



**NEHEMIAH
DEVOTIONAL**

By Pastor Phil Emerson

NAME: _____

OUR DISCIPLESHIP FLOW

At Emmanuel Church, we are passionate about living out the call to be disciples of Jesus Christ, and make it our goal to see His Kingdom come in our lives and the world in which we live. We recognise that in Biblical times, a disciple was someone who followed a teacher or rabbi, not simply to gain head knowledge to pass an examination, but to be fully immersed in the life of the rabbi, and *learn his ways*, so that they in turn could replicate this to the world around them. As Christians, we are now those who have been invited to 'follow' Jesus and all of His ways, and we therefore call ourselves His disciples.

"This is how we know we are in him: Whoever claims to live in him must live as Jesus did." 1 John 2:5,6

We therefore want to take seriously the words of Jesus in Matthew 28:19-20 to make disciples and also commit to an ongoing journey of teaching and discipleship together.

We all have differing personalities and learning styles. At Emmanuel, we recognise this diversity within the church body and therefore desire to support and journey together as we relate with God and each other in some of the following environments:

- **Public (20+)**

In the Bible, we see Jesus seeking to make disciples as He engaged with larger numbers of people, e.g., His interaction with the crowds (Matthew 4:25; Luke 14:25), and the 72 (Luke 10:1-24).

At Emmanuel, we want to use each of our **larger gathered environments** as an opportunity to make disciples, e.g., **Sunday services, Friday Youth/Kids'** environments, **men's/women's** gatherings.

- **Social (10-15)**

Jesus demonstrated the necessity for **smaller accountable relationships** as an essential part of the life of a disciple. He did this by teaching and doing life with his twelve disciples (e.g., Matthew 10).

At Emmanuel, small accountable relationships are offered through:

Lifegroup 12s

These are **gatherings of 10-15 people** who meet bi-weekly in homes or around specific interests, e.g., crafts, football.

- **Personal (2-5)**

As well as having smaller accountable relationships amongst His twelve friends, Jesus also seemed to go to even deeper levels of trust with three in particular – Peter, James and John (Matthew 17; Mark 9). At Emmanuel, we seek to do this through:

Lifegroup 3s

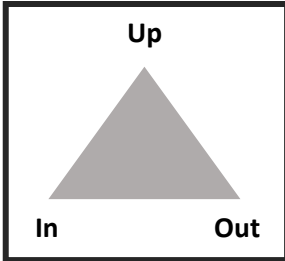
These are smaller **gatherings of 2-5 people** who are committed to transparent and accountable relationships in order to grow together in following Jesus. The aim for these groups is that after 1-2 years, each person in the group would be able to lead a smaller number of people themselves and replicate the process... **disciples making disciples!**

- **Intimate (1-1)**

Jesus regularly withdrew to spend time alone with the Father. This is the ultimate goal of discipleship, that each member of our church family would increasingly spend time alone with the Father and grow in devotion and desire to see the Kingdom come.

A TOOL TO USE

As stated previously, 1 John 2:6 makes it clear that for those of us who call ourselves disciples of Jesus, our goal should be to daily *walk in the ways of Jesus*, our Rabbi. As we examine the New Testament we see that Jesus lived His life based on three relationships: **Up** – with His Father; **In** – with His chosen followers; **Out** – with the hurting world around Him. This is illustrated in the following triangle:



Jesus *taught* and *modelled* out to His disciples how to live into each of these areas in life.

Up

Jesus frequently left the disciples to spend personal time with the Father (Mark 1:35; Luke 5:16). He taught them the significance of prayer, and how to pray and communicate with the Father (Luke 11:1-13). When comparisons with one another or insecurities presented themselves, He spoke into it in love and challenged them into a greater depth of living (Mark 9:33-37; Matthew 18:1-5).

In

Jesus had significant relationships with others in which He intentionally invested (12s and 3s). When He went to engage with the Father He brought the three with Him (Matthew 17:1). He taught them and modelled out the significance of Sabbath and rhythms of rest (Mark 6:31). He demonstrated with His life the significance of generosity and sacrificial love for others (John 13:1-17).

Out

Jesus personally lived a life that engaged with the crowds and the broken world around Him. He healed the sick (Matthew 8:1-4), fed the poor (Mark 6:30-44), and cast out demons (Matthew 8:28-34). But with the people who were closest to Him, He challenged them to do the same (Mark 6:37), and when they took risks themselves He critiqued and gave honest feedback to call out more for them (Luke 10:17-20).

As we spend time alone or together in this devotional, we want to help and encourage you to engage in each of these ways – UP, IN, and OUT.

HOW TO USE THE BOOK

First

If you haven't already done so, please take a second to fill in your name on the inside of the front cover. There'll be a lot of identical books floating around, and we don't want yours to get lost.

Prepare

Get ready for each session by spending some time to invite the Holy Spirit to speak to you. The Bible is a written word (logos), which becomes a living word (rhema) as the Holy Spirit breathes upon it and speaks directly to our lives through it.

Commit

Commit to the journey. Discipleship is not a commitment to a moment, but to a lifetime journey. As you personally commit to journeying with God daily, commit to others by sharing what you are learning (possibly in Lifegroup 12s or 3s), and in this way encouraging one another in what God is saying.

Reflect & Respond

Each day, as you spend personal time with God, we encourage you to ask the following two questions:

- 1) What is God saying to me?
- 2) What am I going to do about it?

This is how we become doers and not just hearers of what God is saying.

INTRODUCTION TO NEHEMIAH

Today's book – like Ezra, Esther, Daniel, Ruth, and others – is named after its principal character: Nehemiah, a man in exile working closely beside a foreign king to whom the nation of Israel was in bondage. It is a book that has been used by many leaders to teach leadership principles, and no better book for this, I may add. Rather than complaining, we see a man who took action and brought a nation into line with his raw courage and unique talents.

Nehemiah's gifts in administration and perseverance enabled him to mould the people back into "*the people of God*" so they could obey God's commands and have a distinction from the nations 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.

I love this book so much. Let's get our trowels out and start building. Join me for the journey of thirteen action-packed chapters and learn how to live out what God has called you to do. Bible at the ready, journal, and pencil. Take your designated spot to learn, grab a brew, and off we go. I trust you enjoy and learn much.

Love you all,
Phil

Read

Nehemiah 1

Live

It is strange that the returned exiles who had returned to Judah some years before Nehemiah had still not rebuilt the busted and broken walls. This once grand city lay defenceless to every marauding tribe and nation. Zerubbabel had led back a group of exiles some ninety years earlier, and Ezra led a second group thirteen years before the events in this chapter. Maybe that's why Nehemiah struggled with the information coming from Judah. He couldn't figure out why no one had thought about the city's defences – it's walls. You could say that Nehemiah had a 'Popeye moment'. Your age will determine if you understand what I mean by a 'Popeye moment'. Popeye was a cartoon sailor on TV in the sixties who had some pretty strange sayings, some with not very good English! One of these was, "I've had about as much as I can stands, I can't stands it no more!" That's what we see in Nehemiah in chapter one; he just can't 'stands' it no more!

I love the detail of Nehemiah's response. He hears the report and it breaks him, reducing him to tears. He fasts and prays, crying out to God, reminding Him of His covenant with these people. While Nehemiah takes time to thank God, he quickly follows with repentance and specific requests, and then presents his availability to go and make a change if God so desires it.

This is such a good prayer-guide chapter that we can learn much from. God has called each of us to important tasks, both as leaders and as followers. Reading the book of Nehemiah will help us to have the courage we need in the face of difficulty and persecution. The whole set-up for this little book happens in this first chapter and the thing that is made glaringly obvious is the condition and readiness of Nehemiah's heart. There was no thought of personal gain in this plan, it was totally driven in response to the shame brought on the name of the Lord.

Pray

Father, let Your ear be attentive to hear and Your eyes be open to see the prayers Your servant is praying before You day and night for my family and friends. I confess my sins and those of my family committed against You. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

The Holy Spirit in inspiring the writing of this glorious book gives us some great details, like the fact that this heathen king noticed the sad demeanor on Nehemiah's face. It may seem like a small detail, but 'raining on the king's parade' in this day was punishable by death. I love how this book records the spontaneous prayers of Nehemiah. You will find eight times throughout the story that he had to pray, as it were, on his feet.

There was work to be done and while prayer is always important, so is good, hard graft. D.L. Moody was once sailing on an ocean vessel when a fire broke out. One of his travelling 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 out the fire!" We tend to build a wall between praying and doing, and very often 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 the fronts of both prayer and action.

What fears do you have that keep you from taking risks with your faith? Tell God about them and let Him show you how to overcome them with His strength. If there's one curriculum I want to master and be mastered by, and if there's one school I want to excel in, it's the academy of prayer. God's grace appears to us like a spectacular sunrise after the bleakest darkness of the night. Grace brought salvation to us; we would never have found it or earned it left alone in our sin, brokenness, and foolishness. This is the blessed assurance that all our hope is in Him and in Him alone.

Pray

Father, as one of Your beloved, gladly sitting under the vastness of Your boundless grace, give me great joy in saying an emphatic "No!" to everything that robs You of Your glory, and an enthusiastic "Yes!" to everything that reveals Your beauty and glory. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Read

Nehemiah 3

Live

A gifted leader can motivate people to begin a job, but a job usually gets completed because of prayer and unity. When there is a lot of mundane work to be done, like repairing a badly damaged wall, there must be unity for the task. 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 and the biggest key to this is that the high priest was the first one mentioned rolling up his sleeves and getting stuck in. This passage describes the hard work of building the wall around Jerusalem and repairing the gates.

Look at the groups or individuals in this chapter who gave themselves to the work. 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? Maybe you could ask the Lord to give you a helper in your ministry and to teach you both how to work together.

Today I find myself thinking about unity and togetherness. While it's great to serve God in our homes, jobs, and church, how much more beautiful it is to do it alongside friends and comrades. I began to ponder this morning the myriads of people who have prayed for me over the years, heroes to whom I will forever be indebted, some of whom I might not even have known personally. As we observe the skill and obedience of men like Nehemiah, may God help us to be a multiplier of people and never a diminisher, someone who inspires and enthuses friends, families, and colleagues to labour for God in everything. I love how Nehemiah got people to build the wall nearest their homes and the priests to rebuild at the Sheep Gate. The Sheep Gate was the gate where sheep would be brought in for sacrifice; therefore, the priests were building at a place of deep investment, just as the people were doing at their homes. Pretty smart leadership, I'd say!

Pray

Father, I love the reoccurring phrase in this chapter today, "*next to him ... next to them*". How beautiful to work for You next to someone with a similar heart, task, and vision. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

This boy, Sanballat, was the governor of Samaria which was just north of Judea. It is most likely that he had his eye on Jerusalem to feed his lust for power, but Nehemiah's return threw a massive spanner in the works. Initially, Sanballat's attack came in the form of opposition from the outside. The children's saying, "Sticks and stones may break my bones, but names will never hurt me!" is utterly untrue. Words hurt. When we want to oppose something because it is getting in our way, we adults can also engage in this kind of attack, albeit in a slightly more devious and sophisticated way. 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 it and be able to fight in opposition if we will do God's work. How have our plans for good and faithful service to the Lord been frustrated lately? If anyone understands opposition from without and within, it is most certainly Jesus. As we read of the journey to the cross, we know there weren't any surprises for Him. He knew what was coming His way, a plan secured before the world began. Jesus fully knew that He would take the wrath of Judgment Day for all who would trust in Him. At the end of the journey, His 'bruised heel' (Genesis 3:15) would secure the ultimate crushing and casting out of the ruler of this world, Satan himself. At the end of the journey here on earth, Jesus would pay the supreme price for the redemption of God's covenant people, a beloved family from every nation, tribe, people, and language, a number as great as the stars in the sky, sand on the beaches, and dust of the earth. For this very reason, He came from eternity into time and space. For this very reason, He emptied Himself of His glory by taking the form of a servant-man. For this very reason, He became obedient even to death on the cross.

Pray

Father, I love that You knew the end from the beginning. I thank You that for the joy that was set before Him, Jesus endured the cross and paid the price for my redemption forever. In Jesus' strong and awesome name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

In chapter 4, we saw opposition from the outside. Today, we see a much more devious demon to fight, opposition from the inside. These people had most likely returned from exile with some wealth. They were content with their condition and saw Nehemiah as someone coming in to rock their boat. Most organisations and nations fall apart because of opposition and deterioration from within, rather than from without. We see this in the book of Nehemiah. Sometimes an idea is conceived, gains some kind of ground and grows to fruition. Then, after a period of time, the work it took to get to that point is taken for granted and personal agendas corrupt the intended purpose. At the beginning, there was sacrifice by some people, but then someone figures out how to make money or get some power, and it is not long before that which helped people, hurts people.

We could ask ourselves a few questions from this chapter: In what ways are leaders today, spiritual or secular, 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 arise within our churches or Christian groups to divert us from our real objectives?

Nehemiah has to jump in and re-envision why they are doing the job. It was all about the glory of God. My prayer is that God will continue to reveal Jesus as the hero in all the Scriptures. Don't read the writings of Moses without thinking about Jesus. May Moses's words (and every other Scripture writer) drive us to the riches of God's grace, for Jesus has fulfilled the demands of the law for us and is now fulfilling the beauty of the law in us. May we never read the great Apostle Paul's unfolding mysteries of the church without thinking about the head of the church, Christ. Jesus' cry from the cross, "*It is finished!*" is the foundation and guarantee of His ongoing work in our world.

Pray

Father, grant me redemptive heartburn like that which You ignited in the hearts of those on the road to Emmaus who encountered Jesus after His resurrection. Continue to open the Scriptures to me until the day Jesus returns to finish making all things new. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

Using power to create pressure is an 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 confident in what they are doing, they may not be bothered by this approach. Nehemiah had wrestled with God so thoroughly about what he was doing in building the wall that he was not side-tracked by attempts to call him away from the work. When someone reacts like Nehemiah, the intimidator must turn up the heat and become more and more threatening. It eventually boils down to who is the strongest and most confident, the intimidator or the one who knows God's will and won't be deterred.

Notice in this chapter that Nehemiah doesn't give in to the intimidation in any shape or form. I'm sure we can all recall a time when we had to be aggressive to fight for something we fully believed in. It is essential to know that the work God has called us to do is a "*great work*" and worthy of our full attention. We can expect some opposition in the job we are doing for the Lord, so it is important to prepare our hearts to be steadfast and unmovable, to have single-mindedness and determination as we work to proclaim His truth to those around us. Ephesians 1:4 reminds us that God chose us even before the earth's existence and conception. That is a pretty humbling thought. I don't think I would have chosen me!

May we be like Nehemiah of old who, with a clear call and mandate from heaven, would not allow any intimidation to distract from what God had called him to do. May God close our ears to discouragement and open them to the balcony people who line the corridors of our Christian lives cheering us on. We don't want to become deaf to critique when it's given for our good, but we need to learn to discern between critique and criticism, and know when to take heed and when to press on regardless.

Pray

Father, I love how Jesus set His face as a flint to go to Jerusalem. Even when Peter tried to stop Him, He saw the enemy working through His friend. Give me this clear direction today. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

When it comes to seeing a work done for God, you will always find two important qualities in action: faithfulness and a healthy fear of the Lord. Faithful people get stuff done and God-fearing people usually have all their priorities in order. Other giftings are important but faithfulness and reverence are the two trump cards in good leaders.

Family history is a powerful thing. I remember my parents talking about our family genealogy, and I thought, 'How boring', but now I wish I had listened more. I recall those nights around the old range when Dad would tell us about his Granddad George, how he fell in love with Jesus in his thirties and pioneered a little brethren assembly. He became a hero of mine, even though he was long dead before I was born. It is good to wander down memory lane every so often. I recall the many stories told before we had a TV to watch. I recall the nights I would eavesdrop on my dad and local farmers talking in the old garage around a heater called a sally-burner. These were the busiest men I knew, but funnily enough, they never seemed to be in a hurry. Their busyness had a godliness to it with no hurry attached.

I tend to speed read over long lists of names like the one found in today's chapter, as if they were unimportant. But every single name carries a story, a family, a thousand memories, just like my family history. In this chapter, we find that if people could not trace their lineage back to a pre-exilic Jewish relative, they were not considered true descendants and could not be counted. I wonder if some of them wished they had listened more to their relatives when they were talking about great-granddad and great-great-grandmother. Try it today, recall a fond family memory from a holiday or your childhood. Thank the Lord for giving you your past as a remembrance and as a guide for the future. I love the fact that Nehemiah found this work of recording names so important.

Pray

Father, help me today to be thankful that I heard the gospel story. Thank You for the links in the chain that allowed me to hear the old, old story that is ever new. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Read

Nehemiah 8

Live

Oh, I love this so much. Ezra reads the Pentateuch (the first five books of our Bible). The people listened and their lives were changed. I have been beating this drum for over forty years; this Book will change your life! Ezra had arrived some thirteen years before Nehemiah; he led the spiritual revival of the city and nation while Nehemiah's task was to rebuild the walls. Nehemiah was the layman governor while Ezra was the spiritual leader. Hence, when the walls were completed, Ezra became the more prominent of the two.

A look at church history indicates that mature Christians have a pretty wide variety of religious emotions; they know how to laugh and how to weep. Sometimes we avoid both crying and laughing because it implies we are not stable, but when we deny the variety of emotions found in the Bible, we are robbing ourselves. In this chapter, we see repentance and weeping as well as great celebration and joy in doing what God wants. Without celebration, our tears of repentance would lead us into downright depression and that would do us no good at all because only God can handle our sins and shortcomings; we can't do it. On the other hand, without true repentance, we do not find joy of the kind in this chapter. Many Christians do not have much joy because they don't take obedience to God's Word seriously. A great question to ask our own souls today is, how can we guard against that in our lives?

In this chapter, the reading of the Word led to questions like ... What now? How should we respond? Is this significant for my life now? These are the big questions that the reading of God's Word should stir. It should always influence and bring change. I love God's Word. It reminds us that as far as the east is from the west so far has God removed our transgressions from us, and He does not deal with us as our sins deserve (Psalm 103). It declares that if He were to keep a record of our wrongs who could stand? But there is forgiveness with God (Psalm 130). Simply stunning!

Pray

Father, help me to use my emotion as I love on You today. I truly love You with all of my heart and don't know how I'd live without You. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

My observation of the great revivals in Scripture and in our own history is that they never happen by simply relaying the stories of old. No, they come by a people who repent, cry out to God, and turn from fleshly living to lives of true holiness. 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 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.

Everything about God reveals the depth of His compassion for sinful, broken people like us. The tears Jesus wept coming into Jerusalem and even the passion He showed driving the moneychangers from the temple, every encounter, parable, and action gives staggering clarity to Paul's words in Romans 5:6-8 *"You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates His own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us."* Paul was writing this about us. I am one of the powerless, ungodly sinners for whom Jesus died, demonstrating His incomparable love for those who didn't deserve it. We have peace with God only because He made His peace with us through Jesus. We would still be blind to what brings us peace if He hadn't opened our eyes to see our need and His provision. The gospel would still remain hidden from our eyes unless Jesus had given us sight to behold Him as the Lamb of God who took away our sin. We have no claim to salvation, no boast, no hope, no assurance of sins forgiven and righteousness received apart from sovereign grace.

Pray

Father, I yearn for the day when I will see You as You are and I will be made like You. This is my great hope, but until that day, keep healing the eyes of my heart from anything that keeps me from seeing the magnificence of Your glory and the full measure of Your grace. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

If my maths is right, eighty-four people signed the covenant vowing to separate themselves from ungodly ways and be accountable. Nehemiah's name was first, followed by the names of priests, Levites, and heads of homes. Just like the rebuilding of the city wall, spiritual restoration would involve all the people, not just Israel's leaders. We have the names of the persons who signed and sealed the covenant, and the things they agreed to and promised to perform: in general, to observe the law of God; in particular, not to marry the people of the land, to keep the sabbaths weekly and yearly, to pay annually the third part of the shekel for the service of the temple, and to bring into the temple the wood offerings, first fruits, firstborn, and tithes.

Sometimes the world thinks that Christianity is a rip-off because we give a tithe, and even more, to the Lord. Part of the confusion is that people see the church, or Christian leaders, as getting that money. While Christians see all they have as belonging to God, non-believers see all they have as a result of their own skill and hard work! This is why we, as believers, must be honest and responsible with the money we have. Otherwise, we open the body of Christ to ridicule and suspicion by people outside the church.

There is no way the body of Christ can function well unless all God's people support those who work full-time in the church body. This chapter of Nehemiah is about making such a covenant of support. It's not just about the money. The more aware we become of our brokenness and the brokenness all around us, the more it should make us long for the staggering inheritance God has promised His children, an inheritance beyond financial worth. The more I ponder a life devoid of evil with no sin or tears but rather permeated with beauty and wholeness, heaven sounds a delight to look forward to. And it will all be ours only because of God's sovereign delight and generosity.

Pray

Father, my stubbornness is seen most clearly in my refusal to believe You fully, in the ways I still run to broken cisterns, and in my multiplied failures to love others as Jesus loves me. How can I not give ALL to a Father like that? In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

People with only the world's values consider many different factors in choosing a place to live and work. As a believer, however, we seek to honour God in every way. When we are deciding where to live and work, we will base the decision on where we feel God wants to develop a ministry and how we can be of help in the building up of the body of Christ. Not only our money belongs to the Lord, but our profession and gifts belong to Him as well, to be used in the body of Christ. God surely knows better than us where we should live and work, fitting into His plans for the building of His kingdom! Only God can balance all the variables in a way that works best for His purposes, whether the calling is to be a doctor, lawyer, lorry driver, shop assistant, homemaker, schoolteacher... We should see all as a ministry and vocation to the Lord, revelling in the fact that God delights to use us in His kingdom plans.

While our callings in life take up a huge chunk of time and attention, we need God to grant us fresh wisdom for living at the pace of grace. We need to know the difference between living a *driven* life and a *called* life. Also, we need the wisdom and encouragement to cut from our schedule the things that may be good but aren't essential. Though sacrificial living and service are always the way of the kingdom, ignoring Sabbath rest, not taking care of ourselves, and living faster than we can love, aren't.

God is the God of hope in an increasingly complex world, one that feels more uncertain and fragile than ever. We all need a fresh and compelling vision of God's finished story, one that will remind us that our labours in the Lord are never in vain. I'm sure you, like me, want to overflow with hope not just for it to be a slow drip.

Pray

Father, You are the ultimate peacemaker reconciling enemies and restoring broken things. I presently have peace with You only because You've made Your peace with me through the finished work of Jesus. May this free me to live today as a conduit of Your peace-making love and healing presence. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

With the wall completed and policies written, it was time to dedicate the work. "If a job is worth doing, it is worth doing right!" I wish I had a pound for every time I heard that saying growing up. Integrity and respect come to those who do a good job. We recognise excellence when we see it, and we are disgusted by a job half-done. We would be of much better use to God, and to others, if we didn't volunteer for everything that came along, but rather did a better job at the things we can realistically complete. If I do my part faithfully, God will do the rest in building His kingdom.

I love this passage from Psalm 19, *"The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul; the statutes of the Lord are sure, making wise the simple; the precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes; the fear of the Lord is clean, enduring forever; the rules of the Lord are true, and righteous altogether. More to be desired are they than gold, even much pure gold; sweeter also than honey and drippings of the honeycomb."*

Apart from Jesus, there's no way we would be able to join in singing this praise song in Psalm 19 about the law. The truth is, the law didn't revive us; it condemned us. The law didn't give joy to our heart, but rather fear to our soul. The law wasn't like sunshine lighting our way; it was a searchlight exposing our sin. If the truth be told, we didn't value the law like precious gold; we avoided it like a deadly plague. It wasn't sweeter than honey from the comb, more like bitter juice from a squeezed lemon. But when the law drove us to Jesus and gave us the faith to trust Him as our Redeemer and Saviour, my, oh my, just about everything that could change began to change.

Pray

Father, may the gospel continue to free me from cheap grace which ignores Your law, and from graceless legalism, which ignores Your Son. I want to continue growing in the obedience of faith and love until the day when Jesus, who has perfectly fulfilled the law for me, perfectly fulfils the law in me. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

It is interesting to see how the command in verse 1 to not allow anyone from these two rebellious nations to enter the temple was then ignored in verse 7. Nehemiah had to return to Babylon and when he came back to Jerusalem, he found this very thing had happened. Sometimes we emphasise 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 not kingdom values! If relationship with God is the most important thing in life, then helping people back into right relationship with God is the best thing we can do for them. When we don't do this, we are really more concerned about what that person thinks than what God thinks. When we are biblically directed, we will be respected and others will hear God's Word through us.

Nehemiah chucked all Tobiah's stuff out the window and had the room purified. No messing around with this boy! We are told he confronted the leaders and demanded to know why they had neglected the house of the Lord. Nehemiah is hopping mad at these people who have broken their vow against inter-marrying from outside nations and he reminds them of Solomon's downfall. If Solomon could fail and fall, anyone could.

The greatest gift we could ever be given is the most treasured possession of heaven, the one and only Son of God, Jesus Christ. Through relationship with Him, there exists a perfect and limitless revelation of God's heart. As we finish this book today, may the eyes of our heart be opened to rightly see and intimately know the awe-inspiring person of Jesus, the One who is forever faithful to His promise to draw near to us whenever we draw near to Him. What a beautiful invitation and blessed assurance. Let's choose to draw near to Jesus today, not being satisfied with rare glances but to gaze upon His majestic beauty and rest in the perfection of His boundless love.

Pray

Father, as I embark upon this journey into the depths of who You are, may the pleasure of Your company become my greatest quest in life. I long to know You personally more and more each day. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

