

WEEK THREE: Nehemiah 4:1-15 (Facing Opposition) + Theme: Powerful Witness (Unity + Love)

Day 15: Sunday, February 16:

Sabbath Reflection:

READ: Psalm 36 (and reread Nehemiah 4:1-15) (NLT)

REFLECT:

Psalm 36 is known as a meditation on God's covenantal love – a love available for those who love God (who have chosen to learn His commands and obey them). It is broken up in three sections: a description of those who reject God (as evidenced by their behavior); a description of the unfailing love of God; and ends with a brief prayer, asking God to move on his behalf along with an exclamation on what God has done for His people.

Reflection Questions

1. What similarities do you see between the experience of the psalmist (David) and what Nehemiah describes in Nehemiah 4:1-15?
2. The psalmist, David, makes a seemingly abrupt switch from verse 1-4 and verses 5-9 – from talking about the “wicked” to describing the unfailing love of God. Why do you think the psalmist does this? How can you mimic the psalmist's chosen response?
3. How should we respond when we face opposition (i.e. how did Nehemiah respond, what did Nehemiah and the people do in response to Sanballat and Tobiah)? What was the psalmist's response to those who reject 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:

- Tell God what you're seeing or experiencing in the world and in your life that troubles you.
- Declare attributes of God to counter what unrest you're experiencing because of the trouble you see (i.e. the unfailing love of God, His ability to work out things on your behalf, His care for you)
- Present the things you're seeing and experiencing before the Lord and leave the situations in His hands.

Prayer

Oh Lord, I see so many things around me that are not right – those who are not acting justly, those who are unmerciful, and those who do not walk in humility with You. But from beginning to end, You are God. You are Lord of all – sovereign and supreme. You promise to care for and protect those who are being crushed. You promise to feed those who come to Your hand for their needs. Hear my prayer, Lord. Release the captives and comfort the broken hearted. Give “a crown of beauty for ashes and festive praise instead of despair.” I will praise you in advance for the way You will rescue and work things out for Your glory. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Day 16: Monday, February 17:

Renew: A Powerful Witness Through Love and Unity (Part One)

READ: John 17:6-26; John 13:34-35 Ephesians 4:1-6, 14-16

REFLECT:

Our third (and final) theme for this season of prayer and fasting is that we would be a powerful witness for Jesus. A powerful witness appropriately follows the other two themes – a fresh love for God in our hearts and transformed lives because having a fresh love for God and transformed lives equips each of us to be a powerful witness in the world and all of us being a powerful witness together. Ultimately, we're praying that through our fresh love for God and our transformed lives that we would have uncommon, undeniable unity and love for one another, giving us the opportunity to reveal the truth of who Jesus is. We need a fresh love for God, transformed lives, unity, and love for one another to fully represent the Kingdom of God. This is the privilege of telling the story – of bearing witness - to what God has done, is doing, and will do in our lives and in the Church.

John 17 is often called Christ's High Priestly prayer and is the longest prayer Jesus prayed in Scripture. It is also the last moment Jesus had with His disciples before He was arrested. What He says in these final moments is quite significant to our lives as Christ-followers – through prayer Jesus is commissioning the disciples (which includes us) to be representatives of God in the earth.

The way we can represent Jesus – the way we can be a powerful witness – is by first belonging to Him. We must acknowledge and understand our relationship with God is first and foremost – over any other allegiance, membership, or beliefs we may hold. This is not a single moment of surrender and saying yes to living for Jesus, but a daily surrender of our own agendas, desires, and plans to pick up that which Jesus has for us. Being a powerful witness also requires that we share a message – the message about Christ into the world. We have that message in the Word of God, which means that we need to read, learn, and know the Word of God so that we can accurately reveal the message of Christ to the world. In fact, it is our knowledge of and obedience to the Word of God that makes us set apart; we are made holy by the truth of God in His Word.

Being set apart and united with God is how we, as Christ-followers, can experience unity with one another. This unity has its foundation on love – the love of God for us, and the love we have for one another as disciples of Jesus Christ. We are protected by God the Father so that we can be united in the name of Jesus – and the love of the Father He represents to the world. It is by this unity, a perfect unity with Christ as Lord of all, that the world will know that Jesus was sent to the world by God the Father – to save, to set free, and to restore all who would come to know Him and surrender their lives to Him.

Reflection Questions

1. Have you fully surrendered your life to Jesus? Do you surrender to Him every day – seeking Him first, walking in obedience and a willingness to set aside your own agenda to fulfill the will of God?
2. What does it look like for you to learn the message about Christ (through the Word of God)? How can you ensure that your life reflects the message about Christ?
3. What do you think it means to be kept safe from the evil one? What does that mean for you individually and us as the body of Christ?
4. What does it look like for you to love like Jesus? What things will you have to start doing and what things will you need to stop doing?

PRAY:

- Ask the Lord to show you the “unsurrendered” places in your heart and life. Commit to surrendering all things to Him so that you can best represent Christ. *(continued on the next page)*

- Ask the Lord to help you better know the message about Christ (through pursuing Him in His Word and in prayer). Ask Him to reveal where the message about Christ that you're sharing through your life is tainted with perspectives of the world. As He reveals, release those perspectives so that you can better represent Jesus.
- Thank God for protecting you from the evil one. Ask the Lord to continue to protect you, and the body of Christ from the plans of the enemy.

Prayer

Lord, it is the greatest privilege of my life that I can represent You – to be a powerful witness to who You truly are and the greatness of Your love for all those You created. To best represent You, I must be closer to You, I must choose to pursue You, I must seek You first above all else. Lord, show me the places in my life that I need to surrender to You so I can represent you well. Show me the ideas about the world and how it should work, and the perspectives I have about You that are not true. Help me to hand those over to You so that I have room in my heart and mind for the truth. Teach me the truth through Your Word and how to use the Word as my compass, guiding my thoughts, desires, and plans. I thank You, Lord, for the ways You have protected me from the evil one – ways that I may not even be aware of. I pray that as I walk in obedience to You, I will remain under Your protection and care. Lord, as we are all on this journey together, help us, as we surrender to You and submit our agendas, desires, and plans to You, to be united with You as the Head. Teach us how to be a united body of believers filled with the love of Christ for one another. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Day 17: Tuesday, February 18:

Renew: A Powerful Witness Through Love and Unity (Part 2)

READ: Ephesians 4:1-6, 14-32

REFLECT:

Ephesians 4:3-6 (NLT) | ³ Make every effort to keep yourselves united in the Spirit, binding yourselves together with peace. ⁴ For there is one body and one Spirit, just as you have been called to one glorious hope for the future. ⁵ There is one Lord, one faith, one baptism, ⁶ one God and Father of all, who is over all, in all, and living through all.

In Ephesians, the Apostle Paul encourages the people of the church to live in unity. He adeptly answers the question, “What does unity in the body of Christ look like?”, by providing insight into the ways the people of the church should live together in the sight of the world.

An important part of this passage in Ephesians 4, and an essential part to living in unity as the body of Christ, is easy to miss in the middle of all that Paul is saying about life as Christ-followers. He says (in verse three), “**Make every effort to keep yourselves *united in the Spirit***” (emphasis added). We cannot experience unity in the church without the Holy Spirit. We need His influence and transformative power to equip and enable us to live and love well - to “**lead a life worthy of [our] calling for [we] have been called by God.**”

We have been called to unity – and we must make every effort to be unified as one body, empowered by the Holy Spirit, with One Lord who rules and reigns over us. We can be united because of one faith in Jesus Christ. This means that everything else – like opinions and politics – must be secondary to our faith in Jesus Christ. We can’t expect the body of Christ to be united around something that is secondary to our faith – there is no cause more important than the cause of Christ and no leader more significant than Jesus Christ.

We all have different perspectives, experiences, opinions, and political views that will try to take the first place in our heart. We must be diligent to make our faith in Christ the most important thing and not equate a specific belief outside of Christ as the deciding factor for our unity. This is the reason we must learn to be humble, gentle, and patient with each other. This is the reason we must make allowance for each other’s faults because of the love of Jesus we have in our hearts. This is the reason we must learn to speak the truth in love. We all tend to elevate our opinions and experiences, and by being humble, patient, forbearing, and forgiving, we can maintain our unity in Christ and under Christ. We must all declare, as Christ-followers, that Jesus Christ is most important, and our role is to represent Him well above all else.

Reflection Questions

1. What does it look like for you to “lead a life worthy of your calling”? What does it look like for us, as Christ-followers, to “lead a life worthy of [our] calling”?
2. What kinds of behaviors does the Apostle Paul say are not becoming of those who are Christ-followers and are part of the body of Christ – i.e. what behaviors does he tell us to get rid of?
3. What kinds of behaviors does the Apostle Paul require of those who desire to be part of a united body of Christ?
4. Do you have opinions or views that are overshadowing the cause of Christ?

PRAY:

- With your fresh love for God and your life transformed by the power of the Holy Spirit, ask the Lord to help you set aside the behaviors that do not represent Christ, and to pick the behaviors that represent Christ.
- Ask the Holy Spirit to continue to do His transformative work in all of us so that we can “**come to such unity in our faith and knowledge of God’s Son that we will be mature in the Lord.**” (Ephesians 4:13)
(continued on the next page)

- Ask the Lord to search your heart for opinions, views, or allegiances that are overshadowing Your commitment and surrender to Jesus.
- Ask the Lord to soften the hearts of people who don't yet know Him – so they could come to know the saving grace and power of Jesus Christ.

Prayer

Lord, I know that for the Church to be effective, we must be united. That is not the case in this day and age. Show me how I am contributing to disunity. Show me the ways that I speak and act that are elevating my opinions, allegiances, and perspectives above the cause of Christ. Lord, I repent of those behaviors. If I have hurt my brothers and sisters in Christ, make a way for me to make amends – to heal hearts, and rebuild bridges to cross the divides of our differences. Lord, I'm sure there are ways I can do better with regards to humility and patience, forbearance and forgiveness. Continue to transform my heart so that I can be more like you – the model of humility, patience, forgiveness, and forbearance. Help us, as Christ-followers, to walk this narrow path together so that we can display uncommon, undeniable unity in Christ. When people see our unity and the love we have for one another, I pray that You would begin to work on the hearts that are hardened towards You. Use us (and our unity and the love we show toward one another) to bring many people into the family of God. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Day 18: Wednesday, February 19:

READ: Psalm 9

REFLECT:

We are a powerful witness in the ways that we live and love – individually and as a body of believers. We can also be a powerful witness as we share our testimonies – our stories of how we have seen God at work in our lives. When we tell our stories, we reveal the strength, might, power, and constant presence of the Living God, which not only reminds us of the goodness of God and encourages other believers, but our stories reveal the character and identity of God to people who don't know Him. Our stories declare the reason we are people who have chosen to surrender their lives to Jesus Christ.

Psalm 9, written by David, shows a model of giving testimony – sharing the story of God at work in our lives. David starts off praising the Lord – being thankful for who He is and all that He has done. Then, David tells his story – he had an encounter with his enemies and the Lord worked things out in his favor. David then speaks of the reason the Lord worked things out in his favor – because of His character. God rules and reigns with justice; He is faithful and trustworthy. Our response to the character of God, and His hand moving in our lives should be to praise Him for who He is and to tell others of the goodness of God.

This psalm also brings to light David's humanity – he says, **“Lord, have mercy on me. See how my enemies torment me. Snatch me back from the jaws of death.” (Psalm 9:13)**. Even though David has experienced God ruling in his favor over his enemies in the past, he still had moments of fear and concern, just like we do. It's a reminder that in our humanity we doubt the strength and presence of God when faced with difficulty, but our doubt doesn't change who He is. If we would pause and remember who God is and what He has done for us, we will be encouraged to keep going knowing He is with us all the way.

Reflection Questions

1. How often do you take time (outside of Sundays) to praise the Lord for who He is?
2. What about the character of God is revealed in this Psalm? Write these attributes of God down, so you can access them in moments you need encouragement or to remember who God is.
3. What is the story of the psalmist (David) in this psalm? Is there something in this Psalm that reminds you of your own testimony? Is there someone you need to share your story with today?
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 who He is to you (the attributes of God you are experiencing now – peace, joy, strength etc.)
- Ask the Lord to fill your heart with His joy so that you have more moments where you spontaneously praise and thank Him for who He is.
- Ask the Lord to help you prepare and have the right words to share your story about His goodness and faithfulness in your life.
- Ask the Lord to provide you with an opportunity to talk about Him and what He has done for your life.

Prayer

O Lord, I praise You today because You are glorious. You are wonderful, loving, and kind. I can't thank You enough for the way you have transformed my life by the power of Your Spirit, so I can live free today and have hope for tomorrow. I pray, Lord, that You would fill me with Your joy and peace by the power of the Holy Spirit because I trust in You. Plant a song (or words) of praise in my heart in the morning, afternoon, and evening so I can sing and rejoice in Your goodness all day long. When you move in power, remind me to pause and write things down, so that

I can remember Your strong arm and faithfulness when I walk through dark valleys. Remind me that my story is significant. Show me, Lord, someone who needs encouragement and comfort in the way that I have been encouraged and comforted by You. Give me the boldness to share who You are and what You have done for me, with the pray that I would lead one heart one step closer to You. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Day 19: Thursday, February 20:

READ: Psalm 71

REFLECT:

Psalm 71, written by an anonymous psalmist and sometimes attributed to David, is another reflection from a person who lived a long life and trusted God throughout it. The psalmist shares testimony of the faithfulness of God over a lifetime.

Though faced with a lifetime of trouble and rescue, the psalmist cries out to the Lord, but not without hope. He knows that the God he serves is one who can meet his every need. In every situation where the psalmist cries out to the Lord, he responds to himself with an attribute of God. For example:

Psalm 71:1-5a (NLT) | ¹“O Lord, I have come to you for protection; don’t let me be disgraced. ² Save me and rescue me, for you do what is right. Turn your ear to listen to me, and set me free. ³ Be my rock of safety where I can always hide. Give the order to save me, for you are my rock and my fortress. ⁴ My God, rescue me from the power of the wicked, from the clutches of cruel oppressors. ⁵ O Lord, you alone are my hope.

In this short section of the psalm, the psalmist calls on God to be his Protector, Savior, Rescuer, and Rock of safety. He trusts in the character of God to do these things because God is One who does what is right; He is One who listens and sets free; He is a Hiding Place and a Solid Rock.

As you read the psalm, you’ll see that the psalmist continues to face difficulty in his life, but instead of bemoaning his state, he chooses to trust God and praise Him while waiting for rescue and favor to come. The psalmist has faith that God **“will restore [him] to life again...lift [him] up from the depths of the earth, restore [him] to even greater honor and comfort [him] once again.”**

Reflection Questions

1. Can you see the hand of God working through the story of your life? Spend some time reflecting on where you have come from and where you are now, looking to see how God has orchestrated the major events of your life.
2. What about the character of God is revealed in this Psalm? Write these attributes of God down, so you can access them in moments you need encouragement or to remember who God is.
3. Write a prayer or a praise to God based on the circumstances you’re facing today. Remember, it doesn’t matter if you’re skilled with words (Psalm 71:15), the Lord wants to hear 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 His heart for you.

PRAY:

- Present your life in its current state to the Lord – thank Him for where you are and/or ask Him to help you to walk through the time you’re facing.
- Declare the attributes (or character) of God over the hard things in your life – i.e. if you feel lost, Jesus is the Way or if you’re feeling embattled by enemies, God is Mighty to Save.
- Ask the Lord to show you ways and give you opportunities to proclaim His power to the new generation, His mighty miracles to all who come after you (Psalm 71:18b).

Prayer

Thank You, Lord, that You are not a man that You should lie, that You don’t change Your mind, and that You never change. I can plant my feet firmly on You, as my Rock, and let my hope be anchored in You. I know that You see my every need, situation, and difficulty. I pray that You would save me and rescue me with Your strong arm. I pray that You would hide me from those who seek my harm and that they would fall into their own traps. Lord, plant words and songs of praise on my lips – even as I wait for You to come through. Give me another opportunity to tell my

story of who You are and how You have rescued me from darkness and from the hands of the evil one. Teach me, open my eyes, show me the ways I can share my story to encourage new believers or those younger than me that a life lived surrendered to You is the best life there is. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Day 20: Friday, February 21:

READ: Psalm 103

REFLECT:

Psalm 103:1-2 (NLT) | ¹Let all that I am praise the Lord; with my whole heart, I will praise his holy name. ²Let all that I am praise the Lord; may I never forget the good things he does for me.

In a world filled with trouble, and curated stories on social media, it is easy to find things to complain about. Our lives don't always measure up to our expectations – we're short on time, money, vacations, cars, and homes. In the face of discontent, Psalm 103, written by David, gives us a definitive call to action – we should praise the Lord with all that we are because of all the good things God has done for us.

David proceeds to give a list – while not exhaustive – of things God has done for him (and for us as well as Christ-followers). We have so much to be grateful for! This is what it looks like to be a powerful witness for Jesus Christ – freely sharing the Good News of Christ with all we encounter. And even if things aren't perfect (and I'm sure they're not), we choose to praise the Lord remembering who we were before we met Him and seeing who we are now because He has changed us.

We have the greatest story to tell – we once were lost and now we're found!

Reflection Questions

1. Think about your recent conversations with friends and with the Lord in prayer. How much time do you spend complaining? How much time do you spend in praise and being thankful to the Lord?
2. Ask the Lord to show you the work He has done in your life. Take some time to write out part of your testimony, being sure to note how the Lord's strong arm intervened and set things right for you.
3. What kinds of things does David thank God for? Write these down so you can access them in moments you need encouragement or to remember what God has done.
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:

- Praise the Lord with your whole heart for what He has done for you.
- Using the psalm, praise the Lord for the ways God moves in our lives because we choose to surrender our lives to Him.
- Ask God to show you more of Himself – as you seek Him first in prayer and in reading the Word of God (Bible).

Prayer

Lord, you are marvelous! I am part of the greatest story ever told – one that takes a person like me, far from God, draws me near, and gives me new life as I choose to surrender my life to You. Thank You, Jesus, for showing me I'm what I'm worth – the cost of the sacrifice of Your life on the cross. Remind me to take time throughout the day to just be thankful for what You're doing now. Or, if I'm having a rough day, remind me about all the things You have brought me through and that You're still walking with me. May I praise You, Lord, with my whole heart. May I never forget the good things you have done, are doing and will do for me. In Jesus' name. Amen.