my life that it fails to move me to sorrow over my sin and rejoice in Jesus. Teach me the discipline of pausing and remembering. Help me lead others to remember Your great salvation as well. Let it be always on my lips and present in my thoughts. Let Your baptism and supper be occasions for joy in Your church.*

## WEEK 7 PART 1



## NEHEMIAH 9:1-8

### The people declare the character of God

#### Story: The people declare the character of God

For nearly a month, the Israelites had been gathering daily for the hearing and understanding of God's Word. This hearing and understanding had stirred and initiated responses of worship, confession and rejoicing. One moment they would be shouting for joy and in another they would be weeping in sorrow.

In the midst of all the emotions of joy and sorrow, the Levites began to cry out to the LORD their God! As they poured out their hearts to God, they instructed the people to stand and join them. Together they began to pray as Nehemiah did when he first heard of Israel's desperate situation. They acknowledged to whom they prayed. They prayed to Yahweh, the LORD who is the Only True God. All things were made by Him and all things are preserved by Him. He is king and all the host of heaven praise and worship Him without ceasing. The Creator was not distant from them, but He had chosen them by choosing their father, Abraham. To them, God chose to give them promise and favor. This God, the God with all power and authority is for them.

#### Truth: God's Word informs His people

Ezra led the people in a magnificent prayer that demonstrated the people's great depth of theology. This great knowledge of God came through His working through His Word as the people listened to Ezra and the leader's reading and explaining it, for **faith producing**

*knowledge of God can only come through the hearing of His Word (Heb. 10:17).*

*It is necessary to apply to Scripture, in order to learn the sure marks which distinguish God, as the Creator of the world, from the whole herd of fictitious gods. – John Calvin*

In Romans 1, the apostle Paul explains that man knows enough about God through examining creation to be held accountable for their rebellion against Him, but this knowledge of God is clouded, twisted and ultimately rejected because in man's heart exists pure hatred of Him. Their minds have been blinded to the truth and no one can see and know God accurately unless He reveals Himself through His Word. His Name, His identity must be proclaimed to us.

#### Instruction: Diligently study the character of God

Ezra and the leadership led the people in an awesome moment of worship and praise, but this moment of worship could not be categorized as spontaneous. Instead, the high moment of awe and wonder in the presence of God came through tedious studying, listening and lengthy explaining.

Believe it or not information expands and deepens our capacity to experience awe and amazement. Knowing the sun

#### Stop & Think

What truth about God do you find the hardest to understand or believe?

When you talk to unbelievers about God, what questions do they ask? What objections and/or arguments do they present against God and/or Christianity?

**Thus says the LORD: "Let not the wise man boast in his wisdom, let not the mighty man boast in his might, let not the rich man boast in his riches, but let him who boasts boast in this, that he understands and knows me, that I am the LORD who practices steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth. For in these things I delight, declares the LORD." - Jer. 9:23-24**

is far away is one thing, but to know that the sun is 93,000,000 miles away is another. To know your favorite football team won the championship might produce some joy, but knowing they have won 5 out of the last 9 heightens that joy. **When something or someone captivates our awe and wonder, we naturally seek to learn more about it, trusting more knowledge will enhance our joy, not lessen it.**

Strangely in the church, we have disconnected studying, learning and thinking from worship. The Scriptures speak of God's saving work as so splendid and so mysterious that even the angels long to

*Emotion without truth produces empty frenzy and cultivates shallow people who refuse the discipline of rigorous thought. But true worship comes from people who are deeply emotional and who love deep and sound doctrine. Strong affections for God rooted in truth are the bone and marrow of biblical worship.*

- John Piper

study and understand it, yet God's people so often remain content with a basic and elementary understanding of their Creator and Savior. The apostle Paul desired that his readers would come to know the height, depth and width of God's love which will always go far beyond anyone's full comprehension, yet the study habits of many Christians would suggest that they have already come to the limits of God's wisdom, love and work and that nothing more is left for them to learn.

When Christians begin to encounter the awesomeness of God, they stop studying His Word for its usefulness in the practice of every-day living, and they begin studying it for the purpose of beholding and enjoying Him through learning real statements of truth. Yes, **experiencing God's presence involves much more than knowing information, but all encounters with God include rather than exclude information.** One's deepening relationship with God always corresponds with a deepening knowledge of Him. Get a pen, a notebook and your Bible and set out to learn the cold hard facts about God. Download sermons. Read articles. Listen to

people who might challenge the way you have always thought. Become a student who majors in theology.

### Stop & Think

Do you consider yourself a theologian? Why or why not?

If we asked your family members how diligently you study God's Word, what would they say?

What keeps you from being even more diligent and consistent in studying God's Word?

What does the reason you gave say about you and your relationship with God?

### Respond with Praise and Thanks

**Take a Moment:** Praise and thank God for teaching you about Himself.

**Example:** *Father, I used to stumble around in the darkness, but now You have taught me about Yourself. Thank You for giving me a knowledge of the truth. Thank You for continually increasing my knowledge of Your love, power, holiness and faithfulness. You are so great that we will never be able to know You fully, but by Your grace we can know you truly! Thank You for not leaving us in the dark.*

### Respond with Confession

**Take a Moment:** Confess to God your failure to diligently study His Word.

**Example:** *Graciously You have spoken to us in Your Word, yet I find so many other activities to occupy my time that I have little left to study the Scriptures. I have been content to know the a little bit about You. Outside of the weekly sermon, I spend very little time seeking to know and understand you through diligent study. It is not that I cannot understand, I just do not want to take the time and effort. I use many excuses about time and difficulty, but truly I just do not find it that important or worthwhile.*

### Respond with Requests

**Take a Moment:** Ask God to teach you the discipline of study His Word to know Him. Ask Him to give you knowledge and understanding along with fear and awe.

**Example:** *Father, though my study habits suggest otherwise, I do have a desire to know You in a greater way. Give me faith to trust that my time spent in study will lead to greater joy in the knowledge of You. Produce within me a willingness to do the difficult and sometimes tedious work of digging and searching through reading and studying. As I learn of you, protect me from pride and clothe me with humility.*



## WEEK 7 PART 2



## NEHEMIAH 9:9-31

The people recall the  
works of God

### Story: The people recall the works of God

Eventually, the focus of the people's prayer transitioned from the identity of the LORD as the all powerful and covenant keeping God to His great and awesome deeds. In love, this God saw their affliction in Egypt and He rescued them. Before their eyes, He demonstrated His power by rolling back the Red Sea and bringing it down on top of Pharaoh. Graciously He led them through the wilderness by fire in the night and a cloud of shade during the day. By grace, He descended down on Mount Sinai to meet with them and speak to them. He left them not in darkness and ignorance, but as a loving Father, He gave good and wise instruction, so they might do well and prosper. Graciously, He supplied their needs. He gave food for their hunger and water for their thirst. He taught them to rest knowing that He would be faithful to meet their needs. When they disobeyed, He was slow to anger, patient, ready to forgive and steadfast in love. Even when they chose to worship an image made with their hands, He did not abandon them in the wilderness. Even in their rebellion, He fed and clothed them. They certainly did not deserve His favor, but He did not withhold His blessing, His protection and His presence. Many times He would have been just to pour out His wrath and destroy them, but this God, the LORD chose to show them mercy.

### Truth: God's Word reminds His people

Thankfully God did not only reveal Himself to His people by a submitting to them a list of His qualities as one would

do in a profile on a dating website or carefully worded resume. Yes, He has plainly said, "I am faithful. I am loving. I am powerful," but He has also gone beyond telling us who He is. He has chosen to interact and engage with His creation in such a way we know and experience Him.

**And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth... For from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known. – Jn. 1:14-18**

He claims all authority and power belong to Him, and then He demonstrated that power by parting the Red Sea, bringing to ruin invincible kings, healing lepers, stopping the storm with His command, turning water into wine and raising himself from the dead. He claimed, "I am patient", and then sent prophet after prophet to warn of His wrath and judgment, so some might repent. He claimed, "I am the ultimate provider," and then He brought the crop producing rain for both the just and the unjust, preserved the soles of His people's sandals in the desert and provided water from rocks. He claimed, "I am humble," and then He stepped down off

### Stop & Think

What is your favorite story in the Bible?

Of what truth about God does this story remind you?

What truth(s) about God do you tend to forget?

His throne to become the servant of sinners and death. He declared, "I am love," and then went to the cross in the place of His people to take on their sin and curse, so they might have His righteousness and life. God is Yahweh, the ruler of creation who loves His covenant people, and amazingly He has chosen to make Himself known to them by demonstrating His nature through great and awesome deeds.

### Instruction: Intentionally recall the works of God

In nearly every marriage book I have read, I have encountered a similar piece of advice. In one way or another, the

writer encourages the husband and wife to regularly recall the good of their spouse. They suggest practices such as writing regular thank you notes or setting aside time to right down 100 things they love about the other. While the suggested practice changes from book to book, the idea remains the same - intentionally remember the good of your spouse. This instruction is wise because we have a tendency to see, hear and respond to the negative. My wife can serve me graciously and thoughtfully all week, but the moment she forgot to do what I asked I lose sight of her goodness and see the negative. If I fail to remember and recall the good, my view of her will slowly become less confident in her love and goodness.

The same is true in our relationship with God. He has done so much for us, yet the moment something goes wrong doubt fill our minds. Does He love us? Does He care for us? Is He good? Is He really in control? The cure to these thoughts and doubts comes through the remembrance of what He has done. Regular study of God's work in His Word reminds us of His love as displayed at the cross. In His word we are reminded of His faithfulness, His power and His goodness. The apostle Paul understood

**I will remember the deeds of the LORD; yes, I will remember your wonders of old.**

**I will ponder all your work, and meditate on your mighty deeds.**

—Ps. 77:11-15

the need for believers to know and remember the work of God in their lives, especially the Work He has done in Christ at the cross. Knowing the need to remember, Paul began each of his letters to churches with an exposition on the nature of God in His work. In the book of Romans, he spent the first 10 and a half chapters explaining in great systematic detail the mercy, love and wisdom of God as displayed in His work. By the end of his reflection, Paul could not contain His joy and awe as he wrote, "Oh the depths of the riches and wisdom of knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and how inscrutable His ways!" (Rom. 11:33). Sadly, in the church we desire the emotion, passion and experience of awe found in Romans 11:33-36, but we see little to no value wrestling with the awesome theology and record of God's work found in the

previous 11 chapters. If we want to become a people passionate about God filled with unspeakable and abounding joy, we must be a people who intentionally fix our minds on Him and His work through the regular hearing, reading and studying of His Word. Remember the Lord by knowing His book!

### Stop & Think

Can you think of a time you responded to a situation wrongly? What truths about God did you ignore, forget or reject as you acted wrongly?

Do you do anything to regularly remind yourself of God's work in your life? Can you think of one or two ways you could better keep a record for you and your family to remind you of God's work?

### Respond with Praise and Thanks

**Take a Moment:** Praise and thank God for not only telling us who He is but for also showing us who He is through relating to us.

**Example:** Father, You are truly powerful, loving, merciful, gracious, righteous and just. Thank You for entering our world to show us Your mercy. Thank You for going to the cross to show us Your love. Thank You for parting the Red Sea to demonstrate Your power. Thank You for not remaining distant. You have entered into our world to show us Your glory! Thank You.

### Respond with Confession

**Take a Moment:** Confess your failure to remember and recall His works in your life.

**Example:** Father, I am so busy doing my "work" that I so easily forget or do not even acknowledge all the wondrous things you are doing around me. Rather than going to Your Word to be reminded of all You have done, I come to Your Word in a hurry hoping it will serve me in some way. After a quick reading of the "verse of the day," I rush off to accomplish my tasks without giving any thought to the multitude of ways you have worked around me. This leaves me prone to forget Your love and power.

### Respond with Requests

**Take a Moment:** Ask God to teach you the discipline and importance of pausing to remember His works in your life.

**Example:** Father, give me enough faith to carve out a few minutes in my day to remember and record what You have done. Help me to lead my family in remembering and acknowledging Your actions. Teach us to stand in awe of Your wondrous deeds. Let Your praise be on our lips. Let the moments of remembrance equip us to be quick to share and testify about what You have done. Cause us to consider Your works. Teach us to see Your hand and not take Your work for granted.

## WEEK 7 PART 3



## NEHEMIAH 9:32-37

### The people trust God

#### Story: The people trust God

After recalling who God is and what God has done, the people concluded their prayer by requesting salvation and restoration. They make their request on the basis that as the Creator, nothing is impossible for God. If He could destroy Pharaoh, He could surely free them from their current slavery and restore them to greatness once again for His Name's sake. They also make their request on the basis of God's past work. In the past, He has shown them mercy. In the past, He had been slow to anger. In the past, He showed unmerited favor. In the past, He did not abandon them when they deserved to be cut off from His presence. This remembrance of God and His work emboldened them to request His merciful and gracious help once again. This knowledge allowed them to ask for and expect rescue and restoration while also in the same moment confess their sin. They can say honestly, we are guilty, and You are just to destroy us, but please hear our cry for we know you can save us and we know you love us: a steadfast, faithful and unending love. In this lies the power to rejoice. When the trouble around them and the sin within them offered no hope for the future, they were able to rest from their weeping and rejoice for they hoped not in chariots or horses or men or any other form of creation. Instead, they hoped in the LORD.

#### Story: God encourages His people

After seeing who God is and what God had done, the people found great assur-

ance that He would act once again on their behalf. This assurance that God would act again came not out of a confidence in their efforts and obedience, for they understood how guilty they were and how just God was to deal harshly with them. Instead, their faith and confidence stemmed from God's revelation of Himself and His past works. He was Yahweh. We have seen His love, patience, power and forgiveness in the past. He does not change. He will do what he says; therefore, we can ask even now, LORD save us!

*Unfortunately our degree of trust in God often lies more in our ability to foresee a way in which He might answer our prayers than in our belief in His power. If we can't see how He can answer, we tend to doubt that He will answer.*

– Jerry Bridges

As the people heard the Word of God, they experienced Him. As they experienced Him, they learned of His character and were reminded of His works. In view of His character and in view of His Works, they called out to God confident He would act on their behalf. Throughout the Scriptures we see that the confident faith of God's people rests on the knowledge and experience of Him.

#### Stop & Think

Can you think of a time when you had no other option but to cry out to God for help?

Can you think of a time, God heard your cry and brought deliverance in the situation?

Is there a situation, about which you are still crying out to God and in which you are still waiting for Him to bring deliverance?

**Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand; do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. – Phil. 4:5-7**



## Instruction: Confidently Trust God

As those who gathered to hear the teaching of Ezra, every one of us faces brokenness and ruin. Each one of us wrestles with those things which trouble our hearts and fill us with shame. Maybe you experience this brokenness in the home. Perhaps your greatest afflictions come from the work environment. Maybe a romantic relationship has you in turmoil. Maybe you have experienced crushed dreams, devastating disappointment or years of investment and endurance which have yet to produce any measurable results. In our struggles and pain, we will turn to place our trust in something. We will turn to a spouse, a new employer, a new parenting technique, a new habit, a new toy, a new rehab center, a new counselor, a new church or a new self. Each one of us is trusting something to help us achieve whatever version of the “good life” we have imagined. Unfortunately, all these potential saviors lack power and ability. They will not serve. They will not love. They will not change. They will only leave us with greater pain, greater brokenness, greater trouble and greater shame. When God’s people are remind-

ed of His character and works through the Word they are encouraged to trust in the LORD, the one and only. The great and awesome God who remains faithful to His promise in unwavering, steadfast love. In view of God’s mercy, power, love and grace, only a fool would turn to the creation rather than the Creator for hope and rescue. Do not be lured in by the false hope offered by the

**Their idols are silver and gold, The work of human hands.**

**They have mouths, but do not speak; eyes, but do not see.**

**They have ears, but do not hear; noses, but do not smell.**

**They have hands, but do not feel; feet, but do not walk; and they do not make a sound in their throat.**

**Those who make them become like them; so do all who trust in them.**

**O Israel, trust in the LORD!**

**- Ps. 115:1**

multitude of gods created by man. In your trouble, I urge you, “trust in the Name of the LORD our God.”

## Stop & Think

When you face a crisis or difficulty at home, other than God who or what do you tend to look to for help?

At work?

At church?

When this week did you place your hope in something other than God? What did you need or want, and to whom or what did you turn?

## Respond with Praise and Thanks

**Take a Moment:** Praise and thank God for giving you plenty of reason to trust Him.

***Example:** Father, by revealing Your character and demonstrating it through Your many works, You have made clear that we, Your people, can cry out to you for help with confidence that You will answer. Even in our imperfection and inconsistent obedience, You love us patiently. You have proven time and again that You are both willing and able to deliver us. You have promised You will, and all You promise You will do.*

## Respond with Confession

**Take a Moment:** Confess to God your idolatry. Confess your failure to trust Him.

***Example:** Father, even after you prove your power and love over and over, I still find myself turning to other people and things for help. Rather than running and crying out to you, I determine I have little time for prayer. I run off to serve all the little false gods to which I have become a slave in hopes that they will rescue me from my current situation and bring about improvement.*

## Respond with Requests

**Take a Moment:** Ask God to give you an unshakable confidence in Him character.

***Example:** Father, make it my instinct to turn to You in the face of trial and difficulty. Cause me to cry out to You for help. Give me faith to wait for You to act. Give me eyes to see the false hope offered by the multitude of other gods which have no power to deliver on their promises. Do not let me be fooled. Raise up a people who out of confidence in Your love and power come together to lift up their voices in a cry of dependence upon you. Deliver us from our false gods, and comfort us with the truth about who You are and what You have done.*

## WEEK 8 PART 1



### NEHEMIAH

9:38-10:27

The people returned  
to God

#### Story | The people returned to God

For three weeks the people taught, listened, explained and understood the Word of God. The hearing of God's Word, led to praise and prayer which eventually gave way to action. After the conclusion of their prayer, the people united together to make a "firm" covenant with the LORD. Through the preaching of God's Word, the people saw again the power and love of God and based on this knowledge the people made a covenant. Their covenant marked a formal return to the LORD in faith that He would receive them back, and as evidence of their seriousness, the leaders sealed the document with the names of the princes, Levites, priests and Nehemiah. By faith in the love and mercy of God the people drew near to Him, confident He would accept them rather than reject them.

#### Truth | God's Word welcomes His people

As a child, I spent hours throwing a ball against the side of the garage, so I might perfect the skills of a shortstop. I remember one day throwing the ball wildly and then watching the ball travel in slow motion through the garage door window into the garage where my dad was working. Immediately, I was frozen in fear. What would he do? Would he ban me from ever touching another ball? Would he exile me to

my room? Would he...? My transgression brought uncertainty into our relationship and this uncertainty left me paralyzed by fear. I knew not what to do. I felt like running inside and hiding. I certainly was not going into the garage.

**O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing! – Mat. 23:37**

When God uses His Word to expose our sins and our transgressions as He exposed the sins of Nehemiah and the people, we naturally respond in fear as did men such as Isaiah, Job, Peter and John. Like Adam and Eve, knowledge of our sin compels us to run from the presence of God in fear rather than to the presence of God in faith. What we discover in God's Word is contrary to our fears. While we feel an urge to run, God extends an invitation. He says come to me. You are welcome in my presence. He says, "I chose you. I made you. I will not forsake you. I will not destroy you. I am ready to forgive, and I am ready to reconcile." Like the father of the prodigal son,

#### Stop & Think

*What sin in your life do you seem to commit over and over again, so much so the thought of it brings shame?*

*When is the last time you wrestled with doubts that God would use you, take you back, or still love you?*

*If you read about the experiences of Christians who progressed in their relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ beyond the norm, you will note the combination of a deep sense of sin and failure together with a deep appreciation for what God accomplished in Christ Jesus. – Don Matzat*

God the Father invites His people to return to Him and be restored.

### Instruction | Draw near to God

No greater news exist than the good news found in the gospel. The glorious Creator of the universe has created a way for us to draw near to Him and enjoy His presence without being consumed by His just and righteous wrath. Only in Him, can one find life. Only in Him, one can find joy. Only in Him, one can know peace. Only in Him, can one experience satisfaction. He alone is sufficient for all your needs, and through the cross of Christ, He has secured access to His presence for all who will draw near to Him by faith. Therefore, let us pursue Him. Let us come before Him with confidence. Let us stop filling our calendars with the pursuit of much lesser pleasures. Let us stop making our relationship with Him about our effort to earn His favor. With confidence in His work and the shedding of His blood, let us by faith seek to sit in His presence and know Him. Those

who see their sin and then take refuge in the love of Christ draw near to God by faith trusting He will take them back.

**Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.**  
– Heb. 10:19-22

### Stop & Think

*How confidently do you draw near to God? How often? How consistently? What does your effort to draw near to God—or lack of it—reveal about your love for Him?*

*Often our love for God wanes when our awareness of our sin and the magnitude of God's forgiveness escapes our thoughts. Those who have been forgiven much will love much. Take a moment and ask God to show you **three** sins in your own life which you have not yet acknowledged and confessed to God; list them and then rest in God's forgiveness!*

1.

2.

3.

### Respond with Praise and Thanks

**Take a Moment:** Praise and thank God for Jesus Christ who has through His blood secured our privilege to enter into God's presence.

**Example:** *Father, You are holy, righteous and just. We are sinners worthy of Your wrath and condemnation. You are a consuming fire which we could not approach if it were not for the cross of Jesus. You are so merciful, patient, slow to anger and steadfast in love. We fail, and you forgive. Thank You for making Yourself accessible to us!*

### Respond with Confession

**Take a Moment:** Confess to God your failure to draw near to Him by faith.

**Example:** *Father, I have tried to base our relationship off my performance. I try to draw closer by studying harder, attending church more faithfully, walking in Your commands more consistently. These things are good activities but they miss the mark when I trust my performance betters my standing with You. Forgive me for turning our relationship into something other than one founded on Your grace, love and forgiveness. Forgive me for resting in my own work rather than the work Jesus accomplished at the cross.*

### Respond with Requests

**Take a Moment:** Ask God to increase your faith, and to respond to your drawing near to Him with His drawing near to you.

**Example:** *Father give me faith and confidence in Your love so I will draw near to You by faith. You have promised that if I draw near to You, You will draw near to me. Do the same in my family and church. Let us be a people who trust not in our own work but in the work of You Son at the cross. Let us not fall back in fear and reliance upon ourselves to earn Your favor or escape Your wrath. Thank You again for the precious blood of Christ which allows us to enter with confidence into Your presence.*



## WEEK 8 PART 2



### NEHEMIAH

10:28-29

The people  
returned to  
God's Law

#### Story | The people return to God's Law

Not only did the Word of God compel the people to draw near to Him, but the Word of God transformed them in a radical way. In the past, they had been rebellious, stiff-necked, hard-hearted and disobedient. For centuries and generations, God invited His people to return to Him, but each invitation to return to Him and His covenantal fellowship fell on hard, stony hearts. God made himself available to His people. He assured them that if they would just return to Him, he would welcome them back, but they loved other gods. They adored the created rather than the Creator. Yes, God extended the invitation, "Come and enter my fellowship," but no, the people refused. Amazingly, God sovereignly began to conquer their hostile hearts as Ezra and the leaders preached and taught the people God's Word. Like rain which falls and transforms a wasteland into a forest, so God's Word fell on the hearts of the people and transformed hard, rebellious hearts into loving and submissive hearts. With hearts affected by the Word of God, the people willingly committed to "observe and do all the commandments of the LORD [their] Lord and His rules and statutes."

#### Truth | God's Word changes His people

In the Scriptures, obedience is always tied to love. Love is not obedience, but love is always accompanied by obedience and submission. Jesus said, "**If you love me, you will keep** my commandments." He also said, "You shall **love the Lord**

**your God** with all your heart and with all your mind... And... You shall love your neighbor as yourself... **On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets**" (Mat. 22:36-40). The apostle John wrote that you can be confident you know God and love God because you keep His commands and they are not a burden.

*The magnitude of the change that must be wrought in a person before he is willing to come to Christ cannot be accomplished by force or the coercion of his will. It requires the supernatural recreating work of the Holy Spirit in regeneration. – Paul Washer*

Jesus himself did not introduce this connection between love and obedience; instead, God speaking through His prophets made this connection all throughout the Old Testament. Perhaps God spoke of this most clearly through Moses, "The LORD your God **will circumcise your heart** and the heart of your offspring, **so that you will love the LORD your God** with all your heart and with all your soul... and **you shall again obey** the voice of the LORD **and keep all his commandments** that I command you today" (Deut. 30:6-8). God's people will obey Him because He will so affect their heart that they love Him. He will reach down and change their heart so that He becomes what they desire, what they fear, what they adore, what they passionately pursue. How will He

#### Stop & Think

Which areas of your life has God most radically changed your conduct and behavior?

How has your God changed your life style in your home? At school or work? In leisure time?

do this? He will do so by giving their heart eyes to see by faith His supreme value, beauty, glory, worth and splendor. He will shine the light so they might see Him as the supreme treasure He truly is. He will show Himself worthy of their worship and affection, and He will do all of this through the preaching and teaching of His Word. Through the Word, His people will receive faith to believe. Through the announcement of the Gospel, God will reveal Himself as gloriously desirable. Through His Word, He creates within His people a love for Himself, and when He does they turn to Him with a posture of willing submission.

When God makes clear His great power and steadfast love, His people become love-struck. This love for God empowers His people and drives them to obedience. ***Un-like a servant driven to obedience to a master whom he hates, the people of God are drawn to obedience as a lover who pursues and submits to the will of his beloved.***

*The first thing we need to realize is that God's Word is an extension of Himself. To hear His Words... is to hear Him. To obey His Words is to obey Him... He so identifies Himself with His words that our response to His Words is our response to Him. - Jonathan Leeman*

### Instruction | Return to God's Instruction

How does one return to God? He does so by returning to His Word. God has spoken. He has instructed. He has commanded. He has communicated with us. Thinking we could return to Him while stiffening our necks in rebellion against

His Word would be as foolish as a husband thinking he could pursue joy filled relationship with his wife while refusing to find joy and delight in her expressed desires, requests, wants and instructions. When one ignores and disregards our words and our expressed wishes, we take it personally. We understand a rejection of our words as a rejection of us. In the

**The law of the LORD is perfect,  
reviving the soul...  
the precepts of the LORD are right,  
rejoicing the heart;  
the commandment of the LORD is pure,  
enlightening the eyes...  
the rules of the LORD are true,  
and righteous altogether.  
More to be desired are they than gold... sweeter also than honey  
and drippings of the honeycomb  
... in keeping them there is great reward. - Ps. 19:7-11**

same way, God has spoken. He has instructed. He has revealed His will and His ways. To return to the Lord means to return to His Word. Do you wish to know greater intimacy with God? Discover what He instructs and begin to walk in those instructions.

### Stop & Think

Which commands of God do you struggle most to obey?

What desires of yours run contrary to these commands?

What would walking in God's commands require of you moving forward?

### Respond with Praise and Thanks

**Take a Moment:** Praise and thank God for changing you through His Word.

**Example:** Father, You Word is powerful and able to save the worst of sinners. Thank You for speaking to me with power. Through Your Word and the working of Your Spirit, we are not who we used to be. Through Your Word, You have replaced my hard, rebellious heart with a heart of affection and love for You. As a result, You have done what the Law could not do; You have caused me to love Your Law and to walk in Your ways. Thank You for not leaving me as I was, but making me who I am.

### Respond with Confession

**Take a Moment:** Confess to God your failure to walk in His ways.

**Example:** Father, if I am honest, I despise Your instruction. My fleshly desires rage against Your Law and commands, and most the time it wins. I want intimacy with You. I desire to stand in Your presence. I long for moments of refreshing. I desire to be near You, but Your Law about relationships, Your order for the family, Your design for the church, Your placement of authority all challenge me. Forgive me for trying to know and enjoy You without also returning to Your Word. Any attempt to return to You and ignore Your Law is vain. Forgive my disregard for Your instruction.

### Respond with Requests

**Take a Moment:** Ask God to give you a love for His instruction and to empower you to keep His commands.

**Example:** Father, cause me to walk in Your ways. Give me a love for Your judgments and commands. So change my heart that I will walk in Your Law and will not find it burdensome. To return to You is to return to Your Law. Draw me to Yourself while also shaping my conduct in such away it complies with Your Law rather than rebels against it. Do this not only in me but in my family and church. Powerfully change us through Your Word.

## WEEK 8 PART 3



### NEHEMIAH 10:30-39

The people returned to  
God as one

#### Story | The people returned to God as one

In addition to compelling the people to draw near to God and empowering them to obey, the hearing of God's Word also united them as one. Together with one voice, they committed, "We obligate ourselves to not marry foreigners, to not dishonor the Sabbath and to not neglect the temple and those who serve in it." They saw themselves as one. As one they would either be pure or impure. As one, they would either disobey or obey. Individual obedience and purity found its significance in how it affected the whole. Each man, woman and all others who could understand saw himself or herself as one piece of the much larger whole. As a result, the purity of the entire community became everyone's responsibility and concern.

#### Truth | God's Word unites His people

In Nehemiah 9:38-10:39, the pronouns we and our are used an amazing 34 times. When God's Word was spoken and the people were renewed a great sense of oneness fell on them. They did not speak of my God, my cattle, my gifts, my sin or my family. Instead, I and mine were replaced with we and ours. The people understood their relating to God not on an individualistic level but on a corporate level. In this text we find no thought of one's "personal relationship with God." The people thought of the obligation to worship pursue and relate to Yahweh as a collective unit rather

than isolated individuals. This unified community is the result of God's work. He alone makes one man out of many. When He works, He brings people into His family. He unites them with Christ and His people. He understands purity as not just an individual matter but a collective issue. He makes this one people united in 1) awe of God 2) confession of sin 3) pursuit of God and 4) submission to His Word. In the church, our individuality gets swallowed up by the community of the church. We are no longer our own but we are just one member of a much larger and more diverse body.

[Jesus] is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility. And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near. For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father. So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God—Eph. 2:15-19

#### Stop & Think

*On a scale of 1-10, how connected / unified to the church would you say you are? [1 being not unified at all and 10 being as unified as we could possibly be.]*

*Why did you select the number you did?*

*In what areas do you see examples of unity and oneness in your church?*

#### Instruction | Make purity and obedience a corporate issue

Making purity a corporate issue involves two major shifts in thinking. **First, I see my sin in relationship to the rest of the body.** My pride, selfishness, addiction and laziness are not individual matters. I cannot privatize my sin while attempting to manage, hide or minimize it. Like an infection in my little toe threatens the whole body if not treated, so my sin threatens the spiritual health of the whole body of Christ. **Those who see the seriousness of sin in relationship to the whole body will welcome the accountability of others. They**



**will desire for others to know them intimately so that sin can be identified and conquered.** They will not hide their weaknesses and the sins which they more commonly commit. Like a concerned patient who seeks the observation, counsel and treatment of others equipped to treat symptoms, so the people of God seek the observation, counsel and treatment of others. The sin that rages within you cannot be overcome through your own strength. Your sin is a church matter. Place yourself in intentional relationship so that others may assist you in making war against the flesh.

**Second, see the sin of others in relationship to the rest of the body. Those who do will confront the sin of other professing believers swiftly, willingly and truthfully.** Do not be mistaken, God has instructed the church on how to deal with sin in the body, so those who confront sin should do so according to the methods prescribed by God; however, the fact that God has instructed us to deal with others' sin proves that He not only allows but expects and commands for sin in the body to be confronted! In a church full of

sinners, sin happens. Anyone engaged in the body will learn of the sin of others, and they will take one of three actions. They will ignore it, gossip about it, or confront it. God takes the purity of His people seriously. Should His people not do the same? You may not see how the fornication of a college student affects your life, your family and your individual goals. But, if you have been united with Christ to pursue the fame of God's name and the good of God's people, you will see how even the slightest manifestation of man's wickedness in the body threatens the church and its mission.

**Now I am writing to you not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother if he is guilty of sexual immorality or greed, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or swindler—not even to eat with such a one. For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Is it not those inside the church whom you are to judge? God judges those outside. “Purge the evil person from among you.” - 1 Cor. 5:11-13**

## Stop & Think

How are you allowing others in the church to help you combat the sin in your own life? Do you tend to try to deal with your sin privately, or do you take your struggle with sin to others?

How does your church tend to deal with the sins of its members? Do they ignore it? Gossip about it? Or, confront it biblically? Why do you answer the way you do?

Every church could grow in dealing with the sins of its members. Where do you see weakness in your church and how could you help take responsibility?

## Respond with Praise and Thanks

**Take a Moment:** Praise and thank God for uniting the church and making one out of many.

**Example:** *Father, only by Your power and love can men experience genuine oneness. Thank You for rescuing each of us in the church from our self-centered lives and for uniting us in passion for Your glory and Your kingdom. Thank You for the joy You create in the intimate fellowship of the church.*

## Respond with Confession

**Take a Moment:** Confess to God your failure to take your sin and the sin of other believers seriously.

**Example:** *Father, being vulnerable and seeking help in overcoming is difficult. Most of the time, I keep my sin and my struggle with it concealed. No one in the church is close enough to me to know my struggles and the truth about my personal life. I wrongly see me sin as a personal and private issue and I have failed to recognize that my sin effects the entire body for I am one with it. Downplaying my own sin has also led to my down playing of other's sin. Yes, I see the sin of fellow believers but it's easier to ignore or gossip about it rather than confront it. Forgive me.*

## Respond with Requests

**Take a Moment:** Ask God to cause you to see the body as one collective whole rather than many individual parts. Ask him to help you and your church take sin seriously and confront it responsibly.

**Example:** *Father, create in our church a culture that takes sin seriously. Do not allow us to ignore our sins or gossip about them. Instead, teach us to confront the sin with grace and truth even when it may for a time separate relationships. Do not let the god of “individualism” dictate our behavior. Let us see ourselves and others as part of one whole, so we might take responsibility for each other.*

## WEEK 9 PART 1



### NEHEMIAH

11:1-12:26

The people get intentional about worship

#### Story: The people get intentional about worship

For nearly a month the people of God had experienced a spiritual awakening initiated by the preaching, teaching and understanding of God's Word which resulted in reverent worship, humble confession, hoped filled rejoicing and solemn submission. In preparation for future and continued renewal and growth, Nehemiah organized the people – both those who settled in Jerusalem and those who remained living in the rural areas. Attention was given to both civil organization and also religious organization. With the commitment not to neglect the temple, much detail and attention was given as the leaders were placed, the provisions were secured, and the commands of God were followed. In the temple, worship practices had carefully been restored back to the days of King David, the man of God.

#### Truth: God's Word commands His people to worship

Ever since Adam and Eve sinned, man has "exchanged the truth about God for a lie," and as a result, "They worship and serve the creature rather than the Creator." When one experiences the goodness of creation he naturally praises and offers up thanks to the created thing rather than the one who created it. Man does not naturally experience the goodness of creation and declare, "God is good!" He more naturally praises and thanks his spouse, his employer, his favorite team, his car, his children, his pas-

**Praise the LORD!**

**Praise God in his sanctuary;  
praise him in his mighty  
heavens!**

**Praise him for his mighty deeds;  
praise him according to his  
excellent greatness!**

**Praise him with trumpet sound;  
praise him with lute and  
harp!**

**Praise him with tambourine  
and dance;**

**praise him with strings and  
pipe!**

**Praise him with sounding  
cymbals;**

**praise him with loud  
clashing cymbals!**

**Let everything that has breath  
praise the LORD! - Psalm 150**

tor and himself. Thankfully, God speaks to man and commands, "You shall have no other gods before me!" He directs us to join in with the rocks and stars as they praise His glory. He commands His people to rejoice, to praise, to adore, to worship, to enjoy, to sing, to testify and to shout. He is the giver of all that is good and He commands us to stop ignorantly and foolishly offering up worship to that which deserves no worship at all. God does not command our praise so that He can experience a boost in self-

confidence. Rather, God knows that you will serve what you worship. You will submit to what you esteem. Thankfully, He speaks to His people the truth, "I am the Creator. I am the source of all the good you have ever experienced. Do not turn to esteem, recognize, thank and praise those that have no power, authority or love. Instead, look to me. Make me the object of your praise. Direct your thanks to me, for I am the rightful object of your worship!"

#### *Stop & Think*

To what persons, organizations or objects do you tend to worship with praise and thanks?

How can your enjoyment of these persons, organizations and objects lead to ultimate praise and thanks directed to God - the Creator and giver - rather than the person or thing - the creation and gift?

## Instruction: Intentionally direct yourself and others to praise and thank God

Nehemiah knew the people would naturally neglect the worship of God, so he led the people to make the temple, regular worship and praise a priority. As King David led the people to praise and thank God, so Nehemiah led the people to intentionally direct their praise and thanks toward the Creator. Wise parents, leaders and pastors within the church community will esteem, elevate and prioritize praise and thanks toward God. They will regularly and intentionally fix their attention on God and call others to do the same knowing that if they do not, they will soon fall back into the praise and worship of idols. The wise parents will pause regularly to set aside family time to read Scripture and praise and thank God. They will lead their family weekly to corporate worship to train themselves and their children to acknowledge their Creator. The wise pastor's sermon will expose God's character and work in the Scriptures and then call the people to elevate their voices in praise and thanks. When the church understands the natural tenden-

cy of man to worship with praise and thanksgiving everything except the one worthy, the church will regularly, passionately and intentionally direct their praise and thanks to the Creator. God says praise me. Thank me. To praise and thank something without acknowledging me is nothing less than being deceived. God commands our worship.

Let us not wait around until we feel

*The primary reason the church gathers it to glorify God. We gather together for corporate worship to ascribe unto God the worship due Him. We declare God's greatness and truth through the reading of Scripture, through sermon and through song. - Matt Boswell*

**Ascribe to the LORD, O heavenly beings,**

**Ascribe to the LORD  
glory and strength.**

**Ascribe to the LORD the glory  
due His name;**

**Worship the LORD in the  
splendor of holiness. - Ps. 29:1-2**

like worshipping. Instead, let us intentionally direct our own worship to God while calling and commanding others to do the same.

### Stop & Think

Outside of your church's corporate worship time, how do you intentionally direct yourself to praise and thank God? What regular practices have you established in your week to help you make God the object of your praise and thanks?

How do you encourage and lead others—your family, friends, colleagues—in making God the object of their praise and thanks? Do you have any ideas on how you could do this more intentionally?

## Respond with Praise and Thanks

**Take a Moment:** Praise and thank God for revealing himself as the One True God who alone is worthy of our worship.

**Example:** *Father, You are the LORD alone. There is none like You. Your power, love, wisdom and knowledge are infinite. From You alone comes all good and perfect gifts. All we have has come from You and to You alone belongs all our praise and thanks. Thank You for freeing us from the foolishness of idolatry. Thank You for revealing our false gods as dumb, powerless and void of wealth. You are the object of our praise and to You we direct our thanks!*

## Respond with Confession

**Take a Moment:** Confess to God your failure to direct your praise and thanks to Him. Confess the other persons and things to whom You give praise and thanks apart from Him.

**Example:** *Father, outside of corporate worship, I rarely intentionally praise and thank You. Most days I wake up go about my day do all that needs to get done thanking those who serve me and praising those who impress me without any thought about You and Your work in and through those around me. Because I rarely direct my own attention to praise and thanks to You, I am ill-equipped to call others to praise and thank You. I tend to acknowledge everything but You. My focus and thoughts are easily captivated by the creation rather than You the Creator.*

## Respond with Requests

**Take a Moment:** Ask God to increase your praise and thanks of Him by opening Your eyes to see Him and His Work more clearly and often

**Example:** *Father, You are at work all around me. Give me eyes to see and be aware of what You are doing. Allow the good things and persons I encounter stir thoughts, awe, wonder and worship of You. Teach me the discipline of acknowledging You in all things. Do not let my heart be led away into idolatry. When I see You act around me, give me boldness to call others to recognize You with praise and thanks as well. Help me lead my family to worship You and You alone, for You alone are worthy.*



## WEEK 9 PART 2



### NEHEMIAH

12:27-43

The people  
experienced great  
joy

#### Story: The people experience great joy

Now that both the external walls had been restored and the internal faith and love of the people had been renewed, the time for dedicating the wall had arrived. In preparation, all the Levites from all surrounding places gathered in Jerusalem to purify themselves, the people, the gates and the wall so nothing would be ceremonially unclean. When all was prepared, Nehemiah divided the choir into two. One marched south on the wall around the city followed by Ezra and a crowd of leaders and priests. The other choir marched north followed by Nehemiah and half the congregation. Each choir marched to the sound of lyres, trumpets and cymbals. The joy and gladness filling the hearts of the people burst forth into singing and rejoicing. Eventually the two choirs met in the temple where great sacrifices and offerings were given, for God himself had “made them rejoice with great joy!” Together in the presence of God the people experienced such joy that the sound of their rejoicing could be heard from afar!

#### Truth: God’s Word causes His people to worship

I will never forget June 5, 2010. Just a few minutes after 3:00 PM that day, I stood at the front of the very long, narrow auditorium of Calvary Baptist Church in Florence, SC, where I waited with excitement and anticipation to see my bride walk through the doors. To my delight, she was stunning. For what seemed like an eternity, I beheld her beauty as she slowly walked down the aisle. The closer

she drew near to me, the clearer my view of her became. Standing there in her presence, my heart filled with joy, delight and wonder, and this experience of pleasure within quickly translated into outward praise as I looked her in the eye and quietly verbalized what I had already experienced, “You are beautiful!” These words formed on my lips involuntarily, as the experience of her glory produced the response of praise which I could not contain. It was as if the joy and delight I found in her found its completion in the expression of words.

*All enjoyment spontaneously overflows into praise... The world rings with praise – lovers praising their mistresses, readers their favorite poet, walkers praising the countryside, players praising their favorite game – praise of weather, wines, dishes, actors, motors, hoses, colleges, countries, historical personages, children, flowers, mountains, rare stamps, rare beetles, even sometimes politicians or scholars... we delight to praise what we enjoy because the praise not merely expresses but completes the enjoyment.*

– C. S. Lewis

True, genuine worship of God occurs in the same way. God’s Word brings His people into His presence where they see,

#### Stop & Think

Considering this study of Nehemiah or another study you have done, can you list 3 truths about God which stand out to you?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

What emotions and feelings do / should these truths stir up in your heart?

behold, enjoy and experience Him. As they see, behold and experience Him, He makes them glad. He satisfies them. In Him they find great pleasure deep within their hearts, and this internal joy and delight springs forth in uncontrollable rejoicing, thanking and praising. The experience of the glorious produces the response of praise. A heart that has been made glad will fill a mouth with praise. Through God’s Word, His people find themselves able to enter His presence, and every time they sit in His presence they find that He does not disappoint. He possesses the ability to satisfy all our desires. He is so good, so satisfy-

ing and so glorious that He will one day satisfy us eternally resulting in eternal joy leading to eternal praise! The words of praise and thanks without the experience amounts to nothing more than empty flattery or religious attempts to earn the favor of a deity. But, when the words of praise flow out of deep satisfaction and joy they form as an expression of love, adoration and gratitude!

### Instruction: Rejoice!

Because God “made them rejoice with great joy,” the people “offered great sacrifices that day and rejoiced” (12:43). The Israelites led by Nehemiah and Ezra through a party. God filled them with joy, and they stopped to rejoice. This marks a community satisfied in God in contrasts to a community busy trying to make God satisfied in them. Too often in the church, all the activities of the Christian life are turned into chores. Read your Bible. Attend worship. Share your faith. Make disciples. All of these become attempts to be a better Christian, be a better church, be a better ministry. In my own personal experience, I struggled to consistently do any of these until God showed me that the point of all

these is my joy in His glory. The Bible exist to show me God, so I can enjoy Him. He commands me to worship so my joy in Him can be intensified in a community of people who also find their joy in Him. I share my faith so my joy in God might expand as others come to know the joy I know. In the church, I have found we are good at many things, but rejoicing in God often seems to not even be a goal. Jesus came so our joy might be full, yet so much of the church life is done with complaints on our lips. Dear friends, we are sinners deserving of extermination, yet God has chosen to spare us from His wrath and give us eternal joy in Him. We should be the happiest people on earth! Let us rejoice in the LORD always! Let us work at rejoicing. Let us set aside time. Let us become skilled in the art of delighting in God!

**Rejoice in the Lord always;  
again I will say, rejoice.  
- Phil. 4:4**

## Stop & Think

What percentage of your church's activity is spent on simply “rejoicing and enjoying in fellowship with God and His people?”

Why did you give the percentage you gave to the previous question?

What percentage of your Christian life is characterized by rejoicing? Are times when you are filled with great joy over God few and far between? When you study Scripture, do you find yourself experiencing joy?

## Respond with Praise and Thanks

**Take a Moment:** Praise and thank God for the truths about Himself He has revealed in Scripture.

***Example:** Father, without Your Word, we would remain in darkness and have no way to know and enjoy You. Thank You for making Yourself known and experienced through the written Words of Scripture. In them, we see and experience Your love. In them we see and experience Your power. In them we see and experience Your knowledge and wisdom. When we come to Your Word, we encounter more than mere facts; we encounter Your presence! Thank You.*

## Respond with Confession

**Take a Moment:** Confess to God your failure to rejoice.

***Example:** Father, too often I turn all your commands into religious activity void of joy, delight, satisfaction. I am busy doing many things, but my obsession with being productive robs me of the ability to rejoice in You. I struggle to simply take time to enjoy a good meal and the fellowship with Your people for Your glory. Even the times of corporate worship have turned into duty and obligation rather than times of joy and rejoicing. My personal times of Bible study have become all about **learning** something rather than seeking to enjoy You and rejoice.*

## Respond with Requests

**Take a Moment:** Ask God to satisfy your soul. Ask him to fill you with joy and teach you to rejoice in Him and what He has done.

***Example:** Father, fill my activity with joy. I am becoming tired and burnt out in my activity and service. Become my source of joy, satisfaction and delight. Give me enough confidence in Your work that I can rest from mine and enjoy what You have given. Teach me to be able to rejoice in You always. Do the same for those in the church. Let us be a people who are so satisfied by You that Your praise fills our lips as our joy in You cannot be contained.*

## WEEK 9 PART 3



### NEHEMIAH

12:44-47

The people returned to  
God as one

#### Story: The people worship correctly

On the day of great joy, celebration and worship, the leaders appointed men to oversee the upkeep of the temple. They desired to see the temple properly maintained and the servants of the temple rightly served. The worship leaders – the priests and the Levites – were a source of great joy for the people. Unlike in the past, these worshipers performed their service in the temple of God according to all He had commanded. Their obedience led to worship and thanksgiving as in the days of David and Zerubbabel. As the leaders follow the instructions and commands of God, the people benefited.

#### Truth: God's Word instructs His people to worship

In the days of Nehemiah, God instructed His people on how to worship in detail. He gave instructions about where to worship, how to prepare to worship, who could worship, what to do while worshipping and when to worship. The people of God could not worship in any way they imagined or desired; instead, God gave them instruction. These instructions served to keep the truth before the people as they approached the presence of God.

In the New Testament, the detailed instructions fade away as Jesus Christ comes onto the scene. As it turns out, all the rituals of Old Testament worship were signs pointing to the true reality of Jesus Christ. In a conversation with a Samaritan woman, Jesus explained that His coming marked a drastic change in

worship. No longer would proper worship be measured by the where, what, when, and how of worship; instead, true worship will be marked by “spirit and truth.” By spirit, Jesus means that the visible actions must flow from a heart which feels and experiences what the mouth and hands express. True and acceptable worship not only says with the mouth, “God, You are holy!” but true and acceptable worship also feels in the heart a sense of awe and fear at His holiness. True worship experiences the love of God and praises God because of it. False worship flows from the mouths of men and women who sing about His love, power, holiness and justice but

who have never felt awe over His power, never been astounded by His love, never been shaken in fear over his justice and never been brought low in humility over His holiness. ***True worship expresses outwardly what one genuinely feels and experiences inwardly in relationship to God.*** Not only does true worship align with genuine feelings of the heart but it also aligns with truth. True and acceptable worship is not an expression of whatever one feels, for often one's feeling ignore the truth. ***True worship begins with the truth which by the power of the Spirit leads to right affections in the heart which leads to acceptable praise from the lips.***

The woman said to him, “Sir, I perceive that you are a prophet. Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, but you say that in Jerusalem is the place where people ought to worship.” Jesus said to her, “Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father. You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.”

—John 4:19-24

#### Stop & Think

How has God's Word led to your joy in God and worship of God this week?

Can you name one of your favorite worship song?

What truth(s) about God are mentioned in the song? What emotions are conveyed in its lyrics? Sorrow? Awe? Rejoicing? Hope? Love? Thanksgiving?



## Instruction: Pay close attention to the practice of worship

Knowing God had instructed the people in worship, Nehemiah led the people to pay close attention to their practices. The same should be true in the church today. A church concerned with true and genuine worship will carefully consider a few important factors. First, serious worshippers will constantly be asking, “Does my life style confirm I truly feel and think in accord with the words I express in song?” When I sing, “As the deer pants for the water so my soul longs for You,” does my life show that I am pursuing him with passionate desperation? When we sing about His sovereign rule over evil, do I run around all week stressed and restless as if everything depends on me being perfect? God instructs His people to worship in away that flows from the inner self. ***The emotions and feelings I express in worship should be the true feelings I am experiencing. Other wise we are like the Pharisees who praised God with their lips while their hearts remained far from him.***

Second, a church concerned with genuine worship will be careful to understand very clearly the words they use while praising God. ***A church serious***

***about worship will be a church serious about theology.*** They will be students who study God. They will be careful to have a biblical understanding of love and grace. They will seek to understand what is meant when the church praises God for electing them. They will seek to know what the angels meant when they sang, “Holy, Holy, Holy is the LORD God Almighty.” A church serious about genuine and acceptable worship would rather stand silently than to sing about things of which they do not know. A wise church does not rush to use the next “moving” song on the Christian radio station without first examining its message to see whether or not it aligns with truth. God instructs our worship and the wise church will be careful to examine whether or not the words they sing flow from “spirit and truth.”

*True worship is carried along by the Holy Spirit and is happening mainly as an inward, spiritual event not an outward, bodily event...*

*True worship is a response to true views of God and is shaped by true views of God.—John Piper*

## Stop & Think

Do your outward expressions of worship accurately reflect the internal condition of your heart? Do you enjoy God? Does your praise feel more like obligation and duty rather than the natural and uncontrollable expression of your internal experience with God?

Why did you answer the way you did?

How seriously do you seek to know God? Do you find yourself getting board with sermons, Bible study and reading? What might this say about your capacity to enjoy and worship God?

## Respond with Praise and Thanks

**Take a Moment:** Praise and thank God for instructing us in our worship so we might not stumble into idolatry.

**Example:** *Father, You are worthy of our praise, and You alone deserve our worship. Thank You for instructing us in worship. Thank You for producing within us genuine experiences of joy and awe and for giving us acceptable means to express the pleasures and joys experienced in Your presence! Thank You for not leaving us in the dark. Thank You for revealing the truth, so we are not captive to our feelings which often are rooted in falsehood rather than truth.*

## Respond with Confession

**Take a moment:** Confess your failure to pay close attention to your worship practices.

**Example:** *Father, if I am honest, I have failed to give much thought to my worship practices. I go to church participate in singing and go on with life. I pay little attention to the words of the songs, and rarely do I stop to think, “are these lyrics presenting the truth about God?” Yes, I praise you with my lips, but if I am honest again I rarely experience genuine joy and pleasure in You. As a matter of fact, You seem so far from me. Yes, I do the practice of worship, but in my heart I do not feel the emotion I so often express.*

## Respond with Requests

**Take a Moment:** Ask God to give increase your knowledge of the truth, and ask Him to let you experience joy and delight in Him as you grow in knowledge.

**Example:** *Father, I want to know you. I desire to sit in Your presence and gaze upon Your glory. I want to grow in knowledge of You, but I don't want to just know the truth, I want to feel joy, awe, delight and pleasure in what You reveal. I want to experience Your presence. Show Yourself to me in such away, I know joy, satisfaction and delight!*

# Why Study the Bible?

## *Five Truths that Motivate and Shape our Bible Study*

In the church, most would affirm the importance of reading and studying God's Word, but unfortunately many of the same people who affirm its importance spend very little time outside of church studying it. Many obstacles hinder consistent and disciplined study of God's Word. Many find great difficulty in carving out time in the day between getting the children ready for school, being prompt to work and participating in social activities in the evening. Some have attempted to study in the past, but their efforts seemed unfruitful and the text seemed irrelevant to their lives. Others feel inadequate and incapable of deciphering the meaning of Scripture and have found it more efficient to rely on professional pastors to teach them what the Word says. Still others simply find the study of Scripture laborious and boring.

At different times in my own life, I have neglected the pursuit of God through the study of His Word for all the reasons mentioned above. Thankfully, over the last five years, God has given me such a strong hunger for Him that he has filled my heart with a passion for His Word. This passion has grown out of a few glorious truths I now firmly believe. These truths compel me out from under the warmth of my bed and up the stairs to my private little study where I seek God in His Word nearly every morning. These truths have both motivated and shaped my pursuit to know God.

## Truth #1 | God is most glorious, most satisfying, most valuable and most worthy to be treasured.

All of us pursue what we desire, and we desire what we find glorious, satisfying and valuable. In the Scriptures, we find the God who claims to be the only true source of satisfaction. He invites all who experience thirst, "Come to me and be satisfied." He calls to the hungry, "Come and be filled." He says to the wealthy, "Sell all you have, and follow me, for I am the treasure that surpasses the worth of all your earthly possessions." The Creator warns each of us that our pursuits to be satisfied by anything other than him will leave us empty and unsatisfied. Their glory, their value and their worth get overtaken by the light of the glory of God.

*The kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls, who, on finding one pearl of great value, went and sold all that he had and bought it. - Matt. 13:44*

## Truth #2 | God makes himself known.

By known, I do not simply mean "known about." We all understand that one can know something of a person or thing without actually "knowing" him or it. In today's vernacular, we might distinguish the difference by using the terms "knowing" versus "experiencing." There is an eternal difference between knowing a camp fire burns at roughly 1,500 degrees Fahrenheit and experiencing its warmth on your cold bare hands on a cool autumn night. To know the flames have the warmth you need does nothing to satisfy your longing to be warm unless this knowledge moves you into the place of experience.

Thankfully, God has not only made it possible for sinners to know facts about him, but he has also made himself available to be experienced. He has removed the sin of his people, and He has given them access into His presence. Just as a great difference stands between knowing the temperature of a fire and feeling its warmth, so a great difference remains between knowing God's love and experiencing the extent and perfection of that love to your own satisfaction. God declares to each of us, "I am good!" Then He invites all who believe to draw near to Him and experience His goodness!

*Taste and see that the Lord is good. - Ps. 34:8*

## Truth #3 | God makes himself known in Jesus Christ.

How does an invisible God make Himself known to His people? He does so through His Son, Jesus Christ, whom He sent over 2,000 years ago.

*He [Jesus] is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature. - Heb. 1:3*

*No one has ever seen God... He [Jesus] has made him known. - Jn. 1:18*

When one desires to see the power of God, he must look no further than to Jesus as He says to the storm with all authority, "Peace, be still!" If one desires to feel the holiness of God, one must only behold Jesus' hatred and hostility for those who defiled the Temple with their passions for worldly treasures. And, if one wants to be moved by the steadfast love of God, he must only behold by faith the suffering Christ on the cross dying in his place. The God of all glory has chosen to not remain hidden. Instead he has made himself known by entering our world. In Christ, we not only learn of God's character, but we also experience Him as his character gets lived out through Christ in relationship to us.

*In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son  
into the world, so that we might live through him. - Jn. 3:16*

## Truth #4| God makes Himself known in Jesus Christ through His written Word.

If you are like me, you have never enjoyed a cup of coffee with Christ. God has not designed for us to know him through a physical relationship. Instead, he has recorded all we need to know about Christ in the Bible. The Bible consists of 66 individual books written by 40 authors over the period of several millennia. Each book contains no errors, and each one has been written by God himself.

*All Scripture is breathed out by God... - 2 Tim. 3:16a*

*And we have the prophetic word more fully confirmed, to which you will do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place,  
until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts,*

*knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation.*

*For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit. - 2 Pet.  
1:19-21*

Much variety can be found in the Scriptures. Even a casual reader will notice many characters, settings, plots and genres. In the Bible, many women, children and men have found encouragement, instruction and hope. Yes, the Bible has been used for many purposes over the years, but we must not forget why God spoke all of these Words. Jesus informed his contemporaries:

*You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life;*

*and it is they that bear witness about me. - Jn. 5:39*

*And beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he [Jesus] interpreted to them*

*in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself. - Lk. 24:27*

God has made his glory known and experienced in Christ, and He has made Christ known and experienced in His written Word.

## Truth #5| God transforms His people as they behold His glory in Jesus Christ.

In the beginning, God created humanity in His own image to reflect and demonstrate His glorious character in the world He created. Unfortunately, man rebelled against God and the purpose for which He created him choosing rather to pursue his own glory and the fame of his own name. In response, God chose to enslave man - every human - to the evil desires and intentions of his heart. As a result, men and women feel, think, choose and act always without fail in accord with their dark and evil hearts.

*God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen...*

*And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done. They were filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness. They are gossips, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless. Though they know God's righteous decree that those who practice such things deserve to die, they not only do them but give approval to those who practice them. - Rom. 1:24-25, 28-32*



*darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart. They have become callous and have given themselves up to sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity. - Eph. 4:17-19*

Thankfully, God has chosen not to leave man enslaved to his evil desires, and He has graciously chosen to save a people out of mankind for Himself whom He has promised to transform back into the image in which He created them.

*For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. 30 And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified. - Rom. 8:29-30*

Those chosen by God no longer walk as the rest of the world; instead, they are being renewed and transformed by the knowledge of Christ.

*And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit. - 2 Cor. 3:18*

*Seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices 10 and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator. - Col. 3:9b-10*

One can see how the knowledge of the gospel - the good news of Jesus Christ - led to radical transformation in the pagan city of Thessalonica.

*We know, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you, because our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction. You know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake. And you became imitators of us and of the Lord, for you received the word in much affliction, with the joy of the Holy Spirit, so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia. For not only has the word of the Lord sounded forth from you in Macedonia and Achaia, but your faith in God has gone forth everywhere, so that we need not say anything. For they themselves report concerning us the kind of reception we had among you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come. - 1 Thess. 1:4-10*

Transformation comes through the knowledge of God in Christ as He is revealed in Scripture.

## Conclusion: Seek to know and enjoy God through the study of His Word

If God himself is the most glorious and most satisfying, we have no greater news than the message that He can be known and experienced. We have no greater resource than the Scriptures. And we have no greater activity than sitting in His presence. Many methods of Bible study have been formulated and used by God's people throughout the years, but a common desire to know God has driven all of those who genuinely know God. We pray God uses this resource to show you His glory as you seek to know Him through His Word.

One thing have I asked of the LORD,  
that will I seek after:  
that I may dwell in the house of the LORD  
all the days of my life,  
to gaze upon the beauty of the LORD  
and to inquire in his temple.—Psalm 27:4