

*"REBUILDING A CITY - A journey from RUIN to RESTORATION"*

# NEHEMIAH

and the Songs of Ascent



NEHEMIAH

A 30-day devotional

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# INTRODUCTION

This daily devotional is a combination of resources freely available on the Internet, bible commentaries, and contributions written internally.

## IS IT BETTER TO GRAPPLE WITH THE SCRIPTURES OR TO READ COMMENTARY ON THEM?

What's better? As a general rule, it is better to grapple directly with the Scriptures. This is the approach we encourage in this devotional. By providing helpful questions, we can interact with God's Word directly — discovering what the Bible says on our own (rather than simply letting someone else tell us what it says) and **then** responding in prayer.

In order to cultivate your own revelations and responses, we encourage you to follow the format of this devotional:

- Read the introductory paragraph
- Draw near to God by opening your heart to his heart
- Read the text for the day
- Answer the questions about the text
- Answer the questions for application to your life
- Respond to God in prayer

Of course, once the gold **at the surface** has been mined by directly engaging **with** the Scriptures, one can mine out deeper layers of gold by reading additional commentary.



## WEEK 1

# DAY 1

### Introducing Nehemiah

Nehemiah was in leadership during an extraordinary time in Israel's history. He faced opposition from all sides—both from his own people and from outside forces. A little background will help set the stage for understanding the pressures Nehemiah faced.

From antiquity, Ezra and Nehemiah have been considered almost as one book. The two books cover a period of about one hundred years. In 587 B.C. Judah was removed from the land of Israel and deported to Babylon with only a few left in the land. In 538 B.C. Cyrus sent some of the people back to rebuild the temple. Nehemiah's second return took place around 445 B.C. Zerubbabel, Ezra and Nehemiah are all wrapped up in this history. Zerubbabel built the temple, Ezra brought the Law back into Israel's life, and Nehemiah rebuilt the wall that made Jerusalem secure.

The amazing thing is that Israel had more autonomy and distinctiveness as a sovereign state during this era than at any other time of their history. The Persian Empire allowed the people to practice their religious convictions with seriousness, and this probably explains why Israel had such a pristine religious life at this time.

While Zerubbabel and Ezra worked more in the religious realm, Nehemiah was really sent to Judah to be governor of the land. His status gave him considerably more opportunity to make lasting changes in the life of the people. The people needed Nehemiah's strong leadership to handle the opposition to their work.

There were three primary opposers: Sanballat, Geshem and Tobiah. Sanballat was probably governor of Samaria and totally disinterested in seeing Judah rise as an independent nation again. Geshem is thought to have been a leader of a powerful block of Arab communities. Tobiah was probably governor of Ammon and a member of an influential Jewish family.

Derek Kidner describes the importance of this period of Israel's history:

The two centuries of the Persian empire were among the most formative periods of Jewish history. Out of the ruins of the little kingdom of Judah there had emerged the small community whose concern to be the people of God by pedigree and practice shaped it into the nation that meets us in the New Testament. Already the future prominence of the temple and its priests of the law and scribes, as well as the enmity between Jew and Samaritans, could be seen developing. Throughout this time the Persian regime was given a substantial part to play, both in sending and in subsidising the three expeditions of Zerubbabel, Ezra and Nehemiah, as well as in backing their authority with its own. It was not the first empire, nor the last, to be allotted some such role. (Derek Kidner, Ezra & Nehemiah [Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1979], p. 17)

The Israelites living in the land were fairly passive at this point in history. They had to adapt to the culture around them because they were such a small remnant. Their intermarrying and political ties made this considerably worse.

Nehemiah's gifts in administration and perseverance enabled him to mould the Jewish people back into the "people of God", so as to obey God's commands and remain a people set apart. This is where Nehemiah shines

through. It was not enough to build just the wall; he had to build a people that would once again stand on their own as God led them. Putting some "backbone" back into the people was a large part of what Nehemiah had to accomplish, even if it required him to be harsh with them at times.

There are some key themes to look out for as you work your way through the book:

- The Lord hears prayers (1:4-6).
- The Lord works providentially, even through powerful rulers, to bring about His greater purposes (e.g. 2:8).
- The Lord protects His people; therefore, they do not need to fear (4:14).
- The Lord is merciful and faithful to His promises despite His people's persistence in sin (9:32-35).
- Worship is at the centre of the life of God's people, and it includes the willing, joyful giving of their resources (10:32-39).
- God's people need to be on their guard against their own moral weakness (13:9 & 30-31).

God has called each of us to important tasks, both as leaders and as followers. Reading Nehemiah will help us to have the courage we need to follow through, even in the face of difficulty, persecution and weaknesses. Pray that God will do a work in your heart over the next few weeks.

## WEEK 1

# DAY 2

### Nehemiah 1: Depending on God

At one time or another, most of us have said, "I am too busy to pray!" If the work of God or the work that we want to do for God depended on our energy and insight, then it might be true. But of course (at least theoretically) we believe that God's work can only be done through His power (Ps 127:1, "Unless the LORD builds the house, its builders labor in vain"). Yet we don't think our biggest job is to pray. If we did, it might make a big difference in what we try to accomplish for the Lord! As we go before the Lord in prayer, we gain His perspective, and we gain confidence. In this study Nehemiah models dependency on the Lord for His strength.

### Drawing near to Him

Before you look into the Scriptures, sit quietly for a few moments and ask the Holy Spirit to give you discernment as you begin studying Nehemiah.

### Read Nehemiah 1

### Discovering the Word

- In verses 1-3 what event is being discussed?
- What four things does Nehemiah do when he hears Hanani's report (v. 4)?
- List the specific concerns that Nehemiah mentions in his prayer (vv. 5-11).
- What evidence do you find here that Nehemiah believed God heard his prayer and would answer it?
- What do you learn about Nehemiah's character from his reaction and his prayer?

### Applying the Word

- Nehemiah got more confident as he prayed and fasted. How does this compare with what you have experienced in prayer?
- As you think about your ministry, are there any reports you are hearing that you need to petition God for?
- What will you do to take a risk and become part of the answer for that prayer?

### Responding in Prayer

Thank the Lord for using people just like you to carry out His plans. Ask Him to give you courage as you participate in His work.

# WEEK 1

## DAY 3

### Introducing the Songs of Ascent

In ancient times, it was traditional for the kings of Israel to ‘witness’ to the people at the great Festival of Tabernacles - that is, to give public praise to God for the successes of His reign. The people would sing songs of praise in response.

Nehemiah did this at Tabernacles in 445 B.C., three weeks after he had completed the wall. He told a brief story each day, describing the steps by which he had achieved this, beginning with Nehemiah 1, his lament in Susa, and ending with his dedicatory procession; and after each recital the singers chanted a worship response. The Songs of Ascent (Psalm 120 – 134) were these responses to the testimonies given, sung at the fifteen services throughout the week of Tabernacles. These songs were used by Jewish pilgrims as they made their way to Jerusalem. This pilgrimage, accompanied by the Songs of Ascent, portrayed an upward, Godward life, ever advancing from one level to the next.

The sequence of the songs, as sung in response to Nehemiah’s memoirs, is shown below:

Nehemiah reference	Psalm	Sung in response to:
1:1-11	120	The lament at Jerusalem’s plight
2:1-9	121	The journey from Susa
2:10-18	122	Arrival at Jerusalem and seeking the people’s good
2:19-20 & 3:33-38	123	The contempt of the enemies
4:1-17	124	God delivers from their planned attack
5:1-19	125	The restraint of the nobles and officials oppression
6:1-19	126	Wall completed with the nations’ recognition of God’s hand
7:1-5a	127	Gates guarded and the building of houses
7:26-32 & 11:1-2	128	The city’s repopulation
13:4-14	129	Tobiah’s expulsion

13:15-22	130	A confession of sin after the Sabbath-breaking
13:23-29	131	Humiliation after the mixed marriages
13:30-31	132	A renewal of the purity of the temple and its clergy
12:27-43	133	The procession to the temple
12:27-43	134	The thanksgiving at the temple

The image of a pilgrimage has often been used as a metaphor for the Christian life. As Christians, we recognise that we are on a pilgrimage. This world is not our true home, and therefore we should never get too cozy here. Read the following passages for further reflection and prayer:

- Hebrews 13:14
- Hebrews 11:8-10

## WEEK 1

# DAY 4

### Psalm 120: A Prayer of Repentance

This seems like a strange place to start. Psalm 120 doesn't speak of going on a pilgrimage. It does, however, express the feelings of homesick people settled in a strange land. Thus the tone is set for a joyful upward journey in the psalms that follow.

#### Drawing near to Him

James Boice finds two things that bother the psalmist: *lying neighbours* (verses 1-4) and *hostile neighbours* (verses 5-7). He writes, "Thus, the starting place for our spiritual pilgrimage is seeing the world for what it is in order to turn from it." Pilgrims are people who are dissatisfied with the way things are and therefore are on their way to some place better.

Peterson writes, "The usual biblical word describing the 'no' we say to the world's lies and the 'yes' we say to God's truth is *repentance*." Start this time by asking God to open your heart to the things in your life that require adjusting...so that your whole life can be turned to Him.

#### Read Psalm 120

#### Discovering the Word

- When reading this psalm, what is encouraged as the appropriate response to times of distress?
- How does the psalmist describe his culture?
- How does he deal with his frustrations with his culture?

#### Applying the Word

- In what specific ways do you see some of these same issues in our culture? How do you deal with your own frustrations with things in our culture that are not as they should be?
- What are some of the lies that the world tells us? How have you responded to them?
- Have you said "no" to the lies of the world and "yes" to God's truth? Have you asked for God's deliverance as the psalmist has in verse 2? Do you need to do so today?
- When we make a decision to turn from our current way of seeing the world and follow God's way, what hope can we find in Psalm 120 that God will help us?

In what ways have you experienced God's help as you've made decisions to follow His way?

- In order for our burdens to become blessings, we must pray (vv. 1-2), trust God (vv. 3-4), and patiently endure (vv. 5-7). Why are each of these essential? Which is hardest for you?

#### Responding in Prayer

Take some time in prayer to ask God to deliver you from lying lips and a deceitful tongue. Here is a sample prayer from Eugene Peterson:

Rescue me from the lies of advertisers who claim to know what I need and what I desire, from the lies of entertainers who promise a cheap way to joy, from the lies of politicians who pretend to instruct me in power and morality, from the lies of psychologists who offer to shape my behavior and my morals so that I will live long, happily and successfully, from the lies of

religionists who 'heal the wounds of this people lightly,' from the lips of moralists who pretend to promote me to the office of captain of my fate, from the lies of pastors who 'leave the commandment of God, and hold fast the traditions of men' (Mark7:8). Rescue me from the person who tells me of life and omits Christ, who is wise in the ways of the world and ignores the movement of the Spirit.

## WEEK 1

# DAY 5

### Nehemiah 2: The Planning Process

Once Dwight L. Moody was sailing on an ocean vessel and a fire broke out. One of this traveling companions said, "Don't you think we should go and pray, Brother Moody?" Moody replied, "You can go and pray, brother, but I am going to man the water buckets. There is a time to pray and a time to put the fire out!" We tend to build a dichotomy between praying and doing. Usually what trips us up in the Christian life is not finding the balance between dependency on God and action on our part. Surely both must be important in God's eyes! In this chapter Nehemiah shows evidence of careful planning on both fronts.

### Drawing near to Him

What fears do you have that keep you from taking risks with your faith? Tell your Father about them—and let him show you how to overcome them with His strength.

### Read Nehemiah 2

### Discovering the Word

- How did Nehemiah give evidence of having a well-thought-through plan in verses 1-9?
- What is the difference between Nehemiah's prayer of chapter 1 and the prayer we see in this chapter?
- What evidences of thoroughness do you find in verses 11-16?
- Why do you think Nehemiah appears so confident in verses 17-20?
- From this chapter, what makes it reasonable for Nehemiah to be so hard-line with Sanballat, Tobiah and Geshem (vv. 18-20)?

### Applying the Word

- When you do a "great work for God," do you expect opposition? Explain.
- Do you feel it is okay to say the "gracious hand of my God [is] upon me" (v. 18) regarding the work that you are doing? Explain why or why not.

### Responding in Prayer

Consider one risk or act of faith you need to take this week and ask the Lord to guide you through this test of your obedience.



## WEEK 2

# DAY 1

### Psalm 121: A Prayer of Assurance

The Jews were on an uphill journey to Jerusalem and the temple at Mount Zion. This psalm is among the many "songs of ascent" sung (or inwardly affirmed) by individuals in the convoy along the way. Any pilgrim facing an uphill climb of faith, and all of us on life's pilgrimage from this earthly existence to the heavenly glory, will find assurance in repeating the confession of this psalm.

#### **Drawing near to Him**

Imagine a battle of faith that you may be facing. Think of all helpful resources you may have turned to, or could be turning to, for help. Then face the Lord who watched you go to and fro. How do you imagine God making a difference in that situation?

#### **Read Psalm 121**

#### **Discovering the Word**

- Judging from the words and phrases most often repeated in this psalm, what is its major theme?
- How does the second verse in each of the four verse pairs (v. 2, 4, 6, 8) expand on the mini theme of the introductory line in each pair (v. 1, 3, 5, 7)?
- What kind of help does the Lord provide his people along the journey (in contrast to those idols who may slumber or slouch on the job)?
- In light of the assurances offered in this psalm, how do you account for the fact that some people do slip and fall into harm's way?

#### **Applying the Word**

- Imagine you are an Israelite making this pilgrimage to Mount Zion and dialoging your way through this psalm of confession and assurance. What parts do you find most reassuring for yourself?
- What parts do you find most reassuring for a fellow pilgrim whom you know is struggling along the way?
- Consider one time, day or night, when you slipped badly and fell into harm's way. How was God watching over you in that situation?

#### **Responding in Prayer**

Consider using Psalm 121 as an appropriate prayer for all your comings and goings. Offer it at mealtimes, office breaks and bedtimes. Let it influence the prayers and counsel you offer family, friends and work associates - especially anyone facing an uphill battle.

## WEEK 2

# DAY 2

### Psalm 122: A Prayer for Peace

Prayer for the "peace of Jerusalem" (vv. 6-9) is the distinguishing theme of this Zion hymn. (For other Zion songs, see Ps 46, 48, 76, 84, 126, 129, 137.) This prayer is not just for fellow worshipers, but for the policies and programs that bring "peace and prosperity" to the city. This call to pray for the decision-makers in government confers a benediction on their work, the result of which would be shalom for the "City of Peace."

#### **Drawing near to Him**

When you think about doing good and seeking the welfare of others, who comes to mind? Mentally open up today's newspaper, along with the Bible, to see the people and the needs that God cares most about in your city.

#### **Read Psalm 122**

#### **Discovering the Word**

- What was it like for these worshipers to go to the house of the Lord in Jerusalem (Mount Zion)?
- Describe the city of Jerusalem (vv. 3-5).
- What does the psalmist pray will be given to the city (vv. 6-9)?
- What would this psalmist say to someone who wanted to first meet his own needs or that of his family, before seeking the peace and prosperity of the city?

#### **Applying the Word**

- Worship at Mount Zion was both a regular obligation (although a joyous event) and a bonding experience for temple-bound worshipers. What is "going to church" like for you?
- Psalm 122 also evokes memories of how Jesus revered and wept over Jerusalem (Lk 9:51; 13:31-35; 19:41-44). By comparison, what tears have you shed over your beloved city?
- "Peace within your walls" and "security within your citadels" (author's italics, v. 7) will also benefit believers; but the city itself is the end in view here - not the believers. How do you go about working for the good of the city where you live and worship?

#### **Responding in Prayer**

Scan the daily newspaper for events and people that need God's "shalom" (peace and prosperity). Bring all those people with that need to God in prayer.

## WEEK 2

# DAY 3

### Nehemiah 3: Many Hands Make Lighter Work

A gifted leader can motivate others, but a job usually gets done because of prayer and unity among believers. This can be attributed to the fact that vision is primarily spiritual and not material. When there is a lot of mundane work, like repairing a badly damaged wall, there must be unity for the job to be done. People need to feel they are part of the decision and the process. To miss this step of getting people "on board" dooms most projects to failure. This chapter shows how much the Israelites desired to work.

#### **Drawing near to Him**

Where are you today with the Lord? Take stock of yourself in relationship with Him, confessing your sins and acknowledging His grace for you. He is listening and desires to talk with you today.

#### **Read Nehemiah 3**

#### **Discovering the Word**

- This chapter describes the hard work of building the wall around Jerusalem and repairing the gates. List the groups or individuals in this chapter who give themselves to the work.
- What are some of the occupations of the repairers?
- What was the place of women in this work (v. 12)?
- From the chapter, what seems to be the motivation for people to work on their part of the wall?
- Was Nehemiah privileged to have everyone committed to the work (v. 5)? Explain.

#### **Applying the Word**

- How do you feel when facing what seems to be an impossible task, especially when there doesn't seem to be commitment from those with whom you are working?
- How has cooperation played a significant part in your church or fellowship group's success in ministry?
- Do you feel you are as motivated to work in your church or fellowship as this group of people were? Explain your response.

#### **Responding in Prayer**

Ask the Lord to give you a helper or partner in your ministry, and ask Him to teach you both how to work together.

# WEEK 2

# DAY 4

## Psalm 123: A Commitment to Serve

The author of Psalm 123 calls out to God with an attitude of expectant servanthood. As the pilgrims draw closer to the Temple, the song exhorts them to keep their eyes fixed upward on the God in whose mercy they trust.

### Drawing near to Him

James Boice calls Psalm 123 “a psalm for the eyes.” He notes that the word “eyes” occurs four times in verses 1 and 2. Each usage is accompanied by one of two phrases: “lift up” (once) or “look to” (three times). Like the author of Hebrews, who exhorts us to “fix our eyes on Jesus,” the psalmist acknowledges that our gaze reflects the desires of our heart.

Ask God for help in this regard: “Lord Jesus, help me to fix my eyes on You”.

### Read Psalm 123

### Discovering the Word

- In verse 1, the psalmist refers to God as “you who are enthroned in heaven.” How does that description add to the psalmist’s plea? What does it tell us about his posture before the Lord?
- Verses 3 and 4 describe the psalmist’s motivation. What is he seeking? Why? Can you relate to his struggle?
- In verse 4, how does the repetition in the latter part of the verse add to our understanding? In what way is *contempt* different from *scorn* or *ridicule*?
- The psalmist is describing his service to God. Does this passage tell us anything about serving others? How does it relate to John 13:12-17?

### Applying the Word

Consider the following list of words that Spurgeon uses to describe how we as servants should look to our Master. Do they characterise how you look to God?

(Reverently, Continuously, Submissively, Obediently, Expectantly, Imploringly, Attentively, Singly)

- In commenting on Psalm 123, Peterson remarks that “a servant Christian is the freest person on earth.” What do you think he means? In what way does servanthood grant us freedom?

### Responding in Prayer

Consider the following quote by Eugene Peterson:

“Too often we think of religion as a far-off, mysteriously run bureaucracy to which we apply for assistance when we feel the need. We go to a local branch office and direct the clerk (sometimes called a pastor) to fill out our order for God. Then we go home and wait for God to be delivered

to us according to the specifications that we have set down.”

Compare this description with Psalm 123. How is it different? What do these two examples reveal about the nature of your own prayer? Let your prayer be other-centred and with a commitment to serving God and His people.

## WEEK 2

# DAY 5

### Nehemiah 4: Opposition from the Outside

"Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never harm me!" We usually hear children say this. But when we want to oppose something because it is getting in our way, we adults have a slightly more sophisticated way of doing the same thing.

The enemies of Israel started out at the "sticks and stones" level, but they were soon into slander, intimidation and threatening with weapons. Our enemy, the devil, is always going to oppose the work of God. We need to expect and be able to fight opposition, if we will do God's work.

### Drawing near to Him

How have your plans for good and faithful service to the Lord been frustrated lately? Express your feelings to the Lord and give them over to Him completely, trusting he will continue to do His will on earth.

### Read Nehemiah 4

### Discovering the Word

- Describe the progression of seriousness in how Sanballat and Tobiah threaten the Jews and the building of the wall in verses 1-3.
- List the ways Nehemiah responds to these forms of opposition (vv. 4-6).
- Why do you think Nehemiah is so uncharitable in his prayer in verses 4-5?
- Note that Sanballat has inside help in his intimidation of the Jews and Nehemiah. What is it (vv. 10 and 12)?
- In verses 13-20, how does Nehemiah handle these threats?
- What was Nehemiah trusting in to get the work done (vv. 9, 14 and 20)?

### Applying the Word

- In what situation have you seen a creative solution keep the work moving forward?
- Does opposition make you want to quit a job, or does it challenge you to work harder to complete it? Explain.

### Responding in Prayer

Pray verses 4 and 5 to the Lord, boldly asking for sinful oppression to be lifted from Christians today.

## WEEK 3

# DAY 1

### Psalm 124: A Song of Thanksgiving

This is a thanksgiving hymn for the community, particularly for an occasion in which God's people have been under threat but have been delivered. When Nehemiah and the people were repairing the walls and gates of Jerusalem, the surrounding nations ridiculed them (Neh 2:19-20 and 4:1-5) and then threatened to attack them (Neh 4:7-23). Nehemiah's words "Our God will fight for us" resembles verses 1, 2 and 8 of this psalm.

#### **Drawing near to Him**

We may not have entire nations and armies opposing us, but we do face situations that are more than we can handle. Turn this morning to the Lord for help, because He is on your side and helps you in your time of need.

#### **Read Psalm 124**

#### **Discovering the Word**

- When reading this psalm, how would you describe the situation Israel is facing?
- As bad as it may have been, the Lord was on their side. Take a look at the following scripture references for encouragement (Rom 8:31, Ps 56:9, Ps 118:6 and Gen 31:42).

#### **Applying the Word**

- Have there been occasions in your life when you were under attack but the Lord proved He was on your side? How did He come to your assistance?
- How does Satan resemble a lion stalking its prey? How can you maintain vigilance against him (1 Peter 5:8 and Eph 6:10-18)?

#### **Responding in Prayer**

God promised His chosen people that He would curse those who cursed them (Gen 12:3), and He has kept that promise. Spend some time thinking about God's promises and prayerfully remind Him of them. And with that, echo the words of the psalmist in verse 8: "Our help is in the name of the Lord".

## WEEK 3

# DAY 2

### Nehemiah 5: Opposition from Within

Most organisations and nations fall apart because of internal opposition and strife. An idea is conceived; it gains adherence and grows to fruition. Then after it has served its purpose for a period of time, the work it took to get to that point is taken for granted, and often personal aggrandisement corrupts the intended purpose. Initially people are willing to sacrifice for the idea, but someone usually figures out how to make money from it; soon after that which once helped people begins to hurt people. That is exactly what happens in chapter 5 of Nehemiah.

### Drawing near to Him

The Lord is excited to hear from you today and wants to listen to all you have to say. Tell Him about your day and your feelings for a few minutes before you begin reading the Word.

### Read Nehemiah 5

### Discovering the Word

- List the three forms of internal opposition in verses 1-5 that are developing against the vision of building the wall.
- Who seem to be the people responsible for this inequity? Why do you think they would do this?
- Make two lists. In the first cite the practices of the nobles, officials, former governors and their servants (vv. 7-12). In the second list cite the practices of Nehemiah (vv. 14-18).
- How would you define the kind of leadership that Nehemiah exercises in dealing with this internal opposition to the wall?
- In what ways does the chapter show Nehemiah doing all he can to not be part of this internal opposition?

### Applying the Word

- In what ways are leaders (spiritual or secular) today likely to assume privileges as these nobles and officials did?
- How do you determine what is culturally acceptable and what God's kingdom values are?
- What kind of internal opposition could likely come up within your church or Christian group to divert you from your real objectives?

### Responding in Prayer

Ask the Lord to "remember you" as you strive to serve Him and carry out His will.



# WEEK 3

## DAY 3

### Psalm 125: A Song of Faith

Three kinds of people are mentioned in this psalm: those who trust in the Lord (v. 1) and are called righteous and good (vv. 3-4); those who compromise with the enemy (v. 3); and those who deliberately go on the wrong path (v. 5). We could probably call them the faithful, the backslidden, and the apostate. Nehemiah mentions all sorts of people who made his work difficult for him, beginning with Shemiah, the “secret informer,” and Noadiah, the hireling prophetess (Neh. 6:10-14). Eliashib was a compromising high priest (Neh. 13:4-9), and one of his grandsons married into the family of an enemy of the Jews (Neh. 13:28). There were also many unnamed Jewish men who entered into mixed marriages that were contrary to God’s law (Neh. 13:1-9, 23-31).

### Drawing near to Him

Thank God for the faithful who believe God and obey His Word! The psalm names the benefits that faith and faithfulness bring to God’s people.

### Read Psalm 125

### Discovering the Word

- Verse 1-2 shows us that faith keeps us standing. Take a look at the following scriptures and think about how faith keeps us standing: 1 Cor. 3:11; 1 Peter 2:4-8; Acts 20:24; Rom. 5:2; Gal. 5:1; Rom. 11:20; 2 Thess. 2:15; Col. 4:12; 2 Cor. 1:21, 24; 1 Cor. 15:58.
- In light of what we read in Nehemiah 5, what do you think the “scepter of the wicked” in verse 3 is referring to?
- How does God bring peace upon Israel?

### Applying the Word

- How does faith in God and in His promises allow us to do what is right, no matter what others may say or do?
- What differences do you see between the faithful and backsliders? Between backsliders and apostates?

### Responding in Prayer

When we begin to trust ourselves or other people, and we bypass the Lord, then we begin to waver, stumble, and fall. Ask God for a faith that will keep you standing, obeying, praying and hoping.

## WEEK 3

# DAY 4

### Nehemiah 6: Facing Intimidation

Using power to create pressure is a very effective way to get at people, especially if they are not sure of themselves or what they should be doing. However, if the objects of intimidation are quite confident in what they are doing, they may not be at all bothered by this approach.

Nehemiah had wrestled with God so thoroughly about what he was doing in building the wall that he was not sidetracked by attempts to call him away from the work. When someone reacts like Nehemiah, then the intimidator must become more and more threatening. It eventually boils down to who can intimidate the most or who is the most confident in what God's will is for the occasion. Notice in this chapter that Nehemiah doesn't give in to the intimidation.

### **Drawing near to Him**

Think of a time when you had to be aggressive to fight for something you thought was right. How did you feel and act? Write down your ideas and compare them to the actions of Nehemiah.

### **Read Nehemiah 6**

### **Discovering the Word**

- List all the efforts at intimidation in this chapter.
- What kind of divided loyalties do you find in the people building the wall?
- From this chapter, what guiding principles does Nehemiah give about how to cooperate with other religious groups?
- How do the circumstances in verses 17-19 make it difficult for Nehemiah to keep his objectives clear?

### **Applying the Word**

- How is the work God has called you to do a "great work" and worthy of your full attention?
- How could your vision be made great and clear enough so that you will not be easily sidetracked (vv. 3, 8 and 11)?
- What do you expect by way of opposition in the job you are doing for the Lord?

### **Responding in Prayer**

Ask God to give you single-mindedness and determination as you work to proclaim His truth to those around you.

## WEEK 3

# DAY 5

### Psalm 126: A Song of Joy

Snoopy's signature supertime dance is a classic picture of happiness. The beloved Peanuts character's head is flung back, his ears are flopping about, and his feet are pounding furiously.

Have you ever felt like dancing for joy? In this passage the Israelites do. Psalm 126 is a pilgrim song of joy. It also teaches us about the reasons for our joy. It teaches us that we can experience joy even in difficult circumstances. It looks back to God's deliverance and forward to a future where God continues to bless His people. As the psalm opens, the Jewish people return to their homeland against all odds. But they are faced with the monumental task of rebuilding.

### Drawing near to Him

What do you do when you are filled with joy?

### Read Psalm 126

### Discovering the Word

- This is a song of celebration by the exiles who returned to Zion. What emotions do you see expressed throughout this psalm?
- What imagery is used in verses 1-2 to describe the joy the writers feel?
- How do verses 4-6 reflect a balance between cause and effect?
- How are sadness and joy intertwined (vv. 5-6)?
- The second half of the psalm looks to the future. What things does the psalmist expect the future to bring? Are they all good things? Would you describe the tone of this section as optimistic or pessimistic? Why? According to the psalmist, what role will God play in Israel's future prosperity? What is the role of the people of God?

### Applying the Word

- In the opening verses of the psalm, the people were amazed at what God had done because it had come so suddenly after a very long period of waiting; they had begun to lose hope and then God acted. What things can cause you to lose hope in God or to lower your expectation of what God can do?
- The Israelites give God the credit for the "great things" that have happened. How do you do with giving God the credit?
- When do you feel inhibited about freely expressing your joy?

### Responding in Prayer

What do you need to praise God for? Share your joy with Him.

## WEEK 4

# DAY 1

### Nehemiah 7: Family History

I remember my grandparents talking about our family genealogy, and I thought, "How boring!" So I didn't listen. Now I have 4,600 names on my computer about my genealogy, and I wish that I had listened to those conversations, because now I have lost much of the information with no way to retrieve it. I have even started recording many of the oldest relatives on tape so that I get not only the information but also their voices on tape for future generations. In this chapter of Nehemiah, we find that if people could not trace their lineage back to a pre-exilic Jewish relative, they were considered illegitimate descendants, unworthy of being counted. I wonder if some of them didn't wish they had listened more to their relatives when they were talking about great-grandpa and great-grandma.

### **Drawing near to Him**

Recall a fond family memory that you have from a holiday or your childhood. Thank the Lord for giving you your past as a remembrance and guide for the future.

### **Read Nehemiah 7**

### **Discovering the Word**

- In verses 1-3, who is to guard the city, and what do you learn about where they are assigned to guard?
- We previously met Hanani in 1:2. From the qualifications given in verse 2, why could Nehemiah trust him?
- Nehemiah decides that the families who have returned should be registered. How would the registration deal with Israel's sin of mixing themselves with the people of the nations around Jerusalem (vv. 64-65)?
- Look more closely at these lists. Why are there so many priests and so few Levites?
- Why couldn't some of the people make connections with relatives?
- What is significant about Nehemiah giving the priests 530 garments and the rest of the people only giving 67 garments?

### **Applying the Word**

- In what ways are you concerned about your family history and protecting it?
- How does the thought that you will be in someone's Christian family tree affect you?

### **Responding in Prayer**

Think of one person you would like to invite into the family of God and ask the Lord to assist you as you witness to this person.

# WEEK 4

## DAY 2

### Psalm 127: Worthwhile Work

Will we allow technology and our society's definition of personhood to drive a wedge into our community? It can and does happen almost naturally—without our help.

As we respond to Jesus, there will be purpose in our lives and meaning within our relationships. It is the context of relationships with God and other persons that should give meaning to our work. Unfortunately, our culture elevates the possession of things and applauds compulsive work habits. We need to intervene where God's image in people is being destroyed by our society and structures. These passages encourage us to take the lead in bringing God's kingdom back into our relationships.

### Drawing near to Him

What challenges to faith are you currently facing in your workplace? Talk to God about them and ask Him to reveal things during today's time of devotion.

### Read Psalm 127

### Discovering the Word

- What basis is offered in this passage for the worth of our work (v. 1)?
- Why is it foolish to work long hours (v. 2)?
- Children (v. 3) are a gift from God and are a sign of his favor on those who do worthwhile work. In what ways has God rewarded you for good work?

### Applying the Word

- How does your attitude toward work shape how you view your personal relationships?
- In what way do you need the rest that the Lord grants "to those He loves"?

As Eugene Peterson says, "A Christian's work is a natural, inevitable and faithful development out of God's work." Consider the following verses and what they say in relation to work and finding its proper place in your life, fulfilling God's purposes in whatever you are doing:

James 4:13-15 | John 15:5 | Deuteronomy 28:47-48 | Ephesians 2:9-10 | 1 Corinthians 15:10, 58 | Proverbs 10:22 | Proverbs 21:30-31 | Mark 4:26-29

### Responding in Prayer

Ask God to build in you the attitude toward work that he wants you to have. Take some time to consider and pray whether, whatever your work may be, you are truly coming alongside God to accomplish *His* good works for the Kingdom. Read Matthew 6:25-34 and keep it in mind if you find yourself becoming anxious and worried about your labour.

## WEEK 4

# DAY 3

### Psalm 128: The Blessedness of Godly Living

This wisdom psalm expands some of the topics in Psalm 127 which ended with the “blessed...man” (127:5). Psalm 128 gives a further description of this man’s blessedness. In the context of ancient Israel, it consisted of a productive farm, and a faithful wife and children around the table together. The ending of the psalm shows that neither wisdom nor blessedness are individualistic; both relate to the larger reality of the well-being of God’s people.

#### **Drawing near to Him**

In this psalm, we see the blessing that comes to those who fear the Lord. Take some time to reflect on God’s majesty and character, his heart toward you, and his saving work for you. Trust for his blessing to be a reality to you as you stand in awe of him.

#### **Read Psalm 128**

#### **Discovering the Word**

- According to verse 1, what two “ingredients” will result in the Lord’s blessing? How would you describe each of these in your own words?
- In what areas of life do those who are faithful enjoy God’s blessing?

#### **Applying the Word**

- What is the significance of this passage today?
- What success would you have if it were not for the Lord’s blessing? Why is that?
- How can a person prosper without becoming wealthy? What does it take to be content in one’s old age?

#### **Responding in Prayer**

Take some time to worship God for his blessing in your life. In addition, ask him to lead in greater faith and courage to live a godly life.

## WEEK 4

# DAY 4

### Nehemiah 8: Celebration and Revival

A look at church history seems to indicate that mature Christians have a pretty wide variety of religious emotions. That is, they know how to laugh, and they know how to weep. Sometimes we avoid crying and laughing because it implies that we are not stable. When we deny the variety of religious emotions that we find in the Bible, we are robbing ourselves. In this chapter of Nehemiah we see real repentance, contrition and weeping as well as great celebration and joy in doing what God wants. Without the exhilaration of celebration our tears of repentance would lead us into morbid introspection—something that would do us no good, because only God can handle our sins and shortcomings. But without true repentance and contrition we really do not find joy of the kind this chapter demonstrates.

#### **Drawing near to Him**

What has God's forgiveness meant for you? Recall a specific instance when God's tangible grace intersected your life. Dwell upon it for a few moments and let the remembrance of God's overflowing goodness refresh your soul.

#### **Read Nehemiah 8**

#### **Discovering the Word**

- The seventh month was one of great importance to the Jews. It was to include several feasts as well as the great Day of Atonement. What prompted the people to meet together?
- What were the qualifications of those who attended (vv. 2-3)?
- What statements show the reverence and seriousness of the people as they receive the Word of God (vv. 3-12)?
- Who assembles the second day (v. 13)? Why do you think this is?
- Verse 17 says that all the people had great joy. What was the reason for this?

#### **Applying the Word**

- How much is celebration a part of your regular Christian life?
- How do Christians you know show the great joy they have from obeying God's Word?
- Many Christians do not have much joy because they don't take obedience to God's Word seriously or make it a priority in their lives. How will you guard against that in your life?

#### **Responding in Prayer**

Spend some time in prayer and celebrate all the many ways the Lord has provided for you and forgiven your sins.

## WEEK 4

# DAY 5

### Nehemiah 9: Getting Back to Your Roots

For many of us it is difficult to think about corporately confessing our sins in the sight and hearing of many people. Yet revival and renewal are always preceded by contrition and remorse for our sins. Israel is at the end of itself, and the Lord is the only one who can deliver them, so they are returning to Him. We too must be humbled, broken and serious to be recipients of God's renewal.

#### **Drawing near to Him**

How do we get beyond the sin that keeps us from true fellowship with Christ and find true healing? Ask God to show you as you read Nehemiah 9.

#### **Read Nehemiah 9**

#### **Discovering the Word**

- Note that the timeframe is about three weeks after the first reading of the Law. Why do you think they were wearing sackcloth and putting dust on their heads?
- A quarter of a day is probably two to three hours. Does it seem feasible to you that they could confess sins for that long? Explain.
- Why do you think they spent so much time confessing the sins of their ancestors?
- What are the evidences from this passage that Ezra did not lose hope, even though the sins of Israel were many?

#### **Applying the Word**

- How freely in your Christian life can you move between repentance for your sins and experiencing the celebration of God's forgiveness?
- It may be surprising that the Israelites could go back so far and remember so many sins. Do you have any sense of history regarding your family sins or shortcomings? Explain your answer.
- Now picture a time of corporate confession for your church or fellowship group. What kinds of sins should you be repenting of as a group?

#### **Responding in Prayer**

Think of one act of reconciliation you need to make with members of your family, friends and the Lord himself. Pray and ask for forgiveness and commit to following through on your commitment this week.



## WEEK 5

# DAY 1

### Nehemiah 10: A Covenant with God

Christians see God as the Creator and thus the Owner of everything. From that fundamental view the believer willingly offers a tithe (and even more to the Lord) as an appropriate response. Unfortunately the unbeliever generally assumes that the church or its leaders are the sole beneficiaries of that money. While serious Christians see all they have as belonging to God, unbelievers basically see all they have as a result of their hard work.

Christians must be very honest and responsible with the money they control. Otherwise they open the body of Christ to ridicule and suspicion by the non-Christian world. There is no way the body of Christ can function well unless all God's people support those who have forgone a marketplace job to serve the body in a full-time capacity. This chapter of Nehemiah is about making such a covenant of support.

### Drawing near to Him

What promises have you made or do you need to make with the Lord? Discuss them with Him and ask for a fresh and renewed faithfulness.

### Read Nehemiah 10

### Discovering the Word

- The result of hearing the Law read (chapter 8) and the result of obeying the Law (chapter 9) now produce a written agreement in chapter 10 to obey God and His commandments. Who were the groups of people mentioned in this chapter?
- What evidence is there that everyone was included in the covenant agreement (vv. 28-29)?
- Make a list of the things that the people covenant to do before the Lord (vv. 30-39).
- Why would it be very important in their situation not to intermarry?
- Do you think verse 29 is still binding on us today as it was on the people in Nehemiah's day? Explain why you give the answer that you do.
- Who collected the tithe, and to whom did these people tithe?

### Applying the Word

- How would the decisions to which the people committed affect their lives and worship?
- Do you feel you take material things and the tithing as seriously as they did in this passage? Why or why not?

### Responding in Prayer

Reflect upon your commitments to the Lord in the arenas of family, work, school, and personal fellowship . Rededicate yourself in specific ways to these commitments, and promise the Lord to have renewed effort and obedience.

## WEEK 5

# DAY 2

### Nehemiah 11: Choosing Where to Live and Work

When my friend Ken is deciding where to live and work, he bases the decision on where he feels God wants him to develop a ministry and help to build up the body of Christ. Certainly people with the world's values do not choose a place to live and work on that basis. But as a Christian, the more I think about it, the more it makes sense. Not just my money belongs to the Lord, but my profession and my gifts belong to Him so they can be used in the body of Christ. God would surely know which place and occupation best fit His plans for the building of his kingdom! Only God can balance all the variables in a way that works best for his purposes.

### **Drawing near to Him**

What rests heavy on your heart today? Draw near to Jesus, who is waiting to put his arms around you as you tell Him of your concerns. Let Him listen to all your anxieties and allow your burdens to roll onto His shoulders.

### **Read Nehemiah 11**

### **Discovering the Word**

- How did the Jews in chapter 11 decide who would live in Jerusalem?
- Why do you think the people did not want to live in Jerusalem (v. 2)?
- Why would these five groups of people want to live in Jerusalem (v. 3)?
- How (from chapter 10) would all of these people be taken care of materially?
- How was Nehemiah making the city ready for the people?

### **Applying the Word**

- What factors do you consider in determining where you should live? (Consider occupation, salary, school, church, ministry, family and so on.)
- Since our barter system is money, in what ways does our lifestyle free us up to be more involved in kingdom building?
- As you read this passage, what personal decisions (past or future) about where you live and how that impacts your service to God come to mind?

### **Responding in Prayer**

Ask the Lord to help you live in obedience—your hardest daily decision no matter where God leads you.

# WEEK 5

## DAY 3

### Nehemiah 12: Important Work

"If a job is worth doing, it is worth doing well!" Integrity and respect come to those who do a good job. We recognise excellence when we see it, and we are offended by a job half-done. We would be of much better use to God, others and ourselves if we didn't volunteer for everything that came along, but rather did a better job on the things we can realistically complete. If I do my part faithfully, God will do the rest in building His kingdom.

### Drawing near to Him

How is your kingdom workload? Are you feeling overwhelmed by commitments to your church or fellowship? Or are you ready for a new challenge? Reflect on your commitments of service to God before you begin.

### Read Nehemiah 12

### Discovering the Word

- Why do you think the author mentions so many people in this chapter?
- How would you feel if you were Meshullam in verse 25 and were recognised for guarding the storerooms?
- Consider verses 8 and 24. Do you think most people would have wanted these jobs? Why or why not?
- From the book of Nehemiah so far, what is the reason for their great rejoicing (v. 43)?
- How important do you think the collection of these goods was to the effective running of Jerusalem and providing the worship and celebration that Jerusalem represented (vv. 44-47)?

### Applying the Word

- Since in our culture we see the up-front gifts as more significant than the supporting or helping gifts, would you see being in the choir as an important ministry? Why or why not?
- What are some of the supporting roles you think of in the church?
- How could you give (financially and with your encouragement) to sustain the supporting people (that is, pastors, missionaries, youth workers, denominational headquarters) in your church or fellowship?

### Responding in Prayer

Thank the Lord for giving you a job in His kingdom, and recommit yourself to be faithful in your tasks.

## WEEK 5

# DAY 4

### Psalm 133: Blessed Unity

Some things are good, but not pleasant, and some things are pleasant, but not good. For example, some vegetables are very good for me, but are not very pleasant. Likewise, hot fudge sundaes are very pleasant to me, but, regrettably, not very good for me. One thing is, without a doubt, both good and pleasant for all of us - and that is Christian unity.

### Drawing near to Him

How does the "mystic sweet communion" enjoyed by God's people compare to the kinds of unity that you have witnessed or experienced first-hand with others? As you get into this morning's reading, surround yourself with images of the warm Christian fellowship.

### Read Psalm 133

### Discovering the Word

- What is so good or pleasant or blessed about brothers living together in unity (v. 1)?
- To what is this blessedness compared (vv. 2-3)?
- If the oil of anointing that saturated Aaron's beard and priestly robes was so precious and sanctifying (v. 2; Ex 29:7; Lev 21:10), what does that say about harmony running its course through the fellowship of God's people?
- Mount Hermon rises 9,000 feet at three snow-covered peaks, its many glaciers stretching across 20 miles in northern Israel, watering the Jordan River valleys and cities below. However, during the summer, its snow and glaciers produce a heavy dew that envelops Mount Hermon, leaving much of the surroundings arid. For the "dew of Hermon" to fall on Mount Zion (v. 3) would be most unusual. What does that say about the blessing of brotherly unity?

### Applying the Word

- What does this psalm say to those who know only the brotherhood and sisterhood as it is portrayed in the media (consider fraternity hazing, sports teams that brawl, family corporations divided by sibling rivalry)?
- Where are you experiencing strong brother-to-brother or sister-to-sister bonds and blessings that sanctify and sustain God's people, as does "oil" and "dew"?
- In what way could you experience more of the priestly "oil" and Mount Hermon's "dew"?

### Responding in Prayer

Think about the spiritual refreshment and moral accountability that strong fellowship provides you. Thank God for the brothers and sisters he has given you to sanctify and sustain you. Consider ways that you can live in harmony with your family of faith, and pray toward that end.

## WEEK 5

# DAY 5

### Psalm 134: A Benediction

In trying to make sense of this psalm, some scholars have suggested that the psalm is a call and response: the pilgrims addressing the priests and Levites with a call to worship (verses 1-2) and the priests responding with a benediction (verse 3). Other scholars suggest that the psalm is a song of pilgrims returning home from the Temple “encouraged to know that the priests will be remaining behind to represent them at the Temple and so they will be worshiping God there continually.” Either interpretation reveals an eagerness on the part of the singer to bless God in response to His ample blessing.

### Drawing near to Him

Put yourself in the shoes of a pilgrim who has traveled days or weeks to reach the holy city. Continually, the image of God’s holy Temple has been playing in your mind, drawing you onward. The anticipation builds as the city and then the Temple draw within sight. Picture yourself entering the gates of the Temple and standing at last in the sanctuary. How would you respond? Take advantage of this perspective as you spend time with God.

### Read Psalm 134

### Discovering the Word

- Verse 1 shows us that God never sleeps. Refer also to Ps 121:3-4. How does this truth lead the Israelites to an eagerness to bless God in response to His ample blessing?
- Visitors at churches sometimes ask, “When does the worship service end?” If you had asked that question of a priest or Levite in the temple in Jerusalem, he would have replied, “Never!” While you and I are asleep in our part of the world, somewhere else on the globe, believers are worshipping God. Verse 2 shows us that worship never ends. This is most true in light of eternity (Rev. 4-5), so we had better start learning now.
- To leave God’s house with God’s blessing upon us is a great privilege, but it is also a great responsibility, for we must share that blessing with others. If it is a joy to *receive* a blessing, it is an even greater joy to *be* a blessing. Verse 3 reveals a blessing that never stops. Consider for a moment the precious gift that Mary of Bethany gave to Jesus. The fragrance of that blessing will reach around the world (Mark 14:1-9).

### Applying the Word

- If God never slumbers nor sleeps, why should we stay awake all night, tossing and turning and fretting? “Be still, and know that I am God” (Ps 46:10).
- How might you enrich your personal worship?
- How do you think you could not only be a recipient of God’s blessing, but also a dispenser of that same blessing?

### Responding in Prayer

Ask God for an eagerness to worship him in response to His blessing over you.

## WEEK 6

# DAY 1

### Nehemiah 13: Spiritual Decay

"I know they are sinning against the Lord, but I love them too much to reprimand them." Sometimes we emphasise loving people and not endangering our relationships with them over challenging them to get right with the Lord. When we think like this, we have accepted the world's values and not kingdom values! If relationship with God is the most important thing in the world, then to help people get back into right relationship with God is the best thing we can do for them. When we don't do this, what we are really saying is that we are more concerned about what that person thinks than what God thinks. We must be freed from this kind of bondage, or we are not of much use to God, others or ourselves. When we are biblically directed, we will be respected and others will hear God's Word through us.

### Drawing near to Him

Do you need forgiveness from the Lord today? Stop now and tell him about your pride or selfishness today—and let the solid truth of 1 John 1:9 that you are forgiven and cleansed cause you to rejoice and be refreshed.

### Read Nehemiah 13

### Discovering the Word

- Note from 2:1 and 13:6 that Nehemiah spent twelve years in Jerusalem before going back to Artaxerxes. We don't know how long it was before Nehemiah came back to Jerusalem to check up on things, but it was probably several years. List the things in this chapter that indicate the Israelites have backslidden before the Lord.
- Considering the people made such a strong covenant in chapter 10, how do you think they could have gone this far astray in chapter 13?
- What does the passage reveal about how Nehemiah felt when he came back and saw how bad things were spiritually?
- Compare 10:30 with 13:23-28. Do you see anything in the text that shows you why Israel has backslidden?
- Nehemiah's response in verse 25 is very dramatic and physical. What principles does this suggest to you for how we should deal with sin today?

### Applying the Word

- Why is it so much harder to confront leaders who are sinning, as in this chapter?
- In what ways do you need to be more direct with others about their sin?
- How would you like others to help you in dealing with your own sin?

### Responding in Prayer

Ask the Lord to make you more like Nehemiah, who pursued righteousness and called others to holy living. Pray as he did: "Remember me with favor, O my God."

# WEEK 6

## DAY 2

### Psalm 129: A Prayer of Perseverance

The beginning of the psalm is a reflection of a long history of captivity and persecution, accompanied by gratefulness for the Lord's protection of a persevering people.

#### **Drawing near to Him**

Take some time to think about God's hand in your life – through the good and the bad. Ask God to remind you things that evidences His sustaining presence in your life.

#### **Read Psalm 129**

#### **Discovering the Word**

Eugene Peterson categorises the theme of this psalm as perseverance, or “stick-to-it-iveness.” Consider the following occasions in Scripture where people have demonstrated perseverance and have been blessed by the Lord for their patient yet active endurance.

- Philippians 3:12-14
- 2 Corinthians 11:23-27
- Luke 22:41-46
- Luke 11:8-10
- Genesis 32:24-26
- Hebrews 3:6, 14

#### **Applying the Word**

Think about a time you “stuck to it” through adversity and persecution by other people. How did that make you feel? How did you feel about the people who were obstructing your path?

Reliance on God for rescue has long been the response of the Church to trials and persecution. Have you ever been afflicted with a vengeful boss, teacher, or other figure of authority? Think about what it would be like or what it was like for God to remove the ability of that person to truly harm you, despite all their best efforts. Write down your thoughts.

#### **Responding in Prayer**

Take some time to pray right now that the Lord will make you passionately patient, able to endure because of what God has granted you: not yet perfection, but the patience to endure the long journey of salvation. Pray that God will give you perseverance that is triumphant and alive.

## WEEK 6

# DAY 3

### Psalm 130: A Prayer of Hope

Hope is necessary. It gives us the strength to keep going through the tough times. It gives life joy and meaning in the good times. However, when hope has been repeatedly disappointed, it slips away. This psalm offers a picture of this struggle. The writer is without much hope. Yet he puts himself in a place of allowing for the possibility of hope. As we pray with him, we too can begin to wait with growing expectation. We too can nurture our hope.

### **Drawing near to Him**

How would you describe the experience of hope? How would you describe the experience of hopelessness? Thank God that you have total forgiveness through the completed work of Jesus. Thank Him for your right to have access to His presence because of His mercy, and that you can, as a result, enjoy a hope that extends into eternity.

### **Read Psalm 130**

### **Discovering the Word**

- The psalm begins with a cry to the Lord from "out of the depths" (v. 1). What pictures come to mind as you read this phrase?
- The psalmist's distress seems to be related to a struggle with guilt. How can guilt lead to hopelessness?
- Verses 3 and 4 tell us that God forgives. How does the promise of forgiveness contribute to hope?
- Verse 5 says, "I wait, . . . my soul waits." What is the relationship between waiting and hope?
- The psalmist then uses the metaphor of watchmen (v. 6) to describe the experience of hope. What does he convey with this image?
- What reasons does the psalmist give for hoping in the Lord (vv. 7-8)?

### **Applying the Word**

- What area of life is it difficult for you to be hopeful about?
- What reasons do you have for hoping in the Lord?

### **Responding in Prayer**

Thank God for being the source of hope. Pray for courage when you face hopelessness.



## WEEK 6

# DAY 4

### Psalm 131: A Prayer of Humility

Charles Spurgeon described Psalm 131 as “one of the shortest psalms to read, but one of the longest to learn.” For pilgrims entering the holy Temple, it was a potent call to humility before God. As we read the psalm within today’s individualistic culture, the challenge of such a call is readily apparent.

### Drawing near to Him

*Hebrews 10:19* “Therefore, brothers and sisters, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near to God with a sincere heart and with the full assurance that faith brings, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water.”

### Read Psalm 131

### Discovering the Word

- As you read through the verse, try to identify the distinct significance of each segment. How do the thoughts build upon one another?
- To what is the psalmist referring when he mentions in verse 1, “things too great and too marvelous?” What does Deuteronomy 29:29 add to your understanding of this phrase?
- Read again the second verse. What is striking about this imagery? Why is it significant that the psalmist refers specifically to a “weaned child?”
- How does verse 3 relate to the first two verses?

### Applying the Word

- What does the passage suggest about the relationship between humility and confidence in God? Do humility and confidence in God come together in your life? If so, how?

### Responding in Prayer

In the 11th century, Anselm of Canterbury penned the following prayer:

“I do not seek, O Lord, to penetrate thy depths. I by no means think my intellect equal to them: but I long to understand in some degree thy truth, which my heart believes and loves. For I do not seek to understand that I may believe, but I believe, that I may understand.”

Allow this prayer to frame your own prayer to God.



## WEEK 6

# DAY 5

### Psalm 132: A Confidence in God's Promises

The theme of this Psalm is God's covenant with the house of David (2 Samuel 7:4-16) to establish the kingly family line for the good of the people and, eventually, of the world. Most of the psalm expresses confidence in these promises; the requests are for God to carry out his purpose (Ps. 132: 1, 8-9).

#### Drawing near to Him

We get to read this psalm from a different vantage point. We read it knowing that Jesus was the ultimate fulfilment of that covenant promise and reigns as king from the line of David. Let that truth establish a confidence in your own heart, as you as you spend this time with the Lord.

#### Read Psalm 132

#### Discovering the Word

- Why was the ark so significant to Israel?
- What two great ambitions did King David have?
- Note the following: The worshipers in the psalm are praying that Israel will be true to its calling (verse 8-10).  
For example;
  - 1) That the priests would lead worship and teach the Scriptures at the sanctuary and be genuinely godly men
  - 2) That the people would celebrate what God has done
  - 3) That God would continue to show favour to David's heirs, so that Israel would remain a safe place for the reverence of God to be upheld.

#### Applying the Word

- What are your two highest ambitions?
- Today the glory of God resides within and among God's people. In what ways are you aware of that? How does it affect what you do?
- Believers today enjoy an unbreakable covenant relationship with God. Why is this covenant unbreakable?
- Do you agree or disagree that someday Jesus will rule from a throne in Jerusalem? Why?
- Until then, we get to live in the fullness of what God has called us to. What do you feel God had called you to? In what way does it resemble Israel's calling? Are you staying true to it?
- How does a confidence in God's promises help us to stay true to that calling?

#### Responding in Prayer

Thank God for his promises! Ask him to renew a confidence in you because of the covenantal reality of being in relationship with him through Jesus. Thank you, Jesus!