

CrossWinds Covenant Renewal — God is Faithful — Fall 2015

August 30, 2015

From Nehemiah 8 Pastor Jordan talked why getting together as both campuses is important. We learned it is important to worship as a church community, rejoice as a church community and studying God's Word as a church community. As we continue our way through Nehemiah, we learn that it is good when we get together to take time to 1) Remember God's faithfulness to us in the past, 2) confess our unfaithfulness, 3) recommit ourselves to faithfully following God in the future.

Remembering God's faithfulness in the past.

Jordan took a short passage. He only had 12 verses. He gave me the long passage that is a chapter and a half. This was a set up to make you think he preaches shorter messages than I do. I will have to get him back for this later.

Let's put our fingers in the text at Nehemiah 9:6 and begin reading how the Levites helped the people remember God's faithfulness in the past. I will pause to explain things along the way. They begin:

You are the Lord, you alone. You have made heaven, the heaven of heavens, with all their host, the earth and all that is on it, the seas and all that is in them; and you preserve all of them; and the host of heaven worships you. Nehemiah 9:6 (ESV)

Remember the identity of our God. He is the only God. Our God created everything. He did it all by himself. He created the heavens and the earth. He created heaven and all the angelic beings. He created everything on the earth and in the ocean. He sustains everything every day. All the angels worship God.

Remember who we worship. Remember there is only one God and we know him. Remember God's identity!

You are the Lord, the God who chose Abram and brought him out of Ur of the Chaldeans and gave him the name Abraham. You found his heart faithful before you, and made with him the covenant to give to his offspring the land of the Canaanite, the Hittite, the Amorite, the Perizzite, the Jebusite, and the Girgashite. And you have kept your promise, for you are righteous. Nehemiah 9:7–8 (ESV)

Remember how God chose Abraham. God made a promise to Abraham to give him offspring and the Promised Land. Remember how God was faithful to keep his promise in spite of overwhelming opposition? It began with Abraham and his wife Sarah being childless. How can your children inherit a Promised Land when you don't have any children? But remember, God kept his promise. When Abraham's and Sarah's bodies were old and she was beyond the age of bearing children, she conceived their only son, Isaac. God was faithful and kept his promise. Can I get an Amen?

And you saw the affliction of our fathers in Egypt and heard their cry at the Red Sea, and performed signs and wonders against Pharaoh and all his servants and all the people of his land, for you knew that they acted arrogantly against our fathers. And you made a name for yourself, as it is to this day. Nehemiah 9:9–10 (ESV)

Remember when our forefathers were in Egypt. Remember when things looked hopeless because the Egyptians worked them to death and then made them throw their children in the Nile River to watch them drown? Remember how things looked hopeless? God supernaturally came to their rescue with plague after plague that systematically dismantled one of the most powerful nations in the ancient world. God turned the Nile River into blood, flies covered the land, then gnats, then frogs, then hail and a host of other plagues until finally he killed all the firstborn of the land. Remember how things started so hopeless but after

God was done beating on the Egyptians they were literally paying the Israelites to leave town. God made himself world famous. Everybody learned, don't mess with the Israelites or their God. It will not go well for you. Remember how faithful God was to keep his promise when things looked hopeless?

And you divided the sea before them, so that they went through the midst of the sea on dry land, and you cast their pursuers into the depths, as a stone into mighty waters. Nehemiah 9:11 (ESV)

Remember when they left Egypt. Pharaoh's army came up behind them and the Red Sea was in front of them. Things looked hopeless once again. They thought they were going to be slaughtered in the desert. Remember how God was faithful in those hopeless circumstances? He split the Red Sea so they walked across on dry ground, and the same Red Sea swallowed Pharaoh's army when it tried to cross. The soldiers sank like a rock. Remember how faithful God was when things looked hopeless.

By a pillar of cloud you led them in the day, and by a pillar of fire in the night to light for them the way in which they should go. Nehemiah 9:12 (ESV)

Remember how our forefather's walked in the wilderness and they didn't have a GPS unit? They had no idea how to get to the Promised Land. God led them with the glory of his presence that was over the temple. It was a cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. I don't care how bad your sense of direction is. You can't get lost following the world's biggest glow stick. God was faithful and kept his promise to lead them.

You came down on Mount Sinai and spoke with them from heaven and gave them right rules and true laws, good statutes and commandments, and you made known to them your holy Sabbath and commanded them commandments and statutes and a law by Moses your servant. Nehemiah 9:13–14 (ESV)

Remember when our forefather's had no government and no rules. They were just a rag-tag bunch of hillbillies wandering in the dessert following a cloud. They didn't even know what was right and wrong. They didn't know how to worship God or how to please God. They were a disorganized mess. God came down and gave them his law on Mt. Sinai. Do you remember how good God was to our forefathers when he showed them right from wrong and taught them how to worship?

You gave them bread from heaven for their hunger and brought water for them out of the rock for their thirst, and you told them to go in to possess the land that you had sworn to give them. Nehemiah 9:15 (ESV)

Remember when our forefathers were hungry. They didn't know where to find food. They thought they would starve to death in the desert. There wasn't a McDonald's within a hundred miles. Where could an entire nation find food in the desert? God rained down bread from heaven with the morning dew each day. God sent enough bread each day to feed a nation. In the same way, remember when they thought they would die of thirst? God gave them water from a rock. Only God can bring water out of a rock. Let David Copperfield or Houdini try bringing enough water out of a rock to let a nation drink. That is something only God can do. Remember how faithful God was to our forefathers every time things looked hopeless? Again and again he kept his promise against overwhelming odds. God is always faithful.

This story is not just their story, it is our story. Just as God was faithful to our forefathers in the Old Testament in the face of overwhelming odds, he will be faithful to us no matter how impossible the situation. Isn't it good that God is always faithful?

How did our forefathers respond?

While God was faithful, our forefathers were faithless.

While we remember how faithful God was to our forefathers, we also remember how incredibly faithless they were to him in spite of all he did for them.

But they and our fathers acted presumptuously and stiffened their neck and did not obey your commandments. They refused to obey and were not mindful of the wonders that you performed among them, but they stiffened their neck and appointed a leader to return to their slavery in Egypt. But you are a God ready to forgive, gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and did not forsake them. Nehemiah 9:16–17 (ESV)

After all God did for them — after his incredible faithfulness against staggering odds — our forefathers rebelled. They appointed another leader besides Moses and wanted to go home. Were they crazy? We would have punched them in their mouths but God was slow to anger and he was abounding in love. We would have given up on them, but God didn't give up on them.

In the same way, this is our story. Even when we are faithless, God doesn't give up on us.

Even when they had made for themselves a golden calf and said, "This is your God who brought you up out of Egypt," and had committed great blasphemies, you in your great mercies did not forsake them in the wilderness. The pillar of cloud to lead them in the way did not depart from them by day, nor the pillar of fire by night to light for them the way by which they should go. Nehemiah 9:18–19 (ESV)

Remember when our forefathers committed the really great sin of the golden calf? While Moses was speaking with God on Mt. Sinai getting the Ten Commandments, their hearts wandered. Aaron made a golden calf. The text tells us they used the same commitment ceremony they just used to commit to God, they did it again to commit their loyalty to a golden calf. Some scholars believe the calf was one of the gods in Egypt. The calf was a fertility god, and

they worshipped it with pagan sexual sin. That is what it means when it says they rose up to play after they dedicated themselves to a golden calf. While Moses was getting God's Ten Commandments on top of Mt. Sinai, the people were indulging in pagan sexual worship to a god in Egypt at the bottom of the mountain.

If we were God, we would have wiped everybody out and started again. Remember how faithful and patient God was toward them? God didn't give up on them even after that sin. God doesn't give up on us, even when we really blow it.

You gave your good Spirit to instruct them and did not withhold your manna from their mouth and gave them water for their thirst. Forty years you sustained them in the wilderness, and they lacked nothing. Their clothes did not wear out and their feet did not swell. Nehemiah 9:20–21 (ESV)

For 40 years God stayed faithful to them in the wilderness in spite of their rebellious spirit. They didn't need anything. He provided manna and water every day. He even sustained their shoes for 40 years of walking in the desert. They didn't wear out. They were wearing the same pair of sandals 40 years after they left Egypt. I can hardly get a year out of a good pair of Nikes. Remember God's faithfulness toward them, even in little things. In the same way, God is faithful to us, even in little things.

And you gave them kingdoms and peoples and allotted to them every corner. So they took possession of the land of Sihon king of Heshbon and the land of Og king of Bashan. Nehemiah 9:22 (ESV)

God didn't just give his people the Promised Land but he gave to them bonus land he had not promised. Those kingdoms were conquered before they

came to the Promised Land. In spite of our forefathers' unfaithfulness, God remained faithful and gave them extra land besides the original Promised Land.

You multiplied their children as the stars of heaven, and you brought them into the land that you had told their fathers to enter and possess. So the descendants went in and possessed the land, and you subdued before them the inhabitants of the land, the Canaanites, and gave them into their hand, with their kings and the peoples of the land, that they might do with them as they would. And they captured fortified cities and a rich land, and took possession of houses full of all good things, cisterns already hewn, vineyards, olive orchards and fruit trees in abundance. So they ate and were filled and became fat and delighted themselves in your great goodness. Nehemiah 9:23–25 (ESV)

God was so kind. He gave them lots of children. Children are always a blessing from God. When God gave them the Promised Land, he gave it to them fully equipped to enjoy. He gave them cities fully furnished. Water supplies were already dug. The trees were already planted and bearing fruit. All they needed to do was eat the produce of the land and enjoy life, giving thanks to God. They were to become fat on God's goodness. Isn't that a great word picture? Wasn't God incredibly kind to such an undeserving and unfaithful people?

In the same way, God is incredibly good to us even though we are unfaithful and undeserving of his goodness. Remember, God is faithful.

Nevertheless, they were disobedient and rebelled against you and cast your law behind their back and killed your prophets, who had warned them in order to turn them back to you, and they committed great blasphemies. Therefore you gave them into the hand of their enemies, who made them suffer. And in the time of their suffering they cried out to you and you heard them from heaven, and according to your great mercies you gave them saviors who saved them from the hand of their enemies. But after they had rest they did evil again before you, and you abandoned them to the hand of their enemies, so that they had dominion over them. Yet when they turned and cried to you, you heard from heaven, and many times you delivered them according to your mercies. And you warned them in order to turn them back to your law. Yet they acted presumptuously and did not obey your commandments, but sinned against your rules, which if a person does them, he shall live by them, and they turned a stubborn shoulder and stiffened their neck and would not obey. Many years you bore with them and warned them

by your Spirit through your prophets. Yet they would not give ear. Therefore you gave them into the hand of the peoples of the lands. Nevertheless, in your great mercies you did not make an end of them or forsake them, for you are a gracious and merciful God. Nehemiah 9:26–31 (ESV)

In spite of God's goodness, our forefathers turned their backs on God. God, out of his love, let them suffer to bring them to repentance. When they repented, God took them back again and again. Again and again our forefather's become stubborn, suffered, repented and God brought them back.

This is not just their story, it is our story.

This is not just their story, it is our story. Look at your life. God reached into our lives and chose us, just like he chose Abraham. Just like ancient Israel, again and again we find ourselves in hopeless situations. Again and again God comes to our rescue in ways we would never have dreamt. Remember how incredibly good and faithful God has been to us.

Just like ancient Israel, over time we became unfaithful to God while he stayed faithful to us. Our hearts wandered away. We became preoccupied with things. Sometimes God disciplines us in those times because he loves us. When we repent, God keeps taking us back.

This is not just true of us personally but it is true of us as CrossWinds Church corporately. God is faithful. We were able to pay off a mortgage, rebuild a stage, launch another campus, create a new Commons area on the Spirit Lake campus and now we have a new Commons coming to the Spencer campus.

Facilities are the small things. The really exciting part is all the people introduced to Jesus and encouraged in their walks with him that we have on both

campuses. Look around. God grew this church. God was faithful to CrossWinds, even when we were unfaithful to him.

We just want to pause in a moment of silence for prayer. It is appropriate that we thank God for his incredible thankfulness to us that we don't deserve.

(pause for prayer)

Recommitment to faithfulness in the future.

After remembering God's faithfulness and confessing their unfaithfulness, Nehemiah led the people in recommitting themselves to faithfully following God in the future. We are going to look at the recommitment they made to God. Pastor Jordan and I are asking each of us to make the same recommitment to God in our lives as we enter into this ministry year. Let's look at the overview of this recommitment.

The rest of the people, the priests, the Levites, the gatekeepers, the singers, the temple servants, and all who have separated themselves from the peoples of the lands to the Law of God, their wives, their sons, their daughters, all who have knowledge and understanding, join with their brothers, their nobles, and enter into a curse and an oath to walk in God's Law that was given by Moses the servant of God, and to observe and do all the commandments of the Lord our Lord and his rules and his statutes. Nehemiah 10:28–29 (ESV)

They recommitted to living a holy life. They were going to live a life that was intentionally different from the world around them. They were recommitting themselves to follow God's law and live by God's commandments. They detailed five specific ways they were going to focus on holiness. Pastor Jordan and I challenge you to make these same commitments as we look to faithfully follow Christ as CrossWinds Church this year. As we go through these commitments, if you are willing to make them, put your initials after each point as we study them.

1. Commit to only dating and marrying someone that loves Jesus.

We will not give our daughters to the peoples of the land or take their daughters for our sons. Nehemiah 10:30 (ESV)

If you study Ezra and Nehemiah, which were written at the same time, you find God's people intermarrying with the people of the land. Ezra has some very harsh words for the people on intermarriage. Don't do it!

Guys, if you marry a woman that doesn't love Jesus, she will not teach your children about Jesus. She will lead your heart away from Jesus. If Solomon was destroyed by marrying foreign wives, and he was the smartest guy on the planet, I don't think your experience will be much different.

Ladies, if you marry a man that doesn't love Jesus, you will not find him helping you take the kids to church and being your spiritual encouragement. This first recommitment they make because dating and marrying someone that loves Jesus is super important for everyone's future. If you are single and searching or if you are raising children, will you commit to only dating and marrying someone that loves Jesus more than they love you? More important than how somebody looks on the outside or how passionate the chemistry feels on the inside is their relationship with Jesus.

People who love Jesus more than they love you are hard to find. If they were easy to find, this wouldn't be the first commitment they made. You have to live by faith and trust God to provide. Many times you will be lonely while your friends are partying. If this wasn't such an important issue for our relationship with Jesus, why would they begin with it? Are all the singles with me on this? If

you are recommitting yourself to God in this area, put your initials next to that point.

2. Commit to keeping a day of worship and rest.

And if the peoples of the land bring in goods or any grain on the Sabbath day to sell, we will not buy from them on the Sabbath or on a holy day. And we will forego the crops of the seventh year and the exaction of every debt. Nehemiah 10:31 (ESV)

Everybody in the culture around Jerusalem worked seven days a week. God's people were under pressure to work seven days a week and not fall behind in business. If they worked seven days a week they neglected two things God said were essential — their worship of God and their time to rest. They had to live by faith that in six days they could do the work that other people did in seven days. They had to live by faith believing they needed a weekly time of worship even when they felt they were too busy to take it.

This is a challenge we face. It is easy to skip worship because we are too busy. We have too much work. It is also easy to skip worship because we have travel planned. Some of us neglect regular worship because we are taking too much rest instead of too much work.

If we are to make the same recommitment they did, it means we are committing to be faithful to weekend worship and setting a day apart to God. I know nobody can be here all the time but God is probably convicting some of us that we need to be in worship more of the time. If you will commit to faithfully, regularly attending weekend worship and setting a day apart for God, put your initials next to that point.

3. Commit to making sure church can operate.

We also take on ourselves the obligation to give yearly a third part of a shekel for the service of the house of our God: for the showbread, the regular grain offering, the regular burnt offering, the Sabbaths, the new moons, the appointed feasts, the holy things, and the sin offerings to make atonement for Israel, and for all the work of the house of our God. Nehemiah 10:32–33 (ESV)

Historically, the Persians gave financial support for the operational needs of the temple. This was either over or insufficient to cover the daily operations of the temple. The people responded by everyone doing their part. Everyone committed to give a little something, a third part of a shekel, so the temple could operate.

This text obviously applies financially. In our context, there is something more precious than money. Time.

If we are to make this commitment, it means everybody needs to commit to give a little of their time to make sure their campus has what it needs for basic operation. That means everybody is doing something. It means we need greeters and ushers. That is not a big job but it is a needed job. We need people running the Gathering Grounds coffee bar on Sunday. Not a big job but necessary job. We need people helping with set up team and tear down team, not just leaving and heading to lunch. We need helpers in AWANA and teachers for kids as part of the CW Kids program on Sunday morning. The list could go on and on. Everybody needs to do a small part to make sure the church operates. When that doesn't happen some people carry too much while others freeload.

CrossWinds family — will everybody here commit to doing something to meet the basic operational needs of your campus? No freeloading. Going to church is not like going to a movie. Everybody needs to commit to being

involved. If you are willing to make that commitment, I am including teenagers and young adults, put your initials next to that point.

4. Commit to giving God what is first and best.

We obligate ourselves to bring the firstfruits of our ground and the firstfruits of all fruit of every tree, year by year, to the house of the Lord; also to bring to the house of our God, to the priests who minister in the house of our God, the firstborn of our sons and of our cattle, as it is written in the Law, and the firstborn of our herds and of our flocks; and to bring the first of our dough, and our contributions, the fruit of every tree, the wine and the oil, to the priests, to the chambers of the house of our God... Nehemiah 10:35–37 (ESV)

God's people committed to giving God what is first and best in their life.

Giving what is last and worst was a common problem in their day, and it is a common problem in our day. When it came to giving sacrificial sheep the book of Malachi tells us the people were giving the sick and blind that they couldn't sell in the market to God. Giving God the worst and the last is a spiritual issue. It shows God is a low priority in your life.

When I began in the pastorate 20 years ago I had someone call me up and offer to give the church their old couch. They bought a new one and thought the church wanted their old junky one. I remember thinking, "Yes, we will take the new couch!" If the couch junky couch isn't good enough for your family, why do you think it is good enough for God's family? God deserves what is first and best in our lives.

How do we give God what is first and best?

Money — Have the church offering check be the first check you write on payday, not the last check you write.

Serving — Make your service in the church first in your schedule and top in your effort. If you are serving in the church, put that in your schedule first. Fit your vacation time in around church time, not the other way around.

Worship — Go to bed at a reasonable hour on Saturday night so you are awake on Sunday morning. Make sure you are awake and fully engaged Sunday mornings to give God your best. I know what it is like to stay up late on Saturday and fall asleep on Sunday at church. When I was young, I did it all the time.

Bible Study — Have your Bible study as one of the first things in your day, not the last thing. We are freshest in the morning. We do our best work in the morning. Waiting until 11 p.m. to read the Bible after watching a movie is giving God what is last, not what is first.

Whatever we do for Christ in the church or in our lives, God deserves our first and best. Remember it is not just that we give, it is what we give and how we give that matters. If you will commit to giving God your first and best, put your initials after that line.

5. Commit to faithfulness in my tithes and offerings.

...and to bring to the Levites the tithes from our ground, for it is the Levites who collect the tithes in all our towns where we labor. And the priest, the son of Aaron, shall be with the Levites when the Levites receive the tithes. And the Levites shall bring up the tithe of the tithes to the house of our God, to the chambers of the storehouse. For the people of Israel and the sons of Levi shall bring the contribution of grain, wine, and oil to the chambers, where the vessels of the sanctuary are, as well as the priests who minister, and the gatekeepers and the singers. We will not neglect the house of our God. Nehemiah 10:37–39 (ESV)

A tithe is 10 percent of our income. The people committed to financial faithfulness by regularly giving their tithes and special offerings. CrossWinds, as

we enter this new school year, will you recommit yourself to God by committing to being financially faithful with your tithes and special offerings?

In a moment, we are going to sing. We are going to honor God with our best worship by singing from the bottom of our hearts. Remember God has always been faithful to us, even when we were faithless to him. Today we recommit our ourselves to living faithful holy lives as we enter the school year. In a moment we will have a celebratory meal as we thank God for his faithfulness in the past and look forward to his faithfulness in the future.



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