

What does this restoration look like? And last week we saw that it begins with a renewed passion for the word of God. That's where there is no revival apart from the word of God. Amen? And the people of God have a renewed passion for the word of God. You remember what happens? They initiate a gathering. They invite Ezra to preach for six to seven hours, a pastor's dream.

[4 : 15] I mean, you really want to appreciate me. Just let me preach for seven hours, right? And they build a platform so that the word of God would be central. They were affected by it.

They shouted amen. They raised their hands. They were emotional. They rejoiced. And the word of God was reviving the people of God. That's the first aspect where revival begins.

And so if you want renewal to take place in your life, it has to begin with the word of God. Now we see the second aspect of this revival, this spiritual restoration among God's people here in Nehemiah 9.

I'm going to invite you, if you're able to, to please stand as we just read the first three verses of Nehemiah 9. It says, This is revival.

Amen? Let's pray. Father, thank you for this opportunity to study your word. Revive us according to your word. We pray, Lord, for a revival in this place.

[5 : 49] A revival in our hearts and in our lives. Lord, give us a renewed passion for your word. And help us tonight understand your grace. And we pray this in Jesus' name.

And all God's people said, amen. Amen. You can be seated. Sinbari Tafari was no stranger to running races. The Ethiopian-born runner was not only a two-time Olympic runner, but she won the silver medal in the world championship in athletics.

She also won a silver medal in the world cross-country championships. And she held the world record for the women's only 5K road race.

In fact, it was because of all of her success and all of her experience running races that what she did at the Peachtree Road Race in Atlanta was so hard to believe.

Now, she had actually won that particular race the year before. And she was the clear favorite to win it again. She was just seconds away from the finish line from winning the race.

[6 : 58] And she had a very sizable lead over second place. But she was running behind this police motorcycle. When all of a sudden, the motorcycle pulled off the main road, which it was supposed to do.

But Tafari had taken her eyes off of the finish line and put it on that motorcycle. And so she followed the motorcycle and ended up making a wrong turn.

The finish line, look at the moves back and forth. And Tafari is now... Oh, no. Did she go off course? She took that right turn. It looks like she went off course. That mistake not only cost her the lead in the race, it cost her first place, defense of her title, and prize money of \$10,000.

She described it as, quote, a momentary lapse of judgment. Have y'all ever had one of those? You probably had a few of those. Today, right? And she goes on to say, quote, It was a mental mistake on my part.

I was wondering why there were still motorcycles in front of us so close to the finish. I just lost sight of the finish line.

[8 : 16] Close quote. Anybody here like Tafari? Anybody? Anybody here ever made a wrong turn? Anybody ever in the race of life ever gone off course?

I know you have many times in many different ways. Some of you were planning for retirement, planning for kids' college, but somehow got off course financially.

You were married with kids looking forward to a bright future, and somehow life took a different turn. Maybe you were on a path to sobriety. You had been months, maybe even years, since you'd even had a drink, but on one particular night, you made a wrong turn.

Some of you have raised your kids the best that you knew how, the best that you possibly could do, and then yet you watched them go down a different path. Churches do that, right?

Churches that were once preaching the gospel, churches that were committed to the Word of God, and then they veer off into false teaching or politics or social issues.

[9 : 21] The Bible actually has a word for this. It's the word wayward. It's when you go off course. You lose your way. You veer down the wrong path.

And my guess tonight is if we're honest, it has happened to us spiritually more often than we'd like to admit. Just like we sang a few moments ago in the song, Come Thy Fount, prone to wonder,

Lord, I feel it, prone to leave the God I love.

Anybody ever done that this evening? Anybody ever wandered from God? That rather than keeping your eyes focused on Him, you went wayward?

You know, the Bible says this about all of us in Isaiah. You know this verse. And all we like sheep have gone, what? Astray. We've taken wrong turns.

We've turned everyone to His own way. It's why the book of Proverbs encourages us to let your eyes look directly forward.

[10:25] Don't take your eyes off God. Don't take your eyes off His Word. And your gaze be straight before you. Ponder the path of your feet, and all your ways will be sure.

Say it with me. Do not swerve. Do not veer off course to the right or to the left. Turn your foot away from evil.

Faith family, there are times in life we need a course correction. And that is exactly what we see happen here in the life of Israel in Nehemiah chapter 9.

So if the first aspect of revival, which we looked at last week, is a renewed passion for the Word of God, the second aspect of revival, listen to me, is a fresh encounter of the grace of God.

If you want revival to take place in your life, if you truly want spiritual restoration, it begins with a renewed passion for God's Word, and then a fresh experience of His grace.

[11:28] Notice what happens here in verse 15. Notice that he says, this is Ezra, by the way. We don't really know who's praying this prayer. This is the longest recorded prayer in the Bible.

There's a little bit of trivia. Most scholars believe that it is Ezra, since he's the one that was teaching in chapter 8, that he's the one likely giving this prayer.

But it represents the people. And notice what he says. You gave them what? Bread from heaven.

So what Old Testament event are we talking about? We're talking about the Exodus, right?

We're talking about when they were rescued from Egypt. And their hunger, you brought water for them out of the rock for their thirst. You told them to go in to possess the land that you had sworn to give them.

But they and our fathers acted presumptuously and stiffened their neck. And they did what? They did not obey your commands. Now keep reading. Notice here in verse 26.

[12:27] Nevertheless, they were disobedient and rebelled against you and cast your law behind their back and killed your prophets. So now what section of Israel's history are we talking about?

The first was Exodus. This is the time of the prophets, right? When God sent prophets to the people and they rebelled. They refused to listen.

They warned you in order to turn back to you. And they committed great blasphemies. Now look at the next verse in verse 28. But after they had rest. Well, now what are we talking about?

This is once they get into the land of Canaan. If you're with me, say yes. So now we had Exodus.

Then we had the time of the prophets. And now when they actually have rest in the land of Canaan, what did they do?

They did evil again before you. And you abandoned them to the hand of their enemies so that they had dominion over them. Yet when they had turned and cried to you, you heard from heaven.

[13:26] And many times you delivered them according to your mercies. In other words, I give you those three examples to show you what Israel is doing here in Nehemiah 9. And that is they're acknowledging their history of failures.

In other words, upon hearing the reading of the law of Moses, Nehemiah chapter 8, the people come to realize they've been really, really good at one thing for a long time.

Making wrong turns. As they look back through their history, they are saying, it has been one wrong turn after another. They did it during the Exodus.

They did it during the prophets. They did it even in the land of Canaan. Our people have a history of turning away from God. And this is not God telling them that they're failures.

This is the people of God admitting they are failures. Does everybody see that? This isn't God saying, you're bad, you're terrible, this is what you've done. Although that would be true and appropriate for God to do.

[14:35] But no, this is the very people of God acknowledging it themselves. God, we before you recognize that we're really good at turning away from you.

We are really good of going off course. Now this is really, really important, faith family. Where does all this come from? It comes from engaging the scripture.

It comes from hearing the word of God. Because Nehemiah chapter 8 is all about them hearing for six to seven hours a day the law of God being read.

And what does the law of God expose? Their sin. Their shortcomings. In fact, notice this on the screen, faith family. You can't read God's perfect word and it not reveal your imperfections.

The word of God is like a mirror. Do you want to see how messed up you are? Read it. In fact, and you say, well, that's a discouraging thing. I'm not sure I like that.

[15:40] Actually, the apostle Paul says, this is a gift of God. It's a good thing that God gave the law and that the law exposes your failures.

This is what he says in Romans chapter 7 verse 7. What then shall we say? Is the law sin? By no means. Yet if it had not been for the law, I would not have known sin.

For I would not have known what it is to covet if the law had not said, you shall not covet. In other words, Paul recognized this as a gift of God's grace.

I'm so thankful that God has, through the law, revealed to me how many times I've fallen short. How wayward my heart is.

The people of God embrace this. They don't run from it. And let's be honest this evening.

Waywardness is not an Israel problem. Waywardness is a human problem.

[16:39] Amen? This is not just true for the people of God in Nehemiah 9. It is true for all of us.

Paul says in Romans 5 verse 12. Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to what?

To all men. That is, to everyone because all sinned. In other words, everybody in this room and everybody listening online, notice your history is one of wrong turns.

If you look back over your life, just like Israel is doing, you will see one wrong turn after another. But listen, it is not enough just to know this.

It is another thing to grieve it. To be broken over it. To have sorrow at this reality.

Notice what Israel does here in the first couple verses we read a few moments ago. Now on the 24th day of this month, the people of Israel were assembled with fasting and in what? Sackcloth.

[17:42] And with dirt on their heads. The Israelites separated themselves from the foreigners and stood and confessed their sins and iniquities of their fathers. They put on sackcloth and they fasted.

Now you may know this, but if you don't, this was a very common thing in the ancient Near East to do during a funeral. If you had lost a loved one, you would be so grieved and so broken over that death, over that loss, that you would put on sackcloth.

Many people would even put on ashes. And you would go without food. You'd go without drink.

You'd fast. This was a way of grieving your sorrow.

In fact, this very thing, if you remember, happens in Nineveh when Nineveh experiences a revival. It's very, very interesting that the revival that Nineveh experiences is very similar to that of here the people of Israel.

Look at here. This is Jonah. Jonah chapter 3 verse 6. The word reached the king of Nineveh and he arose from his throne, removed his robe, covered himself with what?

[18:52] Sackcloth. And sat in ashes. He issued a proclamation and published through Nineveh. By the decree of the king and his nobles, let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste anything.

Let them not feed or drink water. So what are they doing? They are fasting. But let man and beast be covered with sackcloth. Let them call out mightily to God.

Let everyone do what? Turn from his evil way and from the violence that's in his hands. Very same thing that's happening here in Nehemiah chapter 9.

There is a grieving, a sorrow over the reality, the recognition of their failures to God. Now, let's be honest. In our culture and even in church culture, we don't really like to embrace this.

What I mean here is we don't want to make people feel bad. We don't want people to be sad.

Often times, even in church, I'm guilty of this. Like, I want you to have a happy, a joyful experience.

[19:59] We don't really want to come to church and all leave crying, right? But there's actually something really good about grieving. There's something spiritually healthy about brokenness.

Amen? Do you remember Jesus' words in the Sermon on the Mount? Remember the Beatitudes?

This is Matthew 5, 4. Blessed are those who, what?

Mourn. For they shall be comforted. And that's not something, that's not the way we tend to think.

We wouldn't tend to think, happy are the people who are sad.

I mean, that doesn't make any sense at all. Blessed are those that grieve. And yet, that's exactly what Jesus is saying. Now, I've taught you this before, but let's remember it again. That beatitude comes right after the first beatitude, which is, Blessed are the poor in spirit. That is, blessed are those that realize they're spiritually bankrupt.

[21 : 03] Blessed are those that realize they have absolutely nothing to offer God on their own. That they are sinners. They are failures before God. And that they have no righteousness in and of themselves.

And when they realize that, they grieve it. They mourn over that reality. And then just follow the rest of the beatitudes. What do they do? Right?

They mourn. And then those that mourn are humbled. Blessed are the meek. And then they hunger and thirst for righteousness. Realizing they don't have any righteousness. They hunger for a righteousness outside themselves.

And then what do they find? Notice this verse. Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy. So I want you to notice this on the screen.

That godly grief, godly grief actually prepares you to experience amazing grace. Somebody say preach, preacher. Godly grief.

[22 : 01] That is mourning over our sins. Mourning over our rebellion. Being broken over the fact that God, I have turned from you time and time and time again.

And we grieve that like they do. And that prepares us to experience something amazing. So track with me here.

Are you with me? They listen to the law of God. The law of God in its perfection reveals their imperfection. They realize that they have a history of turning away from God.

They're broken over that. They're grieved over that. And then that prepares them to experience verse 17. Notice Nehemiah 9, 17.

They refused to obey and were not mindful of the wonders that you performed among them. But they stiffened their neck and appointed a leader to return to their slavery in Egypt.

[22 : 59] We studied that in Exodus. But, but, but. Everybody just say but. But, but. This is a but God moment. This is an Ephesians 2 but God moment.

But you are a God ready to forgive. Gracious. Merciful.

Slow to anger. Abounding in steadfast love. And did not forsake them. Here's what's going down in Nehemiah 9.

Nehemiah 9. The people of God are saying we have a history. And our history is that of failures. We did it in Exodus.

We did it with the prophets. We did it in the land of Canaan. It's what caused the exile. Our history is one of failure. Your history is one of forgiveness.

[23 : 58] Your resume, oh God. Towards the people of God. Is forgiveness. Time and time and time.

Again. As I said, this is the but God moment. Right? You know Ephesians 2. You were dead in your trespasses and sins.

But God being rich in mercy. Nehemiah 9 is we have a history of wrong turns.

But God has not forsaken his people. Faith family, listen, listen. I want you to stop this evening. I mean if you really, really want revival to take place in your life.

If you want a spiritual renewal. Then you need to take time tonight and think about the history of God's forgiveness in your life.

[25 : 04] Like don't just theoretically amen that. Personally enter into that. God, when I look back over my life.

All I see is one wrong turn after another. I have been prone to wonder. Lord, I feel it. Prone to leave the God I love. And you've never left me.

You've always forgiven me. You have been faithful every moment along the way. Listen, every wrong turn that you've made, faith family.

Every wrong turn that you've made. He has forgiven you time and time again. Now there's something about the nature of God's forgiveness and grace here in Nehemiah 9.

That is honestly disturbing. Now by disturbing what I mean is. It's so radically different from ours. We have a very hard time coming to grips with it.

[26 : 14] Coming to even believe it sometimes. And I've actually taught you this before. But it's been many, many years and I want to come back to it. Because this is really something we need ingrained in our mind.

And here it is. Notice it on the screen. That God's forgiveness anticipates your failures. God's forgiveness anticipates your failures.

Here's what I mean. What I mean is. It isn't as though you take a wrong turn. And then in light of that God's like. Okay in this moment I'm going to forgive.

Now that's true. I'm not denying that. But what I'm saying is it's bigger than that. Is that God enters into a covenant with you. Knowing you're going to fail before you even do.

And still enters into covenant with you. This isn't a you fail and now I've got to figure out what I'm going to do.

[27 : 14] Well I guess I'll forgive you. It's no. God from the very beginning knew exactly how many wrong turns you were going to make. And entered into a loving, faithful, unconditional covenant with you anyways.

Now let me prove it to you. Let me prove it to you. I'll give you just a few examples here. The first is in Exodus. In Exodus when God, meaning the event of Exodus.

The book is actually Deuteronomy. God gives Moses the law at Sinai. You remember that. And God commands this in Deuteronomy 28 verse 14. He says do not, say it.

Turn aside. Don't make any wrong turns. Stay on the course. Run with faithfulness. Don't turn aside from any of the words that I command you today.

Don't go to the right. Don't go to the left. Don't go after other gods to serve them. Is everybody with me? Stay on the course. Don't make any wrong turns.

[28 : 19] And then what God does is, you remember this. He gives a series of blessings and curses. Meaning if you stay on course, here's the blessings I'll give you.

And if you veer off course, here are the curses that you will experience. And then at the end of all that, this is what God says. When, and this is in the context of the curses.

That is those that will come as things that will come as a result of disobedience. When all these things come upon you. Meaning, God knew they would fall short before they ever started the race.

He already knew. He starts the race by saying, if you run off course, this is what's going to happen. And if you don't, this is what's going to happen. And ends it by saying, and by the way, when you do run off course, I'm going to be there.

I won't forsake my covenant. And then you go to Solomon. Solomon builds the temple in Jerusalem. And he offers up this public prayer as the people are gathered.

[29 : 26] This is 1 Kings chapter 8 verse 46. Say it with me. When they sin against you. This is not, nobody here has actually some preconceived idea that we're going to be able to be faithful on our own.

Amen? Solomon says, when they sin against you. And then look at the next statement. For there is no one who does not sin. Let's be clear.

There's no one that's going to run this race that doesn't go off course. When this happens. And you become angry with them. And give them over to their enemies. And who take them captive to their own lands.

And if they have a change of heart in the land where they are held captive. And repent and plead with you. The point is, both in the Exodus. God knew Israel's unfaithfulness before they even were unfaithful.

In Solomon's days. God knew Israel's unfaithfulness before they would even be unfaithful. And if those things don't prove it. This one is the biggest exclamation mark.

[30 : 33] And that's the story of Hosea. The story of Hosea. I know somebody that wrote a great book on this. Anyway, it's right. It's never mind. In the story of Hosea.

In the story of Hosea. Remember how the story starts. This is Hosea chapter 1 verse 2. So this is right out of the gate. When the Lord first spoke through Hosea. The Lord said to Hosea.

Go and take to yourself a wife of Hortum. And have children of Hortum. For the land commits great Hortum by forsaking the Lord.

And you know that the relationship between Hosea and Gomer. Is a picture of the relationship between God and the people of Israel. If you're with me, say yes.

Okay. And so Hosea is told to go marry Gomer. Already knowing the kind of woman she is.

[31 : 34] In fact, as you keep reading through the story. Notice what happens. This is Hosea 3 verse 1. And the Lord said to me. Go again. Love a woman who is loved by another man.

And is an adulteress. Even as the Lord loves the children of Israel. Though they turn to other gods. In other words. Hosea isn't called to marry Gomer.

Then find out who she is and what she does. And then have to decide. Am I going to forgive her or not? Is everybody with me?

No. No. Hosea goes in to the relationship knowing she will be unfaithful before she's ever unfaithful. And that's precisely the kind of love that God has for His people.

God is not caught by surprise when you run off course. His forgiveness has already anticipated your failure.

[32 : 44] And you say, that's disturbing. I know. Because it's a love like no other.

It's a love like no other. Notice it on the screen, Faith Family. God's forgiveness is not based on our behavior. God's forgiveness is based on His character.

Let me say it a different way. And this is the best news you've ever heard. God's forgiveness is not reactionary. God's forgiveness is not reactionary. God's forgiveness is not reactionary.

It's permanent. It's permanent. It's eternal. And He knew who He was entering into relationship with the very moment He entered into relationship with you.

And that's why the very moment you run off course, What do you have waiting on you when you return? Wide open arms.

[33 : 53] And Israel realizes this. And it brings her to her knees. How can God love like this?

How can our history of failures be met with a history of forgiveness? Look at it in chapter 9, verse 18.

Even when they had made for themselves a golden calf. Even when I ran off course.

God, you were faithful to forgive. As the great theologian Randy Travis says, It's a love without end. Amen. Let me illustrate it this way and then we'll wrap it up. Again, I've given this illustration before many years ago. It's in the book as well.

[34 : 57] The way I think through this is that I took the story of the prodigal son. You know the story of the prodigal son, no doubt. Even if you're kind of new to the church thing, you probably have heard that story before.

The younger son takes his father's inheritance. Does a very shameful thing. Spends it all. Returns home. He's embraced by the father.

The father throws a party for him. And the truth is, we're so accustomed to the story that the father's response doesn't even seem shocking anymore. Even though to the older son, it's like the biggest disgrace one could.

How could you love my brother like that? He doesn't deserve a party. Well, what I want to do is take that a step further and imagine that Disney purchased the rights and made a sequel called Prodigal Son 2.

And in this sequel, what happens is it picks up the morning after the big party. Everybody with me? So the father throws the big party for the son because he's returned home.

[36 : 05] And then the next day, the younger son wakes up, breaks into the father's safe, drives to the airport, buys a ticket to Amsterdam, where he stays at a hostel in the red light district.

After days of unrestrained debauchery, he comes to his senses and he decides to go home. Now he's approaching the driveway of his father.

And how would you expect the father's response to be in the prodigal son 2? Well, you would say maybe he's excited to see his son.

But let's be honest. He's not as excited as he was the first time. He'll probably be greeted, but there won't be a kiss. He'll probably be welcomed, but there's certainly not going to be a party, right?

Then, given Disney's obsession with trilogies, they decide to make the prodigal son 3. This time, after a few months of working at the father's business, the younger son makes some under-the-table deals.

[37 : 10] And his father ends up having to file bankruptcy because of his son. His son takes what money there is and runs, this time across the border, where he gets involved in Mexican drug cartels.

After being arrested, he's brought back to the father a third time. How would you expect the father to respond this time? Be honest. Be honest. If you're just being truthful about how you think the

father would respond, you would say, Well, maybe he loves him.

I mean, after all, he's still his son. But there won't be a greeting. There won't be a welcome. And he's at least going to have to work his way back into the family. That's just how it ought to be, right? Which is why we jump off the couch while we're watching the prodigal son 3 end the exact same way the first one ended and the exact same way the second one ended, namely the father running down the driveway screaming, My boy is home.

My boy is home. He was lost but now is found. Faith family, this is the nature of God's forgiveness towards the history of our failures.

[38 : 27] He has time and time and time knowing already you are going to take wrong turn after wrong turn and every single time has welcomed you home.

Spiritual restoration, that is revival, begins when we become freshly aware of the depth of God's forgiveness in the face of our repeated failures.

It goes like this, faith family. You, chapter 8, hear the word of God and all of its perfections. And it reveals all your imperfections.

And you don't just know it. You grieve it. You're broken over it. And you are fully and freshly aware that you've been really good at one thing for a long time and that is making wrong turns.

And if it has not been wrong turns with the feet, it's been wrong turns with your heart. And yet every single time, God's welcomed you home.

[39 : 51] And you're so overwhelmed by that reality, you are restored to God.

There will be no revival in your life apart from a jumping in the deep end of God's grace.

Israel doesn't just rebuild a wall. Israel has a heart revived. And it starts with a renewed passion from God's word, which then leads to a fresh encounter of God's grace.

And I close with this. Notice what happens as a result of all of it. Verse 38. Here it is. Because of all of this, we make a firm covenant in writing on the sealed document of the names of the princes, the Levites, and our priest.

Do you know what Israel does here? She renews her vows to the Lord. She is spiritually restored to God. The rebellion that sent her to exile has been repented of, and now they are restored to God.

[41 : 27] And I don't know that I really love this word, but it's the word that was used when I was growing up in church a lot, is people would say, do you need to rededicate your life?

And whether, again, that's the right term or not tonight to use, I would ask you this, faith family.

Does what happened in Nehemiah 9 need to happen in your life?

Does your relationship with God need to be restored? Does your covenant need to be renewed?

Not that you have, you know we don't teach here the losing of salvation.

The scripture doesn't teach that at all. That's complete nonsense. But your heart can still wander away. And all I'm asking you tonight is, do you need to come home?

Do you need to be brought back afresh in communion with God? Do you remember the promise that God gave the people of Israel?

[42 : 32] Don't take the verse out of context. This was given to the people of Israel. This is 2 Chronicles 7 verse 14. My guess is some of you have this verse memorized. If my people who are called by my name humble themselves and pray and seek my face, and say it with me, turn from their wicked ways.

Please get back on course. Come back home. Then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and heal their land.

That was a promise given to Israel. But listen to me. If that was true for Israel, how much more those who are in Christ.

Our life is a history of wrong turns. Amen? Can we just acknowledge that tonight? It has been one wrong turn after another.

Whether by feet or by heart. Isaiah 53 says, For all we like sheep have gone astray. We have turned everyone to his own way.

[43 : 45] But aren't you glad the verse doesn't end there? What's the rest of the verse? And the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

At the cross, our failures meet his forgiveness. And while our sins are many, his mercy is more. So today, no matter how many wrong turns you've made in life, know that you can be restored through faith in Jesus Christ.

After all, I close with this. Notice Hebrews 5. For every high priest chosen from among men is appointed to act on behalf of men in relationship to God.

To offer gifts and sacrifices for sins. Jesus can deal gently with the ignorant and wayward.

[44 : 55] And all God's people said, Amen. Let's pray. Let's pray. Father, thank you so much that you have time and time and time again welcomed us home.

That forgiveness is not transactional. Forgiveness is eternal. For Jesus died once and for all.

And so, Father, tonight upon hearing your word, we become freshly aware of how we have all sinned and fallen short of your glory.

That ours is a history of failures. But yours is a history of forgiveness. Forgiveness. And tonight we come to remember, by setting our minds on the cross, just how amazing and forever your forgiveness truly is.

So I pray that in these next few moments, it will be a beautiful time of remembering. And that that remembering would cause revival and renewal as we encounter, once again, your amazing grace.

[46 : 13] In Jesus' name I pray. Amen. Amen.

Thank you.