

INTRODUCTION:

Several years ago, recently after graduating college. I moved into a house with a couple of friends. One of the first “big boy” purchases I made was this olive green sleeper sofa. A couple of months after we placed the order the couch finally arrived and to save a few hundred dollars, my friends and I decided that rather than getting the white glove delivery and having them put it together, we would do it ourselves.

Once we got the box inside the house, which was an adventure all its own. We found several pieces, like 50 pieces. There was one set of instructions for connecting the base, another set for the outer part of the couch, another for connecting the sections of the couch together. We knew we were in for a long day. So, we began step by step putting the couch together. Our problems began when we chose to just look at the pictures rather than reading the instructions. We told ourselves, “We just got college degrees, this seems simple enough.”

About an hour later we got to the last picture of the last instruction booklet to find that holes for the screws were not lining up. We had messed up the direction of the support beams from the very first set of instructions—and it reminded us how quickly pride can show up when we refuse to follow the instructions.

We spent another half hour taking everything apart before then spending the same amount of time putting it back together, but this time we used the instructions . By the end of the day, we had a couch for our living area, but only after we stopped our ways and began looking at the instruction manual.

In Nehemiah 8, the Law is opened, they learn what obedience actually looks like. ***They had realized they’d been looking at the pictures in the manual, but not reading the instructions.*** In obedience to the word, they entered into a time of celebration and feasting. But they never stopped to deal with the conviction they had felt. Now that the party is over, they can see that all the ways that they had been living were wrong.

Nehemiah 8 gives them conviction; Nehemiah 9 is where their conviction turns into a posture of the heart.

In Nehemiah 9, the feast is over. The party supplies go up. Now the Israelites have to face what the Word of God has exposed.

So, what do they do? Let’s look at **v1-3 [Slide]:**

“On the twenty-fourth day of this month the Israelites assembled; they were fasting, wearing sackcloth, and had put dust on their heads. ² Those of Israelite descent separated themselves from all foreigners, and they stood and confessed their sins and the iniquities of their ancestors. ³ While they stood in their places, they read from the book of the law of the LORD their God for a fourth of the day and spent another fourth of the day in confession and worship of the LORD their God.”

There are three things to notice about their posture before we ever get to their prayer:

1. **The Israelites are mourning.** Their dress code is (i) basically Pigpen from Charlie Brown: sackcloth and dirt required, stink lines optional. But this wasn't for attention. Their outward life matched what was happening inside. This was real repentance, not performance. They were grieving their sin and they wanted their community to know it.
2. **They are separating themselves from foreigners.** They separate for confession, as Israel recommits to God. So, while there might be foreigners who have begun to dwell alongside and identify with the Israelites in their worship of God, they're pulling away as descendants of Abraham to enter into mourning and confession.
3. **Continuing from Nehemiah 8, teaching from the Word is being used as the foundation for their confession.** Like we discussed last week, Israel is rediscovering the Law of the Lord through the public reading of the word. They are relearning what it looks like to obey God, and it is heavily influencing what it looks as the Israelites begin to worship God through the mourning of their sin.

Pictures and Instructions: How Conviction Becomes Confession and Commitment [Title Slide]

From that posture, the Levites stand up and lead the people into a prayer. In this prayer, they will recount the entirety of the OT in about 30 verses.

Today we're walking through the four movements in the Levite's prayer: God's character → our ownership → God's mercy → renewed commitment.

As we do this, we'll see that Renewal begins when God's people confess honestly, depend humbly, and recommit fully.

TRANSITION: *In Nehemiah 9, Confession begins by fully understanding God's Character.*

POINT 1: Confession begins when we see God clearly. [Slide]

In v5b-6 the Levites begin the confession by remembering God as Creator **[Slide]**:

"Blessed be your glorious name, and may it be exalted above all blessing and praise.
⁶You, LORD, are the only God. You created the heavens, the highest heavens with all their stars, the earth and all that is on it, the seas and all that is in them. You give life to all of them, and all the stars of heaven worship you."

The Levites begin by going all the way back to Genesis 1. They begin by looking at God as our Creator.

They recognize that God has the highest authority. He is distinctly set apart. There is no ruler, politician, scientific advancement, form of technology, declaration or constitution, or anything else that holds the same level of authority as God.

No earthly authority competes with him.

Next, they remember God as a Promise Keeper.

In Nehemiah 9, they talk about God's Covenant to Abraham. **Look at v7-8 with me [Slide]:**

"⁷ You, the LORD, are the God who chose Abram and brought him out of Ur of the Chaldeans, and changed his name to Abraham. ⁸ You found his heart faithful in your sight, and made a covenant with him to give the land of the Canaanites, Hethites, Amorites, Perizzites, Jebusites, and Girgashites—to give it to his descendants. You have fulfilled your promise, for you are righteous."

The Levites go all the way back to Genesis 15 and recount the promise God made to Abraham, **Genesis 15v12,17-21 [Slide]**:

"¹² As the sun was setting, a deep sleep came over Abram, and suddenly great terror and darkness descended on him."

“¹⁷ When the sun had set and it was dark, a smoking fire pot and a flaming torch appeared and passed between the divided animals. ¹⁸ On that day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying, “I give this land to your offspring, from the Brook of Egypt to the great river, the Euphrates River: ¹⁹ the land of the Kenites, Kenizzites, Kadmonites, ²⁰ Hethites, Perizzites, Rephaim, ²¹ Amorites, Canaanites, Girgashites, and Jebusites.””

Notice what happens here, God is the only party that passes between the offering. He walks through the animals by Himself. Abraham is fast asleep, and while he slept God fully takes on the weight of the Covenant.

Think of it like “Co-Signing”: It’s like someone signing their name to a debt they did not owe and saying, ‘If this goes wrong, I’ll pay the cost.’ Genesis 15 shows God carrying the weight of the covenant himself.

Nehemiah 9 is a recognition from the Levites that God HAD kept his promise, but they had not.

In Neh 9v16-17a, the Israelites recognize their own disobedience [Slide]:

“But our ancestors acted arrogantly; they became stiff-necked and did not listen to your commands.¹⁷ They refused to listen and did not remember your wonders you performed among them. They became stiff-necked and appointed a leader to return to their slavery in Egypt.”

They forgot God’s character—his rescue, guidance, provision, and his Word that shaped their life.

Why? ***Because they couldn’t see God clearly, they were too focused on their control.***

If we’re not careful, we start acting like we’re wiser than God. We appoint ourselves rulers of our own lives and we seek the same chains God has freed us from.

If we want to experience freedom from our suffering, we must learn to say, “God you are right, and I am not.”

Sometimes we begin to ask why God won’t change what hurts, why he won’t remove the problem, heal the body, fix the marriage, end the anxiety, or break the addiction.

We embrace the idea that God hasn't kept his end of a deal. We say, "My suffering means you are unrighteous." Our sense of control says, "I am righteous and God is not."

There is nothing wrong with bringing our 'why' questions to God. The Psalms do that all the time. But over time, if we are not careful, our pain can begin to accuse God. We can start to believe that our suffering proves God has failed us.

But the Levites take a completely different approach. In Nehemiah 9, they recognize they are wrong. **V17b-21 [Slide]:**

"But you are a forgiving God, gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in faithful love, and you did not abandon them. ¹⁸ Even after they had cast an image of a calf for themselves and said, "This is your god who brought you out of Egypt," and they had committed terrible blasphemies, ¹⁹ you did not abandon them in the wilderness because of your great compassion. During the day the pillar of cloud never turned away from them, guiding them on their journey. And during the night the pillar of fire illuminated the way they should go. ²⁰ You sent your good Spirit to instruct them. You did not withhold your manna from their mouths, and you gave them water for their thirst. ²¹ You provided for them in the wilderness forty years, and they lacked nothing. Their clothes did not wear out, and their feet did not swell."

God's righteousness means that He is faithful even when we aren't. When the Israelites forgot God, when they turned to their power, God didn't abandon them, He forgave them and said I love you anyways and I will keep my promise to you.

God isn't scared of our wrongdoing, He's not afraid of our brokenness. He is kind to us despite all of it.

Confession is what happens when the lights come on. In the dark, the room looks clean. But when the light comes on, you see the dust, the clutter, the things you stepped over and ignored. God's righteousness is not a spotlight meant to humiliate us. It is a light that tells the truth so we can finally be made clean.

This is the Gospel, **Romans 5v8 [Slide]:**

"⁸ But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us."

God's love abounds despite our wrongdoing. Isn't that a beautiful gift? Even in the moments we try to take control of our own lives, His love for us still abounds.

We can look to the cross of Christ and hear our savior whispering, **Matthew 11v28**
[Slide]:

“Come to me, all of you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.”

TRANSITION: Confession can only begin when we come to the end of our authority and fully recognize God’s righteousness and our own unrighteousness.

Like the Israelites, when we fully understand we are wrong, then we can confess our sin honestly.

POINT 2: Confession requires us to own our sin honestly. [SLIDE]

One of the most natural responses to our sin is to fail to take accountability of it.

Most parents in the room can probably think pretty quickly of a time that they caught their kid in a lie.

One year as a kid, we had made this “Pink Salad” for Thanksgiving. This was like your classic strawberry jello mixture conglomerate, and I’ll tell you what as a kid, I was a sucker for this stuff. One night, I decided I couldn’t wait until our Thanksgiving feast to dig in. So, I walk into the kitchen and start going ham on some of the “Pink Salad.” After I had finished what I wanted. I closed the fridge and went back to my bedroom and slept like a rock. The next morning, my parents walk into the room and go, “Pate, did you uh, happen to get into the Pink Salad last night?” And I’m immediately like, “NO, I would never.” Little did I know, I had left my spoon in the sink, and a trail of Pink Salad on the floor throughout the house to my bedroom, and had also missed all of the Pink Salad smeared across my cheeks and mouth. I had been caught red-handed and pink-cheeked in my lie.

That is what sin does to us. We are standing there with evidence on our hands, evidence on the floor, evidence on our face, and still our first instinct is, ‘It wasn’t me.’

In Genesis 3, we find two of the ways we treat our sin.

For a quick refresher on Genesis 3, Adam and Eve have both just disobeyed God by eating of the fruit of the tree in the middle of the garden. They recognize their nakedness and immediately make clothes out of some leaves.

In Gen 3v8-9 Adam and Eve fail to take accountability for their sin, **(1) They Hide From God. [Slide]:**

“⁸ Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden at the time of the evening breeze, and they hid from the LORD God among the trees of the garden. ⁹ So the LORD God called out to the man and said to him, “Where are you?””

Like Adam and Eve, one of our responses to sin is to Hide it away. We convince ourselves that if our addictions are out of sight, then they're also out of mind. But in reality, sin kept in the dark is still sin. It's no less destructive just because it's hidden away.

Think about it this way: Let's say someone is getting ready to come over to your house, and you realize that you don't have time to put away all of your clutter and unfolded laundry. At this point you have two options: (1) Embrace your clutter and mess. You can allow your community to see it, and just maybe, even get a little bit of help as they arrive to take care of the clutter and clean it. -Or- (2) You can stuff that junk closet full of clutter and just pray that no one tries to open it.

Some of us don't confess sin; we just reorganize it. We move it into the closet, close the door, and hope no one opens it

But healing doesn't happen in the closet. Healing begins when we bring what is hidden into the light of God's grace and trusted community.

When we expose our sin to the light, when we leave the clutter out for others to see, we begin the process of taking accountability for our mess and we do it in a deep relationship with one another. Reminding one another of the gospel and the transcendent purpose we find in our renewal.

In Gen 3v11-12, the second way we fail to take accountability for our own sin **(2) We Blame-Shift It. [Slide]:**

“¹¹ Then he asked, “Who told you that you were naked? Did you eat from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from? ¹² The man replied, “The woman you gave to be with me—she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate.””

Adam's response is simple, “It's not my fault, it's hers.” Blame-shifting is like holding a mirror up to everyone else while refusing to look into it ourselves.

Our response to sin begins by saying it's someone else's fault:

"If they just had a better attitude I wouldn't of..."

"You just wouldn't understand everything I have going on at work and at home right now..."

"You don't know what it's look it to be in my shoes..."

"If you would've done xyz, then I wouldn't of..."

All of these statements undercut our responsibility in our sin. When we focus on someone else's sin instead of our own, we begin to miss the mercy, love, and renewal that God has offered us.

Our third option is to Repent of our sin. When we repent of our sin, we take full responsibility for our wrong doing. We stop focusing on how others perceive us and begin focusing on taking care of what is getting in between our relationship with God.

In Nehemiah 9, the Levites lead the people of Israel into repentance. By the end of their prayer, they are taking full responsibility for their sin. **v36-37 [Slide]:**

"Here we are today, slaves in the land you gave our ancestors so that they could enjoy its fruit and its goodness. Here we are—slaves in it! ³⁷ Its abundant harvest goes to the kings you have set over us, because of our sins. They rule over our bodies and our livestock as they please. We are in great distress."

By the end of their prayer, they stop self-justifying and start owning the reality of their sin.

TRANSITION: *Renewal begins when we stop hiding, stop blaming, and honestly bring the truth into the light.*

Once our sin is in the light, we can depend humbly on God's mercy.

POINT 3: Confession leads us to depend humbly on God's mercy [Slide]

If we ever truly want to see change in our lives, we have to come to the end of ourselves. That means, we're gonna have to be humble, to submit ourselves to God's authority, and also have complete dependence on God's Mercy.

In Nehemiah 9, The Israelites arrive at their confession and repentance when they realize there is nothing they can do to save themselves. Through humility they declare, God, we need you to save us.

In Nehemiah 9v32-37, the Israelites confess their sin. **[Slide]:**

“³² So now, our God—the great, mighty, and awe-inspiring God who keeps his gracious covenant— do not view lightly all the hardships that have afflicted us, our kings and leaders, our priests and prophets, our ancestors and all your people, from the days of the Assyrian kings until today. ³³ You are righteous concerning all that has happened to us, because you have acted faithfully, while we have acted wickedly. ³⁴ Our kings, leaders, priests, and ancestors did not obey your law or listen to your commands and warnings you gave them. ³⁵ When they were in their kingdom, with your abundant goodness that you gave them, and in the spacious and fertile land you set before them, they would not serve you or turn from their wicked ways. ³⁶ Here we are today, slaves in the land you gave our ancestors so that they could enjoy its fruit and its goodness. Here we are—slaves in it! ³⁷ Its abundant harvest goes to the kings you have set over us, because of our sins. They rule over our bodies and our livestock as they please. We are in great distress.”

The Israelites are confessing saying, “God time and time again, we have taken the matters of our lives into our own hands, we have rejected your love and care for us.” They were looking at the pictures and doing it their way rather than reading the instructions. Because of that. ***Instead of finding life, they found more brokenness.***

Take a moment and think of the story of the Prodigal Son with me. The younger son has chosen to play God by having total control over his own life. He believes freedom means life without the father. But life without the father does not make him free. It makes him empty. He takes his inheritance and runs away to the big city. Where do his choices lead him, does he establish a successful business, does he purchase land for his family, does he invest well into others? No! He wastes it away! His childlikeness and selfishness cause him to throw away his inheritance on luxuries in hope that they would bring him fulfillment. Rather than finding a transcendent purpose for his life, he ends up eating alongside pigs.

The younger son hits rock bottom, realizes that his ways would only lead him into further destruction and is given a choice: Go home and seek the Father’s mercy -or- continue in his own ways.

When he returns home, what does his Father do? He runs to his son, showers him in blessings and grace, and throws a party.

Every parent has watched a child refuse help while saying, 'I do it myself.' Shoes on the wrong feet, shirt inside out, total frustration — but they still don't want help. Just like the Prodigal Son, this can be our posture towards God.

Humility begins when we stop pretending we can do it ourselves and start asking God for his help.

Ian Morgan Cron, author of *The Fix* says it this way [Slide]:

"Grace goes into action when we finally give up trying to save ourselves, when we turn our will and our life over to the care of God as we understand him and let the current of Divine Love carry us...when you finally muster the courage to say to yourself, *I give up; I can't do it*, you're given the power to do it. That's called transformation!"

That's the language of humility, "*I give up; I can't do it.*"

Once we are fully submitted to his authority, then we can depend on his Mercy.

Paul in his letter to Titus says, Titus 3v5 [Slide]:

"⁴ But when the kindness of God our Savior and his love for mankind appeared,⁵ he saved us—not by works of righteousness that we had done, but according to his mercy—through the washing of regeneration and renewal by the Holy Spirit. ⁶ He poured out his Spirit on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior ⁷ so that, having been justified by his grace, we may become heirs with the hope of eternal life."

What are the two things necessary for our transformation according to Paul: (1) submission to His authority and (2) Dependence on God's mercy.

"Not by works we had done but according to his mercy."

If you want to experience the renewal a life in Christ offers, then you will need to submit yourself to God's authority and depend on God's mercy. That's when Renewal Happens.

The Israelites recognized this truth, and as a nation they confessed their sin and trusted in God to deliver them from their chains so they could experience freedom and life.

TRANSITION: *Lastly, The Israelites understood that confession must end with renewed commitment to God.*

POINT 4: Confession bears fruit in renewed commitment. [Slide]

This isn't the first time that Israel found themselves asking God to save them. They had done it plenty of times before.

In Nehemiah 9v26-31, Israel Cycle of Sin takes shape [Slide]:

"²⁶ But they were disobedient and rebelled against you. They flung your law behind their backs and killed your prophets who warned them in order to turn them back to you. They committed terrible blasphemies. ²⁷ So you handed them over to their enemies, who oppressed them. In their time of distress, they cried out to you, and you heard from heaven. In your abundant compassion you gave them deliverers, who rescued them from the power of their enemies. ²⁸ But as soon as they had relief, they again did what was evil in your sight. So you abandoned them to the power of their enemies, who dominated them. When they cried out to you again, you heard from heaven and rescued them many times in your compassion. ²⁹ You warned them to turn back to your law, but they acted arrogantly and would not obey your commands. They sinned against your ordinances, which a person will live by if he does them. They stubbornly resisted, stiffened their necks, and would not obey.³⁰ You were patient with them for many years, and your Spirit warned them through your prophets, but they would not listen. Therefore, you handed them over to the surrounding peoples.³¹ However, in your abundant compassion, you did not destroy them or abandon them, for you are a gracious and compassionate God."

Israel had a cycle they would fall into:

1. **Sin:** They would be disobedient to the Law and dishonor God. They would fracture their relationship with the Lord by rejecting the invitation to experience life and love in Him.
2. **War as Judgement:** In the same way that the Lord turned the Promised Land over to the Israelites through conquest, he would allow them to return to captivity.
3. **Repentance:** The nation of Israel would cry out for the Lord to save them.
4. **Deliverance:** The Lord would raise up a deliverer (A judge, or a prophet) to lead the people of Israel out of their captivity and back into the life the Lord had set aside for them.

This was the cycle for the Israelites through the OT. Sin → judgment → repentance → deliverance. Again and again. No matter how hard they tried, they would end up right back in the thick of their disobedience, waiting for the Lord to show them grace again.

Can you see yourself in the people of Israel, in their cycle of sin?

Many of us treat God the same without even realizing it. We get trapped in this cycle of Sin → judgment → repentance → deliverance. Our relationship with God becomes nothing more than a New Years' Resolution.

Every New Year, we commit to a New Goal. Learn a new skill, hit a health goal, pay off all your debt. You start strong, hit some resistance, and by February, you've dropped your goals.

It's one thing to be motivated at the beginning of the year, but it's completely different to make a commitment that lasts. Motivation says, 'I should get healthy.' Commitment signs up, changes the schedule, gets accountability, and shows up when the feeling is gone.

In Nehemiah, the Israelites don't make a resolution, they make a commitment. Their confession doesn't end by focusing on their desire for deliverance, it ends with them recommitting themselves to the Lord. **Nehemiah 9v38 says [Slide]:**

"In view of all this, we are making a binding commitment in writing on a sealed document containing the names of our leaders, Levites, and priests."

A vow is more than an emotional moment. On a wedding day, a couple doesn't stand at the altar and say, 'I feel strongly about this today.' They make promises for the days when feelings are high and for the days when feelings are low.

Israel is doing something similar. They are not just having a powerful worship moment; they are making a commitment. They are making the choice to follow God despite the suffering and hardship they will face.

Going back to Paul's letter to Titus, immediately following the idea of Transformation through Submission to God's Authority and Dependence on God's Mercy he says this, **Titus 3v8 [Slide]:**

"⁸This saying is trustworthy. I want you to insist on these things, so that those who have believed God might be careful to devote themselves to good works. These are good and profitable for everyone."

Notice what Paul says our response to Transformation should be...not, a return to our own authority or control, not spiritual laziness, but rather a life dedicated to serving others.

Renewal can only happen in our communities when it leads to commitment in us.

Nehemiah begins with one thing: Personal Revival. **Look at Nehemiah 1v4 [Slide]:**

“⁴ When I heard these words, I sat down and wept. I mourned for a number of days, fasting and praying before the God of the heavens.”

What God has brought about in the nation of Israel, God began in one man's heart, Nehemiah. The personal renewal he experienced led to renewal among the nation because Nehemiah committed himself to the Lord.

Nehemiah's commitment to God led to the Nation's hunger for redemption. They wanted renewal and they knew through Nehemiah's life, the only place they would find it is through commitment to God. Not just as a church but from individual members of the body committing themselves to living like Christ.

What's true for the Israelites is also true for us. ***If we want revival in our lives, our church, our schools, our workplaces, and our world, confession is only the beginning. We must commit to becoming more like Jesus and making Him known.***

Revival begins when ordinary people confess their sin, follow Jesus, and live as people who bring His grace into the world. Unafraid. Overflowing. Sent.

THURSDAY NIGHT: Tonight, we're going to take a moment to partake in the Lord's supper. When we do this, we do it as Jesus said to remember his body given for us and his blood poured out for us.

The Lord's Supper reminds us that confession does not lead us to condemnation; it leads us to Christ. We come to the table not because we have cleaned ourselves up, but because Jesus gave His body and blood for sinners in need of grace.

If you're not a christian, don't take this, but we do invite you to participate in the prayer time. Gather up and ask, what keeps me from trusting God and repenting from my sin?

We have tables [direct to table location]. Then you can return to your seat and gather in groups of 6 to 7 people and a Cv'nt Member will lead you in a time of prayer.

Following the Lord's supper...

BOTH: we'll have prayer counselors at the front of the room, and the altar will be open.

Confession and action happen best when we bring our sin from the dark and into the Light. Maybe today, the spirit has shown you ways you've been hiding or blame-shifting your sin. I would love to challenge you to come forward to pray with a prayer counselor at the altar. You do not have to confess everything to everyone, but healing begins when

you stop carrying sin alone. Today, that may mean coming to pray with someone you trust.

Maybe the Lord has brought to mind someone in your life that you know needs to repent of sin. Or maybe, you feel like the Lord is calling you to pray for our church to repent and experience flourishing. I would love to invite you to come forward in prayer as well.

Maybe, you're new to church or you've never taken a step towards following Jesus. If that's you, would you be willing to take a step toward God today by trusting in Jesus by confessing your sin for the first time with a prayer counselor or at the altar.

THURSDAY: I'll pray, we'll take the Lord's Supper, and then the band will lead us in worship as we respond in prayer.

SUNDAY: I'll pray, and then take 60 seconds to reflect before the band comes to lead us in worship.

PRAYER: God, I thank you for the invitation we have to enter into a relationship with you through the life, death, and resurrection power of Jesus. Would you reveal to us what we've been keeping from you and give us the courage to lay it at the foot of the cross today. In the name of Jesus I pray, Amen.