

## **WEEK TWO: Nehemiah 2:1-10 (Finding Our Purpose) + Theme: Transformed Lives**

### **Day 8: Sunday, February 9:**

*Sabbath Reflection:*

**READ:** Psalm 90 (and reread Nehemiah 1:5-11; 2:1-10) (NLT)

#### **REFLECT:**

Moses was a man who had a very special relationship with God. He received the Ten Commandments directly from God and often spoke to the Lord face to face. So, he wrote Psalm 90 – a prayer – from the place of an intimate relationship with God. The prayer that Nehemiah prayed in Nehemiah 1:5-11 and the breath prayer Nehemiah prayed in Nehemiah 2:4 provide us with a similar perspective into the prayer life of someone who walks in a close relationship with God.

#### **Reflection Questions**

1. What similarities do you see between the prayer of Moses in Psalm 90 and Nehemiah's Prayer in Nehemiah 1:5-11? Do you see the initial focus on God, a time of confession, and a bold request?
2. The ability to pray like Moses and Nehemiah comes from a relationship with God that has been intentionally cultivated. Focusing on verses 1-2 and 13-17 of Psalm 90, what do you learn about God? What about the character of God is revealed through the prayer of Moses?
3. Try praying in the pattern of Moses and Nehemiah. Write out a prayer that starts off with an initial focus on God (who He is and His character), take time to confess the ways you have lived outside of His will (ask Him to show you what you need to confess), and make a bold request.
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:**

- Declare your trust in the Lord because of His sovereignty - He is the Lord over creation, and He exercises His rule as King of kings and Lord of lords.
- Thank God for His care for you in calling you to abide in Him – to make Him your home – and giving you His unfailing love and gladness.
- Present the work of your hands to the Lord so that He can establish it and make you successful.

#### **Prayer**

Lord, you are my shelter and strong tower. You are the place I run to for safety, support, and strength. Thank You for so generously pouring out Your joy, peace, and unfailing love into my life. You know me completely – every sin and failure as well as every moment of success as I walk in obedience to You. Thank you for forgiving me of my sin – all the ways that I have not lived in line with your will. I'm grateful that You are always with me, even in the times when I don't acknowledge You. Teach me to seek You and Your presence for satisfaction. Satisfy me with Your love. Fill my heart with Your unspeakable joy so that I may live pointing to Your goodness, grace, and mercy in my life. In Jesus' name. Amen.

## Day 9: Monday, February 10:

### *Renew: Transformed Lives*

#### READ:

**1 John 1:9 (AMP) | If we [freely] admit that we have sinned *and* confess our sins, He is faithful and just [true to His own nature and promises], and will forgive our sins and cleanse us *continually* from all unrighteousness [our wrongdoing, everything not in conformity with His will and purpose].**

**Romans 12:2 (NLT) | Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect.**

#### REFLECT:

Our second theme of this prayer season is for the transformation of our lives. We're praying that our lives would be transformed by the power of the Holy Spirit as we confess our sin and surrender to Him. Prayers for transformation appropriately follow the work we began last week on our hearts – without hearts surrendered to God, hearts that seek His will and way above our own agenda and plans, we cannot be transformed.

The word “transformed” means “to change completely the appearance or character of something or someone, especially so that that thing or person is improved” (Cambridge Dictionary). If we want to be transformed – our character and appearance completely changed, we must be willing to meet two conditions according to the passage in Romans. First, we have the instruction “**Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world...**” This means if we want to be transformed, we must choose to set aside superficial customs, values, and ways of conduct that are not in alignment with the Word of God.

As we set those behaviors aside, we're providing space for the second condition, “**...let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think.**” It's significant that the verse says “**let**” – we must allow the Holy Spirit to show us ways that are contrary to His way of thinking and then we must be willing to surrender that way of thinking. God will not force us – we must choose. This is why it is so important to have hearts filled with love for God. When we love God, our heart desires to do what He says, and think the way He does. With a love for God in our hearts, we have a willingness to surrender, which is required for transformation.

The last sentence of the passage in Romans encourages us that when we are transformed, we can then, “**learn to know God's will for [us] which is good and pleasing and perfect.**” This is why being transformed is so important. We cannot know the will of God until the Holy Spirit equips us with a new way of thinking. We cannot be obedient without seeking and knowing the will of God. Transformation is a requirement to walk in love and live purpose-filled lives aligned with the will of God as a Christ-follower.

There's a catch, friends. God's will is perfect, but we are not. Transformation, being made more and more in the likeness of Christ, is a lifelong journey. There are going to be times we miss it, times we mess up, times we sin and don't walk aligned with His will and purpose. The good news is that we don't have to live for God alone. We have the Holy Spirit who teaches, advises, reminds, and corrects us so that we can choose to repent – to learn how we sinned, to confess the sin, and to turn from the sin. When we confess, we receive the promised forgiveness, times of refreshing (Acts 3:19), and we take another step in our journey of transformation. Our transformation is what helps us to become more and more like Jesus – the ultimate goal of every Christ-follower.

#### Reflection Questions

1. Evaluate your desires, new goals, actions, and thoughts. Do you have behaviors, customs, and ways of thinking that are more aligned with society and today's culture than with the ways of Jesus? (*continued on the next page*)

2. What are you willing to do to be transformed? Are you willing to set aside (surrender) your desires, goals, and actions that you have had (even if you've had them for a long time)? Are you willing to be uncomfortable and allow the Holy Spirit to transform you?
3. What does it look like for you to seek and to know the will of God? What kinds of things will you start doing or stop doing so that you can seek, find, and walk in the will of God?

**PRAY:**

- Ask God to reveal your ways of thinking, acting, and speaking that are more aligned with the world than the will of God.
- Thank God for how He reveals His unfailing love, mercy, and grace toward us through forgiveness.
- Repent of the ways you have acted wrongly and outside of the will of God.
- Ask God to transform you by the power of the Holy Spirit.

**Prayer**

Lord, I know that as someone who loves and serves You, I must commit to daily surrender my life to You and to allow You to transform and renew my heart and mind. Today, I present myself before You – submitting to Your power, Holy Spirit, so that I can be shaped and formed more and more into the image of Jesus. I confess the ways that I have lived more in alignment with the world than the Kingdom of God. Thank You, God, for Your powerful forgiveness that cleanses me from every sin and unrighteousness so that I can walk in an intimate relationship with You. May my transformed life reflect and reveal Your goodness, grace, mercy, and love to everyone I encounter. In Jesus' name. Amen.

## **Day 10: Tuesday, February 11:**

**READ:** Psalm 139 (NLT)

### **REFLECT:**

To live transformed lives, our perspective about God must be transformed – meaning we must gain a more complete knowledge of who God is. Why would we want to surrender and be transformed by Someone we don't know or understand? In this psalm, David reveals attributes of God that can strengthen our faith and increase our desire to be transformed by Him.

God is omniscient (He knows everything) and omnipresent (He is always present, at all times, and in all places). This means that in every circumstance we face, the Lord is there! Even when the world seems the darkest. Even when chaos abounds. Even when we feel unseen and unknown, the Lord is there – He sees us and knows us. God is so great that He operates outside of time. He has gone into our futures to prepare the way and helps us to heal from the trouble of our past. That is the blessing of being in His presence.

What's amazing about God is even when we feel far away from Him – because we have walked away, or drifted away because of our choices, He is still there. He wants to guide us, strengthen us, and support us - all so that we can connect with Him and develop or regain our relationship with Him.

God created us on purpose and for a purpose. We're not here by accident or coincidence, friends. God had His hand in our formation even before we were born. Even before we were born, He had a plan for our lives – He knew what He was making us for. It is a lie from the enemy to think that our lives are useless. He was excited to form us so that we could be in relationship with Him and we could work together to accomplish His purposes in the world.

The last two verses of this psalm are a response to the character and the greatness of God. When we know and understand God better, we want to please Him with every part of our lives – not just in the things we do, but in our hearts – in the ways we think, in our motives, and in our desires.

### **Reflection Questions**

1. How does the statement in verse 1 (“**O Lord, you have examined my heart and know everything about me.**”) make you feel – comforted, nervous and anxious, concerned? Are you living in a way that God would be comfortable in your presence?
2. How close to the Lord do you feel today? Are you walking hand in hand with Him or are you some distance away? What kinds of things do you sense are separating you from God?
3. Reread and consider verses 16-17. God has precious, and infinite thoughts about you. Ask God to show or share with you His thoughts about you.
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 His heart for you.

### **PRAY:**

- Rest in the fact that you are fully seen and known by God and He loves you with an everlasting love.
- Ask the Lord to give you His strength and support in whatever season you're in.
- Thank the Lord that He had His caring and loving gaze on you even before you were born.
- Ask the Lord to reveal His plans and purposes for you.
- Spend some time before the Lord, asking Him if anything in you offends Him. Repent and ask Him for the new way He wants you to live.

*Don't forget to pray through the prayer on the next page.*

## **Prayer**

Lord, how amazing it is to know that You know everything and You're always there for me. I'm grateful that You're near to me and care about what happens to me, every day of my life. Thank You for the privilege of being in Your Presence and the blessing and favor I experience because of Your Presence. Strengthen and support me as I walk out the path You have designed for me. Reveal Your plans and purposes for me so that I can continue to be obedient to Your will. O, Lord. I so desire to be one of Your faithful ones – so show me the areas in my heart, mind, and life that are not aligned with who You are and what you have for me. Forgive me, cleanse me, and lead me along the path that brings me closer to You. In Jesus' name. Amen.

## Day 11: Wednesday, February 12:

**READ:** Psalm 51(NLT)

### **REFLECT:**

Part of being transformed is a willingness to confess sin – to admit we were wrong and to turn from the wrong way to the Way – Jesus Christ – so He can show us the way to go. The Apostle Paul reveals to us why confession must be a regular part of our lives.

**Romans 3:23 (NLT) | <sup>23</sup> For everyone has sinned; we all fall short of God’s glorious standard.**

To acknowledge our sinfulness takes humility. When we are humble, we understand and acknowledge the infinite greatness of God and the finiteness of humankind; humility is putting ourselves in the proper place before the glory God. Humility is an often-overlooked characteristic of people who follow, love, and serve Jesus, but it is necessary for us to live in the light of Christ because it is the only way we can confess our sin. We have to be able to admit we did something wrong, something that didn’t meet the standards and character of God.

The progression of humility and confession is what we read in Psalm 51. Psalm 51 was written by King David. King David had an intimate relationship with God. He was called a man after God’s own heart. He was the author of the most famous psalm – Psalm 23, which describes the relationship we can have with God as our Shepherd, but he was not perfect. He wrote Psalm 51 after he was confronted by the prophet Nathan for committing adultery and murder. Here is a man who was very intimately connected with God – and still sinned grievously against God. What made King David a man after God’s own heart was his humility – he admitted his sin and confessed it before God.

The relationship King David had with God made it easier to confess his sin. He understood the character of God and knew sin wasn’t the end of his story. It’s not the end of ours either. There is no expectation from God for us to be perfect – He knows we can never be. The expectation from God is that we would ask Him to reveal our sin to us, and then we would take the time to confess and turn from our sin.

In humility, King David also asked God, “**Create in me a clean heart...Renew a loyal spirit within me.**” King David knew that he needed to be transformed by the Spirit of God so that he could have pure thoughts, holy desires and please the Lord. We need the same experiences with the Holy Spirit to be changed and transformed. And when we are changed and transformed, we can teach the way of God to people around us by the way we live. We can sing of the goodness and compassion of our God who forgives. We can praise God because He restores us to walk in relationship with Him.

### Reflection Questions

1. What are the characteristics of God that King David reveals in Psalm 51? What are the kinds of things King David counts on God to do for him?
2. Take some time with the Lord to evaluate your heart. Are you carrying around any unconfessed sin, which is robbing you of your closeness with God and the joy of His Presence? What is your attitude toward God like?
3. What does it look like for you to teach the way of God to people around you by the way you live?
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 His heart for you.

### **PRAY:**

- Thank the Lord for His mercy, unfailing love, and great compassion.
- Present yourself before the Lord and ask Him the ways you have sinned against Him.
- Thank the Lord for forgiving your sins and cleansing you of all unrighteousness. (*continued on the next page*)

- Ask the Lord to transform your heart so that you can have a pure heart, holy desires, and please Him.
- Ask the Lord to fill your heart with joy and plant a song of worship in your heart to sing to Him.

### **Prayer**

Lord, so great is your mercy, compassion, and unfailing love toward me that the words "Thank You" don't seem sufficient. I know that there are ways that I have sinned against You – reveal my sin to me now so that I can confess and receive Your forgiveness and the times of refreshing You have promised. Thank you, Lord that You satisfy my soul with Your promise of forgiveness every time I come to you and confess my sin with a contrite heart. I pray that You would "Create in me a clean heart, O God. Renew a loyal spirit within me" so that I can walk in the way that pleases You. Give me joy in my heart and a song to sing that testifies of Your goodness to the world around me. In Jesus' name. Amen.

## Day 12: Thursday, February 13:

**READ:** Psalm 40 (NLT)

### **REFLECT:**

**Matthew 7:17-20 (NLT) | <sup>17</sup> A good tree produces good fruit, and a bad tree produces bad fruit. <sup>18</sup> A good tree can't produce bad fruit, and a bad tree can't produce good fruit. <sup>19</sup> So every tree that does not produce good fruit is chopped down and thrown into the fire. <sup>20</sup> Yes, just as you can identify a tree by its fruit, so you can identify people by their actions.**

These words of Jesus remind us that who we are (and who we serve) should show up in the way we think, speak, and act – by the fruit others see in our lives. But what does this fruit look like? What does it mean to bear the fruit of a transformed life? Psalm 40 – a psalm of David – shows us what a transformed life looks like and how we should act in response to the goodness, grace, and mercy of God.

When we live a new, transformed life in Christ, we know that we must first turn to the Lord in prayer when we find ourselves in circumstances that are dark or messy. Why? Because He will hear our voices and send us the help we need. The help we need may not be taking us out of the situation, but the Lord will “**lift [us] out of the pit of despair**” – He will give us a new perspective of our circumstances as well as the strength and wisdom to endure.

God strengthens us as we plant our feet firmly on (place our faith and trust in) Christ the Solid Rock. When we choose to place our confidence not in people, or things, or even circumstances going the way we want and we choose to trust in God alone, we can have unspeakable joy in our hearts. We can continue to have joy and peace as we walk through hard times in life as we remember the unchanging nature of God. The God we serve, worship and trust with our lives today is the same God who performed great wonders, miracles, and rescued His people throughout the Bible. He still saves. He still rescues. He still heals. He still sets us free from sin.

How should we respond to the God who saves, heals, rescues and sets us free? We sing songs – “hymns of praise.” We show and tell people what God has done for us. And we are joyful people as we walk in the will, way, and purpose of God.

### Reflection Questions

1. Can you think of a time when God lifted you up from the dark and steadied your feet with His Presence?
2. Who can you share your testimony with so that they would be amazed and put their trust in the Lord?
3. What do you sense the Lord is asking you to do in this season? Do you have joy in doing the will of 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 His heart for you.

### **PRAY:**

- Thank the Lord for all the times He has shone a light into your darkness and when He has been your firm foundation.
- Reflect on the unfailing love and faithfulness of God that protects you and sets you free from sin.
- Ask the Lord to fill you with joy and gladness and give you a song to sing to Him with a grateful heart.

### Prayer

Oh, Lord. Thank You! Thank You for new life as I surrender my life to You. Thank You for turning Your ear toward me when I'm crying out to you. Thank You for responding to my prayers – by picking me up, giving me Your perspective, wisdom and strength to navigate the challenges of life. Lord, I am amazed at the way You love me. Help me to remember and reflect on Your love even when things are dark around me. I will joyfully

walk in Your purposes and plans for my life. I will show and tell everyone I encounter of Your love, faithfulness, grace, and mercy toward me. Show me the opportunities I have today to share the truth of who You are. In Jesus' name. Amen.

## **Day 13: Friday, February 14:**

**READ:** Psalm 62 (NLT)

### **REFLECT:**

Being transformed is simple for us because we don't transform ourselves. We are transformed as we submit our lives to God and depend on the Holy Spirit to renew our minds. He gives us new desires and changes the way we think. Being transformed is not "one and done," but it is a process through which we are changed to become more like Jesus.

Living a transformed life is a completely different story. Living transformed is often complicated. Why? Because when life gets difficult, we have a tendency to go back to the way we used to think, speak, and act before experiencing the power of the Holy Spirit in our lives. The old way is comfortable, and we're used to responding that way. Living a transformed life is also complicated because it's countercultural. Everywhere around us we see and experience people reacting and living in ways that are not aligned with the will and ways of God. This is the reason Jesus says, **"Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. <sup>14</sup> But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it."** (Matthew 7:13-14).

It's easy to look around and imitate the behaviors of the world – to place our hope and trust in ourselves, our finances, or other people. Don't forget we're called to set aside the behavior and customs of this world (Romans 12:2). In moments of confusion, we must turn to our Source of wisdom (the Living God) and His Word so we know how to handle the situations we face.

Psalm 62, written by David, reveals the way we are to respond to difficult or unfair circumstances. We are to place our hope in the Lord. We are to trust in the sovereignty (the just rule and reign of God over all Creation) and the character of God. We can trust in God because our victory comes from him. We can trust in God because He is our Rock and our Salvation. God is our Fortress – a place we can run to for safety and peace despite the chaos in the world around us. Power belongs to God and He is filled with unfailing, unending love – and He chooses to act on our behalf in His timing. Who God is – the character of God – is how we can "wait quietly before God" when the world calls for us to take things into our own hands.

### **Reflection Questions**

1. What did feel when you read **"wait quietly before God"**? How do you respond when unfair things happen to you? What does your response tell you about your perspective of God?
2. What does placing your hope in the Lord look like? Read these promises of God to strengthen your hope today: 1 John 5:13-14, 1 Peter 1:3-6, Ephesians 2:8-10, 2 Corinthians 4:16-18 and John 4:13-14
3. What is the solution David presents as waiting quietly before God? Is it being silent? How does verse 8 change your perspective on waiting quietly before 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 His heart for you.

### **PRAY:**

- Share with the Lord a current struggle or difficult situation.
- Ask the Lord what victory looks like in your situation. Thank the Lord that He is the One who can bring you the victory!
- Ask the Lord what it looks like for you to wait quietly before Him.
- Ask the Lord to renew and strengthen your hope in Him, so that you can walk through the season you're in the way He desires.

*Don't forget to pray through the prayer on the next page.*

## **Prayer**

Lord, by Your power I am being transformed so I can become more and more like you, day by day. You know everything about me – when I sleep and when I rise, and everything that is going on in my life. Today, I surrender all the things that are weighing me down – and I hand them over to you because my victory comes from You. I place my feet on You as the Rock of my salvation and the only One in whom I place my trust. Lord, I thank You in advance for the victory over every difficult thing in my life – whether it means you change my perspective or you rescue me. Thank you for renewing and strengthening my hope in You. Teach me how to wait quietly before You and walk in Your way. In Jesus' name. Amen.

## Day 14: Saturday, February 15:

**READ:** Psalm 33 (NLT)

### **REFLECT:**

While we have spent this week focusing on bearing the fruit of transformed lives personally, we cannot forget that we were not meant to walk this Christian life alone. We see that we are truly transformed when we do life with others - the fruit we bear in community is the proof of our personal transformation by the Holy Spirit.

**Ecclesiastes 4:9-12 (NLT) | Two people are better off than one, for they can help each other succeed. If one person falls, the other can reach out and help. But someone who falls alone is in real trouble. Likewise, two people lying close together can keep each other warm. But how can one be warm alone? A person standing alone can be attacked and defeated, but two can stand back-to-back and conquer.**

Being part of a community and walking in relationships with other Christ-followers protects us from the schemes of the evil one. Both Christ-centered communities and relationships help us to live transformed lives when we're tempted to turn back to the ways of the world. Community is the reason we gather on a Sunday for worship.

Psalm 33 reminds us of what worship should be like on a Sunday morning - and our role in worship services. We should not be bystanders or consumers, but we should all be worshipping God together. Everyone should be singing to the Lord, even those of us who feel we don't have good voices, because **"it is fitting for the pure to praise him."** We worship and praise the Lord to remind one another that **"the word of the Lord holds true, and we can trust everything he does."** When we're weak, afraid, or in trouble, the community lifts us up and reminds us of the power and sovereignty of God and His unfailing love toward us.

**"...let us not neglect our meeting together, as some people do, but encourage one another, especially now that the day of his return is drawing near." (Hebrews 10:25)**

### Reflection Questions

1. Do you have relationships with other Christ-followers who have permission to hold you accountable to living a transformed life?
2. What attributes of God does the psalmist reveal? What does it look like for you to encourage other Christ-followers with these attributes of God - truth of who God is?
3. Are there parts of your life that you're depending on your own strength instead of in the Lord?
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 His heart for you.

### **PRAY:**

- Ask the Lord to give you fresh excitement to gather with His people.
- Think about the season of life you're in. Ask the Lord for a verse or passage of Scripture to encourage you to place your trust in Him.
- Pray that the Lord would move by the power of His Spirit in a fresh way as we worship together on Sunday.

### Prayer

Lord, what a privilege it is to gather with Your people. We pray that You would give each of us fresh love for you and transform our lives so we can better represent Your love, grace, and mercy to the world. As we sing together and worship You in spirit and in truth, I pray that we would experience Your love and power in a way that is undeniable. We rejoice, Lord, that You have plans for us that can never be shaken - this gives us hope and confidence for the future. Lord, we're grateful for Your watchful eye and the greatness of Your love toward us. In Jesus' name. Amen.