



ENTER God's presence

Do not fret because of those who are evil or be envious of those who do wrong; for like the grass they will soon wither, like green plants they will soon die away... Commit your way to the Lord; trust in him and he will do this: He will make your righteous reward shine like the dawn, your vindication like the new day sun.

- Psalm 37 (selected verses)

Heavenly Father, you are constant and unchanging, an ever present help in times of trouble. Yet our world constantly distracts us from the reality of our security in you. Help us to put aside the distractions of our daily lives as we come together around your word to rediscover and refocus on the truth of your word to us. Amen.



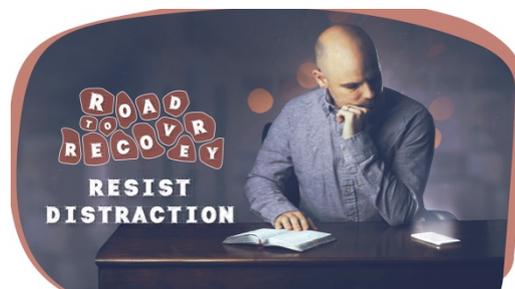
SHARE life together

1. **How have you seen Jesus at work in your life this week, in your highs and your lows?**
2. **Share how you went with your living purposefully from last time?**
3. **What are some of your goals in life at the moment?**
4. **What are the things that distract you from achieving them?**

Sports enthusiasts know it happens. The lead car hits the wall or runs out of fuel in the last lap. A penalty kick is blocked or swings wide. The last ball of the last over clears the boundary for 6 and a match is decided. A runner/rider celebrates too soon and they're overtaken in the last 100th of a second. It's not enough to start something...you have to finish...and finish well. Nehemiah is in the home stretch of rebuilding the wall around Jerusalem. He can see the finish in record time. But it's at that moment that we're all vulnerable. It's at that moment, with the end in sight that distractions pose the greatest threat. When we resist distraction and carry out the work to which God calls we honour God, bless people, and actively demonstrate God's rule to the world in a way that enemies are defeated and outsiders are drawn into God's salvation. Nehemiah is not just rebuilding a wall or a city; he's restoring God's people to their God-designed purpose, call & work in his world. And nothing can distract from or interfere with that effort reaching its completion.

Week beginning
Sunday 15th August 2021

Worship series:
Road to Recovery



VEDGE for the week

When all our enemies heard about this, all the surrounding nations were afraid and lost their self-confidence, because they realized that this work had been done with the help of our God.

Nehemiah 6:16



REMEMBER this week

Only when you know a deeper **"Yes"**
- the great work to which God has called you -
are you able to say **"No"** to distractions.



LISTEN attentively

Read Nehemiah 6:1-16

- 5. What stands out for you in this text? What questions does it raise for you?**
- 6. The diversionary tactics used by Nehemiah's enemies change subtly throughout this passage. What various strategies do you see them using?**
- 7. How does the church face similar distractions today?**

The attempts of Sanballat and his friends to delay or derail the plans of Nehemiah, seem to escalate as this chapter of the story progresses. The first attempt is simply to slow the building project down, to divert Nehemiah's attention and get him somewhere that they could physically harm him. When that was not successful, they move up to discrediting his reputation and attacking him personally. The kind of smear campaign that we sometimes see when political election campaigns go negative. Finally, when none of these attacks have caused Nehemiah to bite, they try to trick him into abandoning his faith in God.

In these situations there are three things which Nehemiah was able to rely on to help him avoid the distractions set up by his enemies. He was clear on his purpose, his identity, and his security.

The things that tempt and distract us from what God has called us to do as his people in the world, are usually playing on at least on of these areas in which we experience a level of insecurity.

- 8. How does having a clear purpose help you to stay focussed and avoid distractions?**
- 9. How might having a very clear understanding of your identity in Christ help you avoid the distraction of needing to defend yourself against the accusations of others?**
- 10. How does confidence in the protection and security of God's love and grace enable you to continue the work God has planned for you?**

The clear purpose, identity, and promises that God had given Nehemiah were Nehemiah's only focus. The initial invitation to meet together was not necessarily a bad thing, but Nehemiah saw through the ploy and understood the detrimental effect his absence would cause at such a critical time of the wall rebuilding - it did not align with his purpose. The secondary personal attack of Sanballat and his messengers did not derail Nehemiah. In fact it appears to have washed over him like water off a duck's back because it was clearly not aligned with the reality of his identity as a faithful servant of God. The final attempt to get Nehemiah 'off task' was to openly threaten his life and well-being. Again, this did not distract or concern Nehemiah because he trusted completely in God to uphold and protect him while he carried out the task God had given him to do.

- 11. Which of these areas; purpose, identity, or security, do you think are a weak point for you at the moment?**



GROW deeper

So, what is the identity and purpose of the church in the world today? You might forgive those who look upon the church from the outside and see only a group of people who meet once a week to carry out a 1-2 hour ritual which involves prayer, preaching, bread, wine, and singing. For many people, this is all they see of the church – a massive international organization that requires people to act a certain way and give their hard earned cash to support the agenda of the organization. In some churches, this might be closer to the truth than we would like to admit. But Jesus gives his people, his 'church' a very clear purpose – to make disciples of all nations, to baptize, and to teach them everything he himself taught his disciples. (Matt 28:19-20 - paraphrased).

- 12. What do you think someone from outside would think of our church if they only encountered us through our website? Would they clearly identify our mission and see how we are living it out, or could they possibly walk away with the wrong impression?**

13. Sanballat and his friends were clearly intimidated by Nehemiah and the Israelites as they saw the wall being rebuilt and they were suspicious of Nehemiah's motives. How might their reaction to Nehemiah help us to understand some people's attitude towards the church today?

There are so many different expressions of church these days. It is easy to be critical of churches that do not look familiar or that do things differently. It can be easy to be diverted from our mission of reaching those who have not yet accepted Jesus as Lord and Saviour when we are not clear on God's purpose for us as his church. There are many churches doing many great things for their communities but if they fail to proclaim Jesus to others, then all that work is really for nothing.



LIVE purposefully

Our purpose as Jesus' disciples and as a community of believers could not be made clearer than it is already expressed in the Bible. It has been expressed in so many ways; love one another, love your neighbor as yourself, make disciples, baptize, teach, proclaim the good news, bear witness to Jesus, be prepared to give a reason for the faith that is within you. All of these are simply different ways of saying the same thing, our purpose is to live Jesus love, share his hope with all and grow in his grace together as faithful disciples. It's not complicated but it can be difficult, especially if we let ourselves be distracted.

14. Jesus love comes alive in us as we read his word and allow it to transform our hearts and lives. What are the things that distract you from reading God's word regularly? How might you avoid those distractions this week?

15. What is one practical and achievable step you can take this week to either 'live Jesus' love', 'share his hope' or 'grow in his grace'?



PRAY intentionally

- Praise God for his faithful love and grace to us shown through his son Jesus Christ.
- Pray for the church around the world, that we would not be drawn to look inward during these times of global pandemic and periods of isolation but that we would be inspired to remain focused on his mission to share the good news of the resurrection throughout the world.
- Ask the Holy Spirit to help you avoid those things that would distract you from experiencing the fullness of life with Jesus.
- Pray for the people of Afghanistan as they face the renewed attacks of the Taliban.



BLESS one another

You might like to address one person in your group and make the sign of the cross in the air as you say...

[Name], the Lord is your strength. Amen.