

What Happens When Religion Turns Into Revival?

- [Narrator] Nehemiah Chapter 9. "Now on the 24th day of this month, the people of Israel were assembled with fasting and in sackcloth, and with earth on their heads. And the Israelites separated themselves from all foreigners and stood and confessed their sins and the iniquities of their fathers. And they stood up in their place and read from the book of the law of the Lord their God for a quarter of the day. For another quarter of it, they made confession and worshiped the Lord their God. On the stairs of the Levites stood Jeshua, Bani, Kadmiel, Shebaniah, Bunni, Sherebiah, Bani, and Chenani; and they cried with a loud voice to the Lord their God. Then the Levites, Jeshua, Kadmiel, Bani, Hashabneiah, Sherebiah, Hodiah, Shebaniah, and Pethahiah said, 'Stand up and bless the Lord your God from everlasting to everlasting. Blessed be your glorious name, which is exalted above all blessing and praise. You are the Lord. You alone. You have made heaven, the heaven of heavens, with all their host, the earth and all that is on it, the sea and all that is in them; and you preserve all of them; and the host of heaven worships you. You are the Lord, the God who chose Abram and brought him out of Ur of the Chaldeans and gave him the name Abraham. You found his heart faithful before you, and made with him the covenant to give to his offspring the land of the Canaanite, the Hittite, the Amorite, the Perizzite, the Jebusite, and the Girgashite, and you have kept your promise, for you are righteous. And you saw the affliction of our fathers in Egypt and heard their cry at the Red Sea, and performed signs and wonders against Pharaoh and all his servants and all the people of his land, for you knew that they acted arrogantly against our fathers. You made a name for yourself, as it is to this day. And you divided the sea before them so that they went through the midst of the sea on dry land, and you cast your pursuers into the depths as a stone into mighty waters. By a pillar of cloud, you led them in the day, by a pillar of fire in the night to light for them the way in which they should go. You came down on Mount Sinai and spoke with them from heaven, and gave them right rules and true laws, good statutes and commandments, and you made known to them your holy Sabbath and commanded them commandments and statutes and a law by Moses, your servant. You gave them bread from heaven for their hunger and brought water for them out of the rock for their thirst. And you told them to go in to possess the land that you had sworn to give them. But they and our fathers acted presumptuously and stiffened their neck and did not obey your commandments. They refused to obey and were not mindful of the wonders that you performed among them, but they stiffened their neck and appointed a leader to return to their slavery in Egypt. But you are a God ready to forgive, gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and did not forsake them. Even when they had made for themselves a golden calf and said, 'This is your God who brought you out of Egypt,' and had committed great blasphemies. You in your great mercies did not forsake them in the wilderness. The pillar of cloud to lead them in the way did not depart from them by day, nor did the pillar of fire by night to light for them the way by which they should go. You gave your good spirit to instruct them and did not withhold your manna from their mouth and gave them water for their thirst. 40 years you sustained them in the wilderness, and they lacked nothing. Their clothes did not wear out, and their feet did not swell. And you gave them kingdoms and peoples and allotted to them every corner, so they took possession of the land of Sihon, king of Heshbon, and the land of Og, king of Bashan. You multiplied their children as the stars of heaven, and you brought them into the land that you told their fathers to enter and possess. So the descendants

went in and possessed the land and you subdued before them the inhabitants of the land, the Canaanites, and gave them into their hand, with their kings and the people of the land, that they might do with them as they would. And they captured fortified cities and a rich land, and took possession of houses full of all good things, cisterns already hewn, vineyards, olive orchards and fruit trees in abundance. So they ate and were filled, became fat and delighted themselves in your great goodness. Nevertheless, they were disobedient and rebelled against you and cast your law behind their back and killed your prophets, who had warned them in order to turn them back to you, and they committed great blasphemies. Therefore you gave them into the hand of their enemies, who made them suffer. And in the time of their suffering they cried out to you and you heard them from heaven. And according to your great mercies, you gave them saviors who saved them from the hand of their enemies. But after they had rest, they did evil again before you. You abandoned them to the hand of their enemies, so that they had dominion over them. Yet when they turned and cried to you, you heard from heaven, and many times you delivered them according to your mercies. And you warned them in order to turn them back to your law. Yet they acted presumptuously and did not obey your commandments, but sinned against your rules, which if a person does them, he shall live by them. And they turned a stubborn shoulder and stiffened their neck and would not obey. Many years you bore with them and warned them by your Spirit through your prophets. They would not give ear. Therefore you gave them into the hand of the peoples of the land. Nevertheless, in your great mercies, you did not make an end of them or forsake them. For you are a gracious and merciful God. Now, therefore, our God, the great, the mighty, and the awesome God, who keeps covenants and steadfast love. Let not all the hardship seem little to you that has come up upon us, upon our kings, our princes, our priests, our prophets, our fathers and all your people since the time of the kings of Assyria until this day. Yet you have been righteous in all that has come upon us for you have dealt faithfully and we have acted wickedly. Our kings, our princes, our priests, and our fathers have not kept your law or paid attention to your commandments and your warnings that you gave them. Even in their own kingdom, amid your great goodness that you gave them, and in the large and rich land you set before them, did not serve you or turn from their wicked works. Behold, we are slaves this day in the land that you gave to our fathers to enjoy its fruit and its good gifts. Behold, we are slaves. And its rich yield goes to the kings whom you have set over us because of our sins. They rule over our bodies and over our livestock as they please. We are in great distress. Because of all this, we make a firm covenant in writing; on the sealed document are the names of our princes, our Levites and our priests."

- Hey, welcome to Trinity Church. We're glad to have you guys. We're in a great book of the Bible called Nehemiah. And we're in chapter 9, so we're about 2/3 of the way through. And today's question is: What happens when religion turns into revival? Now, you can read it this week. I'm gonna go through Nehemiah chapter 9. It's the longest prayer, I think, in the whole Bible. It's a very long prayer. And here's what I know. Prayer is how we process. How many of you are verbal processors? You don't have an internal voice, right? You're my people, all right. I love you, all right. We think out here. When Grace and I first got married, she didn't understand that I would verbally process and so I freaked her out all the time. She thought all my ideas were actually gonna happen and everything that I was feeling was actually reality. And then finally she

realized, "Oh, he's just using words. If he really cares about it, he'll bring it up again." And most of the time, I didn't. So prayer is one way that we verbal process with God. When you're in something, you're going through something, you're trying to figure something out, before you talk to a person, you probably should talk to the Lord. "Okay Lord, let me verbally process with you. I probably won't freak you out. I can be real honest and raw and real. And then once I hear from you, I know what to say to others." That's what's happening here in Nehemiah 9. They're verbally processing with the Lord in prayer. And then number two, you really get to know who somebody is when you hear them pray. And what you're going to hear in Nehemiah 9, you're eavesdropping in on people praying, and praying is really exposing who you truly are. Like, if you know someone that is praying and you hear their prayers, you learn a lot about them. "Wow, they really love the Lord," or, "They have a lot of fears," or, "This is a hard season for them." Or the way they talk about the Lord, it seems like it's someone they've heard about, but maybe not somebody they've met. You learn a lot by eavesdropping in on someone's prayers. That's exactly what we're doing here today. So let me jump right in. What's the difference between a dead religion and dynamic revival? That's the first issue. So these people are Jewish, they're Hebrew. They were raised in a culture that was largely spiritual, God-ish-centered, and as a result, they had been going through the motions for 141 years. Their city of Jerusalem had been abandoned. The Temple, the place where God was worshiped and Bible teaching was supposed to happen had been closed for 141 years. So they're vaguely spiritual-ish. They're not hot. They're sort of what Jesus would call lukewarm. They didn't really read the Bible, but they knew a few stories. They didn't really pray, unless there was like some great emergency, and then they're calling in an airstrike from heaven on their enemy. Other than that, they're not really paying much attention to the Lord. They're not really living for God. He doesn't show up in their budget or their schedule. Maybe they will keep a few holidays. They are like the average American. "Sir, do you believe in God?" "Yeah, and I, you know, every Christmas I think about Jesus and you know, maybe Easter as well. And other than that, I go to a church when somebody gets married or dies. Other than that, I just sort of live my life." That sort of passive, cold indifference, that's the way they had lived for 141 years. And there's no sense of zeal or urgency for the things of God. How many of you came from a season like that or have had a season like that? This was me up until age 19. I was Catholic. I didn't have a bad experience in the Catholic Church. I was just bored. And I slept really well during church. I found it an incredible place to take a nap. And so occasionally my parents would take me, and I'd be like, "Okay, I believe there's a God, and I'll go to the building and take a nap for an hour while the guy in the dress is talking. You know, whatever, I'll pay my dues." And so at the end of the day, though, I just really didn't care. I didn't read the Bible, I didn't pray, I didn't really have any interest in the things of God. And then at the age of 19 in college, I got activated. I was reading the book of Romans and God saved me. Somewhere in that process, my heart and soul got changed. All of a sudden like, God is not a periphery in my life. He's the centrality of my life. All of a sudden going to church is not something that somebody needs to drag me against my will, once every presidential election. I want to go to church myself. I got a Bible. I started reading it and liking it and studying it and enjoying it and finding it quite fascinating and interesting. And all of a sudden, I was activated. That's what we see happening here in Nehemiah chapter 9. They go from dead religion. And dead religion, let me give you a couple of clues. It's first and

foremost, it's external, not internal. They go through the forms, but they don't have the love. Jesus talks about religious people, who outwardly everything looks great, but inwardly all He sees is death. It's external, but it's not internal. They may go to church or they may do something religious, but if you look at their heart and their mind, it's not really activated. It's just sort of going through the motions. In addition, it's oftentimes, religion is, in the negative pejorative sense of the word, it's for the approval of men and women, not for God. You want people to think you're a good person. "I go to church so people think I'm a good person. And I make sure that they see me give, so they think I'm a good person. And I take communion, or I pray, I do some things so that people think I'm a good person." But it's not so much that God sees you and you want to have a relationship with Him. It's the approval of others. And it's just sort of like a country club, a little bit. It's just maintaining your membership so that other people see you as a decent citizen. What religion does as well, it hides rather than changes your true self. Religious people are always trying to maintain the airs that they have life together and they're doing well. They don't want others to see them struggling, or sinning, or failing, or needing God or the grace of God. And it conceals who they truly are, rather than changes who they truly are. And then lastly, religion, in its pejorative and negative sense, it's spirituality without the Holy Spirit. It's what we do for God, rather than what God does for us, in us, and through us. See, dynamic revival is God does work for you, in you, and through you. Dead religion is you're gonna do some spiritual things without the Holy Spirit. They've lived this way for a long time. Some of you have lived this way for a long time. I know some of you watching online, you've been living this way for a long time. There is a point where you can get activated, as they were; where you can be filled with the Spirit, as they were; where you can have enthusiasm, as they did. And so what happens is they go from dead religion to dynamic revival. They show up for a worship meeting. Here's how I know they were really excited. The sermon we looked at last week was six hours! Oh, I just love that with all my heart. I just love that! But you know that people who haven't been to church in a very long time show up for a six-hour sermon and nobody leaves early? You know that they're interested. So there's a six-hour sermon and they respond very passionately. They're shouting, "Amen, amen, amen!" We looked at it last week. They're singing to God. Sometimes they're kneeling down, 'cause they're heartbroken for their sin, and they're humbling themselves in surrender to God. It's very obvious that these people are activated, that they are excited, that they are motivated. In addition, they're weeping as they are reminded of the goodness of God. And then they cancel work for a week. And they had a one-week Bible camp with worship, 'cause they needed more Bible, and they needed more of the Holy Spirit, and they needed more worship in God's presence. And here we find them praying, not just a short prayer, but a really long prayer. There are some times that it's perfectly fine to pray a short prayer, but there are some things you really need to work out with God. And they're gonna stop, and they're gonna pray the longest prayer in the Bible. And this becomes for them revival. Revival is a surprising touch of the Holy Spirit that accelerates kingdom ministry. The Holy Spirit shows up in a unique and powerful way. We see this throughout the Bible, where the Holy Spirit falls on a group of people and just ignites them with a sense of passion and urgency for the things of God. What our nation needs is a revival. Now let me say this. I'll say some controversial things. This is the beginning. I am for elections, but I'm telling you this. If everyone is just hoping in elections, your hope is eventually going to

disappoint you. That at the end of the day, what we need is not just an election to go our way, but revival to come our way. We need people to meet Jesus. We need them to have a new nature. We need them to be born again and excited about the things of God. I'm all for elections. I'm all for cultural change. I'm all for fighting the good fight. But at the end of the day, until people are filled with the Spirit and have a love for God, things won't change until God changes the people. That's what I'm saying. And what we have seen in our nation's history is occasions of God's presence falling in a way that produces revival. I'll give you a couple as an example. And I am praying for revival. I'll just be honest with you. I'd encourage you, pray for revival. If you look at everything, you're like, "The world really looks dark and the future looks bleak." Yes, unless God shows up as the X factor, and then things could be quite different. We saw this in the days of Jonathan Edwards. He began preaching at the age of 19. He is, in my estimation, America's greatest Bible teacher and theologian. The Great Awakening came to his church in 1734 in Northampton, Massachusetts. Young people who had drifted away from the church, gone apostate, lukewarm, didn't care, they heard his sermons and they were curious. So they wanted to meet with him and ask him questions. And Pastor Edwards did, in fact, meet with them. And there began this revival called the Great Awakening. One of his most famous sermons was "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God". And today we've reversed it. It's "God in the Hands of Angry Sinners". Rather than God changing us, we want to change God. Rather than God judging us, we want to judge God. But in that day, there was a mass revival. And what happens when there is mass revival, those who know the Lord get really excited about the Lord. The prodigals who had strayed from the Lord, they run back to the Lord. And then their passion becomes contagious, and those who don't know the Lord come to know the Lord as well. Jonathan Edwards said these are the five marks of true revival. Number one, it exalts Jesus Christ. All of a sudden people are talking about Jesus, singing to Jesus, excited about Jesus. Not just religion or morality or tradition, but Jesus. In addition, it attacks the power of darkness. It calls people to repent of sin and it begins to set culture straight. It also is a war on the demonic, and those forces that are evil and unseen in our world. It exalts, Edwards says, number three, the Scriptures. All of a sudden people are like, "I like the Bible. Teach me the Bible. Can I get a Bible? My friend needs a Bible. I was reading the Bible, I was studying the Bible." God's working through His Word. Number four, it lifts up sound doctrine. There's no room for false teaching and heretics and apostates and compromisers and editors, just messengers and obeyers. And then lastly, it promotes love to God and man. All of a sudden, you're like, "God loves me, I love God, and I want to love other people with the love that God gives me." So the revival goes from God to you and then it goes through you to others, as the love and the grace of God spreads. We've seen this at various occasions, not just in biblical history, but in our nation's history. George Whitfield began preaching at the age of 25. He preached 18,000 sermons to over 100 million people during the Great Awakening. One thing you'll see over and over and over in the history of revival as well as revival in the Bible, prayer and preaching go together. People are praying for the hearts of the people, starting with their own hearts, and then God's Word is preached. There is no revival without prayer and preaching, and that leads to praising of God. He planted 150 churches during the season of the Great Awakening. He would preach in open air to 30,000 people at a time without a microphone. They said he would sometimes then be spitting up blood afterward 'cause he strained his vocal cords to preach the gospel in open air. In addition, 80% of

Americans heard him preach live. Lastly, his farewell sermon on Boston Commons drew 23,000 people. That's more people than Boston's entire population. And it was the largest crowd in the history of America to that day. It's like, "Hey, Whitfield's gonna open the Bible. Well, everybody take the day off. We gotta be there for that." In addition, there was a guy named D.L. Moody in Chicago. He began preaching at 21. He started with the boys who were kicked out of the Sunday school classes of other churches. All the naughty boys got kicked out. Moody's like, "That's my crew right there. Give me those guys." So he started with all the boys that were beating up their Sunday school teachers and chewing gum and cussing them out and just creating havoc. And he said, "You know what? If God loves them, I love 'em too." So he brought those rejected boys together. He himself was denied membership in a church. He tried to become a member of a church. So for the interview, they asked him a few doctrinal questions and he failed. He couldn't pass the verbal exam to become a member of a church. He was not a very well-studied man. He was not a brilliant mind, but he was an anointed man. He would preach sermons and he really didn't use hardly any notes. I'll never forget, one of his great sermons in which maybe thousands, tens of thousands were saved, they showed his notes. He had three words, three words written on paper was his entire sermon. I think two of them were misspelled. And thousands got saved, because there was an anointing. You don't need to be a genius, you need to be anointed. A degree is fine, but an anointing is even better. In addition, he reached 100 million people in his life. At the Chicago World's Fair, he preached to 130,000 people in a day. He traveled a million miles and preached to 100 million people live about Jesus. What happens is the Holy Spirit just sort of lights the flame in the soul of one person and then they begin to see that same flame ignited in the souls of others. I'll give you the last two. The College Revivals came during the days of Jonathan Edwards' grandson Timothy Dwight. And it started at Yale. It was a decades-long movement of college students who fell in love with Jesus, went into ministry, and went into the mission field. And I would say right now, what our colleges need more than anything is a college revival.

- [Congregation] Amen.

- That's where a lot of the lying and the brainwashing and the indoctrinating happens. That's where students go, sadly, to lose their faith. And when refreshing comes to a campus, it means an entire generation is awakened for the things of Jesus. That was the College Revivals. And then lastly, there was the Jesus movement. And it was a day not dissimilar to our own. There was a very divided culture. The Vietnam War had just ended. People were very upset with political leadership. The economy was in the tank. We had the false trinity of sex, drugs, and rock and roll. The hippie movement came into existence and it was largely driven by demonic eastern religions, drug use and abuse, gender confusion, sexual rebellion. I don't know if this sounds familiar, but that's what they were dealing with. And then suddenly, God took the hippies and made them worshipers of Jesus. And a lot of it started with a man named Chuck Smith, who has gone home to be with the Lord. I got to meet him before he died. It was on my bucket list. I think we had breakfast at Denny's. So pancakes with Papa Chuck was a big win for me. Nonetheless, what happened was, I think he actually started his ministry in Prescott and he failed. And so he had a small ministry and didn't really have a great result until all of a sudden,

he was teaching in a church that was a little more religious. You gotta dress up for church, you gotta obey the rules. You know, part your hair. You've got to look the part. Well the hippies walked in. You know, they got no shoes on. They smell like weed. And, you know. Some of you laugh, 'cause you have children that are in their teens. Okay, so you've seen this. So these kids show up to church and some of the religious people were like, "They don't, they need to leave. They don't look right." And he's like, "No, no, no. No, it's not that they need to look like they love the Lord 'cause they don't know the Lord. So let's just welcome them." So all of a sudden, you've got hippies sitting on the floor, and next thing you know, they start to fall in love with Jesus. And there's this massive revival movement. It led to a revisitation of what I call expository Bible teaching, teaching through books of the Bible. 'Cause the hippies are like, "We don't trust authority." So you needed to go through the Bible, 'cause that would be the only authority they would trust. And then eventually, the hippies started bringing instruments to church, making their own music. Lo and behold, they weren't super happy with the blue-haired organ player and the old-school hymns. Okay? And so they started bringing their own instruments and writing their own songs. Today we have Christian worship music. All of this is the result of an awakening, a revival in the days of the hippies. So much of what we do today as modern evangelical Protestant Christianity is the result of this revival movement. Well, this is the kind of thing that we're seeing in Nehemiah 9. It's this Old Testament recording and reporting of what happens when God shows up to church and changes people en masse. And then we see that God has visited them, because then they are applying what I will call the gift of repentance. So let me read it to you. It's quite lengthy. "But the people assembled with fasting, sackcloth, and earth on their heads." This is their way of repenting. "And they stood and they confessed their sins," openly and publicly. Not other people's sins, their own. "And the inequities of their fathers," meaning their generational patterns. "They made confession and worshiped the Lord their God." Here's what they said. "Our fathers acted presumptuously and stiffened their neck and did not obey your commands. They refused to obey. They stiffened their neck, committed great blasphemies. They were disobedient and rebelled against you and cast your law behind their back. And they killed your prophets. They committed great blasphemies. They did evil before you. They acted presumptuously and did not obey your commands, but sinned against your rules. They turned a stubborn shoulder and stiffened their neck and would not obey. They would not give ear. We have acted wickedly. Our kings, our princes, our priests, our fathers," our family, our political leaders, our spiritual leaders, "have not kept your law or paid attention to your commandments and warnings that you gave them. They did not serve you or turn from their wicked works. We are slaves." Here's the capstone line. "Because of our sins." You know that someone has been visited by the Holy Spirit when they repent of their sin. There's not room in your life for sin and God. And you love your sin so much that there's no room for God. And then you realize who God is, and you want to get rid of your sin to make more room for your God. And that's what they do, they're repenting. We're all sinners by nature and choice. We're all sinners by nature and choice. As sinners, we have a couple of options. Number one, we can deny it. We've all done these things. "I didn't do that, I didn't say that." Here's my favorite: "You heard that wrong." "You said it. I heard it. That's right." We deny it. "No, no, that never happened. You're making that up, you're lying. That's not true." We can deny it. Or, number two, we can celebrate it. We've got a whole month called Pride. And what we tell people is, "We're

gonna hold parades for your sin. You don't need to repent of it, you need to celebrate it. You don't need to change. In fact, you can't change and God can't change you, and God doesn't want to change you. In fact, you need to celebrate who you are and what you've done. You need to take your sin and make it your identity." The third option is to hide. "I hope I don't get caught. I hope nobody finds out. I hope this private part of my life doesn't go public." That leads to a lot of anxiety and stress. In addition, you can make excuses. "I was tired, had a long day. They make me angry, they drive me crazy, they frustrate me." I like to say sometimes we'll even pull in, you know, our cultural heritage. You know, I'm Irish, so you know, there you go. Yeah, we get drunk and yell. Those are our contributions. And we Riverdance. Those are our three contributions to world history. "Well yeah, I'm very hotheaded. We're Latino." "I'm Italian." Why does everybody who's angry say it's their culture? And then, you can actually, you can self-diagnose, 'cause there's enough pop psychology. You're like, "Well, I took this test online. I did this, you know, Internet research, and here's my personality, here's my issues, here's my thing and I can't change. That's who I am, that's the way it is. I have a good excuse and a good reason." You can also change the subject if you're a sinner. How many of you have a child? You've seen this tactic? You're like, "Why'd you hit your brother with the truck?" And they're like, "Oh, my stomach hurts." You're like, "Okay, yeah." All the moms are like, "Oh, you know my kid." Yeah I do. And we change the subject. Somebody's like, "Hey, I wanna talk to you about this." "No, no, no, no. Squirrel!" Change the subject. Or, shoot the messenger. "Hey, I wanna talk to you about this." "Well, you think you're better than me? You're here to judge me? That's not very loving. That's very rude. I can't believe you said that. I don't like how you said that. I don't think that's right. That's very unloving. I feel very hurt." Shoot the messenger. "You're no better than me. Do you know what you said? You know what you did? You know how it made me feel?" Okay, I just hit a marital issue. I could feel it in the room. Ha ha ha. Awkward chuckling is fine. It's totally welcome here. So the other option is when you realize your sin, you can repent of it. And it's a gift. And what repentance is, it's turning from your sin and turning to your God. Okay? So when we sin, we literally turn our back on God. You're like, "God, I'm not listening, I'm not looking, I'm not following. I am avoiding. I am abandoning. And I'm gonna go toward my sin." And then repentance is literally, I turn from my sin, I turn to my God. "Okay, God, where are you? What do you say? I'm listening. Where do you want me to be? Who do you want me to be? What do you want me to do?" That's what repentance is. It's turning from sin and turning to God. Jesus says it this way, "Repent and believe." So it's turning from your sin, and trusting, believing in God, who forgives and saves. So let me say a few things here about repentance. Number one, sin is generational and personal. Therefore it needs to be repented of personally and generationally. It says that they repent of their sin and their forefathers', meaning their family of origin's. Sometimes the things that we're doing are things that we've been doing as a family for a long time. How many of you have got generational patterns, curses, brokenness, trauma? Like every generation kind of makes the same mistakes or does the same dumb things. In repenting of that, what you're saying is, "Okay, you know what, we've been doing this wrong for a very long time, and it's gonna change today." This is where you break generational curses. Where vows that have been placed over your family are then broken so you can ultimately be loyal to the Lord. Number two, there is no Christianity without repentance. You can't be a Christian without repenting. We are here and we are Protestant Christians. And there was a day when a man

named Martin Luther decided that Christianity needed to repent. It's called the Protestant Reformation. So he went to the door of a church, Grace and I visited there a few years ago in Germany, and he wrote what is called the "95 Theses". These would be his areas that he believed that Christians in the church needed to repent. "This is not in the Bible, these are religious traditions, these are manmade rules, this is not from the Lord." The first line of the "95 Theses" that kicked off the Protestant Reformation was this line, "The Christian life is one of repentance." That's where he started. Protestantism is the result of repentance. The reason that we're here today, studying the Bible as Protestant Christians, is because some Christians repented of some things that weren't biblical and weren't God-honoring. In addition, for the good to start, number three, the bad must end. A lot of us have things in our life that are bad and we want them to end. But here's the big idea. You can't start the good until you end the bad. For good to start, bad has to end. So if sin is the problem, then that needs to stop, so that your new life can start. And a lot of times what we're trying to do, we're trying to add God to our lifestyle. No, no, no, God doesn't add to our lifestyle. God is Lord over our lifestyle. And so for good to start, bad must end. That's what repentance is. It's that moment that's saying, "This is gonna end; this is gonna start." In addition, before the church can straighten out the world, number four, God has to straighten out the church. The church can't go out and be an agent of change in the world until God changes the church. If the church doesn't believe the Bible, if the church doesn't love Jesus, if the church isn't excited about eternal life with Christ that begins the moment that you encounter Him as Lord and Savior, then how can we be ambassadors for enthusiasm for a God that we're not very committed to or excited about? And today I will just, I love pastors and churches. I want to be careful that I don't take a negative or pejorative tone. But there's just this mass apostasy. There's hard wokeness, there's soft wokeness. All of a sudden, it's like, man, if the church doesn't believe you need Jesus, then nobody's gonna believe you need Jesus. If the church doesn't believe the Bible, nobody's gonna believe the Bible. If the church doesn't hate sin, nobody's gonna hate sin. So God needs to straighten out the church before He does the world. And that's exactly the case study in Nehemiah 9. Number five, sadly, not everyone repents. There's this mass repentance in Nehemiah 9, but the critics and enemies, they never repent. We've looked at them previously. Geshem, Sanballat, Tobiah. There are some named critics, opponents, and enemies in the book of Nehemiah. They never come forward and say, "We're sorry. You know, we lied about you. Sorry about the legal threats. Sorry about the PR smearing. Sorry about the death threats. Sorry about the false narrative." They don't say anything. They never apologize. They never recant. They never repent. Not everyone does. Sometimes you're gonna have enemies and critics in your life and you pray for them and you love them and you forgive them. But sometimes they never repent. They never change. They never own it. They just stay their tragic course. And then lastly, the demonic counterfeit of repentance is tolerance. Just marinate on that for a moment. Everything that God creates, Satan counterfeits. God's Word names a sin, and God says, "You need a repent of that." Satan comes along and says, "No, no, no. It's not about repentance, it's about tolerance." The demonic counterfeit of repentance is tolerance. We're going to get into this next year when we get into the book of 1 and 2 Kings and we look at the life of a guy named Elijah. And there is this demonic woman named Jezebel who rises up against him. She's spoken of in the book of Revelation, because that same demonic spirit works in multiple generations. And here's what is

said regarding her, "You tolerate that woman." The Bible only uses the word tolerate or tolerance a few occasions in the New Living Translation, if my memory serves me correct. And it's always negative and pejorative, it's never a good thing. You and I are not to tolerate sin, but to repent of sin. We are not to accept sin, but reject sin. We are not to celebrate sin, but to crucify sin. And you can't be a Christian if you tolerate your sin. You can only be a Christian if you repent of your sin. I'm a sinner. I mean, you all know that. We've been together long enough now. This is an obvious fact. But it's us getting honest about who we are, so here's the good news, so God can change who we are. The reason that some people struggle with repentance is because they don't think that they can change. And the truth is, you can't. But God can change you. You don't need to celebrate who you are. You don't need to hide who you are. You don't need to tolerate who you are. You need to confess who you are and let God change who you are. So then what I love in this story, they get very focused on God. Up until this point, God was a fleeting thought, not a committed idea. God was more of a concept than a person. God was on the periphery and not centrality. The totality of this lengthy prayer is really God-centered. So I'm going to give you 26 things that they pray about God. Here's what they are praying. Our God is, number one, eternal. "The Lord your God is from everlasting to everlasting." You need to know that before there was anything, there was God. Before anything existed, God. God preexisted. Everything comes from Him. Everything belongs to Him. Everything is ruled by Him. Everything will return to Him. Everything will be judged by Him. Our God is eternal. He's the only thing without beginning or end. Number two, He's the only God. They say, "You alone are the Lord." You alone. There is no other God. There are not many ways; there is one way. There are not many gods; there is one God. There are not many saviors; there is only one Savior. There's no one like God. There's no one alongside of God. There's no one that will excel beyond God. Our God is the great God. Our God is the only God. Number three. He is the creator. They say, "You have made the heavens and all the host and the earth." Our God made our planet. Our God made the cosmos. Our God made us in His image and likeness. Our God made animals, His lower creation. Our God made angels to worship and serve Him. Every one of us is made by God. We find our purpose in God. We find our dignity in God. We find our life in God. Since we come from Him, there's no meaning, there's no value, there's no purpose apart from Him. Number four, they say that their God is the sustainer. They say, "You preserve all." Friends, God has sustained you. Some of you should be dead, and here you are. Some of you should be divorced, and here you are. Some of you should be filled with despair, and here you are. Some of you should have given up a long time ago, but here you are. God is the sustainer. And I know some of you are in a difficult season. Some of you are in a painful place. We've been there as a family. We've been there as a married couple. I've been there as a ministry. I've been crucified and resurrected. I'm now in zombie mode. You can't scare me. I know a God who sustains. He sustains. Number five, that our God is worshiped by angels. "The host of heaven," they say, "Worships you." Right now, in the unseen realm, Jesus Christ is risen from the dead. He is seated on a throne. He is ruling and reigning. He is hearing prayers. He is altering destinies. He is saving lives. I know when you look out at the culture, it is bleak. But I'm asking you to look up. It's not a time to worry, it's a time to worship. And He's being worshiped by angels right now. They are in His presence and they are crying out, "Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty. Heaven and earth are full of His glory." And I'm telling you, when you start worrying, you need to

stop and start worshiping. Number five, He is a covenant maker. It goes on to say, "You are the Lord, the God who chose Abraham." You made a covenant. God took no one from nowhere and put a calling and a destiny on his life and on his family. God makes a covenant with His people. Once He says "Yes" to you, He always says "Yes" to you. God can't love you any more. God won't love you any less. There's nothing that you can do to undo the one-way love of God, which is the grace of Jesus Christ. When God has determined that He will adopt you as His child, He never orphans you. He'll never leave you. He'll never forsake you. He'll never abandon you. He'll never betray you. Everyone and everything will fail you except for this God, who is faithful to His covenant promises. Number seven, He is a divine deliverer. It goes on to say, "You brought Abraham out of the Ur of the Chaldeans." In that moment, it probably felt to Abraham like he was being destroyed, but he was being delivered. He left his family, he left his homeland, he left his nation. He left his economic security. And he needed to trust that the Lord would provide for him. God is a divine deliverer. God gets you out of hardship. He gets you out of difficulty. Some of you right now, you're in that place of transition. You may feel, as Abraham likely did, that you are being destroyed. You, my friend, are not. You're being delivered. God has good for you. He has hope for you. He has blessing for you. He has future for you, because He is a good God. In addition, our God is faithful. It says, "You have kept," they pray, "Your promise." Every promise that God makes, He is faithful to keep.

- [Congregation] That's right.

- Politicians do not keep their promises, no matter how hard they try. Couples on their wedding day, exchanging their vows, invariably fall short. But our God makes promises, and He keeps every promise that He makes. You will see Jesus Christ face-to-face. You will rise from the dead. You will enter into the kingdom of God. You will be blessed forever. You will judge the angels. You will rule and reign as the children of God. You will see all the tears wiped from your eyes by the nail-scarred hands of your Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

- [Congregation] Amen.

- Your God keeps His promises. In addition, our God, we are told, is righteous. They say simply, "You are righteous." God is good; we are bad. God is holy; we are unholy. God is love, but the number one attribute of God mentioned in the Bible is His holiness. God is holy, God is righteous. What this means is when we disagree with God, we are wrong. That God does not conform to our standard, that we must conform to His standard. Now, the good news is this: Our God doesn't do evil. Our God doesn't justify the means to get to the ends. Our God doesn't take shortcuts. Our God is trustworthy and true. He not only does right, He only and always does right. It also says, number 10, that He is a miraculous waymaker. They say, "You perform signs and wonders." As God's people we're being delivered, in context, from slavery and bondage to Egypt, they found themselves on the edge of the Red Sea. And suddenly, their enemies were quickly following them and approaching them to destroy them. And God parted the seas. He made a way, when there was no way. Our God can still move mountains. He can split seas. He can perform miracles. He can heal the sick. He can answer prayer. He can do whatever He

wants to do. It doesn't matter how mighty the person against you is, the Almighty is always for you. I don't know what miracle you need. I don't know what supernatural inbreaking you need. I don't know what touch from God you need. I don't know what provision from God you need. But here's what I do know. He performs signs and wonders. Our God does the inexplicable, our God does the impossible. In addition, He is glorious. It says, "You made a name for yourself." "You made a name for yourself." We live in a world where everybody's trying to make so much of their name. We exist to make much of one name. It says in Philippians 2, "That at the name of Jesus Christ, that at the name of Jesus Christ, every knee will bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord both on the earth and under the earth to the glory of God the Father." At the end of the day, there is one name. It's the name of Jesus. The great name of God is Jesus Christ. And they pray, "You've made a name for yourself." You started with a few people, but now the nations have heard about our God. Our God shows up, our God is living, our God is active, our God is powerful, and our God comes to save us, and His name is Jesus. They go on to say, regarding this great and glorious God, that He is our judge. Continuing in the story, the Exodus, they say, "You cast their pursuers into the depths as a stone into mighty waters." God not only parted the seas so that His people could pass through and be delivered to worship Him. As the enemies pursued them, the waters retreated and flooded the enemies of God. You need to know that God has a way of not only delivering you, but judging them. You don't need to judge your enemies. God will take care of that. "'Vengeance is mine,' says the Lord." There is nothing that evildoing unbelievers have done that is beyond the scope and sight of God. God will deal with everyone and everything justly. Everyone who is going to hell has earned their place, and they will be punished according to their deeds, justly and rightly by our righteous God. Friends, here's the good news. I say it all the time. If you belong to this God, Jesus Christ, this is as close to hell as you will ever be.

- [Congregation] Amen. And if they don't know Jesus Christ, this is as close to heaven as they will ever be. Their heaven is our hell. It only gets better for the children of God. Love your enemies, pray for your enemies, forgive your enemies, and let God deal with your enemies. He is the one who judges. He then goes on to say, and they pray, that God leads and guides us. They say, "By a pillar of cloud, you led them in the day, and by a pillar of fire in the night, to light for them the way in which they should go." Their prayer is a summation of all of God's Old Testament work. When you don't know where to go, follow the Lord. When you don't know what to do, ask the Lord. When you're not sure which path you should take, seek the Lord. The Lord knows the future. The Lord knows your needs. The Lord knows what is coming that you don't know is coming, and the Lord knows exactly how to lead and guide you. The Holy Spirit is as present in your life as the pillar in the cloud. The God of the universe is willing to meet with you at any time, to discuss with you anything, and to lead you and guide you into a path that has joy, peace, prosperity in the future, because our God is for you, not against you. In addition, He is a law giver. "You gave rules, laws, statutes, and commandments," they pray. What they're saying is this: We need to evaluate our life by the Word of God. These are God's standards, and we need to judge ourselves so that we don't have to be judged by God. People say this all the time. "You can't judge me." Two things: Actually, I can. And in saying that, you're judging me, so I feel like we're now equal. But the better thing is, rather than arguing that you can't be judged, is to

start judging yourself. If you judge yourself, you'll come to repentance. Friends, you know your deeds. You know who you are. You know what you think. You know what you say. You know what you do. You know what your character is when no one is watching and the lights are off. And God knows, too, and He judges by His laws. God's laws do not change. We are to conform to God's Word. We are not to edit God's Word. It also says that our God is a Sabbath-giver. They say, "You have made known your holy Sabbath." Your God doesn't work you like a slave, He rests you like a son. In that day, people were just driven like cattle or animals or machinery for productivity. God set an example for us to follow. Six days He worked; seventh day, He rested. We rest, because ultimately our God cares about our emotional, physical, spiritual, mental well-being. God wants to draw you into relationship with Him, not drive you to performance. God wants to meet with you. God wants to hear from you. God wants to be with you. God is a relational God, and He wants time carved out of your schedule for that intimate relationship of affection. In addition, our God is good. "You are a God ready to forgive, gracious and merciful, slow to anger, abounding in steadfast love, and did not forsake them." He's quoting here Exodus 34. It is the most quoted verse in the entire Bible. God comes down and He says, "I am the Lord, the Lord, slow to anger, I'm abounding in love, I forgive sinners, and I don't let the guilty go unpunished." You need to know that this God is Jesus Christ. You need to know that you are a sinner. You need to know that He loves you. He's abounding in love. That He is a merciful God, that He is a forgiving God, that He is an exceedingly patient God, that He has endured to this very moment with you and He loves you. He will take you as you are. He will love you too much to keep you as you are, but He will take you as you are. If you've not given yourself to this God, you give Him your sin and He becomes your Savior. His name is Jesus Christ. In addition, God is merciful. It says, "In your great mercies, you did not forsake them in the wilderness." Grace is where we get what we do not deserve. Mercy is where we don't get what we do deserve. God has been so merciful to us. Amen?

- [Congregation] Amen.

- The decisions we have made should have destroyed us. The things we have said should have destroyed us. The ways we have behaved should have destroyed us. God not only saves us from Satan, sin, death, hell, and the wrath of God. God saves me from me. God has saved you from you, and God saves us from us. In addition, he says that God is the Spirit. "You gave your good spirit." Life cannot be lived without the power of God. This life is too much for you. You need a supernatural power to plug your life into, to live by the power of. The same Holy Spirit who empowered the life of Jesus is sent by Jesus after He died, rose, and ascended. As Jesus goes up, the Spirit comes down. The same Spirit who lives in you is the same Spirit that raised Jesus Christ from the dead. You do not need to be powerful. You need the power of God. You don't need to just grin and bear it. You need to find Him and His presence and power through it. Friends, you are not orphaned. You are not abandoned. You are filled with the Spirit of God. You have power to live the life that God has destined for you. You can walk away from the person that you were and you could start to become the person that Jesus says you are. It also says that He is a family sustainer. "40 years you sustained them in the wilderness. They lacked nothing." That's generations. Some of you have trusted God for yourself. You're worried about

your kids, your grandkids, your great-grandkids. They're prodigals, they're wandering, they're indifferent, they're lukewarm. And/or some of you have small children. You wonder, "What kind of world am I sending them into? Will God prepare a place for them, as He did for me? Will God provide a way for them, as He has for me?" Answer: Yes. I'm here to testify that God is faithful for generations. God has been faithful to my parents, who love the Lord. God has been faithful to me and my wife. God has been faithful to our children. And I look forward, when the day comes, I don't know it, but I'm prophesying it, that I become Grandpa. When that day comes, I will have the joy of seeing God provide for generations of our family. In addition, He is a child maker. "You multiplied their children as the stars of heaven." Friends, our God is the living God. Our God is the life-giving God. Children are a blessing. We don't kill our blessing; we welcome our blessing. We don't mutilate our blessing; we disciple our blessing. We don't curse our blessing; we bless our blessing. God, judge! God, judge! An election where, "What about the economy?" "That's important, but can we kill the babies?" "What about the border?" "Well, that's important, but can we kill the babies?" "Well, what about crime?" "Yeah, but can we kill the babies? We really want to kill the babies. How many babies can we kill?" God is a father. We all need the father heart of God. Ours is a wicked and cursed nation. I didn't intend to say this, but I will. How can you give God the finger and want His hand of blessing? We need the repent of our sin if we want His blessing on our lives. It says in Proverbs, "God says, 'All who hate me love death.'" You either love God and love life, or you hate God and hate life. We are pro-life. We are pro-life from womb to tomb. We are pro-life for those who have disabilities. We are pro-life for those who will have physical struggles. "You multiplied their children as the stars of heaven." He is also, I've just got a few more, an enemy crusher. "They went and possessed the land and subdued it. They captured fortified cities and a rich land and took possession of houses full of goods." Here's what you need to know. There was a day that God's people were poor and then they became rich; that God's people were oppressed, then they were set free; where God's people were discouraged, and then they were filled with joy. Friends, there is a day of reversal coming. I've read the rest of the Book. You should be encouraged. It goes very well for the children of God in the end. All the wealth that they store will be given to His children. All of the houses that they build will be occupied by His children. God will get rid of His enemies and He will once and forever bless His family. He is also a disciplining father. It says they did evil again. "You abandoned them to the hand of their enemies. Yet when they turned and cried to you, you heard from heaven. Many times you delivered them according to your mercies." What it says is every generation rebelled against God and they felt the pain of sin. They felt the difficulty of rebellion. Life without God doesn't work. That's why we have massive depression. It's why an entire generation is struggling with mental health. It's why we're gonna have riots in the street in the next week. Because, apart from God, apart from discipline, there's no recognizing that sometimes the pain in our life is God's warning to us that we're headed into danger. And He gives us just a little bit of discomfort to save us from total destruction. He is a loving father. If it hurts, pay attention. If it's not working, stop and pray. If the direction you're going isn't providing the life you were hoping, stop and repent. Last two. Constant Savior. "In your great mercies," they pray, "You did not make an end to them or forsake them. For you are a gracious and merciful God." God is not going to destroy you; He's going to deliver you. God is not going to forsake you; He is going to save you. That over and over and over, God shows up, and what

happens is, just like them, God delivers us, God redeems us, God saves us. And then we go back into our foolish ways. And we wonder, "Is He done with me? Has He abandoned me? Is He sick of me? Is He tired of me? Am I too much for him?" No. He then grabs us, like a father who delivers a child from harm's way. He takes us to Himself and He spares us over and over and over. For those prodigals who are hearing this, for those who have wandered and lost their way, the Father's hand is right there. He loves you, He's for you, He's not done with you, He's not sick of you, He's not overwhelmed by you. Because last but not least, our God is a sin forgiver. Any sinners in the house? You need to accept the bad news that you are a sinner, to receive the good news of Jesus as Savior. "Now, therefore, our God, the great, the mighty, and the awesome God who keeps covenant and steadfast love, let not all the hardships seem too little that have come upon us. You have been righteous in all that has come upon us. For you have dealt faithfully and we have acted wickedly." They repent. The Holy Spirit falls. There is a refreshing. Let me close with one Scripture. Nehemiah 9:5, here it is. This is the Word. "Stand up and bless the Lord." "Stand up and bless the Lord," the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen!