



**ENTER** God's presence

**Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love; according to your great compassion blot out my transgressions..for I know my transgressions, and my sin is always before me... Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me.**

- Psalm 51 (selected verses)

God, your love for us is eternal and unfailing yet so often our love for you and your word seems to wax and wane. Help us now as we gather together around your word to come to a deeper knowledge of how high and wide and deep your love is for us and grow in us a greater hunger for your word. In Jesus name, Amen.



**SHARE** life together

1. **How have you seen Jesus at work in your life this week?**
2. **Share how you went with your living purposefully from last time?**
3. **Have you ever been lost? How did you end up finding your way?**
4. **Have you ever been delivered news that has brought you to tears? What was it that moved you so deeply?**

The most watched hour of TV in the last month? State of Origin? No... Ash Barty's Wimbledon win? No... It's the 11a.m. daily briefing by the Premier & State Health officials on the current state of the Coronavirus that has sent us into lockdown. The nation stops, watches and holds its breath to see if infection and community transmission numbers are climbing falling or holding steady. We drop into suspended animation, hoping there's an end in sight to the lockdowns; waiting for someone to lay out a road to recovery that isn't cut off by a new variant or breakout. We're alive but not fully living...like the disastrous conditions facing the Jewish remnant who returned from exile to Jerusalem. They were trapped in a captivity mindset far from the vision God had for their lives. Nehemiah was still in Babylon but his heart was burdened for those who were free but not living in freedom.

Week beginning  
Sunday 18<sup>th</sup> July 2021

Worship series:  
**Road to Recovery**



**VERSE** for the week

But if you return to me and obey my commands, then even if your exiled people are at the farthest horizon, I will gather them from there and bring them to the place I have chosen as a dwelling for my Name.

**Nehemiah 1:9**



**REMEMBER** this week

**The burden  
you bear  
often reveals the  
purpose  
God is calling you  
to passionately  
pursue.**

He was heartbroken for those who had settled into complacency amidst the chaos. But rather than blaming or shifting responsibility; Nehemiah accepts his part in the situation and lives the truth of Isaiah's words, "In repentance & rest is your salvation; in quietness & trust is your strength..." – Is 30:15  
The Road to Recovery begins with Repenting of the Rubbish and turning our eyes to the one who alone is faithful to all his promises and can help this nation & his church truly recover.



**LISTEN** attentively

#### Read Nehemiah 1:1-11

- 5. What stands out for you in this text? What questions does it raise for you?**
- 6. What things about the world or the church do you grieve over? Why?**
- 7. In his prayer, Nehemiah confesses and assumes some responsibility for the sins of all Israel. What might a similar confessional prayer sound like for the church today?**

The Word of God, the Bible, is a living word. Although it was written by human hands thousands of years ago, it is a living and breathing word which speaks God's truth to us throughout time. The story of Nehemiah has particular relevance to a church in exile or more specifically a church trying to come back from exile or lockdown. Nehemiah had a heart for God's people and he had a heart for Jerusalem. God gave him the opportunity and the task to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem and in many ways to reignite the passion for God and his covenant promises in the people of Jerusalem. Over the next weeks we will see how that process all unfolds but it begins here in Nehemiah chapter one with prayer. It's not just any kind of prayer but a prayer of repentance.

There are many examples in the world of how important it is to get things started correctly. Anyone who has done orienteering or tried navigating on the ocean will understand how beginning a journey only one degree off course can land you quite a long way from your intended destination. C.S. Lewis made a similar observation about solving mathematical problems saying, "a wrong sum can be put right, but only by going back till you find the error and working it afresh from that point, never by simply going on." Repentance is in many ways like a course correction or finding a mistake in a sum. It is turning from the mistake and addressing it before God so that he can deal with it and set us on the right path again.

- 8. We might often repent of our own sin but Nehemiah repents on behalf of all Israel? Why do you think he felt the need to do this? Are there things that as God's people you feel we should repent of corporately today?**
- 9. The concept of repentance is about turning back to God and turning away from our sin. In a world which is always looking forward, would you agree that we are more tempted now to just 'move on' rather than going back to admit and confess our errors? Why/Why not?**



**GROW** deeper

#### Look again at Nehemiah 1:3-4

Nehemiah had things pretty good in exile, he had a position in the king's court (see verse 11) and if we read ahead a little into chapter two, it seems that he was usually content and happy in his service to the king. Yet this news that he receives concerning those who had returned from exile upsets him profoundly. He recognizes that those people who have been given freedom to return to Jerusalem and to once again establish the worship practices of the temple and reaffirm their identity and freedom as God's people, are still living as captives of their sin. While they are free, they are failing to live as free people, the burden of rebuilding and re-establishing themselves seems to be only a constant reminder of how glorious things had been in the past and how depressing their situation was now. Nehemiah recognized that this burden was something the people could not bear, perhaps they didn't even recognize it themselves, but he did and so he did something, the only thing, he could do – he prayed and repented of the sin.

- 10. Nehemiah was moved deeply by the condition of the returning exiles who failed to recognise the freedom and new lives they had been given. How often does the situation of those who don't yet know Jesus deeply move you and stir you to action? Explain.**
- 11. Repentance is difficult if you are unable to recognise your sin or error. What are some current behaviours or attitudes that you see in the world which are regularly tolerated, if not encouraged, that don't fit your understanding of God's will for his people?**

One of the helpful things about Nehemiah's prayer is that he does not simply go to God blindly hoping that his prayer will be answered. He comes before God confident in the promises God had made to his people and to their ancestors. God's actions and promises are the basis for Nehemiah's confidence and repentance. In today's world of blame and litigation, people can be afraid to confess a mistake or to accept blame or admit a fault because they fear the repercussions, the legal implications, the workplace discipline that might follow as a result of their confession. Yet in Mark 1:15 Jesus urges us to repent and believe the good news. Repentance is good news for us, we do not need to fear God's wrath or judgement when we come to him to confess because he has promised us forgiveness through faith in his son Jesus. There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus (Romans 8:1).



## **LIVE** purposefully

Every day can be a day of repentance. Martin Luther talked about daily baptism which is essentially the same thing. Each day we can come before God and confess that we are sinful and need to be washed clean again and clothed in Christ's righteousness. Each day we can begin in the right direction by turning back to God and allowing him to set us on the right path for the day. This is not a sign of weakness, as some might suggest, Nehemiah consistently turns back to God in prayer when he encounters all sorts of struggles further into the story. What it demonstrates is a deep and complete trust in God and his promises of grace and forgiveness for those who believe. Confessing and repenting of our failures frees us from our rubbish and allows us to walk confidently into the plans and promises God has for us.

- 12. Most of us have a secret or hidden sin or issue that we are reluctant to acknowledge even to ourselves. These things are not hidden from God. What rubbish is God calling you to hand to him so that he can make you free of it?**
- 13. How might a regular pattern of repentance also help us practice forgiveness?**
- 14. Is there someone in your life who you might need to repent of a wrong which you have done? What will you do about it?**



## **PRAY** intentionally

- Praise God for his relentless love for all people even in the midst of our sinfulness.
- Pray for those who feel trapped, not because of Covid-19, but because of the things they have done or had done to them. Pray that they would experience God's freedom in Jesus.



## **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], Christ cares for you. Amen.**