

# True Faithfulness

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[ 0 : 0 0 ]     Thank you very much, and thank you for the warm welcome we've received on the island. We look forward to getting to know you a little bit, and we ask that the Lord will bless the time together.

I bring greetings from our own fellowship, Kilmally and Arden American Free Church, and ahead of the visit, we've very much been praying for you, and we trust God to be gracious to us this weekend.

And we're going to look later on in Nehemiah chapter 9, but I want to begin our time just with one verse where the people are told, Bless the Lord your God from everlasting to everlasting.

Blessed be your glorious name, which is exalted above all blessing and praise. Well, we want to bless and praise the Lord together this evening, and we'll do that with our first item of praise as we sing together the metrical version of Psalm 111, and we shall sing the first six verses of Psalm 111.

Praise to the Lord, I will extol Him. Praise to the Lord. I will extol Him. Praise to the Lord.

[ 1 : 1 8 ]     Praise to the Lord.

and on the ancient times. The whole works of the Lord our God are great above all measure.

Slaughter they are of every one at a festive pleasure.

His words most honor our God is most glorious and pure, and is undainted by justness forever doth endure.

His works most wonderful he hath made to be not upon.

[ 3 : 1 2 ]     The Lord is gracious, and he is full of compassion.

He giveth me done to all those that truly do him dear, and evermore his covenant he in his mind will bear.

He did the power of his words unto his people show.

When he the raven's heritage upon them death he's true.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Well, let's continue now in praying together to the Lord our God.

[ 4 : 5 3 ]     Let us pray. Our gracious God and our loving Heavenly Father, we do gather this evening as a congregation, as a company of your people saved by grace.

Lord, we gather to bless, to praise, to extol your name. Father, we praise you for your works in creation, that you have set in their place the sun and the moon and the stars.

we thank you that it was you that formed the heights of the mountains and who founded the depths of the sea, that it was you that breathed life into all living creatures, and it is you who sustains our lives.

And so we praise you and we worship you for the works about which we have sung, works which are right and true. we thank you, Lord, that you are kind, that you are great, and that you are full of grace.

We thank you for the work of grace, for the work of redemption in our world, in our lives. That time and again you have saved your people from all their distress.

[ 6 : 19 ] When they cried, you have heard from heaven and you have answered answered to deliver. Lord, how true that is also of our own lives.

How much we want to thank you for the times you have taken us from the mud and mire and set our feet upon the rock. Time and again, Lord, you forgave your people all of their sins.

For you are a gracious and merciful God, slow to anger and abounding and steadfast love. You are the one who never forgets and who never forsakes your own people.

And how we thank you, Lord, for our redemption in Christ. That the one through whom and for whom all things were made should step into this broken world. That he might make one day all things new.

Thank you that the Prince of Glory was willing to bear our shame. That the one in whom there was life was willing to die our death.

[ 7 : 25 ] And that your only begotten Son should be cut off from his heavenly Father in order that we might be welcomed home and become children of the living God.

So this evening, this weekend, Father, would you fix our eyes upon Jesus? Would you turn our eyes upon Jesus to look full in his glorious face that the things on earth might seem strangely dim in the light of his glory and his grace?

Help us to set our hearts on things that are above to remember that our lives are hidden with Christ who is the hope of glory. So this evening we pray as we turn to your word as we lift up our voices in praise would you refresh our hearts and would you remind us once more of your very great promises and of the plans and the purposes you have for our lives that we might walk in wisdom that we might walk in uprightness for your pleasure and for your praise.

And this we pray in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, we're going to sing once more before we read and our second item of praise is Psalm 85 from Sing Psalms Psalm 85 and we'll sing together verses 1 to 9 In times past, Lord, you showed favour to your own beloved land the prosperity of Jacob you restored by your strong hand.

That's Psalm 85 verses 1 to 9 in time in time in time in time past, Lord, you showed favour to your own beloved land the prosperity of Jacob you restored by your strong hand you restored by your strong hand you forgive your people's trespass you were pleased their sins to hide you withdrew all your disfigured from your wrath you turned us high

[ 10 : 33 ] God our Saviour now restore us from us turn away your rage will your anger burn against us will it last from age to age will you not again be will you not again revive us that we may rejoice in you show us, Lord, your covenant verse show us, Lord, your covenant mercy your salvation grant and you

I will hear what God the Lord says to his saints he offers peace but his people must not wander and return to foolishness surely for all those who fear him his salvation is at hand so that once again his glory may be seen within our land well I

I wanted to look together with you tonight at the ninth chapter of Nehemiah which if you have the same church bible I have before me it should be found on page 483 that's Nehemiah chapter 9 page 482 and 83 it's a lengthy chapter we're not going to read the whole chapter but I hope to reference it in the course of our study together but tonight we're just going to read a few verses from the close of the chapter that's 32 down to the end verse 38 this great prayer of confession before God and Nehemiah chapter 9 verse 32 we come to the conclusion of that prayer let us hear together the word of God now therefore our God the great the mighty and the awesome God who keeps covenant and steadfast love let not all the hardship seem little to you that has come upon us upon our kings our princes our priests our prophets our fathers and all your people since the time of the kings of Assyria until this day yet you have been righteous in all that has come upon us for you have dealt faithfully and we have acted wickedly our kings our princes our priests and our fathers have not kept your law or paid attention to your commandments and your warnings that you gave them even in their own kingdom enjoying your great goodness that you gave them and in the large and rich land that you set before them they did not serve you or turn from their wicked works behold we are slaves this day in the land that you gave to our fathers to enjoy its fruit and its good gifts behold we are slaves and its rich yield goes to the kings whom you have set over us because of our sins they rule over our bodies and over our livestock as they please and we are in great distress because of all this we make a firm covenant in writing on the sealed documents of the names of our princes our Levites and our priests and we thank God for his word in this book of Nehemiah before we turn to the word together for a time of study we will sing once more this time from Psalm 36 the metrical version of Psalm 36 singing together verses 5 to 10 a psalm about the mercy and loving kindness of God towards his people thy mercy Lord is in the heavens thy truth doth reach the clouds

Psalm 36 5 to 10 thy mercy Lord is in the heavens thy truth doth reach the clouds thy mercy Lord is in the heavens thy truth doth reach the clouds thy truth doth reach the clouds thy truth doth reach the clouds thy thy justice di That's what thy justice di E Ais-Blued Lord, thy preserves man and peace, how precious is thy grace.

Therefore in shadow of thy wings, men's sunset shall quay.

[ 17 : 43 ] They with the badness of thy heart shall be well satisfied.

O rivers of thy pleasures, I will think to them provide.

Because of life the fountain pure remains alone with thee.

And in the purest light of mine, we clearly light shall see.

Thy lovingkindness unto them continue that be known.

[ 19 : 10 ] And still on men, how bright in heart thy righteousness be so.

Well, I invite you to keep your Bible open to Nehemiah chapter 9.

And although we read from verse 32, I want to survey the whole chapter with you as we think together. And it's a wonderful prayer. It's a prayer of confession.

And it's good as we approach this weekend that we come before God and acknowledge and confess our sins to Him, trusting in His great mercies, trusting in His steadfast love and faithfulness.

I wonder if you've heard of any occasions in which the leaders of the nation sought to turn a people back to God. It was a little bit before God.

[ 20 : 23 ] It was a little bit before my time, but I believe that during the days of World War II, there was a national day of prayer in advance of the great rescue at Dunkirk. The king himself called the nation to pray.

And all over the land, church bells rang out, queues formed as people were eager to pray for the safe deliverance of the British Army. When the time came, the seas were calm, the skies were cloudy, and a great many were delivered.

The leaders of a nation leading their people to God. And that's something like the scene in Nehemiah chapter 9.

Nehemiah was a leader. We often think of him as something like a civil engineer, rebuilding gates and walls. But he sought also to rebuild the community, the people of the tribes who had returned.

He sought to bring the people back to God. And so in Nehemiah chapter 9, he, Nehemiah the governor, turns his people's attention to the living God, rebuilding not only the city, but rebuilding the community.

[ 21 : 42 ] We have in Kilmali and Ardnamurk been studying together the book of Nehemiah over these past months. And it's the kind of book that's often preached if, for example, you're attending a leadership seminar.

You know, the sort of thing, you know, leadership lessons from Nehemiah. And somebody rightly commented, it is perhaps the oldest book, the oldest manual on leadership in the whole of human history.

Much to teach us about spiritual leadership, much to teach us about servant leadership, particularly the fifth chapter. But it's not just a book about leadership.

And it's a book that's often preached on, isn't it, just before a building project. We are ourselves about to renovate our small church building on the Ardnamurk Peninsula, but that wasn't why we wanted to preach it.

It's not just a book about building projects. In fact, building is really only half the story. The books of Ezra and Nehemiah originally circulated as one book, Ezra-Nehemiah.

[ 22 : 52 ] And we often concentrate on the physical rebuilding. In Ezra, that is the temple. In Nehemiah, the gates and the walls of Jerusalem. But each book is itself in two halves.

The first half, there is a building project. The second half, a rebuilding of the people's lives and their faith and their community around the Word of God. And so Nehemiah seeks not only to rebuild the city, which he does under God, but to rebuild the people.

To restore not only the gates and the walls of Jerusalem, but to restore their relationship with the living God, built on the foundation of the Word of God.

And in chapter 8, that Word is opened for the first time in a long time. And as the people hear the Word, they weep, because they realize what they'd lost, how their forefathers had behaved.

But they're told in that chapter not to weep, because it was a time to celebrate, and a time to celebrate the Feast of Booths. And so in chapter 8, there is feasting, there is a festival.

[ 24 : 02 ] But then in chapter 9, the time comes to weep, to confess their sins before God, to repent of their sins, to turn back in faith to the living God.

And so in chapter 9, that's what we find happening. On the 24th day, the people assemble with fasting, sackcloth, and with earth on their heads.

They separate themselves from the people of the land, and they hear the Word of God for a quarter of a day. Verse 3, And then for another quarter, they make confession and worship the Lord their God.

It's a remarkable passage. Where we live, we have a nice view of Ben Nevis, from some of the windows of the house. And if you're familiar with the Nevis Range, you'll know there's a gondola, which is the easiest and the quickest way to get up to enjoy the view.

And if you take the gondola in Anakmur, you get a tremendous view of the surrounding mountains. Nevis Range, the Memors, all the way across to the west.

[ 25 : 11 ] And in Nehemiah chapter 9, we get a tremendous view of the Old Testament. We're given a summary of Old Testament history. We're given a survey of Old Testament events from the creation of the universe in Genesis to the return from exile at the time of Nehemiah.

And it's not just a register of names and important dates and significant places. It is a record of God's faithful dealings with His unfaithful people.

It's a long passage. But there is a repeated pattern that helps us understand what's at work. Repeatedly, we are told of God's initiative in calling people to Himself, in making a covenant with them.

You did this, the gracious initiative of God. And then there is then described how the people turned away, how they were ungrateful, how they were disobedient.

But we did this. And then they are taught how the Lord showed His mercy and grace, how He persevered with them, and how He pardoned their sins times without number.

[ 26 : 32 ] And so I want to briefly survey this passage, observing three things in the first eight verses. God makes a covenant. In the verses 9 to 31, the people break the covenant and break His commandments.

And then in the verses we read, 32 to 38, they seek to remake the covenant. And the opening verses take us right back to the beginning, right back to the beginning of all things, the creation of heaven and earth.

Verse 6, You made heaven, the heaven of heavens, the earth and all that is in it. We live in a beautiful and a wonderful world.

You live on Lewis. I don't need to tell you that. The more we learn about the world, the more we marvel at the wisdom and the power of the God who made it.

The Lord, we're told, made all men and women. And He chose one man, this man, Abram. And He made a covenant with Him.

[ 27 : 40 ] He who made all things made a covenant with this young man, this old man, I should say. And He promised Abram that He would be the father of many peoples.

He promised to many descendants, though He was at the time childless. He promised His own land, the land of the Canaanites. He promised that He would bless him and that through His seed, through His offspring, all the world would be blessed.

And immediately, we're told, in these chapters, verse 8, You have kept your promise, for you are righteous.

The one who made all things made a promise. And undergirding this whole chapter is that the Lord kept His promise, for He is righteous.

Abram, his heart was found faithful to God, but God proved Himself faithful to His people and to His ancestors throughout their long and their troubled history.

[ 28 : 53 ] God is faithful. God keeps promises at the very start of this confession. Have we ever failed to keep our word?

Have we ever broken a promise? Not kept an appointment, an arrangement without telling anyone? Not fulfilled a contractual obligation?

Not kept a vow, maybe a baptismal vow, but bringing up the children in the faith? Are we unwilling, or more likely unable, to keep the promises we make?

It's part of life in the sinful and this fallen world that people say things and make promises, but they cannot fulfill them. And yet there is one who kept His promise, who keeps His promise, for He is righteous.

In the great hymn Amazing Grace, John Newton has these words, The Lord has promised good to me. His word my hope secures.

[ 30 : 03 ] He will my shield and portion be as long as life endures. He has promised, and He will keep His promise, because He is righteous.

So, the confession begins with a reminder of the faithfulness of God, the favor He showed to Abraham in making this covenant.

And in the chapter, the verses that follow, we move from Genesis into Exodus, the next book of the Pentateuch. And we learn once more of the Lord's deliverance of His people from Egypt.

He fulfilled His promise in multiplying them greatly. And though He had yet to give them the land of their inheritance, they multiplied and they lived in Egypt. And the Egyptians became afraid of the immigrants.

They began to oppress them. They were terrified that they'd take over. And then we have Pharaoh, who does not let his people go. And we're told in Nehemiah from verse 9 that God saw their affliction as they worked as slaves.

[ 31 : 21 ] He heard their cry at the Red Sea and He performed these signs and wonders against Pharaoh, for they acted arrogantly against our fathers.

But Moses went to Pharaoh and he explained that the God of heaven had commanded him to let His people go. Pharaoh said, Exodus 5 verse 2, Who is the Lord?

I do not know the Lord. He failed to rightly honor the God of heaven. And so the Lord showed His signs and wonders and He brought His people safely out, made a name for Himself, divided the sea before them.

And there in the wilderness He fed them daily with manna from heaven. He led them day and night with a cloud of fire. And He led them supremely, verse 13, by speaking to them from heaven and giving them right rules and true laws, making known to them the Holy Sabbath, giving them the law of Moses.

The Lord liberated them. The Lord fed them. He led them. He gave to them His law. He did them so much good. And then in verse 16 we read that word, but they and our forefathers acted presumptuously and stiffened their neck and did not obey your command.

[ 32 : 53 ] How did they respond to the saving initiative? How did they respond to God hearing their cries and helping? How did they respond to His care and His daily guidance?

They stiffened their neck. They refused to obey His commandments. They forgot the miracles, not mindful of the wonders you'd performed among them.

They sought to return to their slavery in Egypt. They committed great blasphemy and they worshipped an idol, verse 18.

They were not mindful of all that the Lord had done for them. Ingratitude, insolent.

They could not have been more ungrateful to the Lord. Instead of worshipping Him, they cast for themselves this golden calf and they said, this is your God who brought you up out of Egypt and they committed great blasphemies.

[ 33 : 56 ] I wonder how you or I would respond in the face of such ingratitude. Would we say, after all I've done for you and this is how you thank me, how does the Lord respond to their ingratitude?

You are a gracious, a God ready to forgive, gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. You did not forsake them, verse 17.

In your great mercies, you continued to give them the pillar of cloud, the pillar of fire. Verse 20, you gave your good spirit, you gave the manna. For 40 years, you sustained them in the wilderness.

They lacked nothing. The people rejected the Lord. The people sought to go back to slavery in Egypt, yet the Lord persevered with them.

He didn't give up on them. He didn't give them over. He persevered with them. Disciplined, yes, but not abandoned. Still fed with the manna, still led with the pillar of cloud and fire, still sustained by his spirit for 40 years in the wilderness.

[ 35 : 28 ] And the answer and the reason why, verse 19, is that word will meet again, these words, your great mercies. He made a promise to Abraham that he would bless his descendants and he kept his promise because he is righteous, he is faithful even when his people are unfaithful.

The opening psalm, reading a little further down to verse 9, Psalm 111, this time in the Sing's Praise version, has this stanza.

He sent redemption for his people. His covenant remains the same, ordained by him throughout all ages, holy and awesome, is his name.

He is faithful even when they are unfaithful. And we see that same pattern play out in the next verses, moving this time from Exodus into the historical books, the conquest, Joshua, all the way through to the end of 2 Kings.

Verse 22, he gives them kingdoms. Verse 22, they possess the land he had pledged to give to them. And it's a lovely land, rich, fertile land, houses and cities they didn't build, flowing with milk and honey.

[ 36 : 53 ] The people delight themselves in God's great goodness. And how do they respond? Well, it's depressingly predictable, isn't it?

Verse 26, nevertheless, they were disobedient and rebelled against you and cast your law behind their back. Not with gratitude and rejoicing at the Lord's great goodness, not with worship and obedience to his word.

On the contrary, they cast his law behind their back, going so far as to kill the prophets that came and spoke to them and warned them. The Lord doesn't give up on them.

Verse 23, he'd multiplied them as the stars of heaven, as he'd promised to do. And though they give themselves over once more to idolatry and blasphemy, he doesn't give them up.

He does give them over to the hands of their enemies, but he doesn't give them up fully and finally. And verse 27, when they cry out to him in their distress, once more he hears their affliction and he responds.

[ 38 : 14 ] And there's that little phrase again in verse 27, according to your great mercies. He made a promise to their forefather.

He kept that promise because he is faithful. And the people just go downhill. Things get worse and worse.

We're told that they acted presumptuously. It's the same language, verse 29, that was used of Pharaoh. So this unbelieving Pharaoh, who didn't know the Lord, acted arrogantly towards him.

And sometime later, the Lord's own people act presumptuously, as if they didn't know the Lord. They keep on sinning. They turned a stubborn shoulder.

They stiffened again their neck. They closed their ears to the pleas of the prophets. And this wasn't an occasional wobble. This wasn't a one-off. We're told it was a pattern of behavior that continued for many years, decades, centuries.

[ 39 : 28 ] They tried his patience time and again. And yet he never made an end of them, verse 31. And he never forsook them, for he is a gracious and merciful God.

He kept his promise, because he is righteous. He is the God of great mercy, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.

Perhaps you've known the experience in your life where you've sought to support a wayward child or a testing spouse or in the workplace, a difficult employee, a manager, member of the department.

Perhaps in your family, there's a member of the family who year after year causes nothing but heartache. They don't listen to advice. They go their own way. They make mistakes, foolish decisions, bringing nothing but shame and dishonor upon the family.

And yet you bear with them. You persevere with them because you love them and they're part of your family. Or maybe a spouse, maybe neglecting you emotionally, maybe never having anything positive to say, never anything encouragement, and yet you bear with them because you love them.

[ 41 : 02 ] And you made a promise, you made a vow to them to love them till death do you part. Sometimes in life, we're called to be long-suffering with those we love, to bear with them.

And the Lord here is depicted as long-suffering with His people. We marvel at His patience century after century as He comes after them and they turn away from Him for many years.

And yet He doesn't make an end to them. He doesn't forsake them. He doesn't forget the promise that He made to their ancestor Abraham, the covenants that He made with their forefathers.

You or I might be tempted, if treated that way, to say, fine, that's it. Have it your way. Washing my hands of you, that's enough. I quit.

We'll go our separate ways. Not the Lord. He made a promise. He made a covenant. He is the God of great mercies.

[ 42 : 09 ] He is righteous, and He will keep that promise. And so it's against that background that we come to the verse. We looked at verse 32, and in these verses the leaders of the people seek to renew the covenant with God.

They've rehearsed the whole story from creation to exile, and they now confess their sins, the sins of the people, the sins of their forefathers, sins, and they remind one another of God's covenant, but also of His steadfast love and of His mercy and grace.

they cast their minds back to the time of the exile, verse 32, when the northern kingdom was taken to Syria and then the southern kingdom off into the Babylonian captivity, the result of the Lord disciplining His wayward people for their breaking of the covenant.

And they acknowledge that in all of this, verse 33, He has been righteous, He has been faithful, and they have acted wickedly.

And it's not a few rotten eggs, it's not a few bad apples among the people. Verse 34, the kings, the priests, the fathers have not kept your law.

[ 43 : 37 ] It's all of them from the top to the bottom, from the greatest to the least, the whole nation has turned their back on God. And so now the whole leadership of the nation seeks to turn back to God, and to turn the people back to God.

Those who knew the law, those who should have known the Lord, who should have taught the law, ignored it, they broke it. Though He had fulfilled every one of His promises, giving them descendants, giving them the land, blessing them with good fruit and good gifts, they failed to honor the giver.

And they turned away and threw His law behind their back. And the irony is, they ended up in the same state they were in before.



Verse 36 tells us that we are slaves this day in the land you gave to our fathers. We are slaves. slaves. They inherited towns and cities they hadn't built, olives and vineyards they hadn't planted.

It was a wonderful land rich in produce. And now their tenants giving the taxes and the tributes to the kings, even their own bodies, are the possession of the kings far away in Persia.

[ 45 : 03 ] home. And you see the irony, when the Lord heard their cries, they were slaves in Egypt. And He brought them out with these miraculous signs, these wonders, brought them out of Egypt, brought them to Himself at Sinai.

And while they enjoyed their good gifts, they forgot about the giver. And they went their own way. And they ended up back in slavery, not in Egypt, but in Israel, in their own place.

It's one of the ironies, isn't it, in the modern world that people think becoming a Christian means some kind of loss of personal freedoms. In some way, if we become a Christian, we have to give up the freedoms that we might have to enjoy.

And of course, becoming a Christian is dying to self. It is a path of saying no to self and saying yes to Christ. But it is in Christ that we find freedom.

It is outside of Christ, Scripture tells us, that we are enslaved. It is in Christ that we find fullness of life. John chapter 10 verse 10.

[ 46 : 23 ] The people were slaves. God heard them. He heard their cries. He delivered them out of slavery. He brought them to a place of abundance and blessing and goodness.

And they turned away. And so they found themselves slaves once more. And realizing their sorry state, they confessed their sins to God, the sins of their fathers, the sins of their leaders.

They cry out to Him for His love and His mercy and His grace. And they promise to change their ways to demonstrate their repentance.

Verse 38, they make this firm covenant and the obligations of the covenant are there for us just over the page. They resolve not to turn away but to turn back to the living God, not to cast His law behind their backs but to open it before their eyes and to hide it in their hearts and to walk in the ways He has commanded them to do.

And they appeal once more to His great mercy. They appeal to the promise He made to their forefather, Abraham. They appeal to His steadfast love and His faithfulness.

[ 47 : 43 ] And in a sense they're saying to Him, Lord, as You treated our forefathers when they sinned, when You welcomed them back, when You showed them Your mercy and grace, when You pardoned them all of their sins and trespass, would You do it again?

Would You do it in our day? Would You do it in our lives? Would You do it in our lives? Will You not again revive us, says Psalm 85?

That we may rejoice in You. Show us, Lord, Your covenant mercy, Your salvation grant anew. That is their prayer. They're asking God to forgive them as He forgave their forefathers.

And so the chapter, lengthy chapter, very helpful review of the history of Israel, a survey, a summary of Old Testament history. But a rich revelation of the character of God.

Slow to anger, gracious and merciful, faithful to His promises, abounding in steadfast love. He is the one who takes the initiative, who makes and who keeps His promise.

[ 49 : 03 ] He is the one who delivers people from their distress when they cry to Him. He is the one that gives to His redeemed people good gifts and who is with them day and night.

He is the one who forgives the unfaithful, for He is faithful. And they say to Him, Lord, would you do it again? Would you give us another chance?

Do it again, Lord. Lord. We mustn't lose sight of the goodness of God. He blessed the people abundantly.

I stayed with a friend last night in Ullapool, and just late at night we were chatting, and then again this morning, and he just out of the blue said, do you know if we thanked the Lord for all His gift stuffs, we'd never have time to talk about anything else.

just awareness of the goodness of God, the God who gives so much that we delight in His great goodness. But we mustn't lose sight of the grace of God.

[ 50 : 14 ] It was God's grace that called Abraham, God's grace that took the initiative, God's grace that made the promise to Him. And as we're sitting here tonight, we mustn't lose sight of the grace of God and the initiative of God in our lives.

How did you come to be in this place? How did you come to be in Christ? Was it through a praying relative, maybe a granny, or a grandfather that prayed for you by name every day?

Was it through a godly influence in the home, a mother or father that taught you, prayed with you, sang with you, brought you Lord's day by Lord's day to church? Was there a teacher in the school?

Was there a Sunday school teacher? Was there a Christian friend who came into your life and showed great faithfulness to you? Was it through the ministry of a minister, perhaps a visiting missionary?

Or was it simply a prompting of the Spirit to go into a building at the time of a service and to see what was going to happen there? The Lord in His grace takes the initiative, sending people into our lives to share with us the gospel, to share with us the encouragement to keep living as a Christian.

[ 51 : 46 ] Because of that grace, He welcomed His people back time and again. And that's true of us. Before He went to Calvary's cross, the Lord made a new covenant in His blood, the covenant the Old Testament prophets had looked forward to.

And He made a promise that all who trusted in Him would receive forgiveness and freedom and fullness of life. life. And yet we can often lose sight of that.

As the people in Nehemiah's day might not have been mindful of the great works the Lord had done. We can forget to be mindful of the great work done at Calvary.

It might be a simple thing, just busy with life, busy with job, busy with career, busy with raising up children or grandchildren, vital role, vital responsibilities, but we can crowd out the things of God.

We can let the devotional time slide. We can let the family devotion slip. We can find ourselves not regularly in the Lord's house.

[ 53 : 07 ] We might just prioritize other things over our Christian walk. We might enjoy all the good things God gives, but we might enjoy them perhaps in the wrong priorities, hobbies, good in themselves, but which seem to expand to fill all the available time, which draw our best affections, which concentrate our best attentions.

things. Or it may be we want to play down our Christian life, keep it quiet, keep it private, don't want any friction at home or in the workplace or among friends.

Or it may be you're here tonight. Maybe you're surprised to be here tonight because you've openly and very deliberately turned away from your Christian faith, faith. Like the people in verse 26, you've cast God's law behind your back.

You were raised in the church, been prayed for and taught, but you shy away from the claims of Christ. The call to deny self, the call to take up your cross, the call to be a stranger in this world.

And you think that more peace and happiness and freedom will be found outside of Christ and in Him and among His people. The Lord warns us that He may discipline those He loves.

- [ 54 : 38 ] He warns us that if we turn from the freedom we have in Christ, we might, like the Israelites, find ourselves back in slavery. But He gives a word of encouragement that He keeps His promise, that He is faithful, that His mercies are great.

They are new every morning. The Apostle John in his first letter says, if we claim we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.

But if we confess our sins, as the men and women of Nehemiah's day confessed their sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

God's great mercies sending forth Christ, the Son of Abraham, to make the new covenant in His blood and so for the blessings of the gospel to flow to the whole world.

God doesn't mean we can be presumptuous. A philosopher once wrote, God will forgive me, that's His job.

- [ 55 : 56 ] It's what God does, what He did. But we mustn't be presumptuous. But we can be confident that if we come before Him as the people of Nehemiah's day came before Him and acknowledge and confess our sins and own our sins and say, Lord, we have strayed, we have wandered, we have gone our own way.

But as you forgave our forefathers, would you forgive us? Would you remember again your covenant? Would you show once more your great mercies and forgive us and cleanse us from all unrighteousness?

I will hear what God the Lord says to His saints. He offers peace, but His people must not wander and return to foolishness. Surely for all those who fear Him, His salvation is at hand so that once again His glory may be seen within our land.

He offers peace tonight to the troubled conscience. He offers us a way out of returning to foolishness. And He offers once more His grace to any whose hearts have gone astray to welcome us back as the Father welcomed back the prodigal so that His glory may be seen once more within our land and within our lives.

Well, may God give us the grace to respond in faith and to look into our hearts and then to look to Him this weekend.

- [ 57 : 46 ] I just want to pray once more before we sing our final item of praise. praise. And we'll just pray together now.

Gracious God, we do bless your name, the name that is exalted above all blessing and praise. Bless you as our Creator, the Maker of the heavens and earth.

I bless you as the one who made all things and the one who made covenant with your people. Father, we thank you that in a world of lies and fake news, your word is true.

In a world of broken promises and broken dreams, your promises are sure for you are righteous. We thank you that you're kind to us hearing our prayers, providing for our every needs, giving to us more than we could ever ask or imagine.

And we thank you, Lord, for your mercy and your grace that you are patient, long-suffering. Lord, even when we stiffen our necks, even when we turn a stubborn shoulder towards you, even when we cast your words behind our back or stop our ears to hear what you have to say to us, that you bear with us.

- [ 59 : 22 ] You do not make an end to us. You do not forsake us. For you are gracious, merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast and covenant love.

Lord, tonight and this weekend we ask that you would teach us the height, the depth, the breadth, the length of that love. And as we look at our lives, as we inspect the state of our hearts, that in your goodness and mercy you would forgive us from our ingratitude, from our insolence, even from our indifference, from our apathy to the things that are eternal.

Would you not again revive us that we may rejoice in you? Lord, show us your covenant mercy, your salvation grant anew. So, Lord, this night, this weekend, this is our prayer, that you will be glorified, that we might respond to your grace, come to you to be refreshed, come back to you after perhaps a time away.

I'll come to you, Lord, even for the first time, and to taste and see that you, our Lord, are good. And so we thank you for your amazing grace given to us in Christ, in whose name we pray.

Amen. Well, to end our time together, I wanted to sing the metrical version of Psalm 126, Psalm that speaks of the return from exile and from joy emerging from sorrow.

[ 61 : 24 ] Psalm 126, the metrical version, when Zion's bondage God turned back, as men that dreamed were we, then filled with laughter was our mouth, our tongue with melody.

We sing to close to God's praise. Psalm 126, the metrical version, when Zion's bondage God turned back, as in a tree in her way.

When filled with laughter was our mouth, our tongue with melody.

They mount the need and said, the Lord, with things more than the throne.

The Lord has done, the Lord has done, the Lord has done, the King's bondage God, when joy to us is done.

[ 62 : 43 ] As streams of water in the south are haunted sharply gall, whose soul endures the leaping time of joy and joy they shall.

That man who hailing precious seed, enrolling for the corn, the earth is bringing at his sheep, rejoicing shall return.

So may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God our Heavenly Father, and the fellowship of his Holy Spirit be with us now, this evening, and forevermore.

Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.