

## **Word-Centered Revival**

Nehemiah 8-10 - NCBC, August 21, 2016

Main Point: **God's people are revived through their response to God's Word.**

- **Heart:** Desire God's Word (8:1-4)
- **Hands:** Engage with God's Word (8:5-6)
- **Head:** Understand God's Word (8:7-8)
- **Heed:** Apply God's Word
  - o Rejoice in the security of God's grace (8:9-12)
  - o Remember God's faithful rescue (8:13-18)
  - o Repent of all sin (9:1-38)
  - o Resolve to obey God's Word (10:1-39)

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### **Opening Announcements:**

*Life Groups / New Member Reception / Missionary update from Phil Underhile*

<<The Joy of the Lord>>



What good news for us today. The Joy of the Lord is our strength and protection! In the presence of Jesus Christ is fullness of joy.<sup>1</sup> And for those who abide in the love of Christ by faith – Jesus gives us fullness of joy.<sup>2</sup>

Are you hungry and eager to feast upon God's Word this morning? If so, please open your Bible to **Nehemiah chapter 8** and prepare to hear the words of our God.



If you do not have a Bible with you today, our ushers are coming now to give you a Bible. Please catch their

<sup>1</sup> Psalm 16:11

<sup>2</sup> John 15:11

attention as they pass by and it would be our joy to give you a Bible. You are welcome to take this Bible home as our gift to you, or just simply return it after our service by placing it on the table in the back of the room.

Allow me to set the table a bit for our feast in God's Word this morning.

Ezra + Nehemiah			
GOD RESTORES			
Ez. 1-6	Ez. 7-10	Neh. 1-7	Neh. 8-13
Restoring the Temple	Restoring the People	Restoring the Wall	Restoring Worship
Zerubbabel	Ezra	Nehemiah & Ezra	
Haggai & Zechariah	-	Malachi	
First Return 538 BC	Second Return 457 BC	Third Return 444 BC	

The wall around Jerusalem has been completed and the gates are installed. But Nehemiah and Ezra both know that the protection of God's people isn't found primarily in walls and gates. True security and assurance are based on what's inside the heart of God's people. So chapters 8-13 record Ezra and Nehemiah's joint efforts at bringing spiritual restoration to the worshipping hearts of God's people.

The hearts of the people need revival. And the starting point for all true revival is always the Word of God.



So please stand with me in holy reverence for God's Word as I read from **Nehemiah chapter 8**. Our text is found on page **403** of the Bibles we've handed out.

Starting in **verse 1 of Nehemiah 8**, reading from the English Standard translation:

*And all the people gathered as one man into the square before the Water Gate. And they told Ezra the scribe to bring the Book of the Law of Moses that the Lord had commanded Israel. <sup>2</sup> So Ezra the priest brought the Law before the assembly, both men and women and all who could understand what they heard, on the first day of the seventh month. <sup>3</sup> And he read from it facing the square before the Water Gate from early morning until midday, in the presence of the men and the women and those who could understand. And the ears of all the people were attentive to the Book of the Law. <sup>4</sup> And Ezra the scribe stood on a wooden platform that they had made for the purpose. And beside him stood [6 Levites] on his right hand, and [7 Levites] on his left hand. <sup>5</sup> And Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people, for he was above all the people, and as he opened it all the people stood.*

*<sup>6</sup> And Ezra blessed the Lord, the great God, and all the people answered, “Amen, Amen,” lifting up their hands. And they bowed their heads and worshiped the Lord with their faces to the ground. <sup>7</sup> Also [13 additional Levites], helped the people to understand the Law, while the people remained in their places. <sup>8</sup> They read from the book, from the Law of God, clearly, and they gave the sense, so that the people understood the reading.*

**Thus reads God’s word. You may be seated.**

**Let’s Pray.**

Revival. What comes to mind as you hear the word, “Revival?”

How you understand “revival” will determine whether or not it is something you desire or despise.

I am convinced that revival is one of my greatest needs personally...and one of the church’s greatest needs today. And yet the concept of revival is widely misunderstood today.

The Scriptures contain more than 1,000 uses of the word that is translated as “revive” or “revival” in our English texts. This word is often translated “return,” “restore,” “renew,” or even “repent.” So biblically, revival refers to the supernatural work of God’s Spirit in our hearts which cause us to grow or flourish again spiritually after a time of dryness or drought. To be revived is to be renewed – made new again – regenerated. Transferred from death

to life. From dryness to refreshment. From despair to hope. From weakness to strength.

**Psalm 19:7** – “The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul.”

**Psalm 23:3** “He restores my soul.”

**Psalm 51:12**, “Restore unto me the joy of your salvation...” And in **Psalm 85** the post-exilic Jews sing their confidence that only God can revive His people after foreign captivity as they sing in **verse 6**,

“Will you not revive us again, that your people may rejoice in you?”

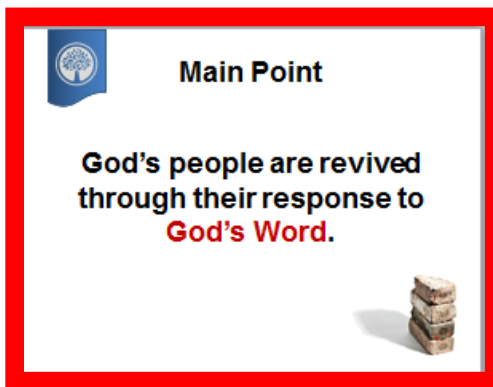
The witness of Scripture is clear – revival is the work of God’s Sovereign Spirit in the hearts of His people. Revival is supernatural in its source and power. True revival turns the hearts of people towards a greater consciousness of their own sin and at the same time a greater reliance upon the sufficiency of Christ and His gospel for divine acceptance and life. Seasons of revival are known in God’s church when the Spirit of God sovereignly blows upon His children to help them supernaturally put away all their sin, get intentional about seeking God in prayer and fasting, and become more empowered in their faithful preaching of Christ!

Would you agree with me this morning that we need the revival of God’s Spirit? Will you long with me this morning for God’s Spirit to revive our hearts with the

flame of faith that would burn off all the sinful dross of worldliness in our lives?

If your heart can honestly join with mine this morning in crying out for God's Spirit to revive us together – then **Nehemiah chapters 8-10** are offering us “biblical kindling” for such a supernatural fire. We will not be warmed by this text without a willingness to be moved towards profound repentance and faith. But for those who are humble and contrite in spirit, and who tremble at God's Word – a feast awaits us this morning.

For in this text we learn today that



**God's people are revived through their response to God's Word.** Spiritual revival always starts as God's Spirit uses His Word to awaken the consciences of souls towards repentance and faith. This morning we will learn to humbly and dependently pursue revival according to God's Word.

Do you long to know Christ more? Do you long for greater freedom from personal sin? Do you long to be awakened to real spiritual life again?

Revival starts among God's people when their hearts



**Desire God's Word (8:1-4)**

Remember how we got to Nehemiah 8. The people had watched God do remarkable feats of glory in recent days. The completed walls were standing proof of God's power – and now the people wanted to know more. So in chapter 8 verse 1 –

*And all the people gathered as one man into the square before the Water Gate. And they told Ezra the scribe to bring the Book of the Law of Moses that the Lord had commanded Israel.*

Do you see the people's desire for God's Word here? Notice the title – the Book of the Law of Moses that the Lord had commended Israel. The people didn't question that the Pentateuch – the first five books of the Old Testament – Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and

Deuteronomy were actually the very words of the living God Himself.

They were hungry for God's Torah – His instruction – His law. Notice – it was the people who told Ezra the scribe to bring the Torah and read it. After all – in these days, only the priests had access to the word of God. So they called Ezra – the man who had committed his life to study God's Word, practice God's Word, and teach God's Word – so that their hearts might be revived according to God's Word.

If you have a Bible with you this morning – hold it out in front of you with both hands like this.

Consider what you hold in your hands. These are wonderful words of life from our Creator God. The self-revelation of the King of Kings – our Savior and Lord. God's Spirit used 40 different authors from 3 different continents over 1500 years to progressively reveal Himself and His saving grace to us in this book we call the Holy Bible. Is your hunger for God growing this morning? Do you desire God's Word more than earthly sweetness or riches?<sup>3</sup>

Revival visits those souls who hunger after righteousness and desire to have God's Words in their heart.

So in verse 2 Ezra starts preaching from the Pentateuch to the entire congregation of men, women, and children – everyone who was old enough to understand.

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3 Ps 19:10

<sup>3</sup> *And he read from it facing the square before the Water Gate from early morning until midday,*

Church – that's 6 hours. Thousands of men, women, and children standing for hours listening to the words of God being read and explained to them. But their hearts were dry – they knew that spiritual refreshment can only be found through God's Word.

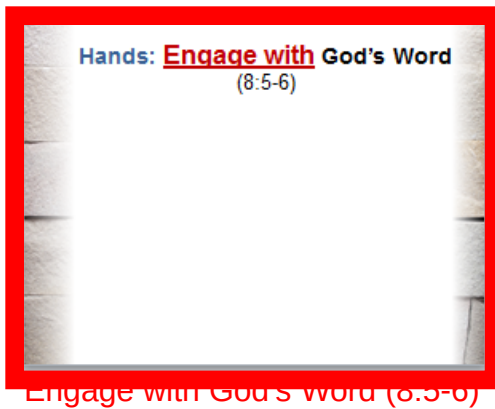
Is it possible we have become so spoiled by our ready accessibility to God's Word that we neglect it?

*And the ears of all the people were attentive to the Book of the Law.*

All the people were attentive.... All ears. Hearts open. God speak to us!! Revive us again from the wellspring of your gospel!

So picture this scene with me for a moment. There's thousands of Jews of all generations gathered in this courtyard surrounded by these new walls which testify of God's powerful hand reestablishing His people. Verse 4 says that they manufactured a massive wooden pulpit of some kind for Ezra to preach from...and then 13 Levites were assisting him with the readings. Verse 7 says another group of 13 Levites were circulating among the people to help explain the meaning of what was being read to the people.

In other words, God's Spirit was preparing the people for spiritual revival by helping them to



God's people are revived through their engaging response to God's Word.

Again we don't know how much time had passed since the people had heard the words of God. Certainly Ezra had read from God's Word to the people at various times up to this point. But here on the first day of the 7<sup>th</sup> month, God's Spirit was doing a powerful renewal among the hearts of His people.

Verse 5 shows us how the people engaged with God's Word with an attitude of reverence.

*And Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people, for he was above all the people, and as he opened it all the people stood.*

They stood up whenever Ezra took up the scroll and began to read. An attitude of reverence for God's Word demonstrated itself by standing to attention for its reading. This is not just an official letter from the Persian king. This are the very words of God.

Church – this is why our custom is to stand for the public reading of God's Word in our worship services. God's Word is in a special category of literature. It's set apart and holy. And worthy of careful respect.

To be clear – we don't worship this book. That would be "Biblolatry." But we acknowledge what this book is – the very words of God Himself. And a proper heart respect prepares the worshipper to receive the Word whenever it is preached.

How much of the first five books of the Bible do you think Ezra was able to read in these 6 hours? According to some research, to read the entire Torah in Hebrew takes 15 hours and 32 minutes.<sup>4</sup> So he probably wouldn't have had time to read all 5 books. But as he read about God's faithfulness to Abraham, Joseph, and Moses...he would stop at different intervals and pray.

Like in verse 6 –

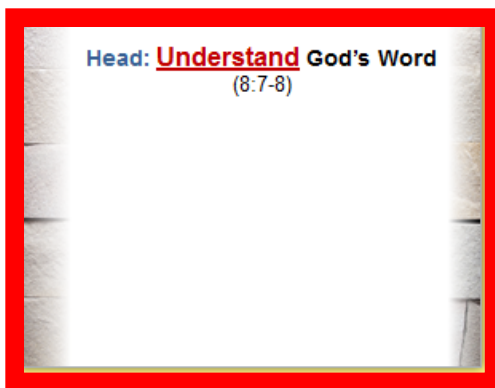
*<sup>6</sup> And Ezra blessed the Lord, the great God, and all the people answered, "Amen, Amen," lifting up their hands. And they bowed their heads and worshiped the Lord with their faces to the ground.*

The people's engagement with the historical reminders of God's faithfulness to their ancestors led them to vocal and physical response. Every part of their personhood was engaged in responding to the Word of God in personal worship!

<sup>4</sup> <http://catholicbiblestudent.com/2013/10/ezra-read.html>

A posture of boredom towards God's Word is nothing more than willful blindness. God's Word testifies that God is with us...God is for us. There is rescue for sinners! Renewal and restoration is possible because of who God is, what He has done, and what He promises yet to do for those who live by faith in Him.

But did you know it's possible to actively engage with God's Word without an understanding that leads to repentance? That's why God's Spirit not only breathed out the Holy Scriptures, but also gifted some of His people with the abilities to teach and explain God's Word, for Word-centered revival requires that you rightly,



Head: Understand God's word (8:7-8)

In verses 7-8, 13 different Levites were appointed to help... *the people to understand the Law, while the people remained in their places.*<sup>8</sup> *They read from the book, from the Law of God, clearly, ...*

So it's likely that as Ezra read from the scroll, these Levites provided some form of a human repeater sound system.

*and they gave the sense, so that the people understood the reading.*

When it says they gave the sense – this seems to be more than just mere translation of language. They were causing people to understand what God's Word meant. They were explaining and expounding upon God's Word.

Today we practice expository preaching here at New Castle Bible Church. Expository is just a \$10 word for what is described in Nehemiah 8:8. Giving the sense. Unfolding or exposing the meaning of the text so that it can be rightly understood and obeyed by all who listen.

Now of course the Scripture teaches us in **1 Corinthians 2:14** that it is impossible for an unregenerate heart – the natural man – to be able to understand God's Word apart from the help of God's illuminating Spirit. So you ask, Pastor, why do you even bother trying to explain God's Word if human teaching doesn't have the power to give spiritual understanding for God's Word?

I'm so glad you asked. Your question shows you are a good Bible student! The apostle Paul answers your questions in 2 Timothy 2 when he charges the young Ephesian pastor to "*preach the Word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching.*"<sup>5</sup> And then back in chapter 2 verse 24 Paul says this,

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<sup>5</sup> 2 Timothy 4:2



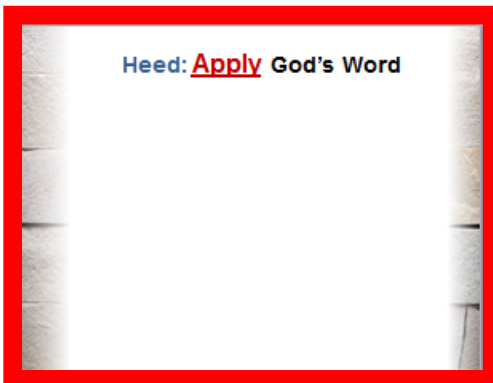
*For the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil,<sup>25</sup> correcting his opponents with gentleness.*

How listen carefully to the rest of the verse:

*God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge (or understanding) of the truth,<sup>26</sup> and they may come to their senses ...*

In other words – God Spirit is the only teacher who truly can turn on the interior lights – and give us eyes of faith to behold the surpassing beauty of Jesus Christ in the Gospel. God's Spirit uses the "foolishness of preaching"<sup>6</sup> to awaken repentance and revival in the hearts of His people. All praise and glory to Christ alone for our salvation and regeneration!

God's people are cleansed whenever they take heed to God's Words. If God's Spirit is to bring the revival rains of repentance and renewal to our hearts this morning – it will only be as we together seek to give heed, and



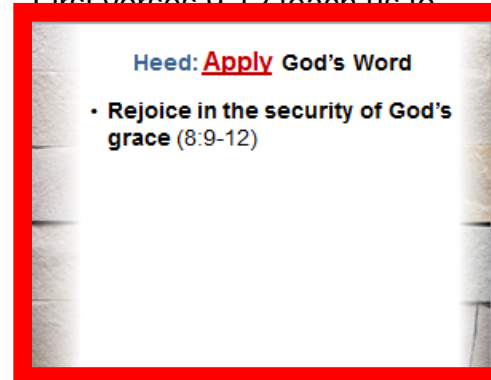
6 1 Corinthians 1:21

## Apply God's Word

James warns us that we only end up deceiving ourselves when we hear God's Word but don't apply it.<sup>7</sup> The one who hears the Word of God, and acts according to it – this is the one who knows the blessing of true spiritual revival.<sup>8</sup>

So let's consider 4 specific applications of God's Word for those who seriously pursue Word-centered revival.<sup>9</sup>

First verses 8-12 teach us to



Rejoice in the security of God's grace (8:9-12)

The result of Ezra's prayer, Scripture reading, and preaching was that God's Spirit began to awaken revival upon His people. And they started to weep.

Church – it is God's law which defines our sin. Paul taught this in Romans 7 – "If it had not been for the law, I

<sup>7</sup> James 1:22-25

<sup>8</sup> Matthew 7:21-27

<sup>9</sup> John 17:17



would not have known sin.”<sup>10</sup> Sin is any transgression of God’s law. Sin is not just those activities or behaviors which are unacceptable to a particular people group in time. Sin is treason against the good sufficiency of God Himself – as He is revealed through His own words. So when we neglect to renew our minds in God’s truth – our sensitivity to sin diminishes and our self-righteousness is unhindered in its forgery.

But here in Nehemiah 8, as the accounts of God’s faithfulness to Moses and Abraham were brought to their minds – and they again heard the law of God – their consciences fell under conviction, and the people who recognized their sinfulness began to weep. Then verse 9,

*<sup>9</sup> And Nehemiah, who was the governor, and Ezra the priest and scribe, and the Levites who taught the people said to all the people, “This day is holy to the Lord your God; do not mourn or weep.” For all the people wept as they heard the words of the Law. <sup>10</sup> Then he said to them, “Go your way. Eat the fat and drink sweet wine and send portions to anyone who has nothing ready, for this day is holy to our Lord. And do not be grieved, for the joy of the Lord is your strength.” <sup>11</sup> So the Levites calmed all the people, saying, “Be quiet, for this day is holy; do not be grieved.” <sup>12</sup> And all the people went their way to eat and drink and to send portions and to make great rejoicing, because they had understood the words that were declared to them.*

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<sup>10</sup> Romans 7:7

Three times the leaders charged the people – “Do not be grieved.” Today is a day for rejoicing! Verse 10 – this day is holy to our Lord. ... Do not be grieved, for the joy of the Lord is your strength!

Now you have to admit – this is an intriguing passage, right? The leaders refuse to take advantage of the people through any emotional manipulation – rather tell them not to weep – but to rejoice instead for the joy of the Lord is their strength.

What does this phrase mean – the joy of the Lord is your strength? Now I need to be careful here – this is my wife’s life verse – I want to get this right!

So think about this with me... What does this verse mean in its context? Is the joy the Lord’s or is it the people’s joy? Strength means protection or refuge. It’s referring to security. So here the people are surrounded by these new walls – hearing the testimony of God’s faithfulness to their ancestors, and the leaders seek to calm their guilty consciences with the truth that the joy of the Lord is your strength.

I believe this is the point for all who desire to rightly respond to God’s Word in conviction over our sin.

The leaders assure the people by telling them to rejoice in the security of God’s grace. The joy of the Lord is that rejoicing that is experienced by God’s children that only comes from our identity in God’s grace.

For example – think about the robe of righteousness that is freely given to every person who believes in Jesus Christ as their Savior and Lord. Isaiah 61:10 says,

*I will greatly rejoice in the Lord; my soul shall exult in my God, for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation; he has covered me with the robe of righteousness,*

Picture a child of God fully clothed in the perfect righteousness that comes from God by faith. Brilliant purity. Full of light and glory. And the name of this robe is, “the joy of the Lord.”

If you can picture that – I think you’re close to understanding what Nehemiah 8:10 means. Spurgeon equates the joy of the Lord with a believer’s assurance.<sup>11</sup> It is your identity in God’s grace – that is your strength and protection.

Child of God – though God’s Word today may convict you of your idolatrous sin... the goodness of God’s gospel enables you to rejoice in the security of God’s grace. If you believe on Jesus Christ as your Savior and Lord, you are among the redeemed and elect of God! God didn’t come to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved!<sup>12</sup>

And so when the people were able to understand that the first five books of the Bible weren’t revealing an angry God who was against them – but a holy God who was

faithfully persistent in His pursuit of their final deliverance – they recognized a powerful internal security of assurance – an assurance that indeed they were God’s people – joint heirs together of God’s grace.

Now is that where your security rests this morning? On the character of God and His finished work through Jesus Christ our Lord. Or are you looking to your obedience for your assurance?

Loved one – whatever you are trusting to keep you saved, is what you are trusting for your salvation. Are you trusting in the finished work of Jesus Christ alone for your standing with God? Do you believe that your sins – past, present, and future – were completely and fully paid for at the cross by Jesus’ sacrifice on your behalf? Do you believe that Christ’s resurrection secures your eternal hope with Him forever?

The Joy of the Lord is your strength dear child of God! Where your sin has abounded...grace yet abounds all the more! (Romans 5:20) Grace has set you free from captivity. Turn from your exhausting remorse and self-pity and guilt-fed penance... and rejoice in the security of God’s amazing grace.

Then,

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<sup>11</sup> <http://www.spurgeon.org/sermons/1027.php>

<sup>12</sup> John 3:17



Remember God's faithful rescue (8:13-18)

Now notice verse 13 carefully,

*On the second day the heads of fathers' houses of all the people, with the priests and the Levites, came together to Ezra the scribe in order to study the words of the Law.*

Daily Bible studies broke out among God's people who were being revived by God's Spirit. Verse 14,

*<sup>14</sup> And they found it written in the Law that the Lord had commanded by Moses that the people of Israel should dwell in booths during the feast of the seventh month, <sup>15</sup> and that they should proclaim it and publish it in all their towns and in Jerusalem, "Go out to the hills and bring branches of olive, wild olive, myrtle, palm, and other leafy trees to make booths, as it is written." <sup>16</sup> So the people went out and brought them and made booths for themselves, each on his roof, and in their courts and in the courts of the house of God, and in the square at the Water Gate and in the square at the Gate of Ephraim. <sup>17</sup> And all the assembly of those who had returned from the captivity made booths and lived in the booths, for*

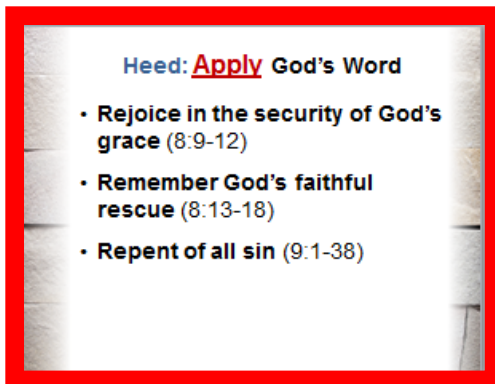
*from the days of Jeshua the son of Nun to that day the people of Israel had not done so. And there was very great rejoicing. <sup>18</sup> And day by day, from the first day to the last day, he read from the Book of the Law of God. They kept the feast seven days, and on the eighth day there was a solemn assembly, according to the rule.*

Now I wish we had more time this morning to unpack the significance of this Feast for the Jewish people – but for now observe this – at some point during their study, they must have come across Leviticus chapter 23 – which prescribed an annual Feast of Booths – or Feast of Tabernacles – designed for the people of God to rejoice before the Lord. God's purpose behind this Jewish feast was for them to remember His faithful rescue of His children from Egypt.

Remember God is a rescuing God. Rejoice that God specializes in setting captives free! Do you believe this today?

When the Jewish people heard these words – they immediately took action to apply them – and while Ezra went on a 7-day Scripture-reading marathon – the people observed the Feast of Booths according to God's commands.

And then chapter 9 goes on to describe the people's repentance following their observance of the feasts. For whenever we commit to applying God's Word we must,



Repent of all sin (9:1-38)

In verse 2 of chapter 9 we read,

*And the Israelites separated themselves from all foreigners and stood and confessed their sins and the iniquities of their fathers.*

Repentance is a change of mind that creates a separation from ongoing sin in our lives. Repentance includes confessing our sins, but it is far more than just agreeing with God about our sinfulness. Repentance turns. Repentance restores. Repentance transforms and renews so that sin is forsaken and righteousness is valued above all.

Chapter 9 verses 5-38 actually contain the longest formal prayer in the Old Testament – and it is a prayer of confession and repentance on behalf of all the people. But if you study this prayer, you will notice that the entire prayer is wrapped in the attributes of God. Their minds had just been flooded with the biblical testimony of who God is and how He had worked in the past...and so their present confession is anchored in the character of a God

who is a righteous promise-keeper, who is ready to forgive, gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love.

Only after such an expression, did the people then formally renew their covenant with God and,



Resolve to obey God's word (10:1-39)

In chapter 10 the entire community adopts the Word of God as their functional authority for their lives. They promise together to live according to God's law, pursue purity in their families by abstaining from mixed marriages, to observe the Sabbath rest of God's people, and not to neglect their worship center at the temple.

Genuine revival always leads to changed lives. For



God's people are revived and renewed through their response to God's Word.

So this morning do you desire or despise the idea of revival?

I pray that God's Spirit would grant us all more of a desire for His Word. And that we would actively engage with His Word on a daily basis, seeking to rightly understand His truth for the purpose of living it out in our lives. For our security and protection doesn't come from exterior walls – but from the joy of the Lord – the perfect righteousness of Christ that is granted to everyone who believes on the Lord Jesus Christ.



May God revive our souls according to His Word, as we believe on Jesus Christ whom He has sent to us today.

**Let's pray.**

<<Blessed Assurance>>

**Benediction**

*<sup>20</sup> Now may the God of peace who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant, <sup>21</sup> equip you with everything good that you may do his will, working in us that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.*

*Hebrews 13:20-21*

**Growing Deeper: Life Group Questions**

1. Read Nehemiah 8 and note every time God's Word is referenced. What is the attitude of God's people to the Word of God and how do our attitudes compare/contrast with theirs?
2. How would you define spiritual revival? Nehemiah 9-10 demonstrates some results of true revival. Do you see signs of spiritual revival around you today? Is so, how come? If not, why not?
3. Read Acts 6:7 and 2 Timothy 4:2. What is God's primary strategy for church growth? What is your individual role to play in this great work?
4. Unlike the Jews in Nehemiah's day, we enjoy nearly constant access to God's Word. How can we keep from taking this for granted? (*Life Essentials Study Bible*, pg. 623)
5. Why do you think so many churches have practically moved away from regularly preaching God's Word?
6. What does God promise in Isaiah 55:10-11? How might your ministry change in your home, community, and church if you really believed this promise?