

WEEK ONE: Nehemiah 1:1-11 (Seeking God With All Your Heart) + Theme: Fresh Love for God

Day 1: Sunday, February 2:

Sabbath Reflection:

READ: Psalm 25 (and reread Nehemiah 1:5-10)

REFLECT:

Nehemiah is not the only one who prayed, trusting in the promises of God and resting in His faithfulness. In Psalm 25, the author (David, who was a king of Israel and known as a man after God's own heart) prayed asking for defense, guidance and forgiveness. David confidently prayed in this way because he knew the character of God and knew that God would continue to save, guide, and forgive as he placed his trust in Him.

Reflection Questions

1. Do you trust the Lord the way David expresses his trust in verses 1-3?
2. What does it look like for you to trust God more? Consider the situations and people you may need to surrender to God or seek God's counsel about.
3. Are there any parts of the Psalm that spoke to your heart – something that jumped off the page, or something that came to your attention? Ask God about those parts of the Psalm to hear what He may have to say to you about it.

PRAY:

- Declare your trust in the Lord because of who He is – He is good, He is compassionate, rich in mercy and filled with unfailing love, He is faithful, He is near to those who call on Him.
- Ask the Lord to show you His will and His way.
- Ask the Lord for the things you need to repent of so that you can continue to honor His name.

Prayer

Lord, I place my trust in You today because of who You are and who You have shown yourself to be in my life. Lord, I confess the ways that I have sinned against you and turn back to Your way. I'm so grateful for your forgiveness that restores. I pray that as I continue to walk with You, You would show me the way You have for me to go and teach me Your truth so that I may bring glory and honor to Your name. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Day 2: Monday, February 3:

Renew: A Fresh Love for God

READ:

Mark 12:30 (NLT) | *And you must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your mind, and all your strength.*"

REFLECT:

The first prayer theme of this prayer season is for the renewal of our hearts – that we would love the Lord as Jesus calls us to – with all of our hearts, with all of our souls, with all of our minds, and with all of our strength. The kind of love Jesus is talking about is agape – a self-sacrificing love, a love that is dependent on the will and not emotions, a love that seeks nothing in return. Agape seeks the welfare of all, wanting the best for all people and looking for the opportunity to do good. The only way we can love this way is by receiving this love from God first.

1 John 4:9-10, 15-17 (NLT) | *⁹ God showed how much he loved us by sending his one and only Son into the world so that we might have eternal life through him. ¹⁰ This is real love—not that we loved God, but that he*

loved us and sent his Son as a sacrifice to take away our sins. ¹⁵ All who declare that Jesus is the Son of God have God living in them, and they live in God. ¹⁶ We know how much God loves us, and we have put our trust in his love. God is love, and all who live in love live in God, and God lives in them. ¹⁷ And as we live in God, our love grows more perfect.

We can love the agape way if we have surrendered our lives to Jesus and have God living in us. Our first step to having a fresh love for God is making sure we're fully surrendered to Jesus. If you have never prayed a prayer of surrender, this is the perfect opportunity to do so. It's very simple to do. We pray in line with what the Bible says in Romans 10:9-10, **"If you openly declare that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. ¹⁰ For it is by believing in your heart that you are made right with God, and it is by openly declaring your faith that you are saved."** Pause right now and pray this prayer:

Jesus, this day I declare that You are Lord. Thank you for descending from Heaven, being born, living a perfect life, dying a torturous death on the cross and being raised back to life on the third day for me – so that I could be set free from sin and made new through You! I'm sorry for the ways that I have sinned, the ways that I have missed the mark and lived life for myself and outside of Your will. Please come, Holy Spirit, into my heart, transform my mind and equip me to live for you. In Jesus' name. Amen.

If you prayed that prayer for the first time, please let us know. Email prayer@walnuthillcc.org so we can connect with you, pray for you and answer any questions you may have about your new relationship with Jesus.

For those of us who have surrendered our lives to Jesus, we know that surrender is a process, a daily submission of our will to the Lord so that we can live the way Jesus calls us to and love the way we were created. Walking in obedience to the Lord is the way that we show Him we love Him. Jesus said, **"If you love me, obey my commandments."** (John 14:15). But sometimes life gets messy, and we spend more time doing things we think are good instead of connecting with God, listening for His voice, discerning His will and being obedient.

Revelation 2:2-5a (NLT) | ² "I know all the things you do. I have seen your hard work and your patient endurance. I know you don't tolerate evil people. You have examined the claims of those who say they are apostles but are not. You have discovered they are liars. ³ You have patiently suffered for me without quitting.

⁴ "But I have this complaint against you. You don't love me or each other as you did at first! ⁵ Look how far you have fallen! Turn back to me..."

We have all gotten caught up and our hearts dulled by the worries of this life, so the fires of our hearts for God dim – maybe even to the point where there are just barely embers. But I have good news, friends! Embers are enough to start a fire again. To stoke the fire of our hearts – to renew our love for God, we must choose to pursue the Lord – in worship, in prayer, and in reading His Word. In this intentional pursuit, we're crying out to the Lord, "Set my heart on fire for You so that I can burn and shine the light of Your love into the world."

Reflection Questions

1. How is your heart today? Are you on fire, filled with love for God, or does your love for Him feel dim or cold? Why do you think that is?
2. What are you willing to do to receive fresh fire in your heart for God? Are you willing to do what it takes to receive a fresh fire, fresh love in your heart, for God?
3. What kinds of habits, thought patterns, behaviors or anything else do you need to set aside so that you can draw near to God?
4. Are there any parts of the Psalm that spoke to your heart – something that jumped off the page, or something that came to your attention? Ask God about those parts of the Psalm to hear what He may have to say to you about it.

PRAY:

- Thank God for His unfailing love – a love that we see through Jesus and the sacrifice of His life on the cross.
- Repent of the times you haven't loved God completely – in a complete surrender of your life and walking in obedience to His will.
- Ask God to stoke the fires of your heart so that you can love Him more completely. Ask God what it looks like for you to love Him more – is there something He is asking you to do (or to stop doing)?

Prayer

Lord, it is so amazing that You know everything about me and yet You love me with the greatest love the world has ever known. Please fill my heart with Your love so that I can love You the way You call me to. Give me a fresh desire in my heart to intentionally pursue You – in worship, in prayer, in meditating on Your Word – so that I can be close to You and my love for You can continue to grow. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Day 3: Tuesday, February 4:

READ: Psalm 63

REFLECT:

Picture this. It's a hot day, you've been outside walking, running, or playing – generally enjoying yourself on a beautiful, sunny, summer day. But now you're thirsty; it's time for a drink. You reach into your refrigerator or a cooler and grab a soda. It tastes good and feels good – but only for a moment. You're still thirsty. So you go back to grab another cold drink – this time water. The water cools your body and soothes the dryness in your throat and mouth. You feel refreshed. On a hot day, there is nothing quite like a cold glass of water.

This ice-cold water on a hot day metaphor is exactly what it is like to spend time in the Presence of God – it's refreshing. In the Presence of God you can receive love, peace, joy, hope, wisdom, and strength – all that you need to take the next step in a world that can be dry and depleting. But sometimes when we're feeling lost, sad and stressed, we choose soda – we choose the things of the world that will only momentarily satisfy, things like food, binge watching television, drugs and alcohol anything we do or consume to make ourselves feel better. In the long run, when we choose the things of the world we're setting ourselves back because we're choosing to spend more time away from the only Source of life and hope.

Praying for a fresh love of God is praying for a change in heart and mind. We're praying that the desires of our heart would be changed – that we would choose to seek God when we find ourselves facing moments of weakness and trouble. When we feel alone, we turn to God on His throne. When we're in despair, we turn our hearts to God in prayer.

When we have a fresh love for God, we choose and desire the Living Water over anything else in the world. As we turn to God to sit and enjoy His Presence, we learn that looking anywhere else for peace, love, joy, hope, wisdom, and strength is a poor substitute, so we keep coming back – earnestly seeking God, longing for Him, day and night.

Reflection Questions

1. Does your soul feel dry and thirsty? What have you been giving your soul to quench your thirst?
2. When was the last time (if ever) you spent extended time in the Presence of God and experienced the refreshment that the psalmist is alluding to? What is stopping you from taking that time?
3. How will you make a change to pursue God – i.e. when you're sad/angry/fearful/anxious, how will you choose to pursue God instead of trying to make yourself feel better?

4. Are there any parts of the Psalm that spoke to your heart – something that jumped off the page, or something that came to your attention? Ask God about those parts of the Psalm to hear what He may have to say to you about it.

PRAY:

- Thank God that He is the Living Water – and He is willing to meet our needs as we turn and present those needs to Him.
- Commit to seeking God in the difficult times to receive what You need from the One who loves you the most.
- Ask the Lord what it looks like to “cling” to Him and be held securely by His “strong right hand.”

Prayer

God, I'm so thankful that You are the Living Water – all I have to do is run to You and I can receive the refreshment I need in this dry and parched land we call the earth. If I'm honest, Lord, I'm feeling dry and needing Your refreshment, but I have tried to refresh myself with things outside of Your Presence. Nothing can satisfy my soul like you, Lord. Help me to turn to You when I'm fearful, angry, sad, or anxious so that I can receive lasting hope, peace, joy, love, wisdom and strength. Give me a fresh love for you – a desire and craving for Your Presence. Teach me to cling to you instead of reaching for the things of this world. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Day 4: Wednesday, February 5:

READ: Psalm 73

REFLECT:

Jesus shared the hallmark of those who love Him; He said, “**If you love me, obey my commandments.**” (John 14:15). As we pray for a fresh love for God, we're praying for a fresh desire to walk in the will of God and obey His commandments. If you've been walking with Jesus for any length of time, you know it's not always easy to be obedient – sometimes it's downright hard. Obedience requires you to be led by the Spirit – to allow the Holy Spirit to dictate the things you do and say, to “[nail] the passions and desires of [the] sinful nature to [the cross of Christ],” and to set aside the behaviors and customs of this world to pick up the way and will of God. We consciously choose obedience out of our love for God.

But let's be honest. We look around us. We see those who are not following God, and then we get caught in a trap that our own eyes and hearts set for us. We see those without a relationship with God having lives that seem easy, strong and healthy bodies, and everything they want. We get caught in a comparison trap – a trap that hardens our hearts with bitterness and envy. A heart that is hard is unable to recognize what God is doing, unable to understand what God is doing, unable to see and hear what God is doing, and is unable to remember what God has done. A hard heart is heart with a dimming fire, a diminishing love for God. And when our hearts are hard, we ask questions like the ones we see in verse 13 and perceive life like we see in verse 14,

13“Did I keep my heart pure for nothing? Did I keep myself innocent for no reason? 14I get nothing but trouble all day long; every morning brings me pain.”

We try to make sense of what we see in the world – using our finite understanding, which leads to more hardness of heart and confusion.

The only cure for hardness of heart, the only cure for a diminishing love for God, is to step into the Presence of God. The Presence of God brings healing to hard hearts and again we can perceive, understand, see, hear, and remember. We can see the state of our hearts and recognize the senselessness of our envy for those who are not close to God – those who do not love Him, those who have not chosen Him. The beauty of the moment our

hardened hearts are healed is revealed in verses 23 and 24, “²³**Yet I still belong to you; you hold my right hand. ²⁴You guide me with your counsel, leading me to a glorious destiny.”**

Even when the love in our hearts waxes and wanes, the love of God stays the same – He still leads and guides us. He still has plans to prosper us. By renewing our pursuit of the Presence of God, we can experience the unfailing love of God – a love that transforms hearts, a love that changes our perspectives and desires, and a love that births a fresh love for God in our own hearts. Our eyes are opened to the truth - the only thing we have and truly need is God. He is our strength and our portion.

Reflection Questions

1. Having a fresh love for God is not just emotion, but it is a commitment to obey God and to walk in purity of heart. How does that make you feel? What kinds of things do you sense God asking you to set aside so you can walk in increasing purity and devotion toward Him?
2. How is your heart today? Have you experienced the “comparison trap”?
3. What does it look like for you to pursue the love of God today and receive healing for your heart?
4. Are there any parts of the Psalm that spoke to your heart – something that jumped off the page, or something that came to your attention? Ask God about those parts of the Psalm to hear what He may have to say to you about it.

PRAY:

- Thank God for His unfailing love and His desire to be in relationship with us.
- Ask God to heal your heart so it would be healed and whole and would not be as susceptible to bitterness and envy but would be caught up in a fresh love for God.
- Pray for “the proud” (see verses 3-12) – that they would have an encounter with the love of God that transforms their hearts.

Prayer

Lord, it never ceases to amaze me that You, the Living God, the God of the Universe who set the world spinning at a word from Your mouth, want to be in a relationship with me. And more than that, You love me with a love so wide, long, high, and deep that I cannot truly understand the magnitude of it. Your love never fails or changes – even as my heart sometimes grows cold. Thank You for Your love. In Your love, teach me to guard my heart and keep my eyes on You. Help me to understand that Your purposes and plans for me are good and perfect gifts, so that when I look around me and see the things others have or the lives they are living, I don’t feel envy rise in my heart that could lead to bitterness. Heal my heart from envy, bitterness, anger, and pride so that I can perceive, hear, see, understand, and remember all that You have done and are doing for me. Fill my heart with love so I can love you with my heart, soul, mind, and strength. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

Day 5: Thursday, February 6:

READ: Psalm 27

REFLECT:

When we develop a fresh love for God and have a more intimate relationship with Him, we gain confidence in His identity and character. We know God provides direction so we can walk in obedience to His will, and we know God saves us from the darkness of a life without Him. It’s like the Apostle Paul wrote:

Romans 8:38-39 (NLT) | “And I am convinced that nothing can ever separate us from God’s love. Neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither our fears for today nor our worries about tomorrow – not even the powers of hell can separate us from God’s love. No power in the sky above or in the earth below –

indeed, nothing in all creation will ever be able to separate us from the love of God that is revealed in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

As enemies come or a mighty army surrounds to attack us, we can stand confidently in the Presence of God and rest in His love. But here’s the thing - the choice we have in times of trial is where we place our focus. Will we worry and obsess over the difficulty of our situations, what people are planning or doing, or will we choose to pursue God and remain in His love?

“The one thing I ask of the Lord – the thing I seek most – is to live in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, delighting in the Lord’s perfections and meditating in his Temple.”

The Psalmist David shows us how to respond to trials and troubles. We don’t have to allow our present circumstances to change our focus or our feelings – we can look to God and trust that He will make things work out for our good and His glory. God will protect us. God will conceal us. God will place us out of reach, but we must choose to seek Him first. We must desire Him and His Presence more than the solution to the problem at hand. We must respond to His call to come and talk with Him, not with, “But Lord, don’t you see all that’s happening? What about...?” but with ***“Lord, I am coming.”*** With that type of response, we’re communicating our trust in our God who saves, our God who helps, and our God who restores.

What is the appropriate response to being saved, restored, and loved with an immeasurable, unfailing love? It’s deeper love – desiring and learning how to live and walk in obedience along the right path. With a fresh love for God in our hearts, we will want to spend more time in the Presence of God. The more time we spend in the Presence of God, the more we experience His love and the more we are led to love Him.

Reflection Questions

1. What do you most desire? Do you look forward to being in the Presence of the Lord?
2. How do you respond when ***“evil people come”*** or your ***“enemies and foes attack”***? Do you respond with trust in the Lord and look for His face?
3. If you’re in a difficult season, can you see or sense the Presence of God with you? Are you confident that God will show you His goodness in the situation?
4. Are there any parts of the Psalm that spoke to your heart – something that jumped off the page, or something that came to your attention? Ask God about those parts of the Psalm to hear what He may have to say to you about it.

PRAY:

- Thank the Lord for allowing us to freely and boldly come into His Presence.
- Ask the Lord to teach you how to change your perspective and reaction in times of difficulty – from focusing on the problems to focusing on His face and His sovereignty in your problems.
- Ask the Lord to transform your heart’s desires – so that you seek His Presence above anything else.

Prayer

Lord, I thank You for the greatness of Your love for me – a love that lights the fire of my love for You. You are the One who saved me from darkness and continues to light my way. Teach me to be confident in Your saving power in the face of trials and troubles. Teach me to take stock of my current circumstance, but no matter what they look like, lead me to always turn to You, knowing that You rule and reign over all and have all-power and authority in Your hands. Lord, I pray that you would give me the pleasure of meditating in Your presence – a time where I am so transfixed by Your perfection, Your beauty, Your glory, and Your love for me, that time passes and I am unaware of it. Lead me to pursue Your Presence, not just in times of peace, but in times of worry and uncertainty so that I can receive Your peace that passes all understanding. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

Day 6: Friday, February 7:

READ: Psalm 116

REFLECT:

To know God is to love Him. That's why it's essential that we spend time in prayer, reading our Bibles, and sitting in silence before Him. In the stillness, God reveals Himself to us and we find that He truly is all that we need – peace in anxiety, joy in sorrow, hope in trouble, and oh, the greatness of the love of God!

Psalm 116 is a reflection – a thankful response to what God has done for the psalmist.

Whenever we say (or sing), “I love You, God,” it is only a response to His love for us – a love birthed at the beginning of time and spans centuries. This love is fully made known through Jesus, the One who came to save us and restore us in relationship with the One who made us. We respond in love to the way God lavishes His love on us.

The Living God hears our voices, our prayers, our cries out to Him for mercy. The imagery of God bending down (v.2), inclining His ear, shows the activeness of God's listening to our voices. He doesn't sit back on His throne, half-listening to our petitions and supplications, but He leans in to hear us and gives us a sense of His nearness as we seek Him with our whole hearts. The beauty of God is that He doesn't just hear, but He responds because He is good, and kind, and merciful. We ask for help, and while sometimes situations don't change immediately, we receive something more important – evidence of His Presence as we feel a lightening of fear, pain, stress, and sorrow. He hears what we want but knows what we need – moment to moment. That is why we should seek Him in every moment because He has exactly what we need in His hands.

Because God is so wonderful, so marvelous, so filled with love and faithfulness, we have much to thank Him for. The psalmist shows us how we can show our gratitude to God. We can praise the name of the Lord (v.13). We can keep our promises to obey and walk in His ways (v. 14). We can offer thanksgiving that costs us – time, talents, finances (v.17). We can tell of the goodness of God as we share our stories with one another, and others who may not know Him. Don't doubt the power of your story of the grace and mercy of God in your life. It may stoke the fires of faith and love in the heart of another or offer reassurance of the Presence of God to someone in a time of difficulty.

Reflection Questions

1. What would a Psalm 116 written by you look like? How has the Lord answered your prayers? Take time to write some recent answers to prayers down and thank the Lord for His faithfulness.
2. Have you thanked the Lord for what He has done? Sometimes in our joy that things work out or move in our favor, we forget to thank God. Take some time to express your gratitude to God.
3. Is there anyone with whom you can share the story of God's goodness toward you? Make a plan for a phone call or coffee to connect and share your story.
4. Are there any parts of the Psalm that spoke to your heart – something that jumped off the page, or something that came to your attention? Ask God about those parts of the Psalm to hear what He may have to say to you about it.

PRAY:

- Thank the Lord for His goodness and faithfulness in how He has answered your prayers.
- Ask the Lord to show you who you can share your story of His goodness with.
- What are you praying for now and looking for answers from the Lord? What situations do you need to surrender the situations to the Lord?

Prayer

I love You, Lord. You have heard my cries toward You and You continue to hear them. I'm thankful that You, in Your sovereignty give me what I need as I choose to seek You with my whole heart, soul, mind, and strength. I'm sorry for the times that I forget to thank You for the ways You have showered Your blessings, love, and favor on me. Fill my heart to overflowing with love, so that my gratitude toward You just pours out. Lead me to someone who needs to hear my story of Your goodness and faithfulness so that I can encourage them in their journey with You. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Day 7: Saturday, February 8:

READ: Psalm 100

REFLECT:

Part of our journey as Christ-followers is being part of a community – a family of believers who we connect with, share our lives and our stories with, those who pray for us and with us in times of joy, and times of sorrow, and those who encourage us to keep running our race in faith.

Psalm 100 is a psalm of thanksgiving that has clear references to the privilege and joy of being part of a community. There are calls to worship the Lord (with gladness), to sing to the Lord, to offer thanksgiving and praise to His name. There is a call to acknowledge the Lordship of God and His creative power in creating humankind. And there is an acknowledgement that no matter what we look like, where we come from, or what language we speak, as we surrender to the Lordship of Jesus Christ we become family together – a flock of sheep He created to be in His pasture.

Coming together with hearts filled with a fresh love for God, creates a fresh worship experience for all. When we hear the shouts of praise and worship from our brothers' and sisters' lips, we can rejoice with them. Or, if we're facing suffering or times of difficulty, those shouts of praise can lift us from the place we're in, and remind us of the goodness, faithfulness, love and mercy of God.

Let's gather tomorrow for worship across our campuses and online so that we can **“Shout with joy to the Lord!”** together.

Reflection Questions

1. How often do you take time to be in community with other Christ-followers? Is it just on Sundays, or do you have other opportunities where you talk, pray, and worship with others?
2. What does it look like for you to prioritize coming together in community with other Christ-followers?
3. Are there ways that you sense God calling you into community in a different way – i.e. serving in a ministry at the church, or opening your home for a Bible study or gathering?
4. Are there any parts of the Psalm that spoke to your heart – something that jumped off the page, or something that came to your attention? Ask God about those parts of the Psalm to hear what He may have to say to you about it.

PRAY:

- Thank the Lord for the blessing of the family of God.
- Ask the Lord to give all in our church family (and the church around the world) a fresh love of God in their hearts.
- Ask the Lord to move by the power of the Holy Spirit in a special way in our worship services and in the services and gatherings of other Christ-followers around the world.

Prayer

Lord, You did not intend for me to walk as a Christ-follower alone. Thank You for placing me in a family here at Walnut Hill. Help me to prioritize gathering with my brothers and sisters – on Sundays and other days of the week – so I can receive and give the love, care, mercy and grace You have so freely given. I pray for my brothers and sisters at Walnut Hill and all around the world. I pray that You would awaken our hearts and fill our souls with Your love so that when we come to worship together, we experience an overflow of Your love as we sing, pray, and study Your Word together. I pray, Lord, that we would, no matter where in the world we are, experience a special outpouring of Your Spirit that changes and transforms us, so that we can go out and be the salt and light You have called each of us to be. Thank You, Lord for the gift of the family of God. In Jesus' name. Amen.