

Returning to Mercy

“We do not make requests of you because we are righteous, but because of your great mercy” (Daniel 9:18).

Scripture: Daniel 9:4-6, 15-19

Song: “Lord, I’m Coming Home”

Thick, black mud caked the tractor’s giant tires. Dennis shifted gears and jammed the gas but with no result. The tractor was stuck. The farm would lose time on spring planting. Head low, Dennis relayed the problem to his dad, Raymond, fully expecting to incur anger. Instead, Raymond laughed. “It happens,” he said. Together they freed the tractor from the mud.

Daniel recognized the sins of himself and the people of Israel. Yet his admittance did not deter him from beseeching God. He boldly requested forgiveness, restoration, and healing from God. He knew that God’s mercy and love were abundant to all.

Often we avoid approaching God. We are fearful of asking for His forgiveness because we are focused on our shortcomings. Yet God desires to lavish mercy and grace on us, not because we are worthy but because He is good. Are you carrying guilt from an addiction and reckless behavior? Have your careless words and angry actions harmed relationships? Do you dread God’s wrath for sinful thoughts and deeds? Take courage from Daniel. Jesus waits patiently and full of love. Receive mercy from His generous heart. Delay no longer; go to Him.

Father, I return to You, confessing my sins to receive the grace of Your forgiveness today. In Jesus’ name, amen.

April 12–19. **Kathleen Dunlap** lives in Colorado with her husband, son, and two crazy dogs. She enjoys cooking new recipes, knitting, and exploring the mountains.

Clearing Out the House

I gave orders to purify the rooms [of the temple], and then I put back into them the equipment of the house of God, with the grain offerings and the incense (Nehemiah 13:9).

Scripture: Nehemiah 13:4-9

Song: “Purify My Heart”

Lynn stared at the boxes of dishes, towels, toys, and clothes. How had she let herself accumulate this stuff? The clutter had to go! God had called her and her husband to mission work. Only a few items could be carried with them. Suddenly Lynn realized: these things served no purpose anymore. God made room in her life for service to others.

Nehemiah was angry with Eliashib for allowing Tobiah, an evil person, to reside in the temple. Nehemiah boldly tossed out Tobiah and all his stuff, then replaced the temple's vessels and furniture. God's house was cleared of junk, refilled with honorable items, and made ready for worship.

As we walk with God, we can accumulate (in addition to physical clutter) unwanted burdens, traits, and even emotions. We may harbor resentment for unfair treatment. We may carry anger over old disappointments. We may linger in fear from past failures. God's desire is for our freedom. He wants us to experience fresh peace and uplifting joy. Reflect quietly on what needs to be removed from your life. Ask the Lord for help in cleansing your soul and mind. Take actions with Him to eliminate the extra baggage you carry. Purification produces health. A healthy heart is strong in love, ready for service.

Father, please remove from my heart, mind, and soul any barriers to serving You and others. In Jesus' name, amen.

Trustworthy Service

Shelemiah the priest, Zadok the scribe, . . . a Levite named Pedaiah . . . [and] Hanan son of Zakkur . . . were considered trustworthy. They were made responsible for distributing the supplies to their fellow Levites (Nehemiah 13:13).

Scripture: Nehemiah 13:10-14

Song: “True-Hearted, Whole-Hearted”

Deb watched the third-grade girl who was sitting at the lunch table and eating a meager half sandwich . . . again. Deb knew this girl needed better nourishment to stay focused for long school days. She called her church friends. “I need sack lunches!” she said. All of them, with the school’s support, provided nutritious, filling lunches for the student. The girl no longer went hungry at lunch.

Nehemiah recognized the urgent need to reestablish the distribution of food to the Levites. They could not serve God in the temple if they were working their fields. Nehemiah appointed men with reputations for trustworthiness and kindness to oversee the supply chain. They stood in the gap (think of Ezekiel 22:30) that neglect had caused.

As the Holy Spirit directs our lives, He will grant us opportunities to serve others. He places us exactly where He needs us to be. We offer prayers for a friend’s healing. Or provide clothing for the homeless in our community. Or volunteer at a crisis pregnancy center. We seek to emulate the actions of Jesus. He tirelessly served others as He healed the sick and fed the hungry. Consider who around you may need support, care, or resources. Ask God for grace and peace to do a vital work. Be the one who fills the gap in someone else’s life today.

Father, help us to serve others wholeheartedly because ultimately we are serving You. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Space to Rest

[Nehemiah] commanded the Levites to purify themselves and go and guard the gates in order to keep the Sabbath day holy (Nehemiah 13:22).

Scripture: Nehemiah 13:15-22

Song: “Satisfied”

In 1810, the United States Congress enacted a law allowing the post office to deliver mail on Sundays. Passionate religious leaders petitioned Congress to revoke the law, as they were concerned about the postal workers foregoing their day of rest and worship. Congress complied. Still today, the USPS post office buildings remain closed on Sundays.

Nehemiah unashamedly rebuked the merchants of Israel for their poor example of working on the Sabbath. He reinstated the Sabbath for the good of Israel. He reminded Israel of the Sabbath’s origin—it was a gift from God. Trying to get ahead on this holy day dishonored Him.

Our culture fosters an endless work cycle. We check our emails incessantly, put in extra hours on weekends, or stay on call for our bosses. Work honors God. It provides support to our communities and families. Yet rest is also vital. What if we took time to skip to-do lists and focus on family and friends? What if we realized our worth lies in our identity in Christ, not in the product we produce or the money we make? Can we make room in our schedules for reflection and communion? God is able to make the remaining hours enough to get everything done. Sabbath realigns us to God’s heart of love and grace. Whether a whole day or a few hours, a break reminds us: we were made for His pleasure, not constant striving.

Father, help us to take the time to rest and to worship You. In Jesus’ name, amen.

The Strength of Our Voice

[Nehemiah] rebuked [men who married foreign women] and called curses down on them (Nehemiah 13:25).

Scripture: Nehemiah 13:23-27

Song: “Stand Up, Stand Up for Jesus”

George had trained to become an actor. His booming voice reached all the audience without a modern microphone. But George knew his true calling was to preach the gospel. When the Church of England declined to give him a pulpit, George Whitefield preached in tents and the open air. His riveting oratories captured audiences in London, then in the United States. Many people heard the gospel proclaimed through his voice.

Passion for holiness stirred up Nehemiah. Not intimidated by mainstream culture in his day, he fervently spoke out against leaders of Israel who were blatantly disobeying God’s command (Leviticus 21:14; Deuteronomy 7:1-4). His voice alone stood out for God’s instruction and truth.

A myriad of messages from the world vie for our attention daily, muddling God’s truth with lies. Not only are we Christ’s feet and hands, but we are also His voice of hope in a chaotic culture. Our country, families, and our churches crave people full of God’s love and compassion. We are called to speak up with passion for truth and faith. When we give advice, care for the needy, support our communities, or lift prayers to Heaven, may we proclaim God’s peace over turmoil, His victory over defeat, and His compassion over hate. Ask the Holy Spirit to empower your voice today.

Father, give us strong voices to speak Your truth over the lies the world teaches. In Jesus’ name, amen.

The Hand of God

Because the gracious hand of my God was on me [Nehemiah], the king granted my requests (Nehemiah 2:8).

Scripture: Nehemiah 2:1-10

Song: “Precious Lord, Take My Hand”

Ray stared at the eviction notice in his hand. His fledgling church would no longer be able to meet in the industrial building they'd been renting. Ray prayed for God's guidance. Shortly after this prayer, he received information about another empty building, ready for use. He called the landlord. “A church meeting in my building? Wonderful!” the landlord exclaimed. Ray's congregation, after moving to the new location, praised God for His provision.

Nehemiah was a politician and a builder by trade. He was not a prophet or priest, yet he remained connected with God in prayer. He recognized God's hand at work as he traveled back to Jerusalem, gathered a team to rebuild Jerusalem's wall, and battled the opposition to his project.

God's hand protects, provides, guides, and comforts. No matter what vocation we are in—pastor, teacher, plumber, farmer—He works on our behalf when we follow His lead. He provides our financial needs. He paves the way to new job opportunities. He nudges a friend to call us when we are despondent. Do we notice His hand in our lives? Are we acknowledging His work of orchestration? He is creating a beautiful tapestry of our lives. Reflect on your personal history. Thank God for His mighty deeds. Whether the immediate situation is triumph or not-yet-complete, His hand remains on us.

Father, thank You for perfecting Your plan in our lives. Give us Your vision as we navigate our lives today. In Jesus' name, amen.

Rebuilding in Triumph

“Let us rebuild the wall of Jerusalem, and we will no longer be in disgrace” (Nehemiah 2:17).

Scripture: Nehemiah 2:11-20

Song: “Out of Ashes”

Thomas ignored the phone call from another debt collector. Since graduating from college, his life had dipped low. He slept on friends' couches. He didn't have a car. He couldn't pay bills. He decided to fast and pray, asking God for a breakthrough. God answered with loving friends who aided him. They helped him find a good job. Thomas paid off his debt and got a car. Thankful for God's provision, Thomas rebuilt his life with hope.

Nehemiah arrived in Jerusalem with a purposeful heart and a clear vision. God had called him to rebuild the wall as a testimony of God's faithfulness to Israel. Undeterred by critical voices, Nehemiah rallied a team to complete the task. They restored what sin had destroyed.

Even as Christ followers, we will experience failure, loss, sickness, and disappointment. Trials and sin leave an aftermath of devastation and destruction. At the lowest of times, though, God is there. Around us He offers support. Through us He receives glory. Although we might see only the rubble of past mistakes, the ruins of grief, or the ashes of loss, by His power we move forward. When we are insufficient, He suffices. When we are faithless, He is faithful. Lean on His everlasting arms. You are not alone. God can rebuild you. Triumphant, you can rise.

Father, You are good. Thank You that You rebuild us with love and grace and power. In Jesus' name, amen.