

## Tell the World

**“God has helped me to this very day; so I stand here and testify to small and great alike” (Acts 26:22).**

**Scripture:** Acts 26:19-23

**Song:** “O God, Our Help in Ages Past”

Summer Dickerson is a survivor of human trafficking. She ran away from home at the age of 15 and was pulled into prostitution and drug addiction. She eventually escaped and now—because of the transformation God brought in her life—is an advocate who defends and helps to rescue women from human trafficking and domestic abuse.

Paul was defending himself, from his Jewish accusers, before Agrippa and Festus (Acts 26:2). He outlined what his life was like before Christ and how Jesus rescued him and changed his life. He reminded Agrippa that everything he was preaching was what the prophets and Moses had already said would happen and did happen. Paul proclaimed the hope that all who believe in Jesus can have (v. 7) regardless of how far away we might be.

When our lives have been changed, we want everyone to know about it. We want others to experience the same changes and freedom in their lives. Paul became a witness and preached the transformation Jesus brings. Summer Dickerson is another witness, to women trapped in abuse like she was, about God’s help. God calls all His people to tell how He rescues.

**Father,** thank You for transforming my life. Help me be open to sharing Your love with someone today. In Jesus’ name, amen.

.....  
 April 5–11. **Amanda Fillebrown** lives in southern Indiana with her husband. She gladly serves her church, family, friends, and community and enjoys art and theater.

## Completely Changed

**You were taught . . . to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness** (Ephesians 4:22, 24).

**Scripture:** Ephesians 4:17-24

**Song:** “All Things New”

Hydrogen is one of the most abundant elements in the universe. In its natural state, it doesn't have any odor or taste. However, when combined with other elements, its properties change. In the right ratios and the right conditions, mixing carbon, oxygen, and hydrogen together forms common table sugar. A complete transformation occurs. What was once odorless and tasteless is now sweet!

Paul knew total transformation. His life was completely changed when he encountered Jesus on the road to Damascus. His previous life had involved even “murderous threats against the Lord's disciples” (Acts 9:1). However, that old life was gone. This new life he was living was the one that he was created to live—the one that reflected the image of Christ. A life that was defined by righteousness and holiness.

When we follow Christ, we can live in freedom. We are no longer slaves to sin, doomed because of our corrupt and evil actions. Jesus paid the price for our sins. When we receive God's Spirit to dwell inside us at conversion—when we put on the new self that God gives us—we are made alive. Romans 6:22 tells us that the benefits of that are holiness and eternal life.

**Father**, thank You for transforming my life and sending Your Spirit to live inside me. Help me to be a reflection of You to others who need to experience Your love and grace. In Jesus' name, amen.

## Keep Your Life Pure

**“Keep my requirements and do not follow any of the detestable customs that were practiced before you came and do not defile yourselves with them. I am the LORD your God”** (Leviticus 18:30).

**Scripture:** Leviticus 18:24-30

**Song:** “Nothing But the Blood”

A friend used to make delicious cinnamon candy at Christmas-time, which she shared with my family. But sadly, she didn't share the recipe! My mom and I have failed to replicate the candy using recipes from the Internet. We have concluded that humidity in our kitchens has gotten into the candy and ruined it.

The Lord gave laws that His people were to follow. The instructions were essentially the recipe for their well-being. Obedience would set the people apart from the surrounding cultures and guide them to keep destructive ways out of their lives. God wanted His chosen people to be separate—set apart for a righteous and holy relationship with Him alone, as their one and only God.

Allowing the destructive impact of sin to invade brought ruin to those people, as it does to all of us. We have been defiled—but we are not without hope. Our hope is in the cleansing power of Christ through His blood that was shed for us on the cross. Through Jesus we can be restored and set free to follow Him in a relationship built on grace and forgiveness.

**Father,** forgive me for the ways I have defiled myself in sin. Thank You for sending Your Son to die on the cross so I can be made clean and set free to live for You. In Jesus' name, amen.

## Take Notice!

**“[The people and the priests] refused to pay attention; stubbornly they turned their backs and covered their ears”** (Zechariah 7:11).

**Scripture:** Zechariah 7:8-14

**Song:** “I Will Follow”

My friend had an old car that got him around faithfully. One day the “check engine” light came on. He couldn’t find the reason and the warning light drove him crazy, so he put a piece of tape over it. The car still drove well, for a while, but eventually started having issues. Then one day he couldn’t get it to start at all. Not taking care of things had only allowed the problem to get worse!

Zechariah wrote how the people refused to listen to and obey what the Lord said to do. Their disobedience was progressive. At first they just casually ignored His words by refusing to pay attention. Eventually, their lack of attention turned into blatant disobedience as they refused to face the Lord and listen to His instructions. This led to a hardening of their hearts toward the Lord—and toward the people He told them to care for.

We may think ignoring certain commands of God is harmless. However, refusing to listen and act is sin, and there are consequences. What commands and promptings of the Lord have you been ignoring? Perhaps you don’t think they are meant for you. Repent and ask the Lord to forgive you and to soften your heart.

**Father**, forgive me for disobeying You. Help me act on the strength and courage You give. And help me reach out in love to serve those You have called me to help. In Jesus’ name, amen.

## Gather and Listen

**All the people listened attentively to the Book of the Law** (Nehemiah 8:3).

**Scripture:** Nehemiah 7:73b–8:6

**Song:** “Come, People of the Risen King”

A hush spread across the audience as she took the stage. She began to speak about the research outlined in her latest book. Several people reached for pen and paper and began scribbling notes as fast as they could. Since she was a known expert in her field, no one wanted to miss a single piece of the valuable information she was sharing. They knew this information could change their lives.

It took the Israelites 52 days to rebuild the walls around Jerusalem (Nehemiah 6:15). It took the time and resources of everyone to accomplish this task. The completed walls offered them physical protection, but they had another need that was just as important. They needed to receive spiritual strength, which could only be provided by God. Otherwise, they would likely end up in exile again. They gathered together and listened to Ezra read the Law. The people responded with praise and reverence as they bowed down to worship God (8:6).

We must be devoted to gathering together to hear God’s Word. His Word is true and possesses the power to change our lives, if we choose to listen to and live by it. It will strengthen us and help us. Our response upon hearing it should be the same as the Israelites’ response: worship.

**Father,** thank You for placing me in a community that gathers together to hear Your Word. Let us allow those words we hear to strengthen us and protect us. In Jesus’ name, amen.

## Turn Back

**“Do not grieve, for the joy of the LORD is your strength”**  
(Nehemiah 8:10).

**Scripture:** Nehemiah 8:9-12

**Song:** “Joy of the Lord”

When I went in for my yearly physical, my cholesterol was up since my last visit and the doctor expressed concern. Admittedly, I hadn't been watching what I ate or exercising like I knew I should. I have a family history of heart disease. I was disappointed in myself that I had not taken better care of my health. But my health would not have improved if I'd remained stuck in frustration. Instead, I changed my ways.

The Israelites were overcome with grief for their sins. Nehemiah encouraged them not to weep but, rather, to let the grief they felt draw them closer to God. Nehemiah knew that God was pleased with their obedience to Him in working together to rebuild the city walls. They needed to be strengthened by their obedience rather than getting stuck in sadness over their past sins. The conviction that the Israelites felt was a call for them to turn back to God.

Awareness of our sin should prompt us to action that moves us closer to God. Instead of just feeling disappointment in ourselves, we should turn back to God and find the strength to change—knowing that He loves us, He will forgive us when we confess, and He finds joy in us as His children.

**Father**, forgive me for the ways I have turned away from You. Thank You for the great love that You have for me. I praise You for being my strength. In Jesus' name, amen.

## God's Masterpiece

**“We have been unfaithful to our God. . . . But in spite of this, there is still hope for Israel” (Ezra 10:2).**

**Scripture:** Ezra 10:1-12

**Song:** “Jesus Christ, My Living Hope”

A practice among many artists is to refuse to call something a mistake. If a stroke of the brush hits the canvas in a way the artist did not intend, he doesn't toss out the whole painting. Instead, he finds a way to cover the mistake in his masterpiece.

The words Shekariah spoke to Ezra about the Jews in today's verse are very encouraging. Despite their disobedience to God, there was still hope. It was not too late for the people then to turn back to God—and it is not too late for us today.

Hope in God is an open door for our future. We have hope, knowing that we are still within God's reach. His forgiveness is still available, and His love for us never changes.

God is the great Creator, and we are His masterpieces. He rewrites a beautiful story of redemption for us through Jesus, when we repent our sins. God is faithful to cover over our sins with the blood of Jesus. In what areas of your life have you strayed from God? There is still hope for you too! Ask God for forgiveness and turn back to Him.

**Father,** thank You for creating me in Your image and giving me hope through salvation by faith in Your Son, Jesus Christ. I praise You for my hope in Jesus, and I turn away from my sin to follow You more closely. In Jesus' name, amen.