

How Do You Make A Family Mission Statement?

- [Narrator] Nehemiah 10, "On the seals are the names of Nehemiah the governor, "the son of Hacaliah, Zedekiah, Seraiah, Azariah, "Jeremiah, Pashhur, Amariah, Malchijah, "Hattush, Shebaniah, Malluch, "Harim, Meremoth, Obadiah, "Daniel, Ginnethon, Baruch, Meshullam, Abijah, Mijamin, "Maaziah, Bilgai and Shemaiah, "these are the priests. "And The Levites: "Jeshua son of Azaniah, "Binnui of the sons of Henadad, "Kadmiel, "and their brothers, Shebaniah, Hodiah, Kelita, "Pelaiah, Hanan, Mica, "Rehob, Hashabiah, Zaccur, "Sherebiah, Shebaniah, Hodiah, "Bani, Beninu. "The chiefs of the people: "Parosh, Pahath-Moab, "Elam, Zattu, Bani, "Bunni, Azgad, Bebai, "Adonijah, Bigvai, Adin, "Ater, Hezekiah, Azzur, "Hodiah, Hashum, Bezai, "Hariph, Anathoth, Nebai, "Magpiash, Meshullam, Hezir, "Meshezabel, Zadok, Jaddua, "Pelatiah, Hanan, Anaiah, "Hoshea, Hananiah, Hasshub, "Hallohesh, Pilha, Shobek, "Rehum, Hashabnah, Maaseiah, "Ahiah, Hanan, Anan, "Malluch, Harim, Baanah. "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 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. "We will not give our daughters to the peoples of the land "or take their daughters for our sons. "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. "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. "We, the priests, the Levites, and the people, "have likewise cast lots for the wood offering, "to bring it into the house of our God, "according to our father's houses, "at times appointed year by year, "to burn on the altar of the Lord our God, "as it is written in the law. "We obligate ourselves to bring "the firstfruits of our ground "and the firstfruits of all fruits 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, "and to bring to the Levites the tithes from our ground, "for where is the Levites who collect the tithes "in all our towns where we labor. "And the priests, the sons 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."

- All right guys, we're in Nehemiah 10 and we're looking at one of the most significant moments in the history of God's people. And how many of you are sick, amen? Are you like me? I am not

feeling great. I'll just tell you right up front. If you wanted a high-energy sermon, come back another time. And for those of you who don't like it when I yell, this sermon is going to be your favorite, I can't yell. My voice is gone. I am not feeling the best. And if I start sweating like Mike Tyson in a spelling bee, just pray for me. I'm just not feeling the best. So we're in Nehemiah 10. The question is how do you make a family mission statement? And whether it's personal or collective, the question is how do you change things? How do you make change in your life? How does change happen in culture? And there's basically two ways to approach this. One is top-down, this is where we vote for a politician or a law, someone is put in a position of authority and they are demanding and commanding top-down. Usually, that only has some degree of success. Because if you don't want to, you're going to find a way to disobey the authority or disregard the law. The way God tends to work is inside out, meaning God changes who we are and that changes how we live. If you're new, I have really good news for you. Jesus Christ is God. He lived without any sin. He died on a cross, in our place, for our sins. Three days later, He rose from the dead. He ascended into heaven. Today, He's alive and well. He's hearing people's prayers, He's changing their lives, and He is doing wonderful things in the world. And the way that this works is we give Jesus our sin and then He gives us a brand new life. And what happens when you become a Christian is something that most Christians don't really understand. And that is that you don't just get forgiven, you get changed. And a Christian is not perfect, but they are new, and they're beginning a process that ends, when God is done with us, in perfection. And so, for me, here's my story of meeting Jesus. At 19, God saved me and I became a Christian. All of a sudden, I really wanted to study the Bible. I had never had that desire in my entire life, never even thought about thinking about it. I had never even considered it. All of a sudden I really wanted to go to a good Bible-teaching church. And I wanted to meet, especially, older men whose wives were smiling, and kids would hug them, and try and figure out how to make that miracle happen one day in my own life. And I just, all of a sudden, I started giving money to the church. Things I had never even thought of. And then the band started playing, and eventually I started singing. And it took a while, but eventually my hands got unleashed. And so, you know, everything in its time. But the point is this, when you become a Christian, it's not top-down God making you do things you don't want to do. It's inside out. God gives you a new heart, the Bible says, so you feel differently. He gives you a new mind, so you think differently. He gives you new desires. And He gives you the new power of the Holy Spirit. And so the way we like to say it is, being a Christian is not what we have to do, it's what we get to do because it's what we want to do. In the same way, you know, I go on dates with my wife because I want to. I eat ice cream because I want to. I take naps because I want to. And nobody has to give me a lot of rules to make those things happen. I just want to. And so what happens in Nehemiah 10, the people meet God and their desires change. And it's not top-down rules, and laws, and fear, and pressure, it's inside out. God made some changes in here and that means things are going to change out there. And so what we're seeing is, for 141 years, generation after generation of these families who were Jewish and claimed to be believers, they had lip service but not lifestyle. They were what Jesus would call lukewarm. They'd go to church maybe on the holidays, they'd give maybe a tiny modicum of their income if they felt bad. They would say a prayer if they were in a desperate place. But other than that, God really wasn't at the center of their life. And then everything's going to change here in chapter 10 and it's going to

start with the men. And so we just read that long list of names, and thank you for staying awake. But that long list of names, imagine if that was your dad or your grandpa, you're like, "They met Jesus. They publicly repented to their sin. They came home and apologized for all the things they've done wrong. And they wanted us to pray for them because they wanted to do better and be better men." How many of you that would be your favorite chapter in the whole Bible? That'd be your- You'd like, "There's my dad, there's my grandpa, there's our family." That's what's happening. These men get together and they are going to form a collective mission statement saying, "Here's how, as God's men, we're going to do life. Here's how we're going to handle our families, and our finances, and our freedoms, and our faith. And we're doing so openly and publicly together to hold each other accountable." This isn't from the top down, this is from the inside out. These are people with new desires. So let me hit this real quick. I'll talk about the men. Chapter 10:1-27 lists all of the men who were the senior leaders and the most prominent families that are agreeing to these changes. And imagine, just imagine your husband came home and he said, "I went to church and God really showed me some things that are wrong with my life, and I'm going to make some changes, and you're going to get a different husband, and I'm now going to pray with you, and we're going to be in God's word, and we're going to go to church, and I'm going to be active with the kids." How many of you ladies, that'd be the best day? Or the dad came home and told the kids, "Hey, you know what? I've done some things wrong. I really need your forgiveness. God has really broken my heart, and dad is activated so you're going to have a new dad going forward." That's what's happening here with the men. And their mission is a mission statement. They're agreeing to the things that they're going to prioritize. Imagine a nation that didn't have founding documents. Imagine a sports league that didn't have a rule book. Well, if your life doesn't have a mission statement, how do you make decisions? How do you determine priorities? How do you set your budget? In addition, they are deciding that they are going to be an ostracized minority subculture. This is really important. They know that they're going to do life counterculturally, which means differently than the majority of people. They're going to be an ostracized, marginalized subculture. You need to know, in our culture, that's where Bible-believing Christians are. We are not the majority. We just confirmed that with an election. We are not the majority. The majority of the culture does not value the things that God's people value. The majority of the culture does not believe the things that the Bible says. And so, ultimately, what they are determining is, "We can't change how everyone else lives, but we can take responsibility for how we live as God's people. We will be a minority group, not a majority group. We will be a subculture, not the primary culture, and we will be rejected and ostracized." And what they're doing here, they are intentionally connecting all aspects of their life to the higher purpose of God. There was a study that came out this week from the School of Public Health. It got a little traction in the media. And here's what they- It wasn't a Christian study, but here's what they determined. People who have a higher purpose to their life live stronger and longer lives. They're more resilient and they're less likely to die. If you just believe in some higher purpose, you actually reduce your mortality rate by 21%. Because, ultimately, at the end of the day, something in us says, "I need to live for someone or something bigger than myself." Now God is the ultimate thing to connect all of your life to. Why am I going to work? Well, because this is part of my relationship with God. Why am I going to be nice to my spouse? Well, because God forgives and loves me. Why am I going to

raise my kids? Well, because they're part of the legacy to send people into the future who know and serve and love the Lord. All of a sudden, everything in life, when it's connected to a higher purpose, what seems rather meaningless, becomes rather meaningful. That's what we see. So here's what I want you to do. We're going to look at seven things that they commit themselves to. And I want you to ask yourself, which of these might be a strength for me, which might be a weakness? If I was to make a mission statement for myself or my family, what would be the things that we would need to make some adjustments on? If you don't get them all, you can grab it on the way out. There's a free study guide. Or at realfaith.com, just go into the store, it's there for free as an ebook. If you want to get these, you're welcome to. But here's the first thing they say, "We will obey the scripture." Nehemiah 10:29 says, "We enter into a curse and an oath "to walk in God's law that was given to Moses "and to observe and do "all the commandments of the Lord, our Lord, "and His rules and statutes." First thing they say is, "We're going to do what God's word says." That's the first thing. And now the reason they need to say this is for a long time that's not what they were doing. You can say you're a believer, you might even be a believer, but are you a Bible-believing, Bible-studying, Bible-following believer? And these people decide, "We need to get back to the Bible." And what they're saying here is this, that we're all going to come under God's word together. Our culture talks a lot about unity and we need to have less division in our culture and we need people to get along. The key to unity is being under the same authority. You can't have unity unless you're under the same authority. Now when God's people come under the authority of God's word, now we can have unity under God's authority. So what you're seeing is a lot of people and families here are deciding we're going to do life differently and we're going to do it together. We're going to come under the authority of God's word. And what they're going to talk about is their schedule, and their budgets, and their dating relationships, for those who were single. And what they're obliterating is what we would have in our culture, this false dichotomy or distinction between sacred and secular. Our culture wrongly thinks, and oftentimes religious culture wrongly thinks, that there are things that are sacred and secular. So church is sacred, work is secular. And the truth is, Jesus Christ is Lord over what?

- All.

- All. So Jesus' throne right now, just so you know, is over everyone and it's over everything. And so when we say Jesus is Lord, that means my budget is under Jesus. My schedule is under Jesus. My marriage is under Jesus. My kids are under Jesus. My hobbies are under Jesus. Everything is under the lordship of Jesus. And so what they're realizing here, it's not that Jesus is part of my life, it's that Jesus is over all of my life. Now let me say this about the Bible. And this is a good time of year to ask yourself, "In the past year, how was my Bible reading and Bible study? "Next year, what would it look like "to make some improvements?" And right now is the time to start to make those plans. I studied this a while ago and shared it with you, but there was a group called Back to the Bible, they took a survey a few years ago. 400,000 people they surveyed, so massive data study. And they found something rather surprising that they were not anticipating. And what they found was people who read the Bible, study the Bible, one, two, or three days a week, they have negligible, minimal change in their life. But after day four,

everything changes. Those who read the Bible, they get into the word of God and they get the word of God into them four or more days a week, here's what they found. They're 407% more likely to memorize scripture. They're 228% more likely to share their faith with others. They're 59% less likely to view pornography. And they're 30%, rather, less likely to struggle with loneliness. Here's what they found. When God's word becomes the majority of your week, your week changes. And this is true. I love that I get to teach you the Bible. I really appreciate it. But if this is the only day of the week that your Bible is open, I want more for you. My hope as a Bible teacher is to get you activated and interested. Maybe even agitated and frustrated, if it gets you in the Bible, I'm fine with that too. But I like it when people are like, "There's more in there than I thought. "I gotta figure this out. "I want to study this." Great, praise God. And some of us are just studious. I'm a guy who, I got saved in college, I don't think there's been a day since I was saved at 19, I'm 52, I don't think there's been a day I've not read the Bible, my whole adult life. And I don't have a plan. I'm not highly structured about it. I just do. I like it. I also probably haven't missed a meal. And I, you know, and it's not intentional. It just seems to happen every day. And so, but some of you, you need more of a plan. And so I would encourage you, there's lots of good Bible reading plans, but this is the perfect time of year to pick a Bible reading plan and to get a little momentum started into the new year. And if you want you can go to YouVersion. It's this great bible app you can download for free. And under, I think, my name, my daughter actually put it together, but there's a full, one-year Bible reading plan. We'll take you day by day through the Bible during the course of an entire year. I filmed a few videos. You'll go through the Old and the New Testament. But I'd love to just help you go through the Bible a little bit every single day for the next year. So the first thing they say is, "We will obey the scriptures." Number two, the men say, "We will lead our families." And so Nehemiah 10:1-29, it's a list of all of these men who are raising their hands saying, "My family is my responsibility." And they say quote, here's what it says. They, quote, "join with their brothers." And the first 27 verses of this chapter, as we just read, are the list of names. And these are all the heads of households who are saying, "Our family is going to start to live differently. "We have not had God as a priority, "but that's changing today." And here's the big idea. These men are publicly choosing to take the responsibility to lovingly, humbly lead their families. And if the husband does not lead, here's what happens. You've got a few options if the husband doesn't lead. Number one, you've got a battle, okay? Now don't raise your hand, but how many of you, you grew up in a home where mom and dad were always in a battle for who was going to be the leader? So dad was home and then he'd go to work and mom would talk trash about dad, trying to undermine him. Then dad would come home and try and lead, but then mom would criticize him. And some of you grew up in those environments where it was just a battle all the time. There wasn't unity, there was conflict. Number two, if the husband does not lovingly lead the home, then the other option is the strongest personality dominates and becomes the defacto leader. This can even be a child. You can have a headstrong, really stubborn, emotional child that wants to be the head of the household. Amen? Any parents seen these children? I mean not your children. Your children are filled with the spirit. They're in the back right now. They're memorized in Lamentations, they're praying for the nations, they're fasting, they're doing great. But sometimes other people's kids, they will wear you out, man, they will give you a run. And sometimes what happens is the parents, rather than leading, or the

father and husband, rather than leading, they surrender to the strongest personality. All of a sudden it's like, "Well, we can't go out to dinner because they threw a fit. "We can't go to church because they had a nuclear meltdown." And so what happens then is whoever is the strongest personality in the family becomes the defacto leader and they make the decisions. Or, number three, if dad doesn't lead, everyone works around the least healthy member of the family. Whoever's the most broken, addicted, traumatized, or confused, we work around them. Rather than getting them the help that they need and leading them into a better future, we all work around them. And if you're a husband and a father, if your wife's got an addiction, or trauma, or a brokenness, or you have a child that's not doing well, you've gotta get them help and healing. And you need to lead the family and not surrender the leadership of the family to the least healthy, oftentimes most emotional and dramatic person in the family. Just because you can cry doesn't mean you're in charge. In addition, the other option, number four, is if the husband and father doesn't lead, eventually Satan does. We see this in Genesis 3 with Adam and Eve, our first parents. Adam decides, "You know what, I'm not going to lead." So he just stands by, sits by quietly, idly, says and does nothing. Satan shows up and says, "Well, if you need a leader, "I'm happy to take over." And he does. So the husband and wife sin against God. They separate from one another. Next thing you know, by chapter four, they have two sons and one murders the other. Satan has taken over the family. So these men are being activated. They're realizing, "God appointed me to lovingly, humbly lead my family." And I love the fact that the men are doing this together and publicly because it means that they're creating fraternity. It's guys saying, "We're in this together. "Yeah, other guys are different. "They don't know the Lord. "But we do. "Other guys don't believe the Bible, but we do. "Other guys don't want to love their wife "as Christ loves the church, "but that's what we're shooting for. "Other men think that their children are a burden. "We don't, we think that our children are a blessing." And so what they're doing, they're creating this collegiality, this community, this fraternity of like-minded men. At our ministry, Real Men, which just concluded and it'll start up again in January, we say, "We build men up to bless women and children." That's exactly the heart of Nehemiah 10. The men are saying, "We are going to build one another up "to bless the women and the children." Number three, they say, "We will worship our God." All of Nehemiah 10 is them committing themselves to the worship of God. And at the most simplest sense, the worship of God means everything in your life is connected to the higher purpose of God. So you worship at work, and you worship at home, and you worship at church. We're always worshiping. Who are you living for? What's your purpose? What's your value? What's your highest allegiance? What's your greatest loyalty? And so what they're saying is, "We're going to give our lives to worship God." This includes singing, but it's more than that. It's not less than singing, but it is more than singing. And what we see is that they are going to honor leaders in the church. We've already seen that they honor Bible teaching. You need to know that right now you are worshiping God by listening to the teaching of God's word. It's an act of humility and submission to the word of God. And so they have already had, we looked at it a few chapters ago, the first sermon that Ezra, the Bible teacher taught, do you remember, if you were here, how long it was? Six hours. Man, I am praying for one of those. That sounds amazing. Can't do it today. Not feeling the best. But I'm telling you, man, I'm going to get there. Six hour sermon, and then they want to learn more Bible, so they had a full week, they took time off of school and work to go to a Bible conference. They want to

learn the Bible. So they're learning the Bible as part of their worship. They honor and they respect the church staff, the priests and the Levites. This would be like pastors and ministry leaders today are mentioned in this chapter. It also mentions the worship leaders in this chapter, or the singers. So when the Bible is taught, they're engaged. And when the band comes out, they're engaged. And, again, this would be for all of the men, women, and children. But this is first and foremost for the men. Let me tell you, men, wonderful things happen when men worship God, I'll tell you this as well. The intimacy between you and your wife is actually deeper at the spiritual level than it is at the physical. This is why couples that sleep together won't pray together. It's too intimate. There is something profound when a wife and kids see a man humbly surrendering to, and that's what happens when we raise our hands, we're surrendering. Saying, "I am under authority." And it's like a son reaching up to a father looking for an embrace and for help. When men worship God, women and children are blessed by that. One of my favorite things is I love to hold Grace's hand and sing in worship. It's one of my favorite things. I really am glad for the band and the speakers so you can't hear me. I don't sing well, but I sing loud. Okay? And what I love is when Grace and I are together and we're holding hands and we're worshipping, I just feel like we're both inviting the Holy Spirit to be in the middle of our relationship in our marriage. And I want the worship of God to be the thing that causes us and compels us to remain together. I recently got a really sweet note card from a woman in the church and she was noting how she sees an unusually high number of men worshipping with their wives, holding them, kissing them, holding their hands while they sing, taking communion together, praying over their wives. And she sent a very sweet note and she said, "Just amazing to see that." Yeah, that the world would see strong men humbly worshipping their God with their wife in an affectionate, appropriate, safe way. And that's what these men are committing to do. And I'm guessing some of these wives have been praying for this for a very long time, and all of a sudden they're activated. They also honor for worship, what we would call the Life Group leaders, these, they call them the gatekeepers. These are people doing ministry, getting together in their neighborhood. And so the men are committing, "We're going to be under the teaching of the Bible. "We're going to respect spiritual leadership. "We're going to sing in worship. "And we're going to get into small groups, "and we're going to pray, "and we're going to build relationships, "and we're going to do life together." If any of this sounds like our church, praise God. That's what we're trying to do. Sometimes people are like, "What's your vision?" I don't have a vision for the church. God does. It's His church. I'm not the senior senior pastor, Jesus Christ is. At the end of the day, it's Jesus' church. So we shouldn't come up with a mission or a vision. We should ask Him what it is. And if it's in the Bible, that's what it is. Here it's Bible teaching, it's worship, it's respect for leadership, and deep, profound relationship where the men are leading. And here's why this is so significant. These men for generations had not been active. It's much like in our own day. I don't know what the latest statistics are, post-Covid, the church went upside down, many closed, attendance is down and still trying to recover. But pre-Covid, 60% of church attenders were female. There were between 11 and 13 million more women than men in church. And it's a crisis. And historically, I can give you a practical reason why this is, at least in part, this sad reality. There were generations of young men that would go off to war, particularly, strong young men. So for example, in World War I and II, the deployment was high. What that means is the young strong men are gone. So who's left to attend church?

Older people, women, and children. This isn't evil or wrong, it's just the reality of war. So then the men are under strong leadership and they're building strong brotherhood and fraternity. And then they come back and they go to church. And while they were gone, church got remade for older people, and women, and children. The music and the songs are a little old and the decorations look like the women made the decisions. That's why most churches, let's just be honest, the average color of the carpet is mauve. Okay, mauve. And if you're a guy, you're like, "I like that." We're praying for you, right? You got some issues, brother. And I've been in churches where they've got, you look at the decor and you're like, "Wow, that's a lot of wallpaper with flowers." And there's a flower arrangement up front "and there's a lot of lace and doily." And I'm a grown man. "I feel very uncomfortable." And so what happens is the men go from this sort of military combat environment into this environment built by and for women and children. And the men are like, "Ah, I don't see the brotherhood. I don't see the strong masculine leadership "and the environment doesn't speak to me." So men stop going to church. Men stop going to church. So statistically, today, the least likely person to go to church is a young man in his twenties. If he did go, his mom drug him to church until he was 18. And then he disappeared. And then his wife, when he's in his thirties, got sick of him and drug him back. That's how he got there. Mom took him, wife took him. He didn't go there on his own. So if you're here and you're a young man, let me just tell you, you're a miracle, right? And there's a thousand women that would like to meet you, okay? But what we see here is that the men are getting activated. And the most significant thing that can happen to change a culture is men get spiritually activated. My favorite sociologist on faith, and fatherhood, and family is a man named Bradford Wilcox. He's at the University of Virginia. I've quoted him a lot. But he is the most renowned sociologist on marriage and family. And just to summarize, here's what he says. "The thing that changes men more than anything else "is Jesus Christ." I've seen men who are strong. The only thing that I've seen stronger than a man is the gospel of Jesus Christ. I've seen men who can change anything but only Jesus can change them. And so what happens, statistically, when a man meets Jesus, his rate of divorce goes down, marital satisfaction goes up, domestic violence goes down, warm intimacy goes up. Men who are in church and in the Word, they tend to be, statistically, the best husbands and the best fathers. They tend to reduce a lot of the cultural pains, problems, and perils that we have. And so I just want to honor the men and I want to thank the men in this church. There's some great men. I want to thank the men who join us online because they care. And we live in a world that beats men down. We want to be the people who build men up. And that's what's happening in Nehemiah 10. The men are getting activated. Number four, they say, "We will only marry believers." Here's what they say in Nehemiah 10:30. "We will not give our daughters to the peoples of the land "or take their daughters as our sons." What happens here is sometimes an unbelieving guy comes and says, "Hey, I'd like to get to know your daughter." No, if you don't know Jesus, you don't get to know her, right? Because if you're not following Jesus, I don't want her following you. And so what they say is, "No, we're only going to marry believers." And these aren't just people who believe in God. James says that demons believe in God. You gotta go higher than that. Do they love God? Do they follow God? Are they walking with God? Are they growing in relationship with God? And they say, "We're not going to allow our sons "to take unbelieving women as wives." So for you young men, I've said this for decades, "Yeah, she's hot, so is hell." Just, you know,

so, right? Just something to pray about. So, you know, and oftentimes guys are looking for a good time, not a good legacy. And I'll tell you this, gentlemen, there are two decisions that are the most important decisions in your whole life. Number one, who's your God? Number two, who's your wife? Those are the two most important decisions. Ladies, same is true for you. Who's your God? Who's your husband? Those two decisions will change your life for good or for bad. And so, ultimately, what we see statistically, again, back to Bradford Wilcox, lowest divorce rate to Bible-believing, church-attending, worshiping Christians, lowest divorce rate, highest marital-satisfaction rate. So you've all been lied to and told that Christians and non-Christians divorce at the same amount. They don't, it's just a lie. The highest divorce rate and the lowest marital-satisfaction rate are two people who have different religious commitments. Because if everything starts with God, if you disagree on God, you can't agree on anything else. And as hard as it is to be married, if you're both committed to different religions and gods, I'll say something controversial, one of you is bringing the Holy Spirit, the other is bringing a demon. That's going to be a weird date night. And wait until you add kids. For those of you who are single, let me tell you this. Raising kids isn't hard. It's impossible, okay? Okay, so it is. And if you and your spouse can't agree on what to do with them, you are going to have pain and they're going to have a divide and conquer strategy for the rest of your life. Grace and I have been faithfully married for 30 years, okay? She is here. I did not ask her this, so I'll just ask her now. If, and you can be honest, but not too honest. So if one of us wasn't a Christian, would we be married? "No," that was very quick. If we weren't Christians, would we have been able to raise the kids in agreement? "No." See, what happens is when we disagree, or as I should say, when Grace is wrong, what we do is- I'm just kidding. What we do is we go to the word of God, and we don't fight as much as we study. Like, okay, well what does God say? Because we believe that God has authority over both of us. And when we're going through something, we pray together and we invite God into the midst of it. And so for us, I couldn't understand Grace and she couldn't understand me without knowing Jesus. I mean Jesus is the most important person to both of us. And if I don't know Jesus, I can't understand Grace. And if Grace doesn't know Jesus, she can't understand me. And so, ultimately, what they're saying is we're not going to allow our children to make this catastrophic decision. We're going to be actively and intimately involved in that process. Number five, then they talk about their business. "We will conduct business ethically." Nehemiah 10:31, "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." So here's what they'd been doing. They had their businesses open seven days a week. Why? More business. More business. If somebody comes and they're like, "Hey, I want to do business on that day." "Great, then there's a sale, there's an opportunity. "We're open for business." But that's not the way that God told them to do business. The way that God works is for six days He labored. On the seventh day He rested. And He set in motion a seven-day week for us to work hard as an act of worship for six days and then to worship well by sabbathing, or resting, on the seventh day. In the original language of Genesis where it says that this is how God functioned, it literally says, in the original Hebrew, that for six days God breathed out. And on the seventh day, He breathed in. The Sabbath day is the day to catch your breath. The Sabbath day is where you don't put your energy out, you pull your energy in. Some people ask, "Does it have to be on a certain day?" Well, after the resurrection of Jesus, the apostle Paul says, "One says this day,

one says that day, "whatever works for you, just pick a day." And people ask, "Well, what do you do on the Sabbath?" Well, what do you want to do? Jesus says that we were not made for the Sabbath, but the Sabbath was made for us. That means it's a grace, not a law. It's not something that we have to do. It's something that we get to do because it's good for us. So what causes you to rest? What causes you to recover? What causes you to replenish? Going to church, great. You want to garden, great. You want to go for a hike, great. You want to read a book, great. You want to take a nap, great. You want to have everybody over for dinner, great. Whatever replenishes, rejuvenates your energy, because here's what you need to know about God. He doesn't treat you like an animal, a slave, or a machine. He treats you like a son or a daughter. He's not always trying to drive you to get more out of you. He wants to rest you so He can get time with you. My kids work here at the church and I wouldn't work them seven days a week, because number one, I want them to have a good life. And number two, I want to have time where we can actually see them. Tomorrow night we're going to get together for dinner because we're not all working tomorrow night. God's a father. He doesn't want to just drive you to results. He wants to enjoy you in relationship. He wants you to get time with Him and the people and things that He has given to you. And so what they're saying is, "We're going to orient our business "that we're going to shut down for a day "and we're going to let everybody get a Sabbath." If you're a business leader, is this a big decision? It's a big decision. And I would say this, you have two choices. That is, you can work seven days a week without God's blessing, or you can work six days a week with God's blessing. And a lot of people are like, "I think I can get more done in seven days." I say, I'll tell you this, I think you can get more done in six days that are blessed. And I've seen in my own life, and I'm guilty of this, I like to work. My default is work. I like to get things done. But here's what I've learned the hard way. If you don't take a break, you break. You break, right? And so you may as well take a break before you break. And there are some companies that have operated on this principle. We have one in our own day. It's kind of interesting. What company comes to mind. "We're closed one day a week for the Sabbath."

- [Congregation] Chick-fil-A.

- Chick-fil-A, the Lord's chicken. Yeah. Hobby Lobby. I don't know about Discount Tire. I'll check it out. But, yeah, here's what I'm telling you. I feel like Chick-fil-A is doing good. Like we have personally given millions to Chick-fil-A. And I want to publicly apologize to Chick-fil-A. Sometimes my kids take more sauces than they should and we've got a whole bin of them in our fridge. It's the Lord's chicken, but apparently it's the Devil's sauce. So we take it. But, you know, there's a business model where those of us who are customers, we appreciate. You're giving families a day off and you're encouraging them to Sabbath. And so what they're doing here, they're deciding that, actually, the Lordship of God extends to their business and how they do their business. And then the last two, number six, "We will give generously." There's a long list of things that they commit to give. But here's the summary scripture. They say, "We obligate ourselves "to bring the firstfruits to the house of the Lord." And we would call that, today, the church. And what they're saying is, "God is first in our life "and now He's first in our schedule with the Sabbath. "We're giving Him the first day of the week. "And now He's first in our budget. "We're going to give Him the firstfruits of our income." This is off the gross, not the net. And

here's what I know. I know that evil and darkness is being funded. And unless God's people fund good and light, there will only be darkness and evil. I know that for a fact. Right now, the majority of money in our economy and in our culture, including taxes, it's going toward darkness and evil. It's not going toward goodness and light. And so what God's people are doing, they're saying, "We're going to give "so that there can be some light in the darkness "and an alternative to the evil. "And that would be the goodness of life with our God." Jesus says this in Acts 20:35. "It is more blessed to give than receive." Giving is part of our worshiping. And also, I would tell you this, the Bible says it is, that God loves a cheerful giver. There is something really enjoyable about being a generous person, because you share in the heart of God. And as we give, what we are doing, we are loving. So giving is loving. And God so loved the world that He gave us His only son. And so as Christians you say, "I want to be a loving person. "I want to be a worshiping person." Then you need to be a generous person. And so some will ask what percentage? And I think that's a great question to ask the Lord. The way we do it, Grace and I do it, we pray every year about a percentage that we want to give of our gross, our firstfruits, not our net. What's interesting now, you've really gotta be intentional about this because the government puts itself in the first position. And how many of you are not completely excited about what the government does with your money, right? I mean, you're funding things that you hate. So we may as well fund things that we love, like Bible teaching and ministry. And so what we do, we pray about a number or a percentage, we come to agreement, and then we set up recurring giving to where every pay period, this can be for you, weekly, biweekly, monthly, we're just giving in the same way we do with our mortgage. Right? To me, I would never treat, I guess I just thought of this, I would never treat God's house any different than I treat my house. I would never call my mortgage broker and say, "You know what? "I just don't feel like it. "I just don't feel like paying the mortgage. "I prayed about it though." And I'm going to pray that the Lord lays an amount on my heart what I should be paying. What it's like for my house, it's like, that's a priority. So I make sure I fund that every month. Well, what about God's house? I want to treat God's house the way I treat my house. I pay for my mortgage. I want to pay for the mortgage for God's house. And I was thinking about it this way, Christianity is a bit like a pay-it-forward program. How many of you have seen those news stories where somebody buys somebody else's coffee in the drive-through line. And it makes the news because they're like, "Somebody gave something. "This is amazing. "Tom, you won't believe it. "People gave something." You know, like it's such, it is so counter-cultural, it's a news story. And I don't know if it's true or not because it's on the internet. So everything there is a lie. But what I read was, the longest one I could find was one pay-it-forward, drive-through coffee line that went two days, 3,600 people.

- [Congregation] Wow.

- And then one guy showed up, was like, "It's over. "It's over. "Everybody's smiling. "This has gotta stop." Can you imagine being that guy? Here's the barista, "Hey thanks, do you want to pay it forward?" "No." "Oh man, okay, you're probably a politician." Okay, so, but Christianity is a pay-it-forward system. So you think about it, you know, somebody paid for the Bible to get translated so we could read it. Somebody paid for a church so you could go there and meet Jesus. Somebody paid for a ministry so that you could meet Jesus, right? Somebody paid for

camp so you could go when you were a kid. Christians fund ministry for non-Christians, because non-Christians aren't going to fund ministry. And it's a pay-it-forward plan. So somebody paid for the Bible I got, and the church that I went to, and where I met Jesus, and now I want to pay it forward for someone else. And so lastly, they say, "We will make church a priority." They say in Nehemiah 10:35, "We will not neglect the house of our God." They say, "We will not neglect the house of our God." You've got a house for your family. This is God's house for our church family. They say, "We're not going to, we're not going to neglect it." And so what they're saying is first and foremost, that, personally, for themselves and their family, church is going to become a priority. It's going to be a priority. How many of you have had a season where church wasn't a priority? And what you quickly realized is if it's not a priority, you just simply stop being involved. And let me say this too. The quickest way to get connected to a church is to serve. People come, they're like, "I don't feel connected." Serve, you'll connect to all kinds of people. I mean, once you activate your faith and you take on something that you're going to do with other people, you're going to build relationships. And we live in a day where if God isn't first in your schedule, if He's not first in your budget and first in your priorities, there's nothing left at the end. You're like, "Well, I'll give to God at the end." You're going to spend it before you get there. "Well, I'm going to spend time with God." Well, if He's at the end of your priorities, something is going to cut in line and you're not going to have any time for Him. If church is not a priority, it's eventually going to go away. And there are so many things in our day. You wake up, one of the kids doesn't want to go, you're tired, there's games on TV, maybe it's a hobby, Or, heaven forbid, your kids join a sports league. There are people that like, "We love church until sports comes. "And then we live like atheists until the season is over." Our kids, our boys played baseball, and our daughter played, she ran track. And for us, the sports season was the most difficult because the tournaments were on the weekend. And it's like, we can't say, "Hey boys, we go to church "except for when you're playing baseball." Because that could be the lion's share of the year. And it's like, "Well you want him to hit." Yeah, but I don't want him to strike out with God. I mean, you know, at the end of the day, we're trying to cultivate a whole character and not just an athlete. I do love sports, my kids played sports. We're not against it. But as a family, you gotta say, "We really need to think through "how we structure our priorities." And so what they do, these men make a family mission statement. This is the perfect time of year to do it. This is a good time to kind of look back, okay, what adjustments should we have made? And then look forward, okay, what adjustments do we need to make for the coming year? And I would encourage you maybe even take some time this week and think through these seven issues, scripture, family leadership, worship of God, marriage, business, finances, church participation. I mean, it's really good to actually take this list and go, "Okay, what adjustments do we need to make "or do I need to make?" Write it down and share it for accountability. That's exactly what they're doing. And then, lastly, let me share one thing with you just as a prayer request, and then I might close. As I'm going through Nehemiah, I'm thinking, okay, their culture was very secular, very godless, very pagan, very sexual, very grotesque, very violent, very rebellious, and it wasn't going to change. Sound familiar? And then God's people decide, "Well, here's how we're going to do life as the church, "as God's people. "And on a smaller scale, "here's how we're going to do it in our marriage, "in our family, at our house, in our lives." And I was thinking about it and it's got me thinking, and I've not reached a

conclusion, but in the history of Christianity, there have been seasons where the impetus of Christianity was missionary, go reach the nations. And then there were other seasons that were not missionary, they were monastery. For example, at the fall of the Roman Empire after the New Testament era, the culture was so gone, just so debased, and so dark, and so damnable, and so despicable, and so demonic that you couldn't send your kids to those schools, that you couldn't enjoy those entertainment outlets, that you couldn't be reading those books, that you couldn't be going to those businesses. It was just too far gone. And so God's people would then say, "Well, we don't expect the world to love and serve the Lord, "but we want to. "So how do we create a place "where God's people can be countercultural, "a subculture, maybe a misunderstood or even hated minority, "but where we can live according to "our God-given biblical convictions and values. "We can't send our kids to those schools. "How do we educate them? "We can't just entertain those entertainment outlets. "Where do we need to have discernment? "We can't just participate in those kinds of activities, "that's not healthy for us." And I've been thinking, as the culture is trending, it feels like it may be the time for the church to really think of being more of a monastery and then inviting people in to see a different way of life. Because you can go out there and argue with them and all they want to do is just pound on you, because they've not seen the difference that life with Jesus makes. So if the church is set up monastery, meaning we're talking about marriage, and family, and forgiveness, and relationship, and finances, and love, and everything being under the lordship of Jesus, of being open and hospitable, saying, "Why don't you come? "Look, there's some people that are joyful. "There's some people that are forgiven "and it's made a difference for them. "There's some people "who have learned to forgive other people "and their relationships got healed. "There are some guys who really love their wives. "There are some kids who have a good mom and a dad. "And yeah, the whole world is falling apart, "but these people's lives aren't. "These are God's people "and they would love you to come "and see the difference that their God makes "and they'd like to talk to you about their God." And I believe that's exactly what's going on here in Nehemiah 10. And I wanted to share something with you because as you read Nehemiah 10, you're like, "Wouldn't it be great if a bunch of men decided, 'We're going to love the Lord, 'and we're going to come together, 'and we're going to live as God's people, 'and we're going to build up men 'to bless women and children.'" And I want to show you our church this week. That's our weekly men's Bible study. That's not an annual conference for the whole city. Those are just our dudes. Anybody like seeing that? Amen? There are guys in there that are teenagers. They're learning about faith, and family, and finances. They've got men who are mentoring them, helping them figure out career paths. There are guys who are single, trying to find a wife. There are guys who are engaged, wanting to get off on a good start. There are guys who are newly married, trying to love their wife. There are first-time dads figuring out how to raise their kids. There are dads trying to figure out how to love their adult children. There are grandpas trying to figure out how to raise their grandkids. Yeah, you clap for that. And the oldest guy there is a hundred, and he fought in World War II. He gave it to Hitler for a while. So it's an interesting group of dudes. And here's what I would tell you. We don't just believe the Bible. We seek to obey it. We don't want to just read Nehemiah 10 and say, "Oh, that had to be wonderful." It's like, no, that can still be wonderful. I don't know what's going to go on in our city, our state, our world. But I know that things are going to go better for those men and their families. I know that

their wives are going to be loved. I know that their children are going to be blessed. And God's people can live life differently no matter what is going on in this world. Amen?

- Amen.

- All right, thank you for joining us and-