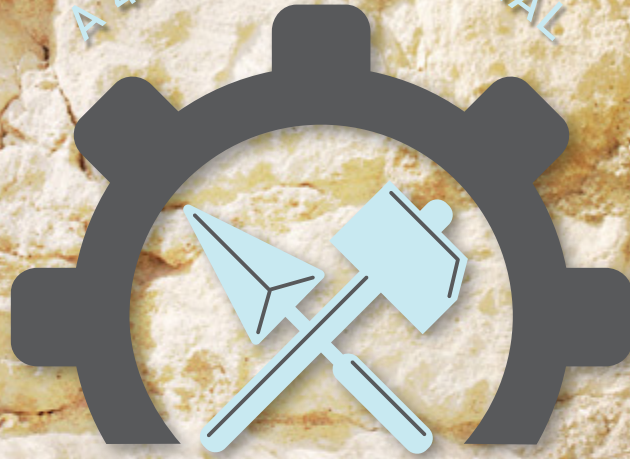


A 40 DAY DEVOTIONAL



NEHEMIAH

How God rebuilds broken people and broken cities

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SOURCE MATERIAL FOR THIS EBOOK

This Ebook is a compilation of resources freely available on the Internet.

The first two sections (What is a Quiet Time and Daily Quiet Time: A way to begin) are adapted from a free PDF made available by Redeemer Presbyterian Church in New York.

The 40 Bible study guides that follow are collections of the daily emails that are freely sent out by Intersity Press – see www.ivpress.com/bible/study.php

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. Through providing helpful questions, it helps us to interact with God's Word directly — to discover what the Bible says on our own (rather than simply letting someone else tell us what it says) and respond in prayer.

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

FREE ONLINE VERSIONS ARE FOUND HERE...

Nehemiah: <https://enduringword.com/commentary/nehemiah-1>

John: <https://www.biblegateway.com/resources/ivp-nt/John>

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 would be around 430 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 than at any time of their existence as a sovereign state. The Persian Empire allowed the people to practice their religious convictions with seriousness, and this probably accounts for 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, and that gave him considerably more ability to make some 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 was not interested in Judah's becoming 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 which meets us in the New Testament. Already the future prominence of the Temple and its priests of the law and its 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 subsidizing the three expeditions of Zerubbabel, Ezra and Nehemiah, and 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 mold this people back into the "people of God" so they could obey God's commands and have a distinction from the people around them. 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.

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 and persecution. God be with you as you study.

Ask God to speak to you and change you as you read and reflect on Nehemiah in the coming 8 weeks, starting tomorrow.

DAY 2: 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.

WARMING UP TO GOD

Before you look into the Scriptures, sit quietly for a few moments and breathe deeply, allowing yourself to become relaxed and peaceful. 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.

DAY 3: INTRODUCING JOHN

The most significant fact in history can be summed up in four words: Jesus Christ is God! The great declaration of the Bible is that God in human flesh was born in Bethlehem. It was God in the person of Jesus Christ who astonished the people of his day with his miracles and amazed them with his teaching. It was God who lived a perfect life and then allowed himself to be put to death on a Roman cross for humanity's sins. It was God who three days after he died broke the bonds of death and came out of the grave alive. The deity of Jesus—the fact that he was God in human flesh—is the bottom line of the Christian faith.

When the apostle John sat down to write his Gospel, he was not interested simply in adding one more biography of Jesus to the three already in existence. John wrote his book with a very specific purpose in mind. He tells us in 20:30-31:

Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

John's book is not a biography; it's a theological argument. John wants to convince us that Jesus of Nazareth is God the Son. Then he wants to show us how that fact will change our lives in some rather amazing ways. It is by believing in Jesus Christ as the Son of God that we find life—real life, eternal life, a whole new kind of life!

Every event John records is designed to show us that Jesus is God. John pulls from the life of Jesus specific incidents that demonstrate his majesty and deity. Of particular interest to John are the sign miracles of Jesus. In the first twelve chapters of his book, John records seven miracles. These miracles were not performed simply to alleviate human suffering or to meet human need. The miracles were "signs." They pointed to the truth of Jesus' claim to be the Son of God.

John was the last Gospel writer. The best evidence points to a date around A.D. 90 for the composition of his Gospel. The other Gospels had been in circulation for some time. John wrote to add his unique perspective and to fill in some of the details not recorded by the other writers. He assumes his readers are familiar with the other Gospels. John does not mention, for example, the anguish of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane. The other writers had adequately described that incident. John does give us the details of Jesus' conversation with his disciples in the upper room. The other writers mention it only briefly.

John never mentions himself by name in the Gospel. He refers to himself simply as "the disciple whom Jesus loved." We have in this Gospel the memories of an intimate friend about the Lord Jesus. Jesus Christ had transformed John's life. I hope you are prepared to have that happen to you! You are about to begin a fascinating study focused on the greatest person who ever lived— Jesus Christ. If you will respond to what John writes in faith and obedience, you, like John, will experience a whole new kind of life.

Ask God to speak to you and change you as you read and reflect on John's Gospel in the coming 8 weeks, starting tomorrow.

DAY 4: THE MASTER & FIVE WHO FOLLOWED

It was a great day in our history when a man first walked on the moon. But the Bible declares that a far greater event took place two thousand years ago. God walked on the earth in the person of Jesus Christ. John opens his Gospel with a beautiful hymn of exaltation to Christ. It is one of the most profound passages in all the Bible. It is written in simple, straightforward language, yet in studying the depths of its meaning, it is a passage where we never reach bottom. It is an ocean-sized truth, and we have to be content to paddle around in shallow water.

WARMING UP TO GOD

Consider the miracle of God becoming human. Give him your praise and worship for what he has done for you.

Read John 1

DISCOVERING THE WORD

- ⚙️ John records more than a dozen names or descriptions of Jesus in this chapter. What are some of these?
- ⚙️ In verses 1-3 what facts does John declare to be true of the Word?
- ⚙️ According to verses 14-18, what specific aspects of God's character are revealed to us through Jesus?
- ⚙️ What steps did John take to guarantee that people would not look at him but at Christ?
- ⚙️ In verses 35-51 we are introduced to five men: Andrew, Simon, Philip, Nathanael and one unnamed disciple (John). How did each man respond to the testimony he heard about Jesus?

APPLYING THE WORD

- ⚙️ Which of the names of Jesus has the most significance to you personally? Explain why.
- ⚙️ What do you hope will happen in your life as a result of studying the Gospel of John?

RESPONDING IN PRAYER

Ask God to bring the light and life of Jesus to you as you study his Word.

DAY 5: WINE & A WHIP

After I had given a presentation on the claims of Christ, a skeptical student asked: “What proof do you have that Jesus really was who he claimed to be?” People have been asking that question for two thousand years! For John the convincing proof of Jesus’ deity was found in his words and deeds. No one but God could say the things Jesus said, and no one but God could do the things Jesus did. In this chapter are two signs that demonstrate that Jesus was the fullness of God clothed in humanity.

WARMING UP TO GOD

Thank God for revealing himself to you personally.

Read John 2

DISCOVERING THE WORD

- ⚙️ When the groom’s parents ran out of wine for their guests, Jesus’ mother asked him to help (v. 3). What do you think Mary expected Jesus to do?
(Remember, according to verse 11 Jesus had not yet performed any miracles.)
- ⚙️ What did Jesus mean by his reply to Mary in verse 4?
- ⚙️ According to verse 11, the purpose of Jesus’ miracle was not to save the groom from embarrassment but to display Christ’s glory. What aspects of Christ’s glory does this miracle reveal to you?
- ⚙️ How does John’s picture of Jesus in verses 15-16 fit with today’s popular concept of him?
- ⚙️ Only the Messiah had the authority to cleanse the temple. The people recognized that and asked Jesus for a miraculous sign to confirm his identity (v. 18). To what “sign” did Jesus point them (vv. 19-22)? Why do you think that particular sign was so significant in Jesus’ mind?

APPLYING THE WORD

- ⚙️ In what practical ways can you demonstrate the same concern that Jesus does toward the holy character of God?
- ⚙️ How do Jesus’ presence and actions at this party serve as a model for you?

RESPONDING IN PRAYER

Ask God to help you to be his representative in everything you do.

WEEK 2

DAY 6: 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.

WARMING UP TO GOD

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 the praying Nehemiah does in this chapter and what he did in chapter 1?
- ⚙ 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.

DAY 7: THE NEW BIRTH

I talked today to a junior in college who is only one month old. No, she isn't a child genius. Recently a friend explained to her the claims of Christ. As she responded in simple faith, she experienced the joys of spiritual birth.

The most beautiful explanation of the new birth is found here in John 3. It's a passage that children can understand, and one that the greatest saints of God have never fully grasped. It's a message not so much to be analyzed and dissected as it is to be received with joy.

WARMING UP TO GOD

Do you remember your spiritual birthday? Reflect on what that time meant for you.

Read John 3

DISCOVERING THE WORD

- ⚙ What is your impression of Nicodemus (vv. 1-21)?
- ⚙ Why do you suppose Nicodemus responds to Jesus' explanation of new birth with such amazement (v. 9)?
- ⚙ How does the story of Moses lifting up the snake in the desert (vv. 14-15; see Num 21:4-9) illustrate our need and Christ's offer?
- ⚙ How and why does our response to God's Son determine our destiny (vv. 18-21)?
- ⚙ How would you summarize John's view of the character and ministry of Jesus (vv. 22-36)?

APPLYING THE WORD

- ⚙ John made it clear that Jesus was superior to him. What is one way you can demonstrate Christ's superiority in your life?
- ⚙ Who do you know that needs to know the truth about God?
- ⚙ How can you help that person see God?

RESPONDING IN PRAYER

Ask God to make you ready to testify of the role of Jesus in your life.

DAY 8: SOUL & BODY—SAVINGS & HEALING

“I love humanity; it’s people I can’t stand!” Those well-known words from a member of the “Peanuts” gang still make us chuckle. But our smiles hide the fact that we sometimes feel exactly like that. John says very little about Jesus’ contact with the multitudes. But long sections of the Gospel are devoted to conversations Jesus had with individuals. In John 4 we see Jesus reach out first to a woman, then to his disciples, and finally to a grieving father. Watching Jesus give himself to people with love and compassion will help us care for those God puts in our paths.

WARMING UP TO GOD

When have you recently felt that you were being mobbed by the multitudes? Ask God to help you to take care of yourself even as you try to help others.

Read John 4

DISCOVERING THE WORD

- ⚙ What is surprising about Jesus’ question to the Samaritan woman (vv. 8-9)?
- ⚙ Why does the woman suddenly change the subject and begin talking about the controversy over the proper place of worship (vv. 16-20)?
- ⚙ From verses 27-42, do you think the Samaritan woman genuinely believed? What do you see in the passage that supports your position?
- ⚙ After his encounter with the Samaritan woman, what specific lessons does Jesus apply to his disciples and to us (vv. 34-38)?
- ⚙ What does the “second miraculous sign” Jesus performs (vv. 43-54) reveal about him?

APPLYING THE WORD

- ⚙ What has Jesus taught you in this chapter about meeting the specific needs of those around you?
- ⚙ What present-day situations might arouse the same racial, religious and sexual prejudices as the Samaritan woman did?
- ⚙ How could you reach someone who has been rejected by the world, as Jesus did?

RESPONDING IN PRAYER

Ask God to help you be aware of the “Samaritans” around you. Ask him to help you reach out to them

DAY 9: 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 is so primarily because vision is 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.

WARMING UP TO GOD

Where are you today, figuratively, 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 you are working with?
- ⚙️ 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 is? 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.

DAY 10: DEITY ON TRIAL

In my high school years, I was hooked on television lawyer programs. Those intrepid men and women always found the missing piece of evidence that would rescue the innocent and convict the guilty. I've learned since high-school days that sometimes judges and juries are wrong.

In John chapter five Jesus is on trial. A group of people are forced to make a decision about Jesus in their hearts. They hear all the evidence but make a disastrously wrong decision. Judgments are still made for and against Jesus. Whenever he is presented as Savior and Lord, people decide in their hearts to believe his claims or to turn and walk away.

WARMING UP TO GOD

How has God recently revealed the truth of his claims as Savior to you? Thank him for his powerful works in your life.

Read John 5

DISCOVERING THE WORD

- ⚙️ Based on the scene and conversation around the pool, how would you describe the feelings and attitudes of the invalid (vv. 1-15)?
- ⚙️ The seventh commandment said: "Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy" (see Ex 20:8-11). In their zeal to apply this command, what were the Jews failing to see (vv. 5:9-15)?
- ⚙️ What insights do verses 19-23 give us into (a) the Father's devotion to the Son and (b) the Son's dependence on the Father?
- ⚙️ What "witnesses" does Jesus call forward to testify on his behalf (vv. 31-47)?
- ⚙️ What counter-accusations does Jesus make against those who are attacking him?
- ⚙️ According to this chapter, what really influences our verdict for or against Jesus?

APPLYING THE WORD

- ⚙️ When have you been more concerned about a religious activity than the reality behind it? Explain.
- ⚙️ How can you avoid the kind of religion that is outwardly pious but inwardly bankrupt?

RESPONDING IN PRAYER

Ask God to help you discover true religion.

WEEK 3

DAY 11: JESUS, THE BREAD OF LIFE

Do you realize that during your lifetime you will probably spend over thirty-five thousand hours eating? That's the equivalent of eight years of nonstop meals, twelve hours a day! The problem, of course, is that even after a big meal we get hungry again. At best, food only satisfies us for a few hours.

Yet in this chapter, Jesus offers us food that satisfies our hunger forever. You can't buy it in a grocery store. It is found only in Jesus himself.

WARMING UP TO GOD

How do you usually respond to an "impossible" situation—a problem in your life that doesn't seem to have a solution?

Read John 6

DISCOVERING THE WORD

- ⚙ Read John 6:1-15. How would you characterize Philip's and Andrew's response to the problem of feeding this enormous crowd (vv. 5-9)?
- ⚙ Imagine that you are one of the disciples, rowing the boat in dark, rough waters (vv. 16-21). How would your concept of Jesus have been altered by seeing him walk on water?
- ⚙ The next day the people were hungry again, so they came seeking Jesus (vv. 22-25). How does he try to redirect their thinking (vv. 26-33)?
- ⚙ Based on the remarks of some in the crowd (vv. 41-42), do you think they finally understood what Jesus was saying? Explain.
- ⚙ When Jesus said, "This bread is my flesh," the crowd could think only of cannibalism (v. 52). What do you think it means to eat Jesus' flesh and drink his blood (vv. 53-59)? Is this something we do once for all time, or is it an ongoing process? Explain.
- ⚙ In verses 60-71 Jesus turns away from the crowd and focuses on his disciples. How would you describe their responses to his "hard teaching"?

APPLYING THE WORD

- ⚙ Which response in question 6 best describes your present attitude toward Jesus? Explain.
- ⚙ Jesus has contrasted the two appetites found in every person—the appetite for food that perishes and the appetite for food that endures. In what ways has Jesus satisfied the spiritual hunger in your heart?

RESPONDING IN PRAYER

Praise God for satisfying all your needs.

DAY 12: CONFUSION OVER CHRIST

Not long ago I had a series of conversations with a young man about Jesus Christ and why faith in him is so important. At first, the young man was interested. He was open to listen to God's Word and to consider Christ's claims. As time went on, however, he became more and more hostile to Christ. Finally, he told me that he didn't want to pursue his investigation any further. He had decided to reject Christ and his offer of salvation.

That is precisely the pattern that John traces in his Gospel. In the early chapters, men and women responded to Jesus with belief. Then some of those who were following him turned away. Now open warfare breaks out between Jesus and his enemies—and yet, some still seek the truth. This chapter will help you respond positively to the wide variety of attitudes toward Jesus today.

WARMING UP TO GOD

"If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink." These are Jesus' words to us today. In what way do you need Jesus' spiritual refreshment? Be quiet before him and experience the "streams of living water."

Read John 7:1-52

DISCOVERING THE WORD

- ⚙ The first blast of hostility against Jesus comes from his own family (vv. 1-13). How would you characterize the statements made by Jesus' brothers (vv. 3-5)?
- ⚙ When Jesus makes his presence in Jerusalem known, people begin to challenge the origin (and, therefore, the authority) of his teaching. According to Jesus, how can we verify the truth of his teaching (vv. 16-18)?
- ⚙ What other opinions or questions do people have about Jesus in verses 20-36?
- ⚙ How does Jesus respond to each one?
- ⚙ On the last day of the Feast of Tabernacles, large vats of water were poured out on the pavement of the temple court as a reminder of God's provision of water in the wilderness. With that custom in mind, how would you explain the significance of Jesus' remarks in verses 37-39?

APPLYING THE WORD

- ⚙ What counsel would you give a believer who faces spiritual opposition from his or her family?
- ⚙ Which of the opinions about Jesus you have identified in this chapter are still expressed today, and in what way?
- ⚙ Based on Jesus' example, what should our response be to such reactions?

RESPONDING IN PRAYER

Pray for wisdom as you face various reactions to Jesus.

DAY 13: OPPOSITION FROM THE OUTSIDE

“Sticks and stones may break my bones, but names will never hurt 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.

WARMING UP TO GOD

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.

DAY 14: CAUGHT IN ADULTERY

Nothing is more humiliating than being caught in an act of disobedience! Whether it's a child with his hand in the cookie jar or an adult driving over the speed limit, we all know the sinking feeling of being caught. In John 8, a woman is caught in the most awkward of situations—in the very act of adultery. The way Jesus responds to her may surprise you.

WARMING UP TO GOD

Think of a time when you hurt someone and that person was willing to forgive you. How did it feel to be forgiven? Thank God for extending forgiveness to you.

Read John 7:53—8:11

DISCOVERING THE WORD

- ⚙️ What do we know about the character and motives of those who bring this woman to Jesus?
- ⚙️ While it is obvious that the woman is guilty, what elements of injustice can you find in this situation?
- ⚙️ The Pharisees and teachers were often very self-righteous. Why do you think they went away rather than stoning the woman (vv. 7-9)?
- ⚙️ How would you describe Jesus' attitude toward the woman (vv. 10-11)?

APPLYING THE WORD

- ⚙️ What can we learn from this passage about Christ's attitude toward us—even when we feel awful about ourselves?
- ⚙️ What does it teach us about forgiving and accepting others?
- ⚙️ Who do you need to offer your forgiveness to?

RESPONDING IN PRAYER

Ask God to show you what it means to forgive.

DAY 15: JESUS, THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD

Jesus never spoke in public without creating controversy. In fact, he was constantly in trouble! Rather than retreating behind the safety of a pulpit, Jesus spoke in settings where people were bold enough to talk back. In this portion of John's story, Jesus makes a series of claims about himself. Each claim is met by a challenge from his enemies. Each challenge is then answered, and the answer leads to the next claim. Throughout this interchange, Jesus shows us how to speak the truth in the face of hostility. He also reveals some amazing things about himself.

WARMING UP TO GOD

Have you ever tried to talk about Christ with a family member or coworker who was hostile to your message? How did you feel at the time? Thank God for giving you a Savior who understands everything we experience.

Read John 8:12-59

DISCOVERING THE WORD

- ⚙ The Pharisees challenge the validity of Jesus' claim (v. 13). How does Jesus answer their challenge (vv. 14-18)?
- ⚙ Jesus' reference to his Father leads to his second claim—that he came from God. How does this claim heighten the tension between Jesus and the Jews (vv. 19-30)?
- ⚙ Jesus makes another startling claim in verses 31-32: "If you hold to my teaching . . . then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." Why does holding to Jesus' teaching lead to true knowledge and freedom?
- ⚙ Jesus' opponents also claim to have both Abraham and God as their father. According to Jesus, how does their conduct contradict their claim (vv. 39-47)?

APPLYING THE WORD

- ⚙ Why is our conduct the truest test of our beliefs?
- ⚙ In what ways does your lifestyle validate (or invalidate) your claim to be a follower of Christ?

RESPONDING IN PRAYER

Ask God to help you change the parts of your life that don't match your beliefs.

WEEK 4

DAY 16: A BLIND MAN SEES THE LIGHT

Our sight is a wonderful gift from God. We marvel at the fiery colors of a sunset, the rich pastels of spring and the delicate beauty of a flower. How tragic it must be to never see the light of day. Yet there is a far greater tragedy than physical blindness. In this passage Jesus meets a man who has been blind from birth. The man illustrates that those who are blind often see clearly, while those with sight see nothing at all.

WARMING UP TO GOD

Before you begin this chapter about various kinds of blindness and sight, ask God to open your eyes so that you can see what he has for you.

Read John 9

DISCOVERING THE WORD

- ⚙️ Based on the question the disciples ask Jesus (v. 2), how do they view the relation between sickness and sin?
- ⚙️ What is Jesus' view of the same issue (vv. 3-5)?
- ⚙️ Why do you think Jesus goes through the process of making mud and instructing the man to go wash, instead of simply healing him instantly?
- ⚙️ On what grounds do the Pharisees object to this miracle (vv. 16, 22, 24, 29)?
- ⚙️ How do the Pharisees react when the genuineness of the miracle becomes undeniable (vv. 28-34)?

APPLYING THE WORD

- ⚙️ When might Christians today exhibit the Pharisees' attitude to a marvelous work of God's grace or power?
- ⚙️ What principles in this chapter could help you improve your spiritual eyesight?

RESPONDING IN PRAYER

Ask God to strengthen your faith so that you might respond as the man did, "Lord, I believe."

DAY 17: THE SHEPHERD & HIS SHEEP

Jesus was a master at using simple, everyday objects or events to illustrate profound spiritual truths. The farmer scattering seed, the vine sustaining the branches, and sparrows falling to the earth all took on a new dimension in Jesus' eyes. In John 10, Jesus uses the scene of a shepherd enclosing his sheep in a sheepfold to give us one of the most moving pictures of our salvation and security in Christ found anywhere in the Bible. If you've ever doubted the love of Christ, Jesus will give you a healthy dose of assurance in this chapter.

WARMING UP TO GOD

What usually prompts you to have doubts about your salvation or your walk with Christ—your own sin? feelings of unworthiness? personal failures? Be honest with Christ about your doubts.

Read John 10

DISCOVERING THE WORD

- ⚙️ What spiritual truths is Jesus trying to convey in verses 1-5?
- ⚙️ In verses 11-15 Jesus talks about the shepherd's care for his sheep. What can you learn from those verses about Jesus' care and relationship with you?
- ⚙️ According to Jesus, how are the Jews in this passage different from his sheep (vv. 22-27)?
- ⚙️ When Jesus claims that he and the Father are one, the Jews pick up stones to stone him (vv. 30-33). Do you think his defense is a denial of his deity (vv. 33-36)? Explain.

APPLYING THE WORD

- ⚙️ How do you respond to promises and assurances Jesus gives his sheep in verses 28-29?
- ⚙️ Which promise from Jesus in this chapter is most encouraging to you? 3. How can Jesus' promise help you when you have doubts?

RESPONDING IN PRAYER

Praise God for giving you such a Good Shepherd.

DAY 18: OPPOSITION FROM WITHIN

Most organizations and nations fall apart because of opposition and deterioration from within rather than from without. An idea is conceived, 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 aggrandizement corrupts the intended purpose. At the beginning there is sacrifice by the people, but someone usually figures out how to make money from the idea, and it is not long before that which helped people hurts people. That is what happens in this chapter of Nehemiah.

WARMING UP TO GOD

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.

DAY 19: RESURRECTION & LIFE

Ever since God judged Adam and Eve, death has plagued humanity. It separates us from those we love and looms over our own lives like a menacing spirit. In this chapter Jesus reaches out to a family struggling with the pain of death. He shows us why we need never fear death again.

WARMING UP TO GOD

When is it difficult for you to feel that God is with you? Talk to God about your feelings of abandonment.

Read John 11

DISCOVERING THE WORD

- ⚙ How can we resolve the apparent conflict between Jesus' love for Lazarus and his deliberate delay in helping him (vv. 4-5)?
- ⚙ What additional insight into God's purposes can we gain from Jesus' statement in verse 15?
- ⚙ What elements of doubt and faith do you see in Martha's statements to Jesus (vv. 17-27)?
- ⚙ How should Christ's statement in verses 25-26 radically alter our views of life and death?
- ⚙ Why do you think John emphasizes that Jesus was deeply moved by Mary's grief and the anguish of those with her (vv. 28-38)?
- ⚙ How would you explain the fact that the people who see the same miracle respond in two totally different ways (vv. 45-57)?

APPLYING THE WORD

- ⚙ How can those verses help us when we feel abandoned by God in a time of great need?
- ⚙ In what ways will this chapter change the way you respond to personal difficulty or the apparent delay of God?

RESPONDING IN PRAYER

Thank God for his personal presence with you.

DAY 20: THE KING'S LAST ACTS

If you have ever felt rejected or misunderstood, you know how Jesus felt as his public ministry came to an end. The hostility against him had risen to a fever pitch. His gentle compassion and abundant miracles were met with oppression and violence. Jesus knew what none of his friends knew—that he was about to die. In spite of the fleeting attempts of the crowd to make him King, Jesus chose the way of the cross.

WARMING UP TO GOD

If you knew for sure that you had only one week to live, what would you do with that week?

Read John 12

DISCOVERING THE WORD

- ⚙ What motivates Mary to pour expensive perfume on Jesus' feet?
- ⚙ Judas objects to Mary's extravagance. What motives and wrong thinking lie behind his objection (vv. 4-8)?
- ⚙ What do the shouts of the crowd tell us about their expectations of Jesus (vv. 12-10)?
- ⚙ How do Christ's statements about his mission clash with the crowd's expectations (vv. 23-28)?
- ⚙ When we stubbornly refuse to believe, what happens to our spiritual senses, and why (vv. 37-41)?
- ⚙ Jesus' last public message to his people is recorded in verses 44-50. What indications do you find that he is still reaching out in love and grace to those who have rejected him?

APPLYING THE WORD

- ⚙ In what ways should we be extravagant in our devotion to Jesus?
- ⚙ How can you apply the example of Jesus to people who reject you or your testimony about Christ?

RESPONDING IN PRAYER

In your own life are you more interested in earthly acclaim and glory or are you willing to lose your life for Christ's sake? Examine your direction and life goals in the light of Jesus' commitment to do the will of the Father.

WEEK 5

DAY 21: THE SON AS A SLAVE

There were two things on Jesus' heart the night before his crucifixion—his Father and his disciples. In John 13-17, we have the privilege of listening to his conversations with them both. However, before Jesus can instruct his disciples about his death, he has to act out a lesson in servitude. Jesus also shows us the spirit he expects in those who follow him. Greatness in Christ's eyes does not come from having many servants but from being the servant of many.

WARMING UP TO GOD

Have you ever been asked to do a demeaning, lowly job? What thoughts went through your mind at that time? Praise God for a Savior who was willing to take on the lowliest task of all.

Read John 13:1-17

DISCOVERING THE WORD

- ⚙ According to John, what did Jesus know about himself (vv. 1-3)? In light of that knowledge, what is remarkable about what Jesus did next (vv. 4-5)?
- ⚙ Foot washing was normally done by servants or slaves. Why do you think that Jesus washed his disciples' feet instead of simply talking to them about love?
- ⚙ Was Peter simply being humble when he refused to allow Jesus to serve him (vv. 6-8)? Explain.
- ⚙ What spiritual truth was Jesus trying to communicate to Peter (and to us) in verses 8-11?
- ⚙ Based on Jesus' words in verse 17, how would you describe the relationship between knowledge, action and joy in the Christian life?

APPLYING THE WORD

- ⚙ What has this chapter revealed to you about your attitude toward serving?
- ⚙ In what specific ways can you model the humility of Jesus toward those with whom you live or work?

RESPONDING IN PRAYER

Ask God to give you a humble spirit.

DAY 22: 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.

WARMING UP TO GOD

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.

DAY 23: THE BETRAYER & THE BOASTER

There are some people we just don't like to be around! They aren't necessarily our enemies. They simply have the uncanny ability to irritate us. If we had been one of Jesus' disciples, we would probably have found it difficult to be around Peter. He was blunt and, at times, arrogant. On the other hand, we might have regarded Judas with trust and respect. The only one who saw deeply enough to discern the true character of these men was Jesus.

WARMING UP TO GOD

Has someone in your life ever hurt you deeply? How have you responded to that hurt? Tell God how you feel about what happened. Allow him to speak to your pain.

Read John 13:18-38

DISCOVERING THE WORD

- ⚙️ Jesus takes this opportunity to predict his betrayal. How would his prediction dispel any doubts the disciples might have and strengthen their faith (v. 19)?
- ⚙️ Evidently, the disciples did not know who would betray Jesus (v. 22). What does this tell us about how Jesus had treated Judas?
- ⚙️ Why does the kind of love Jesus describes convince all of humanity that we are Jesus' disciples (v. 35)?
- ⚙️ Do you think Peter's declaration in verse 37 comes from pride or from sincerity? Explain.
- ⚙️ Three people stand out in this passage—Jesus, Judas and Peter. What one character quality of each—good or evil—impresses you the most?

APPLYING THE WORD

- ⚙️ How would you have treated Judas if you knew he would eventually betray you?
- ⚙️ John later wrote: "This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers" (1 John 3:16). In what practical ways can you exhibit this sacrificial love?

RESPONDING IN PRAYER

Pray for a strong faith that won't lead you into betrayal when times are tough.

DAY 24: COMFORT FOR A TROUBLED HEART

The call came late at night. A broken sob was followed by these words: “Our son is dying. Will you please come to the hospital?” As I made the trip through darkened streets, I wondered what I could say to bring comfort to these heartbroken parents. Jesus faced that challenge too. In this chapter he comforts eleven disciples who feel like their world is coming unglued.

WARMING UP TO GOD

What is troubling you? Give it to God, and wait before him to receive his comfort.

Read John 14

DISCOVERING THE WORD

- ⚙ How would the promises Jesus makes in verses 1-4 bring comfort to his disciples?
- ⚙ In light of verses 5-14, why is it crucial for our focus to be on Jesus himself?
- ⚙ According to Jesus, how will the Spirit bring comfort and help to his followers (vv. 15-27)?
- ⚙ What is the relationship between our love and obedience to Jesus and his love and presence in our lives (vv. 15-24)?
- ⚙ How does the peace Christ offers differ from that which the world offers (vv. 25-31)?

APPLYING THE WORD

- ⚙ Think of a friend who is going through a personal crisis. How could this chapter help you to minister to that person?
- ⚙ How can Jesus' words help you in a personal crisis or when you have a troubled heart?

RESPONDING IN PRAYER

Ask God to comfort someone you know who is troubled.

DAY 25: 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 preexilic Jewish relative, they were not considered bona fide descendants and could not be 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.

WARMING UP TO GOD

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 6

DAY 26: THE SECRET OF REMAINING

The final weekend before Christmas is not the time to visit a shopping mall. If you are fortunate enough to find a parking spot, the press of people inside makes shopping almost impossible. I overheard one mother giving these final instructions to her young son before plunging into the crowd: “Stay close to me and hold my hand all the time. We won’t get separated if we hold on to each other.”

As Jesus prepared his disciples to face life without his visible presence, he impressed on them the importance of staying close to him spiritually. He said, “Remain in me.”; If you’ve ever longed to understand the secret of spiritual growth, you will find it in Jesus’ words to us in John 15.

WARMING UP TO GOD

Have you ever felt far from Christ since becoming a Christian? What circumstances made you feel that way? Be still before God and feel his presence with you now.

Read John 15:1-17

DISCOVERING THE WORD

- ⚙️ Jesus’ instructions to his disciples in this passage revolve around three symbols—the vine, the gardener and the branches. What is Jesus trying to communicate by calling himself the true vine?
- ⚙️ What does it mean to remain in Christ (v. 4)?
- ⚙️ The Father prunes fruitful branches to make them more fruitful (v. 2). In what ways have you experienced the Father’s “pruning”?
- ⚙️ What spiritual benefits result from remaining in Christ (vv. 7-11)?
- ⚙️ What are the requirements and benefits of friendship with Christ (vv. 14-17)?

APPLYING THE WORD

- ⚙️ There are three categories of branches described in this passage—those bearing no fruit, those bearing some fruit, and those bearing much fruit. In which category would you place yourself and why?
- ⚙️ If you are not bearing much fruit, what is Jesus’ counsel to you in these verses?

RESPONDING IN PRAYER

Picture yourself as a tree laden with plump, healthy fruit. Ask God to help you become the person he wants you to be.

DAY 27: 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.

WARMING UP TO GOD

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.

DAY 28: THE COST OF FRIENDSHIP WITH JESUS

While on Earth, Jesus did not surround himself with a group of students or even a group of followers. He placed himself in the company of friends. To admit that we need friends is a sign of maturity, not immaturity. Close relationships are Christlike! In this passage Jesus shows us what friendship with him is really like. There's both comfort and cost.

WARMING UP TO GOD

Are you ready to face the cost of following Christ? Talk openly with God about your fears—and excitement.

Read **John 15:18—16:4**

DISCOVERING THE WORD

- ⚙️ If love is to characterize our relationship with other believers, hate will characterize our relationships with the world. What reasons does Jesus give for the world's hatred?
- ⚙️ What does Jesus mean when he says that without his coming, his words and his miracles, the world "would not be guilty of sin" (15:22-25)?
- ⚙️ In what specific ways will the Counselor and the disciples themselves continue the ministry begun by Jesus (15:26-17)?
- ⚙️ What kind of treatment can the disciples expect from those who do not know Christ (16:1-4)?

APPLYING THE WORD

- ⚙️ What kinds of persecution are more probable for us in our society? Explain.
- ⚙️ If we as Christians are not persecuted in some way, what might that imply about our spiritual commitment?
- ⚙️ How are you experiencing the world's hatred as a Christian?

RESPONDING IN PRAYER

Pray for those around the world who face persecution for their faith.

DAY 29: SECRETS OF THE SPIRIT

A lovely woman in our church died not long ago. She knew for almost a year that, unless the Lord intervened, the cancer in her brain would kill her. That year gave her time of wonderful interaction with her husband and family. Her family had the opportunity to express their love for her, and the dying woman had the privilege of passing on her godly wisdom.

In John 16 Jesus knows that he will die in less than twenty-four hours. When his disciples are faced with that reality, Jesus responds to their concerns by talking about the coming Holy Spirit.

WARMING UP TO GOD

Think about the people in your life who are important to you. What would you want to tell them if you knew that you had only a short time to live? Ask God to make you ready to hear what Jesus had to say in his last days.

Read John 16:5-33

DISCOVERING THE WORD

- ⚙️ Jesus said that it was for the disciples' good that he go away and that the Counselor come. Why was the Spirit's presence more profitable to the disciples than Jesus' presence?
- ⚙️ What did Jesus say the Spirit's ministry would be toward the world (vv. 8-11)?
- ⚙️ The Spirit's ministry is one of communication. What specific things did Jesus say the Spirit would communicate to the disciples (vv. 13-15)?
- ⚙️ Jesus answers the questions the disciples ask in verses 17-18, not by giving them an explanation but by making them a promise (vv. 19-22). What was the promise?
- ⚙️ Why would Jesus' promise bring them joy in the midst of their grief and confusion?
- ⚙️ How would Jesus' assurance of the Father's love help the disciples in the days just ahead of them (vv. 25-33)?

APPLYING THE WORD

- ⚙️ How can this incident help us when our questions to the Lord seemingly go unanswered?
- ⚙️ How do you respond to the promise in verses 23-24?

RESPONDING IN PRAYER

Give God the desires of your heart, knowing that he wants to make your joy complete.

DAY 30: 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.

WARMING UP TO GOD

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 time frame 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.

DAY 31: MASTER'S FINAL PRAYER

The approach of death has a way of bringing our priorities into focus. People who know death is imminent also know what is really important in life and who they really care about. In Jesus' final prayer with his disciples, he prays for himself, for them and for you! Every believer is on Jesus' mind as he faces the greatest trial of his life—the cross.

WARMING UP TO GOD

Spend some time reflecting on God's glory. To what extent is God's glory foremost in your mind on a daily basis? Explain.

Read John 17

DISCOVERING THE WORD

- ⚙️ Jesus makes only one request for himself—that the Father would glorify him so that he might glorify the Father. In what way would each one glorify the other (vv. 1-5)? Why do you think that was so important to Jesus?
- ⚙️ According to verses 6-19, what specific ministries did Jesus have toward his disciples?
- ⚙️ Twice Jesus asked the Father to protect his disciples from the evil one (vv. 11, 15). Why would that protection have been so important in Jesus' mind as he faced the cross?
- ⚙️ Jesus prayed that those who believe in him would be one “so that the world may believe that you have sent me” (vv. 21, 23)? Why is our unity a powerful argument for the reality of Jesus?

APPLYING THE WORD

- ⚙️ Jesus also asked the Father to sanctify his disciples through his word (v. 17). How can we allow God's Word to have that kind of effect on our lives?
- ⚙️ Jesus obviously prayed this prayer out loud to bring comfort and assurance to his disciples. In what particular ways do Jesus' words encourage or assure you?

RESPONDING IN PRAYER

Ask God to bring unity to your church or fellowship.

DAY 32: A COVENANT WITH GOD

Much of the world thinks that Christianity is a rip-off. Because Christians see God as the Creator and therefore the owner of everything there is, we give a tithe, and even more, to the Lord as an appropriate response. Part of the confusion is that the non-Christian sees the church or Christian leaders as getting that money. While serious Christians see all they have as belonging to God, non-Christians 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 secular job to do the full-time work of the Lord and the body. This chapter of Nehemiah is about making such a covenant of support.

WARMING UP TO GOD

What promises have you made or do you need to make with the Lord? Discuss them with him and ask for renewed energy for 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

- ⚙ What effect would the actions the people commit to have on their life and worship?
- ⚙ Do you feel you take material things and the tithing of them as seriously as they did in this passage? Why or why not?

RESPONDING IN PRAYER

Reflect upon your commitments to the Lord with family, at work or school, or in your times of fellowship with him alone. Rededicate yourself in specific ways to these commitments—and promise the Lord to have renewed effort and obedience.

DAY 33: JESUS YOU'RE UNDER ARREST!

Most of us would hate the thought of being arrested and brought to trial. If we were guilty of a crime, being arrested would be humiliating. But if we were innocent, it would be devastating. Yet in what should have been a demeaning experience for Jesus, we see again his majesty and glory. Jesus uses an experience of attack, betrayal and abandonment to demonstrate his confident trust in the Father. His calm assurance will help us face life's hurts and injustices with the same trust in the same Father.

WARMING UP TO GOD

Think about a time when you realized you had committed a deep sin. How did you feel when you took it before Christ? Thank him for his grace to you then and now.

Read John 18:1-27

DISCOVERING THE WORD

- ⚙️ Why would Jesus go to a place where Judas knew he might be found (vv. 1-3)?
- ⚙️ When the soldiers say they are seeking Jesus of Nazareth, Jesus replies "I am he" (lit. "I am"; v. 5). How would you explain the reaction of the soldiers (v. 6)?
- ⚙️ What insight do Peter's action and Jesus' rebuke (v. 11) give you about our attempts at times to "help God out" in our own strength and wisdom?
- ⚙️ Think back to the deepest sin of your life. How does a look at your own sin change your attitude toward Peter's denial of Jesus?
- ⚙️ What specific events in this passage display (a) Jesus' courage, (b) his power and (c) his obedience to the Father?

APPLYING THE WORD

- ⚙️ What can we learn from Peter's failure about being ready to stand against the world's challenges?
- ⚙️ How will this study change the way you will face a time of testing in your own life?

RESPONDING IN PRAYER

Ask God to make you ready to face difficulties with grace.

DAY 34: PILATE ON TRIAL

“Christ killers?” the words made my stomach tighten. Someone had spray-painted the words and a series of swastikas on the Jewish synagogue in our city. Anti-Semitism had raised its ugly head again. The New Testament does blame the Jewish leaders for condemning Jesus to die. But they weren’t acting alone. The Roman governor, Pontius Pilate, also condemned Jesus to die. There is a sense, too, in which we killed Jesus. He died for our sins. The most amazing answer to the question of who killed Jesus is that no one did! Jesus said, “No one takes my life from me. I lay it down of my own choice.”

WARMING UP TO GOD

What temptation to compromise your Christian faith or witness are you facing? Ask the One who has faced deep trials to give you strength.

Read John 18:28—19:16

DISCOVERING THE WORD

- ⚙️ A Roman trial included four basic elements: the accusation (18:29-31), the interrogation (search for evidence) (18:32-35), the defense (18:36-37) and the verdict (18:38). What events or statements from the text are included in each?
- ⚙️ Pilate obviously was trying to release Jesus. What specific attempts did he make (18:39; 19:4, 6, 10, 12, 15)?
- ⚙️ The Jews’ true charge against Jesus comes out in verse 7—“He claimed to be the Son of God.” Why do you think Pilate reacted to that statement as he did (vv. 8-9)?
- ⚙️ Why didn’t Jesus say more to Pilate (vv. 9-11)? Shouldn’t he have defended himself more vigorously?
- ⚙️ What can you conclude about Pilate’s character after reading this passage? What kind of man was he?

APPLYING THE WORD

- ⚙️ How can you respond appropriately to Christ’s grace to you?
- ⚙️ What does this passage tell you about how you should respond when you are treated unjustly?

RESPONDING IN PRAYER

Ask God to help you follow his example of grace when you are under pressure.

DAY 35: 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 be of help in the building up of 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 better than I where I should live and work so that I would 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.

WARMING UP TO GOD

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 them to become his worries for you.

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)?
- ⚙ What reasons can you think of for these five groups of people 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 8

DAY 36: OBEDIENT TO DEATH

There is nothing pleasant or attractive about an execution. The only one I've ever seen was in a televised news report from Vietnam. A captured soldier was shot. It left a knot in my stomach for days.

In Jesus' day execution was designed to be public and painful. The account of the crucifixion is not easy to read. You may be tempted to think that Jesus' death was a cruel mistake. It wasn't. Jesus' life was not taken from him; he laid it down willingly. It was part of his plan—a plan that included you and me. His cross was in a very real sense our cross.

WARMING UP TO GOD

When you think about death, what feelings and thoughts come to mind?

Read [John 19:17-42](#)

DISCOVERING THE WORD

- ⚙ Three groups were involved in Jesus' death—the soldiers, the Jewish leaders and Pilate. How would you characterize each one's attitude toward Jesus? In what ways do their attitudes toward Jesus parallel those of men and women today?
- ⚙ How is Jesus' tender care for Mary evident even while he is dying (vv. 26-27)?
- ⚙ What was the significance of Jesus' cry "It is finished" (v. 30; see Jn 17:4)?
- ⚙ What evidence does John give that Jesus really died?
- ⚙ Why was it so important for John to establish the certainty of Jesus' death?

APPLYING THE WORD

- ⚙ The disciples are not mentioned at the crucifixion; they were probably not there. When it comes to public identification with Jesus, under what circumstances are you tempted to respond in the same way?
- ⚙ What aspect of Jesus' death has made the deepest impression on you, and why?

RESPONDING IN PRAYER

Thank God for providing salvation to you through Christ's death.

DAY 37: IMPORTANT WORK

"If a job is worth doing, it is worth doing well!" I would like to have a dollar for every time I heard that growing up. I don't think that I understood the saying nearly as well as I do after years of working on it. Integrity and respect come to those who do a good job. We recognize 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.

WARMING UP TO GOD

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 recognized for guarding the store-rooms?
- ⚙️ 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.

DAY 38: THE SON IS UP!

The story circulated for days in the hospital where my brother worked. An orderly was told to take a body to the morgue. Simply out of habit, the orderly felt the man's wrist for a pulse. When he realized his mistake, the orderly quickly dropped the arm, but not before his sensitive fingers told him something his mind struggled to believe. There was a pulse! The doctors were called, and the man revived.

That story may or may not be true. But I know of one account of a man coming back to life that is true. The man lived for years after the event. In fact, he is still alive.

WARMING UP TO GOD

Imagine being with Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus preparing Jesus' body for burial. What thoughts and feelings would have gone through your mind?

Read John 20

DISCOVERING THE WORD

- ⚙ John records three witnesses to the empty tomb: Mary Magdalene, Peter and "the other disciple" (John himself). What important details do we learn from each one (vv. 1-9)?
- ⚙ John also records three appearances of the risen Christ: to Mary, to his disciples and to Thomas. Why do you think Mary doesn't immediately recognize Jesus (vv. 10-15)?
- ⚙ After she does recognize him, what impresses you most about their encounter (vv. 16-18)?
- ⚙ When Jesus appears to his disciples, what specific gifts and promises does he give them (vv. 19-23)?
- ⚙ Finally, Jesus appears to Thomas (vv. 24-29). How does Thomas's attitude—both before and after Jesus appears to him— add credibility to the resurrection?

APPLYING THE WORD

- ⚙ What do you learn from Jesus' encounter with Thomas about dealing with people who have doubts about Christianity?
- ⚙ Who could you help to understand and believe the claims of Christ?
- ⚙ John tells us why he has written his Gospel in verses 30-31. Of all the "miraculous signs" John has included, which have been most convincing to you? Why?

RESPONDING IN PRAYER

Praise God for what he has done in Christ.

DAY 39: SPIRITUAL DECAY

“I know they are sinning against the Lord, but I love them too much to reprimand them.” Sometimes we emphasize 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.

WARMING UP TO GOD

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.”

DAY 40: A WALK WITH A RESURRECTED MAN

Most of us find it easier to forgive than to forget. We may be ready to forgive someone who has hurt us deeply, but we have a hard time trusting that person again. Peter failed Jesus miserably. He promised to give up his life if necessary to protect Jesus, but denied him a few hours later. Peter knew Jesus had forgiven him. But would Jesus still trust him? Could Jesus still use him to bring glory to God? Will Christ still use us after we've failed?

WARMING UP TO GOD

How do you feel when someone you have hurt refuses to forgive you?

Read John 21

DISCOVERING THE WORD

- ⚙️ What was Jesus trying to show the disciples by allowing them to catch such a large number of fish (vv. 4-6; see Lk 5:4-11)?
- ⚙️ When Peter hears that "it is the Lord" (v. 7-8), he jumps into the water and begins swimming ahead of the boat. What does this reveal about Peter and his relationship with Jesus?
- ⚙️ What subtle differences do you notice in Jesus' three questions and Peter's responses (vv. 15-17)?
- ⚙️ Why do you think Jesus chose this particular time to predict the kind of death Peter would die (vv. 18-19)?
- ⚙️ What does Jesus' rebuke to Peter (v. 22) reveal about the danger of comparing ourselves with other Christians?

APPLYING THE WORD

- ⚙️ What can we learn from this passage about the steps involved in restoring a Christian who has sinned?
- ⚙️ How does it help to know that you can still serve and glorify God no matter what your past failures have been?

RESPONDING IN PRAYER

Respond to God with your heart and life for what you have learned about Jesus in your study of John.