

“The Water Gate Revival” // Nehemiah 8 // Nehemiah # 6¹ //

Announcement

Gaynor Video / PJD Sharing + Pray (3 minutes)

Thurs: PJD invite worship Staff out to lead in a song, “Goodness of God”

Sun: Gaynor will set up Goodness of God - 3 min

Goodness of God

Introduction

Let’s all remain standing, if we could, for the reading of God’s Word.

8 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. 2 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. 3 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. 4 And Ezra the scribe stood on a wooden platform that they had made for the purpose. And beside him stood Mattithiah, Shema, Anaiah, Uriah, Hilkiah, and Maaseiah on his right hand, and Pedaiah, Mishael, Malchijah, Hashum, Hashbaddanah, Zechariah, and Meshullam on his left hand. 5 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. 6 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. 7 Also Jeshua, (here we go again... Bono) Bani, (Sherb) Sherebiah, (the J-man) Jamin, (A.K.)

¹ Sources consulted: Eric Mason, *Nehemiah for You*, (London, UK: The Good Book Company, 2022); Tim Mackie, “Ezra-Nehemiah - Session Four”, June 2, 2018, Seattle Area Pastors Network Conference; Skip Heitzig, “[The People, the Bible and a Watergate Revival](#)”, June 22, 2005, Calvary Church; Nancy Guthrie, “[Coming Together around God’s Word](#)”, June 28, 2014, The Gospel Coalition’s National Women’s Conference; Dr. Tony Evans, “[Nehemiah - Rebuilding a Broken Culture, Part 6](#)”, July 31, 2020, Oak Cliff Bible Fellowship. And others as noted throughout.

Akkub, (Shabby) Shabbethai, (Hottie) Hodiah, (Macy) Maaseiah, (K-Lit) Kelita, (Ozzie) Azariah, (Big bad Joe) Jozabad, (Han Solo) Hanan, (P-Dawg) Petaiah, (and) the Levites (honestly, using their nicknames is WAY easier!), helped the people to understand the Law, while the people remained in their places. 8 They read from the book, from the Law of God, clearly, and they gave the sense, so that the people understood the reading. Leader: This is the Word of God for the people of God. Church: ***Thanks be to God.***

You may be seated.

Find **Nehemiah 8 in your Bibles, if you will**, if you haven't found it already. And if you didn't bring a Bible, no worries, I always put it on the screen for you, but if you don't have a Bible, we'd love to gift you one. Stop by the **Next Steps area** on your way out at any of our campuses, and we'll give you one. **Nehemiah 8.**

June 17, 1972: 5 Republican operatives were caught rifling through some filing cabinets and planting a few listening devices in the Democratic Party campaign headquarters in Washington, D.C. What they were doing was not all that uncommon--operatives from both parties had done similar things to each other over the years, but this time investigators followed a cash trail that led back to the Oval Office and the discovery of a secret recording system that proved the President knew about this whole thing. Within 2 years, the **Watergate Scandal** had led to the resignation of a sitting U.S. President—the only time in U.S. history this has happened.

Watergate wasn't just a scandal; it was a defining moment for our nation and now, when we hear the term "Watergate," we think of corruption uncovered, a nation shaken, and a turning point in American history. **Today, I'm going to attempt to redeem the words Water Gate for you**, because in Nehemiah 8, we come to another "Water Gate"—a Water Gate that was also a defining moment for a nation, but not because something hidden was exposed in scandal, but because something long neglected was brought back into the light.

Nehemiah 8 tells the story of the most significant spiritual revival in Israel's history since the days of King Solomon. It's called "the Water Gate Revival" because it occurred in the little public square right in front of the newly rebuilt Water Gate--the gate through which people left the city every morning to go fetch water from the Gihon Spring, Jerusalem's primary water source.

This chapter is a case study in revival, identifying 5 elements of any true revival, **whether corporate or individual** (there are actually more than 5, but through a sheer act of homiletic self-discipline, I'm going to limit myself to 5. If you download the transcript, you can check out the others).²

² "Generosity" and "Confession of Sin" are the other 2. See Bullpen. "Confession of Sin" will be covered in Nehemiah 9.

Some of these elements I'm going to give you are prescriptive, meaning they are things we can and should do. Others, however, are descriptive, meaning they are things only God can do.

Revival happens as a combination of us doing what we're supposed to do and God sovereignly choosing to move. When I was growing up in church, "revival" was a week-long event we put on our yearly calendar, and if the pastor felt like we were especially carnal one year we'd have both a Spring Revival AND a Fall Revival. Our normal church attendance rhythm was 3x a week--Sunday morning, Sunday night, and Wednesday night, '3 to thrive,' baby--but during revival week we went to church every night so we could hear sermons about the rapture and why Walter Mondale may or may not be the antichrist. The philosophy was that if we were in church all the time, we wouldn't have time to sin. (It's like I've told you, the only drug problem I had growing up was being drug to church on a continual basis.) I know some of you know what I'm talking about. How many of you grew up like this?

The truth is, however, revival's not based on a calendar, it's based on conditions and God's sovereign choice to move. So, I'm going to give us some things we can do, but then ultimately we look to God for what only he can do.

By the way, if you're new with us: The book of Nehemiah is the story of the rebuilding of the city walls of Jerusalem in 445 B.C. after the Jewish exile. Nehemiah led the 3rd wave of the Jewish return to Jerusalem after the exile. Zerubbabel and Ezra had led the first two waves, rebuilding the Temple and re-establishing the city. Nehemiah was a Jewish official serving under Persian King Artaxerxes who had become burdened by the dilapidated state of Jerusalem's walls and led an effort to rebuild them. He experienced intense opposition from enemies both external and internal (that's Nehemiah 1-7), but he has prevailed, and as we come into chapter 8, the walls are finished! However, the inhabitants of Jerusalem now face an even bigger need than rebuilt walls, and that is their need for spiritual renewal, setting the stage for chapter 8 where the focus shifts from rebuilding the walls with bricks and cement to rebuilding the people w/ God's Word.

Five (Incredibly Powerful) Elements of Spiritual Renewal (renewal/revival; 5 things, and #4 people never see coming!)

Element #1:

1. Hunger (v 1)

- Notice³ vs 1, that it's the people who took the initiative. Vs 1: *"The people gathered as one man into the square before the Water Gate..."* and *"...they (the people) told Ezra the (really old) scribe to bring the book of the Law..."*
- I love that phrase, "Bring us the book." This revival wasn't a program put forward by Nehemiah; it happened when the people said, "Bring us the Book."
- True revival happens when people hunger for the Book.

³ Kidner

- I remember when I first became a Christian how hungry I was to hear God's Word. I couldn't get enough of it. I started to listen to sermons all the time. I basically stopped listening to music--and 80s music at that, which was the greatest decade of music in human history, AmIrite? But I was a 16-year-old driving around in my car listening to preaching tapes and Christian preaching stations. I'm not saying that's the way it has to manifest in your life, but whenever someone gets spiritually awakened, they develop a hunger for God's Word. Like, I heard a story about a young, single guy in our church (and I've heard several different versions of this same story at our church) but he came one weekend to our Apex campus. He sat on the back row so he could slip out if he got bored--the row was empty when he first sat down, but he hadn't learned the rules of TSC, which means a bunch of y'all come in about 8-10 minutes after we start, so to his dismay the row filled up all around him so he couldn't get out without making a scene, so he was forced to stay for the sermon, but God used it to get ahold of his heart, and he told me that within the space of two years he had gone back and listened to every single sermon on our website... twice. He knew my stories better than I knew them. He even asked me at one point, he said, "Hey, why are there no sermons on our website pre-2008?" And I told him, "Because I'm embarrassed of those sermons. I'm not even sure that guy was saved, to be honest." The point is this guy couldn't get enough of the Word.

Revival doesn't begin with a better strategy—it begins when people say, "Bring us the Book." And that's because of one simple biblical principle: the Spirit of Jesus only moves where he's wanted.

Jon Tyson, who was here with us a few weeks ago at our Men's Conference, said something at Passion 2025 that I'll never forget: He pointed out something striking about Jesus' life--namely that Jesus didn't do many miracles in Nazareth, even though Nazareth was his hometown--the place he grew up in; the place where many of Jesus' favorite people would have lived. His relatives; his childhood friends; his elementary school teachers. And yet Jesus did very little of his ministry there and almost no miracles. The place Jesus seemed to hub his ministry was called Bethany--that's where he raised Lazarus from the dead. Bethany was the place from which Jesus commenced his triumphal entry into Jerusalem and it was the place Jesus returned to every night of the final week of his life. Bethany is also the place Jesus went after the resurrection and it's the place he ascended back to heaven from. Why make Bethany his ministry hub and not Nazareth, since Nazareth was his hometown?

Matthew 13:58 tells us, *"Jesus did not do many mighty works there in Nazareth, because of their unbelief."* They said things like "Isn't this just the carpenter's son?" Bethany, by contrast, was the place where Mary broke the expensive bottle of perfume over his feet and washed his feet with her tears. Bethany is where Mary and many others sat at his feet hungering for anything and everything he had to say. And so, Jesus established his functional home in Bethany, not Nazareth, even though Nazareth was his hometown.

Jesus doesn't go where he's merely *known*, Tyson says—he goes where he's *wanted*. The same thing is true with his Spirit today. Wherever revival happens, it is preceded by a hunger for the Word, an intense hunger, where you want the presence of his Spirit in your life more than you want *anything*. Without hunger, there will be no revival. Revival won't happen until everything in your life screams, "Bring us **THE BOOK!**"

So here's my question: Are you Bethany or Nazareth? Is your attitude toward the Word of God hungry, or casual?

Listen, if your primary engagement with the Word is coming in here every other week or so to hear a sermon, I can answer that question for you: **It's CASUAL.** You may know Jesus, but don't expect him to do any miracles in your life. You're Nazareth, but Jesus only shows up in Bethany. You might know him, but you don't hunger for him.

But that leads me to #2, our second element of revival...

2. Preaching (vv 3-4, 8)

Ezra, **vs 4**, the elderly scribe who'd led the second wave of return from exile, built a little elevated platform right there in the public square, and there he "...read from it (the Book) 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."

- **He built a little elevated platform and taught** the Word of God from it literally all day. And they sat there and they hung on every word.
- **The elevated platform served two purposes: The first was functional:** It made it easier for everyone to hear him. **But the second—and more important function—was symbolic.** The word of God was the elevated centerpiece of this renewal.

By the way, vs 8 in this chapter gives my favorite definition of preaching. (You Bible teachers, listen up, I consider this to be my job description, or the job description of any Bible teacher). **"They (i.e., Ezra and the other preacher-teachers) read from the book, from the Law of God, clearly, and they gave the sense, so that the people understood the reading. That's literally what I do each week: I read from the book, give you the sense of it** (meaning, I explain it; put it in terms you can understand, tell you stories to help illustrate it), then do my best to help you apply it to your lives.

- You see, it's not merely hearing the Word that helps you; it's understanding it.
 - When I was a missionary in an Islamic country many of my Muslims friends believed that just hearing the sound of the Koran (which they believe to be the Word of God) would convert you. So I was always getting invited to go and hear "reading from beautiful Al-Quran." It was their way of trying to convert me. We'd just go sit in an audience and people would read the Koran in Arabic. And while I was listening they'd always be cutting eyes at me to see what kind of effect it was having on me. But of course it had no effect because I couldn't understand it, and most of them couldn't understand it either, because they don't speak Arabic. Most of them had never read the Koran in a language that they could understand, but that doesn't matter, because it's simply hearing it, being in its presence, they believe, that has the effect.
- **The Bible presents itself differently. It's not hearing the Word, or being in its presence, that converts you, as if that had some sacramental effect; it's understanding it.**
 - **Old Testament commentator** Derek Kidner points out how many times the word "**understanding**" is used in this chapter. It's used in vv 2, 3, 7, and 8. "Understanding," Kidner says, is everything, and that's because the Bible consistently says that faith is the center of the Christian life.
 - Hebrews 11:6 says that "Without faith it is impossible to please God."
 - Romans 14:23 says that whatever we do that is not grounded in faith is sin.

- Galatians 3:3 say that all the benefits of the Christian life come to us through faith, and that faith only grows in your heart as you hear and *understand* God's word.⁴
- I was talking with someone who visited our church recently (and this was fascinating)--they're only experience in church before us had been the Roman Catholic Church, and so I asked them how they liked our service. And one of the things they said really struck me. He said something to the effect of, "Well, in this church, the center of everything is the Word. The largest single portion of the service is devoted to the Word: you literally stand on an elevated platform in the center of everyone, read the text and then explain how it applies to my life. That's the first time in church I've ever experienced anything like that. Previously in my church experience, there was always a time where the Word of God was read, but it was way shorter, and the guy who reads it literally stands off to the side and he doesn't really explain what he's reading or show me how it applies to my life. The Word of God is not really the central part of the service."
 - The main part of the service in many of these churches is the sacrament; which is why the altar, not the pulpit, is the center.
 - And it doesn't even matter how much you understand it--simply being in contact with it, being in its presence, is what does the trick for you.
- The Bible teaches, however, that salvation and renewal only happen through faith, and faith comes through hearing *and* understanding God's Word.
 - "Faith," Paul says, "comes from hearing..." (and by 'hearing' he means understanding'. We know that because in the previous verse he explains that hearing comes through those sent to preach--that is, people like Ezra, or me, who read and explain--God's Word.⁵
- So, Summit, as God gives me grace, so long as I am your pastor, the center of this church will always be this Book and this moment right there, because this is everything. **This (BIBLE) is the source of revival and renewal:** hearing the Word, understanding it, putting faith in what it says.
 - Like Pastor Bryan said last week, this is more than just a textbook for us or the biography of great men and women of history. This is theo-pneustos, literally "the breath of God."
 - In Genesis 1 God breathed and spoke and the worlds sprung into existence; in the Gospels Jesus breathed and spoke and the lame walked; the blind saw; and dead men got out of the grave. This book is the breath and voice of God. And when you encounter it--when you hear it, with understanding--spiritual life and revival and renewal spring up in you. You don't come to listen to the wisdom of a man or to be caught up in the lights and sounds of a moment; you come to hear the Word.

So, the first element is HUNGER; the second is PREACHING; the third is...

3. Conviction (v 6)

Vs 6 says that as Ezra read and gave the people the understanding, "...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 Word didn't stay in their heads, it penetrated their hearts, and that manifested in a physical response.

⁴ Romans 10:17; Gal 3:2

⁵ In Galatians 3 Paul asks, "How did you receive the Spirit of God? And he answers his own question by saying, "You received him by hearing the Word of God with faith."

- (By the way: SOAP BOX WARNING: People say to me, “I don’t like it when people shout Amen or lift up their hands or do demonstrable things in worship; I like quiet, somber, reflective moments.” Fine, there’s a time for somber, quiet, reflective moments, but if you don’t approve of any of the amen-shouting, hand-raising, fall-on-your-face dimensions of worship, I don’t think you would have enjoyed Nehemiah’s revival much--and, not to be rude, but I’m not sure how much you’re gonna enjoy heaven, either, because there’s a lot of that stuff happening up there, too.)
- The preaching of God’s word gripped them and moved them deeply and their whole bodies manifested that.
- **Vs 9 (b)** tells us that they began to mourn and weep for their sins. They were deeply cut to the heart.
- When revival comes, truths you know with your head you suddenly begin to feel in your heart. Hear me: revival doesn’t usually come through new things you learn; it comes as old things come alive.
- **Jonathan Edwards**, who oversaw the first Great Awakening in America, the largest spiritual revival in American history, described it as the difference between knowing with your head that honey is sweet but then having that sweetness burst alive on your taste buds for the first time; what you knew propositionally in your head suddenly becomes a reality in your mouth. Before, I knew what sweetness was--but now I taste it and I sense it. Here’s how he described it in his own life: **“Sometimes only mentioning the name of Christ or an attribute of God will cause my heart to burn within me (notice: not a new truth he learns; just an old one that comes alive)... suddenly God appears glorious to me. When I enjoy this sweetness it seems to carry me outside of myself. I cannot bring myself even to take my eye from this Glorious Object.”**

Revival is not the result of some new means of grace, Edwards said, it’s the intensification of the normal things.⁶

And I point that out because in a lot of circles, revival is associated with something new--some new weird thing the Spirit is doing, some fresh way he’s working he’s never worked before. But Scriptural revivals don’t work that way--there’s no “new ways,” there’s “the old ways” that suddenly become effective. The Word of God is preached, just like at other times, but it suddenly comes alive in people’s hearts.

D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones was a medical-doctor-turned-pastor in London who’d grown up in the Welsh revivals of the early nineteenth century. He said that most of us don’t crave revival because we don’t know what we’re missing! We’ve just grown accustomed to how difficult ministry is; how slowly it moves. He says, **“Our problem (Lloyd-Jones says) is getting to a place where we realize how absolutely impotent we are. At first, (he says) we persist in thinking that we can set the situation right. We think if we just write a new book; preach some better sermons; start some new mission works; adopt a new program—this will stem the tide of the enemy. But we come to realize at long last that it’s not working... at least not effectively to stem the tide and save our children or our community... and so we throw ourselves upon the mercy of God. It is not so much an organized prayer emphasis as it is an act of desperation. And then, and only then, does the power of the Holy Spirit come flooding upon us and into us. And he does in a moment what incremental organization can hardly accomplish in half a century.”**

⁶ Jonathan Edwards called revival, “the intensification of the normal operations of the Holy Spirit...” It comes through the ordinary means of grace. Things like preaching the Word and prayer.” In a revival, you’re not doing something new; you’re doing all the same stuff you usually do, it just has an unusual power associated with it. *A Treatise Concerning Religious Affections*

“God does in a moment what incremental organization can hardly accomplish in half a century.” Dr. Lloyd-Jones is using imagery there from Psalm 126, which was, by the way, a psalm written during the time period of Nehemiah! The writer of Psalm 126 lays out the path of spiritual renewal. This psalm is really short, and it directly corresponds to the time period we’re studying, so let me walk you through it: [1] When the LORD restored the fortunes of Zion, we were like those who dream. [2] Then our mouth was filled with laughter, and our tongue with shouts of joy; then they said among the nations, “The LORD has done great things for them.” The psalmist is describing their joy in returning from exile in Babylon to a newly restored Jerusalem! It’s like a dream! It’s too good to be true!

But then, in vs. 4, the psalmist yearns for something more: Restore our fortunes, LORD, like streams in the Negev! Those who sow with tears will reap with songs of joy! Those who go out weeping, carrying seed to sow, shall return with songs of joy, carrying sheaves with them. **Psalm 126:4–6**

Old Testament scholar Derek Kidner points out that in these verses the psalmist identifies two distinct ways God brings about spiritual renewal:⁷

The first is in **vs 5**. The psalmist talks about “sowing with tears.”

- **The desert region of Israel** just outside Jerusalem **was** called the Negev, and it was very difficult to get any seed to grow there because it was so dry. (**PIC OF NEGEV DESERT**) The psalmist is **imagining soil so arid** that seeds planted needed to be watered individually, with tears. **Imagine how many hours** of excruciating labor and what exhausting patience that would take--digging individual holes, planting each seed one at a time, and watering each with your tears.
- **This is the normal way God brings renewal into the world.** We patiently plant the seeds of God’s Word in the hearts of those around us, we water them with our tears and fertilize them with our faith. It feels long and laborious, but it’s faithful ministry. And we have to be willing to do that.
- But this psalm shows you there’s another way God can work: **Vs 4, “Restore our fortunes like streams in the Negev.”**
 - **Once every 30–40 years** in this region, they have a **torrential monsoon** where they get about seven years worth of rain in 12 hours. It **forms streams** in the desert, and a **couple of days later, when the flood waters recede**, this is what it leaves... (**PIC** of kids running in flowers). **This is called “The Super Bloom.”**
 - The psalmist imagines God doing this spiritually in the hearts of these returning Israelites. God’s Spirit pours out on the preaching of the Word, and more is accomplished in the space of a few moments than normally occurs in a lifetime.

Isn’t this what you want to happen in your family? In our community, in our church? **How does that happen?**

Let me read that quote from Dr. Lloyd-Jones again: *“Our problem is getting to a place where we realize how absolutely impotent we are... But we come to realize at long last that it’s not working... at least not effectively to stem the tide and save our children or our community... and so we throw ourselves upon the mercy of God. It is not so much an organized prayer emphasis as it is an act of desperation. And then, and only then, does the power of the Holy Spirit come flooding upon us and into us. And he does in a moment what incremental organization can hardly accomplish in half a century.”*

⁷ Derek Kidner, *Psalms 73–150: A Commentary* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1973), 440.

There have been times in history where this has happened:

- I mentioned the Great Awakening.
- It happened in Korea in the early twentieth century. I've told you about that one.
- It's happening right now in parts of S. America and China, where the church is growing faster right now than anywhere in history.
- Honestly, I think it's happening in limited measure right now... We had more than 2,000 show up at our college services and 83 professions of faith.
- By the way, Summit, our total attendance for Easter last week, NOT counting our Good Friday services, was 29,766 people--basically 30,000. The single largest attendance we've ever had, by far. And we had 253 professions of faith.
- There's a wind blowing right now...
- And Pastor Bryan did a great job. Didn't he? By the way, he didn't tell you the full story. Bryan had confided to me a while ago that the thing he missed most about being a senior pastor was preaching Easter, so I figured he had some pent-up resurrection rage in his body, and I was right. But 253 professions of faith.

There's the beginning of a wind blowing here and I want to see it turn into the streams of the Negev, Summit. Don't you?

4. Joy (vv 9–10)

In **vs 9**, Nehemiah says something odd. He specifically instructs the people, "This day is holy to the Lord your God; do not mourn or weep." Then he said, **vs 10**, "Go your way. Eat the fat and drink sweet wine... and do not be grieved..."

Why this clarification? He tells them at the end of **vs 10**, "...for the joy of the Lord is your strength." (Some of you recognize that phrase from worship songs; this is the first time in Scripture it is used!)

Revivals are not defined by days of mourning because of your sin, but days of rejoicing in God's salvation. Revival begins with mourning over sin, but, hear me, *it never stops there*. Write this down: **Sorrow may be the beginning point of revival, but fat-eating, sweet-wine drinking, dance-prompting joy is the destination.** For us Baptists, we at least get one out of the three. (We don't do wine drinking or the dancing, but, boy, let me tell you we can do the fat-eating thing. AmIrite?)

One of the signs God's Spirit is coming into you is you go from sorrow over sin to joy in God's salvation. The gospel's first light is always to expose your sin, but it never stops there! In John 8, when Jesus reveals himself as **the light of the world**, I've told you he does that on the heels of the story of him forgiving the woman caught in the act of adultery. A woman gets dragged before Jesus, having been caught in the act of adultery. The Pharisees ask Jesus what they should do with her since the Law commands she be stoned. Jesus kneels down to write in the dirt, then stands up and says, 'Let him who is without sin among YOU cast the first stone.' They all stare awkwardly at each other, drop their rocks and go home. **Then it's just Jesus and the woman, and he says to her**, "Woman, where are your accusers?" And she says, "There *are* none, Lord," and then he says those famous words, "Neither do I condemn you; go and sin no more."

The woman could have left that encounter still full of shame and self-loathing because of her sin--I mean, less than an hour before she'd been committing adultery and she was likely still half-naked from the encounter--but I suspect that she went home with joy because that moment was not defined by her sin but by his salvation.

Mourning comes from looking at your sin; joy comes from looking at him. Some of you are appropriately broken over your sin; but it's time for you to embrace the more important part of the gospel: **NEITHER DO I CONDEMN YOU**. This is a day of joy, not sadness, and you need to let the joy of that salvation become your strength!

Yeah, your sin was bad, but his grace is greater. Your dysfunction and brokenness is bad, but God's grace is greater.

- Maybe there's a lot of people you've hurt in your life! Get up, God has made you a new creation; he has appointed you to bring blessing and joy to your family now, not sorrow.
- Maybe you've been an addict: get up, friend, he's made you a new creation, and those whom the Son sets free are free indeed.
- You say, "I feel sinful, rejected, defeated, defiled," he says, "Get up, because I've declared you righteous, accepted, loved, forgiven. You've been broken but he's made you more than a conqueror. Though the list of your sins is long, the love of Christ is longer; there's no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

Stop staring at your sin and start beholding your Savior.

- One of Gen Z's critiques of millennials, their older siblings, is that they're too somber. The millennial generation has been known to be somewhat melancholy. And that's because, social analysts say, they've encountered the disappointments of the world in unusual ways--a lot of institutions and power structures have let them down. And that's legitimate. But your younger siblings, Gen Z, have something to say too. Your story doesn't stop with depression, at least for the Christian. Yes, we mourn the messed-up world around us, but God is doing a new thing and the joy of the Lord is our strength.

That brings me, finally, to #5...

5. Obedience (vv 13–18)

One of the things they discovered as they were listening to the Book is that there is a feast commanded in the Law of God that they haven't celebrated in centuries. Look, if you will, at vs 14: And they found it written in the Law (Lev 23, to be exact) that the Lord had commanded by Moses that the people of Israel should dwell in booths during the feast of the seventh month... The "Feast of Booths" was this holiday where the people of Israel erected little tents and slept outdoors--it was kind of like Krzyzewskiville (K-ville), where Duke students leave the nice, comfortable indoor accommodations that their parents paid \$94,000/yr for them to live in and stay outdoors in tents for weeks on end so they can get tickets to the Carolina game. This is kind of like that--but this "tent village" is not to get tickets to see Coach K lose his final game to UNC, but to remind

themselves how God had miraculously provided for his people during their wilderness wandering. God had commanded them to observe this holiday, once every year, for a week in August.⁸

16 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... (now watch this, vs 17) for from the days of Jeshua the son of Nun to that day the people of Israel had not done so.”

They hadn't obeyed this command for 900 years. So, for the first time in 900 years they obey it, “And (when they did, vs 17) there was very great rejoicing.”

Their first action after this revival was to obey a command they hadn't obeyed in NINE HUNDRED years, for almost as long as they'd been a nation.

Here's my question for you: What command have you neglected? Maybe, like Israel, you've neglected it for basically your whole life. Maybe it's:

- Being honest in relationships. You're living a lie with your friends or your spouse. It's time to come clean.
- Asking for forgiveness.
- Extending forgiveness to someone.
- Maybe there's some secret habit you've nursed for years--it's almost part of your identity now, and it's time to give it up.
- Maybe you've never tithed. You've never practiced financial obedience.

It's time for you to start obeying *TODAY*. As Esau McCaulley says, “The goal of the Word is not your information or inspiration; it's your transformation.” So, where do you need to obey ***TODAY?***

VAMP

Let me end this by coming back around to #1... How much do you hunger for his Spirit? You show that by your devotion to the Word, your repentance and by how much you seek him in prayer.

Listen, I'm willing to be the person who faithfully digs a hole for each seed and waters it with his tears--as God gives me strength, I'll do that for the rest of my life for you. But I long for those streams of the Negev. Don't you?

We can't force God to send those streams. The Spirit is like the wind, Jesus says; it blows where it wishes. We can't control it, but we can put up our sails and say, “Jesus, send the Wind here.”

⁸ Luke 23:33–43; Deut 16:13–15; 31:10–13; Num 23:39–43

We should be hungry for the Word and eagerly obeying all that it says. Our Boiler Room should be full each hour of each service with people asking God to send the power as the Word is preached. The Boiler Room is... I can tell how hungry we are by how many people are in that room! I'm willing to do the slow, hard work, but I want an outpouring of the Holy Spirit in my generation. Don't you? Listen, the life of our community depends on this. The life of our CHURCH depends on it. The life of your family depends on this.

Mercy drops 'round us are falling, but for the showers we plead.

So let's open up the altars for those who want to come down and cry out for it. You say, "Well, I can pray in my seat." Of course you can. And we simply don't have space for everyone to come down here, of course. But I think coming to kneel expresses a particular kind of hunger, doesn't it? That's what worship and corporate prayer are supposed to be: putting our hunger on display.

- And maybe some of you are so desperate for it in your life and family you'd want to come down here and do that.
- Or maybe there's something you need to surrender, some area you need to start obeying. And maybe you've neglected it for years. For your whole life, you've never done it, and it's time to start.

Everyone stand, you come right now, as our worship teams come to lead us ...

Bullpen:

1. Bring us the Book (hunger for the Word)

2. Help us understand it (clarity of the Word)

3. Let it break us (conviction from the Word)

4. Let it heal us (joy from the Word)

5. Let it change us (obedience through the Word)

- **One other note here: this joy here is not a perky personality. Or optimism.** If you're naturally perky, or sanguine, or an optimist, an Enneagram 7 or whatever, you're probably in general a more enjoyable person to be around, but that has nothing to do with the joy of the Lord. This is joy founded in who God is and what he has done. It's joy not rooted in temperament but grace. All the people were mourning, appropriately, and Nehemiah said, "Good starting point. But don't insult God by stopping there. You're only halfway. Receive his salvation and rejoice. The joy of the Lord, and the salvation of the Lord, the source of that joy, is your strength." (Spurgeon's conversion?)

6. Repentance and Confession of Sin (v 9)

(There's repentance and confession of sin--You have to forsake what God has forbidden. To push out of your life things that grieve his Spirit. Every revival includes that.

(Korean revival?)

But I'm mostly going to skip that, because we're going to do a whole week on it when we get to Nehemiah 9 in a couple of weeks...).

- In fact, there's a famous story over there that illustrates this: my Muslim friends kept telling me that Neil Armstrong had become a Muslim when he returned back from the moon. The story went that while Armstrong was on the moon, he heard the Muslim call to prayer and when he came back to earth he visited the Middle East he heard the call to prayer and said, "That's it, that's what I heard in space, Allah must have been trying to speak to me" and he became a Muslim. I heard it so many times I eventually looked it up. The Armstrong family had a whole website devoted to debunking the myth. The truth was that Neil Armstrong had indeed visited the Middle East after he returned from the moon, he'd heard the call to prayer and someone asked him what he thought about it, and he said, "It's kind of weird, spacey" and somehow that turned into, "He heard the call to prayer in space and converted to Islam" and that story was printed as fact in

several Muslim newspapers. The rumor was able to gain traction because Muslims believe that simply hearing the words of the Koran, whether you understand them or not, have a magical, sacramental quality on your soul.

But for now, let's go to...

9 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. 10 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."

14 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... 16 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.

7. Generosity (v 10)

- 10 "...and send portions to anyone who has nothing ready"
- Grace creates outward facing people. Always. It's the indicator light of having experienced the gospel!

D. Martyn Lloyd Jones, the British pastor, had a great illustration for this I've loved... (picking up daughter)

Revival doesn't typically come through new truths you learn, or new spiritual practices, or new songs; it's when old truths come alive.

- It reminds me of the words of D Martyn Lloyd-Jones, who wrote and spoke a lot about revival and awakening. He said, "I spend half my time telling my people to learn doctrine, and the other half telling them doctrine is not enough. It's got to be experienced."
- Revival is not a new song, just the normal Christian song turned up to full volume, put into stereo with surround sound on.

"And then we remember the promise, that when the enemy comes in like a flood, it is the Lord who will raise up a standard against him.

Quote (from Isaiah 59:15). Old battle inference. When an enemy would come in like a flood, the defending armies would backpeddle. But when they had gotten their footing and were pushing back, they would raise up a standard. No longer were they on the defensive, they were on the offensive. The standard showed you who was on the offensive.

Lloyd-Jones is saying, “Think of the Christian’s experience like a battle, and the enemy floods in... we try and try and we win a battle here and there, but nothing repels the enemy. And then we remember the promise that when the enemy comes in like a flood, the Lord will raise up a standard against him...”

And so we throw ourselves upon the mercy of God. It’s not so much an organized prayer emphasis as it is an act of desperation. And then, and only then, does the power of the Holy Spirit come flooding upon us and into us.

“And he does in a moment, Lloyd-Jones says, “what incremental organization can hardly accomplish in half a century.”⁹

What revival is: “The Word of God is recovered and rightly understood” **Renewal begins when people:**

- **hear the Word freshly**
- **not casually, but expectantly**
- Keller on revival: “the intensification of the normal operations of the Holy Spirit... through the ordinary means of grace (preaching the Word, prayer, etc.)”¹⁰

Revival starts when: people want the Word again (8:1) (Begg)

- Not “I should read the Bible a little more...” but BRING US THE BOOK!
- Revival doesn’t begin with better strategy—it begins when people say, “Bring us the Book.”
- Kidner: This is a “spontaneous movement” of the people
 - True renewal is not top-down programming
 - It’s a Spirit-driven hunger for Scripture

Sorrow was not the full response; joy should have been (8:9–10)

- The Word wounds before it heals. Revival includes deep conviction of sin
- The word functions like a mirror (Perry Noble)?
- Grief is appropriate but not ultimate
- No awareness of sin, no rejoicing in grace
- For the word to comfort you, it must first confront you
- Word understood: sin exposed; grace declared; joy commanded

⁹ Ibid., 14.

¹⁰ Keller, *Center Church*

- Joy is not personality or temperament, it is rooted in grace. The gospel preachers interrupted mourning to say, “You’re forgiven, now rejoice.” (Spurgeon’s conversion?)

Preaching defined (My job) (8:8) Read, gave the sense, helped people understand. Our services are heavy on word, which can be unusual if you grew up in a sacramental context

- Need comprehension that penetrates the heart
- I spend half my time telling people to learn doctrine, and the other half telling them doctrine is not enough
- Kidner: repetition of word understanding here (vv 2, 3, 7, 8)

Send portions to those who have nothing ready (v 10)

- Grace creates outward facing people

DMLJ, learning from Jonathan Edwards, compared it to the two ways the writer of Psalm 126 says revival comes.

In PSALM 126 the Psalmist ponders God’s fulfillment of his **promises to Israel** to bless them and make them a blessing to the nations:

[1] When the LORD restored the fortunes of Zion, we were like those who dream. [2] Then our mouth was filled with laughter, and our tongue with shouts of joy; then they said among the nations, “The LORD has done great things for them.”

That’s about their joy in returning from exile in Babylon to Jerusalem! **Then**, in vs. 4, the Psalmist prays for spiritual renewal: Restore our fortunes, Lord, like streams in the Negev! Those who sow with tears will reap with songs of joy! Those who go out weeping, carrying seed to sow, shall return with songs of joy, carrying sheaves with them. Ps 126:4–6

OT scholar Derek Kidner points out that in these verse the Psalmist identifies two distinct ways God brings spiritual renewal:¹¹

The first is in vs 5. The Psalmist talks about “sowing with tears.”

- **The desert region of Israel** is called the Negev, and it’s very difficult to get any seed to grow there.
- The Psalmist is **imagining soil so arid** that seeds planted needed to be watered individually, with tears.
 - **Imagine how many hours** of excruciating labor and what exhausting patience that would take--in a dry land with no water, digging individual holes, planting one seed at a time, and watering them with your tears.
- **This is the normal way that God often works through us in the world.**
 - We patiently plant the seeds of God’s Word in the hearts of those around us, water them with our tears, and fertilize them with our faith.

¹¹ Derek Kidner, *Psalms 73–150: A Commentary* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1973), 440.

- Disciple-making can be **laborious, painstaking** work--
 - **I remember this. Am I doing ANYTHING?** I spent all day just trying to get the phone bill paid. I had never worked harder in ministry than in time with the company in Southeast Asia, but at the end of two years of long, faithful labor, I had only a couple of converts, and both were wavering.
- **Was I doing something wrong? No. As Psalm 126** says this is how God has appointed much of our work to go.
 - We're called to suffer, and persevere, to die to ourselves, to bear in our bodies the wounds of Jesus.
 - You know: some of the **greatest missionaries in history** labored faithfully for years with almost nothing to show for it!
- **But. But, Derek Kidner says, God works another way, too.** The psalmist prays, "Restore our fortunes like streams in the Negev."
 - **(PIC OF DESERT)** This is not the Negev, this is in Chile, but the terrain is very similar
- But **once 30–40 years**, they have a **torrential monsoon**, where they get 7 years of rain in 12 hours. It **forms streams** in the desert, and a **couple of days later, when the waters recede**, this is what it leaves...
 - **(PIC** of kids running in flowers).
 - **Actual pic. It's called Super Bloom.**
- **This also happened in the Negev.** The psalmist imagines God doing this among the hearts of wandering Israelites.

Yearning for an outpouring like this didn't negate the psalmist's responsibility to plant the seeds and patiently water them with tears. But it does give him a hope that he refuses to relinquish, a hope that God will again send his Spirit into his land, like a flood.

There have been times in history where God did this! God did more in a moment through a shoddy sermon than a thousand m could have done in two generations.

- The Great Awakening.
- Korea in the early 20th century.
- Parts of S. America and China today.
- Our college campuses right now (2100 at college; 24K overall!)
- Small outbreaks in other places.

DMLJ, said "Our problem," D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones said, "is getting to a place where we realize how absolutely impotent we are. At first," he says, "we persist in thinking that we can set the situation right. We think if we just write a new book; preach some better sermons; start some new mission works; adopt a new program—this will stem the tide of the enemy. But we come to realize at long last that it's not working... at least not effectively to stem the tide and save our children or our community...

"...and so we throw ourselves upon the mercy of God. It is not so much an organized prayer emphasis as it is an act of desperation. And then, and only then, does the power of the Holy Spirit come flooding upon us and into us. And he does in a moment what incremental organization can hardly accomplish in half a century.

~~You say, "Well, J.D., the heading of this point was 'confession,' but you haven't really said anything about *confession*." Yes, I know, and that's because the whole message next week is on confession. So, for now, just know that when revival happens, it produces deep, real confession.~~