

What Is the Air and Ground War in Spiritual Warfare?

- [Announcer] Nehemiah 8. "And all the people gathered as one man into the square before the water gate. And they told Ezra the scribe, to bring the Book of the Law of Moses that the Lord had commanded Israel. So Ezra, the priest, brought the law before the assembly, both men and women and all who could understand what they heard on the first day of the seventh month. And he read from it, facing the square before the water gate, from early morning until midday in the presence of the men and the women and those who could understand. And the years of the people were attentive to the Book of the Law. And Ezra the scribe, stood on a wooden platform that they had made for the purpose. And beside him stood Mattithia, Shema, Anaiah, Uriah, Hilkiah and Maaseiah on his right hand, And Padaiah, Mishael, Malchijah, Hashum, Hashbaddanah, Zechariah and Meshullam on his left hand. And Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people, for he was above all the people. And as he opened it, all the people stood. And Ezra blessed the Lord, the great God. And all the people answered, 'Amen, amen,' lifting up their hands. And they bowed their heads and worshiped the Lord with their faces to the ground. Also Jeshua, Bani, Sherebiah, Jamin, Akkub, Shabbethai, Hodiah, Maaseiah, Kelita, Azariah, Jozabad, Hanan, Pelaiah, the Levites, helped the people to understand the law while the people remained in their places. They had read from the book, from the law of God clearly. And they gave the sense so that the people understood the reading. And Nehemiah, who was the governor, and Ezra the priest and scribe, and the Levites who taught the people, said to all the people, 'This day is holy to the Lord your God. Do not mourn or weep.' For all the people wept as they heard the words of the law. Then he said to them, 'Go your way. Eat the fat and drink sweet wine and send portions to anyone who has nothing ready, for this day is holy to the Lord. And do not be grieved for the joy of the Lord is your strength.' So the Levi's calmed all the people saying, 'Be quiet for this day is holy. Do not be grieved.' And all the people went their way to eat and drink and to send portions to make great rejoicing because they had understood the words that were declared to them. On the second day, the heads of father's houses of all the people with the priests and the Levites came to together to Ezra scribe in order to study the words of the law. And they found it written in the law that the Lord had commanded by Moses, that the people of Israel should dwell in booths during the feast of the seventh month, and that they should proclaim it and publish it in all their towns and in Jerusalem. 'Go out to the hills and bring branches of olive, wild olive, myrtle, palm and other leafy trees to make booths as it is written.' So the people went out and brought them and made booths for themselves each on his roof and in their courts and in the courts of the house of God and in the square of the water gate and in the square of the gate of Ephraim. And all the assembly of those who had returned from the captivity, made booths and lived in the booths. For, from the days of Jeshu, the son of nun, to that day, the people of Israel had not done so. There was very great rejoicing And day by day from the first day to the last day, he read from the Book of the Law of God. They kept the feast seven days. And on the eighth day, there was a solemn assembly according to the rule."

- If you've got a Bible, open up to the book of Nehemiah or find it on your phone. Today's question is what is the air war and the ground war of spiritual warfare? We're going right through this great Old Testament book of the Bible. We're taking a chapter a week. This week, we're in chapter eight. So, here's catch you up on the story for those of you who are new. So God has

sent two of his best men, Ezra, Nehemiah, on this very incredibly important mission, to go to the city of Jerusalem, which had been attacked and abandoned for 141 years to secure the city and to get the church the temple open so the Bible could be taught, so that the choir and the band could take the stage, that people could be saved, that revival could come, that emotional processing and healing would come to the people of God through the Word of God. Well, in addition to God working through these two leaders, they were met by Satan's counterparts. And these are two guys, Sanballat and Tobiah. The big idea is this, for every ministry, somebody's trying to do anti ministry. Every time God is trying to do something, someone is trying to stop it. Sanballat was a bad guy. He didn't claim to be a believer. And Tobiah professed to be a believer, but he didn't live as a believer. He got into the community, he manipulated people with false reports and with manipulation really, of relationships. And so there's been this constant battle from chapter one to chapter eight. There has been ministry and anti ministry. And the point is this, if you're gonna do something for God, you're gonna pay something to get that done. The Lord Jesus said in the New Testament, He said, "I will build my church." And He said, "The gates of hell won't prevail against it." Gates are defensive in every regard. I've never seen someone in bootcamp get handed a picket fence to go to war. And if so, it's your general really not liking you. Because if you go to war with gates, those are defensive, not offensive weapons. And the point is this, Jesus is saying spiritually that Satan and demons, what they do, they take people captive in a spiritual war. And these gates would be things like bitterness because of unhealed hurt, lies that confuse people who need the truth. This would be demonic, counterfeit religion and spirituality and ideology. This could even be traumatic experiences in life. And what happens is, these are like gates. They're like prison cell doors that hold people from the freedom that God intends for them. And so God's intent is to unleash His people filled with his spirit to go break down gates to set people free in Jesus Christ. And so what we see in this section of Nehemiah is nothing less than spiritual war. And in this spiritual war, God's people are trying to get to people who need the Lord and the enemies are trying to stop them from setting the captives free. And so, what we're gonna see is, all warfare has two components, an air war and a ground war. What is true in the physical is also true in the spiritual. In a war there will be an air war. This is where there are fighter pilots and drones and bombs and helicopters. And then, the ground war are literally the boots on the ground. Going to see people who are injured, to rescue people who are held captive, to set people free who are in bondage. And what we see here is that their air war includes preaching and teaching and worship and gathering and their ground war classes and relationships and groups and answering questions that people have and praying over the needs that people give. And the reason this is so important, their citizenship just grew by 50,000 people, which sounds like a lot, but ours is almost doubled that this year. There's upwards of 100,000 people moving into the greater Phoenix Valley. So what was happening in Nehemiah, they were trying to get their old church remodeled, get it open, get the band ready to go, get the Bible teacher set up so that all these new people move to town. They could come to know the Lord, they could come to the church, they could meet God's people, they could meet God, they could join God's people. The exact same thing that we and all the other Bible-based churches in the Valley are trying to do. And so we pick up the story, the war is against the word. In Nehemiah 8:1-5, it says, "All the people gathered." So everybody gets together for church. For those of you that have been with us for a while, how long has it been

since they had a church meeting? 141 years. We just saw a few years ago, some churches closed for COVID and they're really struggling. Let me say, if you've been close for 141 years, you're really struggling at that point. Your attendance is probably not snapping back. But all the people gathered and they told Ezra the scribe to bring the Book of the Law. So everybody's together like a concert and everybody's shouting like bring the Bible, bring the Bible, bring the Bible. You can see this is gonna be one of my favorite chapters in the whole Bible. They're like cheering for the Bible to be brought out. So, they bring the Bible out and then the story continues, "That the Lord had commanded Israel." He read from it. So, Ezra opens the Bible, "From early morning till midday in the presence of the men and the women and those who could understand." So everybody showed up for their church service that was old enough to understand. Grace, my wife and I were talking on the way. She's like, "I wonder if they had kids ministry." I don't know. But the kids weren't in this meeting. So yes, I am going to assume they had bouncy houses, swimsuit summer and slides 'cause that's the will of the Lord. Amen. All right. So, "And the ears of all the people were open," so they're paying attention, "attentive to the Book of the Law." So people are taking notes and they're paying attention. "And Ezra, this scribe stood on a wooden platform they had made," literally a stage, "so that people could see him and hear him." "Ezra opened the book in the side of the people." So he literally opens the Word of God and the people stood out of respect. And so, here's the big idea. It has only been a week since they got their city secure and open. The first thing they do, they have church 'cause that's their first priority. You and I need to understand that for 141 years, it hadn't been a priority. And as soon as they understand how significant gathering for worship is, they make it their first and highest priority. This is for us as believers, we want to make the worship of God and the gathering as God's people our highest priority. And what happens, this is the beginning of basically their new year. So it's the perfect time. Hey, come to church, hear the Bible, get a fresh start. New year, new you. In January, just so you know, we're gonna jump into another book of the Bible called the Song of Songs. It's an Old Testament book about dating and sex and marriage and romance. I can't cover all of the chapters in church. So, we'll cover those at Real Men. And I know you guys will be excited about that. So, we're gonna be in a great new book of the Bible, and Grace and I are releasing a brand new marriage book with Excel in Marriage Today for the series in January. But the point is, they gather for worship. And since it's a new year, they're making their relationship with God their priority. And we wanna also make your relationship with your spouse a priority for next year. And what we see here is these two men work together. So, Nehemiah built the platform, Ezra stood on it to preach and teach. These two men, they complete one another. They don't compete with one another. Nehemiah is the guy who, he understands fundraising and he understands legal and PR and building permits and supply chain issues and cash flow and org charts. How many of you, that's you? You've accepted Excel in your heart. You like things organized and buttoned up. Nehemiah works with Ezra. Ezra's, the Bible teacher, he's the spiritual leader. He organizes the band, the choir, the preaching and teaching of God's Word and the small group leaders. How many of you are more like, you're more like Ezra? They work well together. In your Bible, they each get a book of the Bible, Ezra and Nehemiah are books regarding the ministries of these men who complete one another. They don't compete with one another. It just shows the power of unity and humility. Two world class leaders working together to love people and help people to understand God. That

being said, let's talk about Ezra's sermon. It's long. So, let me ask you a question. What would you think would be a long sermon? 'Cause I know it's different than what I would think. So I just want to, So who would like to throw out a number? What would be a long sermon for you?

- [Congregant] Three hours.

- Three hours, two hours.

- [Congregant] Hour and a half.

- Hour and a half. If you said 40 minutes, we know who. You're a guest, You're your first time visitor. This sermon, this is one of my new life verses in the Bible. If you look at the timeframe mentioned in Nehemiah 8, he preached for six hours. Praise the Lord. That's amazing. So it says too, that the people stood. So, you should never complain. Sermons max an hour and 15 minutes while you sit down. You guys got it easy. These people were standing up. It's a long sermon, six hours. But here's part of the reason, they hadn't had church for 141 years. They got a lot to catch up on. It's like, hey, oh it's nice to have you back. Yeah, I haven't been here since the 1700s. Whoa, wow. You probably need to catch up. In addition, it's biblical. It says that he opened the Book of the Law of Moses. This is the first five books in the Old Testament. He does a six hour sermon on the Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. Five books known as the Pentateuch, the book in five parts. And he's telling them the law of Moses. And so what we see as well, it's very authoritative. Here's where the Word of God is. It's literally over the people. This is very important. They built a platform so that Nehemiah could prepare the way for Ezra to open the Word of God. Everybody gathers. And the center of their service, they're gonna worship afterward as we will, was the opening of the Word of God. At this point. They have most of the Old Testament. Jesus hasn't come and the New Testament has not yet been given. But even visually, what does this tell you? That this must be the highest authority. By putting the Bible over the people it was literally showing the people this Word of God has authority over you. It's very important. This is one of the reasons I always preach with a Bible, just to literally say this is the Word of God and it is over us in authority. And when we open it, we get a word from God because it is the Word of God. And so, what's happening here up until this point, there's been a lot of battles. They've had PR battles, all kinds of false things said about them. They've had legal battles, open charges made publicly to the government. They have had financial battles, they've had security issues. They have had death threats. They have family and friends trying to pull people away from this mission to get this church and ministry moving forward. They have had a battle in some way every day. And now we know why. The battle is always against the opening of the Word of God. If the Bible is gonna be opened, there's gonna be a battle to open the Bible. Because once God's Word is open, you're gonna see it. Revival comes, lives are changed and things happen. So what I wanted you to know is this, whether you're joining us online or you're live, anywhere someone is trying to open the Bible, there is going to be a battle. Because the Bible here has been closed for 141 years and now it's open and that's gonna change everything. And what we believe, what I know to be true is that when the Word of God is open, the power of God is unleashed. And so my story with the Bible, we've

all got a story with the Bible. I grew up in a sort of a Catholic home. I didn't have a bad experience. I was just bored, didn't pay any attention. I was a kid, didn't care. My mom knew the Lord, but I didn't. We did have a Bible at our house. How many of you grew up in a religious family and you had a coffee table with a Bible on it? And the rule is, the Bible has to be the same size as the coffee table. It's that big. It's that big. We had a giant Bible. You would never put it on your lap to read it 'cause your legs would fall asleep. It cut off all your circulation in your lower extremities. And so, I remember as a kid that I never opened that Bible. And at one point it had dust on it. It was just covered in dust. There was a Baptist preacher named Charles Spurgeon, one of my favorites. And he was in London. He said, "Many people have so much dust on their Bible that they can write damnation on it with their finger." That was my Bible, okay. That was my Bible. So then, I go to high school and I meet a pastor's daughter now, my wife, Grace. And she gave me a Bible at the age of, what was it? 17, 18-ish? And I didn't read it until I was 19, 'cause I didn't, I cared about Grace, but I didn't care about the Bible. And so, I finally opened the Bible, assuming I knew what it said. There's a God, be a good person. God likes good people, Good people go to heaven. I'm a good person. Close the book. Don't need it ever again. That's kind of what I thought it said. And I opened the Bible. I started reading it. And the first thing I got was offended. It kept it like, whoa. It says, I'm not good. I'm bad. I need God. I'm like, ooh, ooh. This is very negative book. Sort of, judgey. Very judgey, this book. Very judgey book. Now, I'm like, I'm frustrated with this book. Where is the part that says I'm awesome? I'll go to the book of Mark. That will definitely tell me how awesome I am. That's not what it said. So then, I became a Christian reading the Bible. I got into a really good Bible teaching church. It was great. My first pastor, wonderful. I'll never forget, I was in a Bible study with him. He's like, "Okay, here in the Old Testament, it promises and prophesies the coming of Jesus. Here in the New Testament, hundreds, thousands of years later, I want you to connect. This is exactly how it happened." My mind was blown. I was like, God wrote this book. So then, God spoke to me at the age of 19 at the Men's Retreat. Said, marry Grace, preach the Bible, train men, plant churches. 'Cause I didn't know God still talked to people. And so I went to my pastor, "I was like, I think God talked to me." He's like, "Yeah, God, talked to you. That's what you gotta do." So, I've been teaching the Bible publicly now as a senior pastor, this is my 27th year. And I know you're looking at me saying, wow, you look older than that. 27 years. And what I like to do, I like to preach through books of the Bible. So, that we did Genesis before that we did Romans. Before that we did Daniel and then COVID hit. And now we're leaving Daniel. You're like, what the heck? So you know, you never know what's gonna happen. But when you open the Word of God and you teach it, everyone learns something and so does the teacher. Every time I read the Word of God, I learn something new. And I'm constantly amazed by it. I find that God's word is like anything else I have ever read or studied in my entire life. And so, if you're new, there's a study guide for Nehemiah on the way out. Grab it for free. If you're online, go to realfaith.com. In the store, there's a study guide to help you learn God's Word. In addition, you can sign up for daily devotions, five days a week. We'll email or text them to you to learn God's Word. This sermon is available for free, you get what you pay for, It's available for free in video and audio. We transcribe the sermon and we give it all away for free. And we put my sermon notes online. I have been teaching through the Bible for a long time. I love it. I like it. I find that nothing has the power quite like the Word of God. And here, they've had a war. They've had a battle. But the

battle is always for those who are trying to open the Bible. Now, the Bible gets opened and the power of God is unleashed. And so, what we see next is that spiritual war has an air war and a ground war. It says, "Ezra blessed the Lord." So he starts by praying over the people, "the great God. And all the people answered, 'Amen, amen,' lifting their hands." So, let's just try this. Some of you, you're first time guests, you're like, What are the rules? Here's the rule. You're gonna say amen twice, okay. Okay. So, okay. One, two, three.

- [All] Amen. Amen. You see that little participation encourages the preacher. And some of you, when you go to church, you're like, I don't know if we're allowed to say things. And especially we're not sure what to do with our hands. And here, they lift their hands. Like if you were in a Baptist or a Presbyterian church, your hands go here, they go right here, right. Okay. Now, if you love the Holy Spirit, but you're in a Baptist or Presbyterian church, you do this with your hands. Which is kinda like nobody could see it but in my heart, the Lord knows I'm raising my hands, okay. Then if you are in a, like a Holy Spirit church, woo. If you're in a, like a varsity Holy Spirit church. Whoop, whoop. If you're in like a pro Holy Spirit church, whoop, whoop. It's a little ticker. You're going up and down. That's what you're doing, okay. So what the people do here, they give a little feedback. So, you could say amen. Amen.

- [All] Amen.

- Okay. Amen means I agree with that. Yes Lord, be it so. It also means would you finish the sermon, okay. Hustle it up. And so, when we go to worship, we're gonna go to worship afterward as they do, these are your hands. You can lift them, right. I mean, some of you, you've been arrested. You know how to do this. You can do this. You know how to do this. You can do this. Okay. What? Some people have been arrested. Amen. Okay. Yeah, amen. All right. So, what we see here is they've got the air war, they got the ground war. The air war is this, literally the preaching of God's word goes out. It goes out through the atmosphere, through the environment in the air. So Ezra, is preaching the Word of God. In our day, this would include things like platforms, media, social media, using technology to just get the Word of God out. So, that's what we're doing right now. We're live streaming online, we're getting Bible teaching out. But how many of you have found that when the Bible is taught, people sometimes misunderstand it or they have questions or their first thought is, I disagree with that. Right. So, the ground war is, okay, the Bible's gone out. But now people have questions, objections, prayer requests. They're trying to figure it out. So what happens is, they deploy leaders to go meet with the people. Do you have any questions? Anything I could pray for you about? We would call these small groups, classes, mentoring, discipleship. It's not enough just to blast the Bible. People then have questions. Do you have any questions? They're like, yeah, I do. What is it? I didn't understand it. Or they have objections. They're like, doesn't sound right to me. We gotta talk about this. Or they have a prayer request. Man, okay. That means I gotta make some changes in my life. Every Christian, hear me in this, every Christian is part of the ground war. Every Christian is. So, if you're a mom or a dad, you teach your kids the Bible, they're have a lot of questions. So your job, answer the questions. If you're working with somebody who doesn't know the Lord, they may have objections. Okay, answer the objections. Or you meet people,

they're struggling. You're like, hey, can I pray for you? So, here's what I would encourage you as God's people, everywhere you go, just assume somebody there is experiencing spiritual warfare. Satan has got them trapped in addiction, lies, discouragement, bitterness, trauma. They're struggling with something. And you're sent there as part of the ground war to love them, to pray for them, to ask them if they have any questions or if there's anything you can do for them. Here's what I would tell you. Nobody else is ashamed of their team, politically, socially, economically, sexually, nobody's ashamed of their team. So don't be ashamed of your team. I'm on team, Jesus, you know. Would you like a Bible? Give them one. Can I pray for you? Do you have any questions? Do you have any objections? Do you wanna come to church and be offended? I'll pick you up, you know. So, you can't leave 'cause I'm driving, you know. But how many of you, that's how you came to know Jesus Christ as God and Savior. You had questions, objections, curiosities, prayer requests, and somebody took the time to listen to you, to speak with you, to walk with you, to help you. That's what they're doing here. At our church, this would be classes like premarital and parenting. And we would encourage you to sequence it in that order. In addition, you get that on the way home. That was funny. In addition, and all the dads said, amen, okay. So in addition, this would include like what we call life groups. So the kids in the back, they have life groups for the little guys, get together, pray and talk and serve them. We have student life groups, we have young adult life groups, we have men's life groups here on Wednesday night at Real Men. We've got women's life groups with my wife, Grace, Wednesday morning and evening. We've got home life groups scattered all over the valley to do the exact same thing. We like to say, we open our Bibles to learn, we open our lives to love. The opening the Bible, that's the air war, the opening the life to love, that's the ground war. And so, ministry doesn't change from thousands of years ago to today. The principles remain the same. And then what we see is Bible preaching has God's anointing. Oftentimes, and I love, I'm gonna go back to the six hour sermon. I just find that wonderful. But what happens is, oftentimes pastors will say, well, we can't really get deep into the Word of God because people, you know, need to meet Jesus. And you can't go deep and reach. And my point is, yeah, you can. I've seen over 10,000 people baptized under my preaching in my lifetime. People meeting Jesus. And so, you can teach the Bible and people can meet Jesus. And sometimes people say, well, like they don't have an attention span. So, it used to be said that the average person's attention span was 22 minutes 'cause that was a television show minus the commercial. Now that we have social media, it's a second. That's their attention span, right. You can't tick and talk. That's two seconds. You can tick or talk. One second, that's all we got. But the point is this, the Holy Spirit shows up for Bible teaching in a way he won't show up for Netflix and I'm confident he won't show up for Amazon Prime, okay. The Holy Spirit wants people to learn the Bible so the author of the book meets with those who are studying the book. When you open the Bible, it's the only time you are ever gonna sit with the author and have them help you understand what it is meaning. So, how many of you in reading the Bible, you're like, I didn't think I could understand it, but the Holy Spirit helped me understand it. How many of you, you're like, I couldn't believe that I actually listened to a whole sermon from Pastor Mark for an hour. Some of you're like, are we gonna do that? Amen. Okay. Amen. "Nehemiah, the governor and Ezra, the priest and scribe," Nehemiah 8:9-12. "And the Levites taught the people, they said, 'This day is holy to the Lord your God. Do not mourn or weep.'" We're gonna talk about this in a moment. They first

hear the Bible and they're emotionally convicted. "For all the people wept as they heard the words of the law. Then he said, 'Go your way. Eat the fat. Drink the sweet wine. Send portions to anyone who has nothing ready for this day is holy to the Lord.'" Don't cry, rejoice. Don't throw a funeral, throw a party. "And do not be grieved," I love this line, "the joy of the Lord is your strength." Joy doesn't come from the world, it comes from the Lord. Joy doesn't come from the circumstances, it comes from the one over the circumstances. "The joy of the Lord is your strength." If you don't have joy, you're gonna be weak. You're gonna be very weak for this difficult life. "So the Levites," these are the ministry leaders, "calmed all the people saying, 'Be quiet for this day as holy. Do not be grieved.' And the people want their way to eat and drink and send portions to make great rejoicing because they understood the words that were declared to them." So here's a big idea. The Bible is opened. Their first response is emotional conviction. Emotional conviction. They're like, oh my gosh. That's who God is, that's what God says, this is who I am. And their first understanding is, I have not obeyed God. That is sin. And they're bothered by that. They're weeping. I'll never forget some years ago, I had a guy come up to me after service. He was in the process of becoming a Christian, maybe a brand new Christian somewhere in that season. He suppressor Mark, "I've been reading the Bible." I was like, "Great." He's like, "It's not working." I was like, "What do you mean it's not working?" He says, "The more I read it, the worse I feel." Amen. Yeah, it's working. Because before it can change you. It needs to reveal you. Before it can change you. It needs to reveal you to you. Once you know who God is, and then you see who you are, then you realize the things that God needs to forgive and the ways that you need to change, okay. How many of you like me, first time you read the Bible, you thought you knew what it said and you're like, oh boy. Oh boy, I'm not doing what God said. And there's conviction. Let me say, there's a big difference between conviction and condemnation. What these people experience with emotional mourning and weeping is conviction. And it's a good thing. Everything that God creates, Satan counterfeits. The counterfeit of conviction is condemnation. Romans 8:1 says, "There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ, but there is conviction." Jesus said He would sin the Holy Spirit to convict us of our sin. Conviction, let me explain the difference between conviction and condemnation. Conviction is from God. Condemnation is from other people with their own religious rules or judgements. Conviction is very specific. God puts his finger on the specific issue. Condemnation is very general. I'm like, I feel bad, but I don't know why. I feel like I did wrong, but I'm not sure what it was. I feel like God's anger with me, but I'm not sure what the cause is. It's very specific. And it leads to change. So, it's hopeful. It's God saying, here's the issue, I forgive it. Let's change it. Life's gonna pivot now. Condemnation says, it's not just what you did, it's who you are. You didn't just do a bad thing, you're a bad person. You didn't just fail, you're a failure. So, what they realize as the Bible is taught, they're like, oh, the Holy Spirit shows them their sin. It's very specific. And now they can repent of it, which means to change. So, I didn't have this in my notes. Can I be honest with you? Okay, thank you both of you, supporting me emotionally. I didn't intend to share this. You could tell me when I'm done, Grace, if this is a good idea. Grace gave me the Bible, I started reading it. And one of the first things I realized it said, you're not supposed to fornicate. That's what the pastor said too. You read the Bible and he taught the Bible in our college ministry. And so I was like, "Oh, it's a new word. I don't know what that means." So I did my first word study in the, my first word study in the Bible

was on fornication. That's where I started my theological endeavors, okay. And it seemed to say that fornication meant, you weren't supposed to sleep with someone you were not married to. I thought, well surely that can't be what that means. So, I called the pastor. And I said, "Hey, pastor. Yeah, thanks for the sermon on fornication. Been doing a lot of bible study. Just had a question. I'm really concerned about a friend of mine. I fear they may be fornicating. I didn't tell him it was Grace. So, he said, "Yeah." He said, "What's going on?" I said, "Well, they're not married, but you know, they sleep together." He's like, "Yeah, that's fornicating. They need to stop." I was like, "Oh, are you sure?" He's like, "Yeah." I called Grace. I was like, "Hey, we need to stop." She's like, "Yeah, I know." I was like, "Oh, what? Okay." But it was conviction from God and it was very specific so that we could change. And we did. We stopped. Stop doing what you're not supposed to do. Met with our pastor, studied the Bible, got married. Now, we've been faithfully married for 30 years. We love each other and we have a good marriage. So, praise God for that. Yeah, but here's the point. When God first convicted me, it was from God, not from religious people, not from culture. It was very specific. Get a belt. That's what I heard. I'm not sure that's what was said. And I am wearing a belt, so I'm obedient to this day, okay. And then it was change. And so, we went from feeling convicted to feeling hopeful that we've changed and now God can bless our future relationship. That's the way conviction works. It's very specific. It's from God and it's good. And what happens here, the people are convicted. And this is the beginning of a revival. Lots of people get convicted of their sin and they give their lives to God. And so you need to understand, if you wanna see revival, you gotta start with Bible teaching. A lot of times Christians are like, you know what? I'd love to see revival. Me too. But it starts with Bible teaching. Until the Word of God is open, the Spirit of God is not as active, people are not convicted. And they can't change until they know who God is and how He wants them to change. And the one thing I've learned about the Bible and the reason it convicts us, this Word of God is different than any other book I've ever read. In my library at the house I got, I don't know, five plus thousand books on the shelf at my house. On my laptop, I think I've got maybe 10 plus thousand books. I love books. I love dead guys who write books. I've read a lot of books. This is the only book that I've ever read that as I read it, it reads me. I've never read a book that read me. I've never studied a book that studied me. As you open the Word of God, the Spirit of God does this work. According to Hebrews 4:12, in one translation, "It judges the desires and thoughts of the heart." As you are in the Bible, the Bible is in you. And it now it's examining your motives and your heart and your thoughts and your desires. That's why the Bible, it says repeatedly is living and active. The Bible isn't old, it's eternal. That means it's always timely because it's timeless. The Word of God is a powerful force unleashed to save people and change destinies. And what's happening here, the Bible is being read, but it's reading them. And they're studying the Bible, but the Bible is studying them. And they're reading the Bible to figure out who God is and God's showing them also who they are. And so then they respond rightly and they live under His word. Here's the big idea. "The heads of the father's houses of all people." He gets the men together. This is Real Men 1.0. The reason he gets the men together is, if the men will walk with God, they then are a blessing and not a burden to women and children. See, one of my great convictions is, if we can get the men built up, then they can bless the women and the children. That's why we spend so much time and energy investing in men. Nehemiah does the same. They have Bible teaching, small groups and the

men's meeting, "The heads of the father's houses of all the people, the priests and the Levites, the leaders, came to Ezra to study the words of the law." The men are like, we don't know the Bible. We need to learn it. Great. And they found it written that the Lord had commanded by Moses, that the people of Israel should dwell in booths. This is camping. They are going to have a camping ministry, okay. This would be hard to get Grace to sign up for, just so you know. To quote that great theologian, Jim Gaffigan, we're indoorsy, Right. We're indoorsy. But here what they're gonna do, they're all gonna go camping. How many of you, you're like, yay, camping? Okay, one of you. All right, great. That's great. Welcome to Scottsdale. They're like, Is there a spa? No, you're sleeping on the ground. "And they found it written that the Lord had commanded by Moses, that the people of Israel should dwell in booths or tents during the feast of the seventh month. And all the assembly of those who had returned from the captivity made booths and lives in booths for the people who had not done so." They had not done this for a very long time. And there was very great rejoicing. They're not weeping anymore. They're rejoicing. And I'll explain, why? "Day by day, from the first to the last, he read from the Book of the Law." So they're gonna do a seven day Bible conference. Ooh, that's amazing. "They kept the feast for seven days, and on the eight days there was a solemn assembly according to the rule." So they're reading the Bible and they're like, it says here, we're supposed to do some holiday called the feast of booths. And it's supposed to last seven days. And we're supposed to go through books of the Bible. We've never done that. We should do that. What they do, they adjust their life to obey God's Word. They're changing their schedule. Martha, what did we have next week? Clear our schedule and give me a tent. Why? I was reading the Bible. We're going camping, huh? Everybody's going camping. We're gonna get Bible teaching all day every day. It's gonna be like Bible college for the whole family. What? No Amen? Come on man. So, I'm very excited about this. So, here's what happens, how many of you, you read the Bible and you're like, I've not been doing that? I gotta make some changes. They're gonna change their schedule, they're gonna change their budget, they're gonna change their priorities. They're now worshiping God by taking their time, their talent, their treasure, and giving it to the priorities of God. And so, what is gonna happen is, God is gonna bless them. But let me say this. One of the great myths is that God blesses people. You've been here a while. You know the line. God doesn't bless people. He blesses a place. That place is under His Word. Under His Word. God blesses this place of obedience to His Word. And so if you are a person who wants to be blessed, you need to place yourself under His Word. If you wanna do the right thing, God wants to help you. If you wanna make changes to live in obedience to God's Word, He's excited to come alongside and make that happen. How many of you, when your child is disobedient, you respond to them differently than when they're obedient? God is a father, we're His kids. He's not gonna bless disobedience. He'll bless obedience. So, God blesses people who place themselves under His Word. What they're starting to do here, they're saying, Well, our schedule hasn't been for the Lord. It is now. Our budget's not been for the Lord. It is now. Our priorities have not been for the Lord. It is now. We've actually not opened the Bible for generations. Time to get that Bible open and learn for a week and take some notes. And God blesses them. And so, I was thinking about it. The blessing of God is really what makes the difference in life. Some will call it the anointing. Some years ago I took a flight. And on the way to the destination, massive headwinds. We were over an hour late and the whole flight, they had the, keep your

seatbelt on, and everybody felt a little seasick. The flight attendants weren't giving out anything. They're strapped in their seat because we're we're flying into a headwind. And I remember talking to one of the flight attendants when we landed. They said, "Yeah, we were expecting headwinds. We didn't know it would be that bad. It's a good thing that we put in extra fuel." I was like, "Thank you." My favorite thing about a plane is, it's in the air. That's my favorite thing about a plane. So on the way home, what the pilot told us was, "Now we've got a tailwind." Guess what? The flight was about an hour and a half faster. They didn't turn the, fasten seatbelt on. There was no turbulence. They kept bringing the cart up and down the aisle. Everybody's smiling. No one was throwing up in a bag or looked like they were in a "Scooby Doo" episode. Everybody was in a good mood. Because here's the big idea, life goes a lot better when you're in the tailwind and you're not fighting in a headwind. Disobedience to God is living your life in a headwind. It's going against everything that the Holy Spirit is trying to do in your life. Repenting is literally turning around. It's turning your mind around, your heart around, your life around, your budget around, your schedule around and saying, you know what? I have been fighting God and now I'm gonna start worshipping God. God, if this is where you want me to go and how you want me to live and who you want me to be, I wanna be in your tailwind. I want you to get behind me and give me a little momentum. Save me some energy. These people now, they've been living for 141 years flying into a headwind. Now, they repent. Now, it's a tailwind. And what we see here, they start by weeping, they end by rejoicing. So let me, let me take a few minutes. And it doesn't mean I'm done. It means that you probably not gonna pay attention. So, hang in there. So, I was praying for you all week and I was like, Lord, how do I summarize this? And I prayed on Thursday night and I woke up Friday morning and I just felt like I saw it in the text. So, let me give you the story. Up until this point, it's been 141 years of people not reading the Bible, not obeying God, not worshipping, not attending church, not living for God. Now, they were people who were probably a bit religious, spiritual. Spiritual people are like, oh, I believe in God. And every once in a while I pray and I, you know, I do spiritual things or they're religious. They keep a little bit of the traditions, you know. I make sign to the cross, kneel a little bit, give a few few bucks. Maybe Christmas or Easter, when somebody dies, I go into a building and you know, pretend like I really care about God. They were a bit religious and spiritual. It had been this way for 141 years. And then God broke the heart of a leader named Nehemiah. We saw this in chapter one. Now, the problem had been there for 141 years. The point is this, when the Holy Spirit shows you what God sees, it changes how you feel. And it was like, yeah, well we've not really obeyed God for 141 years. And one day he's like, and this is a crisis. It broke his heart. It said in Nehemiah 1, that he spent months praying and fasting and seeking the God of heaven. He's journaling chapters one through seven were his journal, he's like, God, we gotta fix this. We gotta get the city open. We gotta get the church open. People need Bible teaching. People need to worship. People aren't walking with God. We've already wasted generations. And his heart is broken. The people that support him originally were a very small group. In the New Testament, the word that would be attributed to them would be remnant. Lots of religious people, only a few redeemed people. Lots of people who believe in God, but only a few that are living for him. It's a small group of people. They say, Nehemiah, we agree. We gotta get the Bible open. People need to know the Lord. So, they band together. And they have a battle to open the Bible. Slander, intrigue, threats, security issues, legal problems, lots of battle to open

the Bible. They finally get the church open and the Bible open. They meet for a six hour sermon, as we just saw. And Ezra taught from, "The Law." He calls it actually the Book of the Law of Moses. In the first five books of the Old Testament, the law of Moses, there are 600, 613 laws. So, here's what Ezra's doing. He's like, okay, number one, number two, number three. How many of you by 613, you'd be feeling pretty guilty? Or here's your job description, 613 points from the Lord. The heart of the law of Moses is the 10 commandments? That's the heart of the law. Well, as the law is read, the Holy Spirit convicts all the people. And the law is crucial. In the New Testament, there's a man named Paul and he mentions the law 121 times in his writing. And what he's saying is, we need the law to understand what he calls the gospel. You need the bad news before you get the good news. You need to know you're a sinner before you get excited about a savior. So these two things go together, the law and the the gospel. The law is the bad news of what we've not done, the gospel is the good news of what Jesus has done. So the reason that they're weeping and crying, they got the bad news. You're a guilty center. Now, what happens in our day? We tend to think, let me say this. Let me give you my definition of the law, and then I want to talk about our day. The law is God's perfect, unchanging external authority judging everyone. God's perfect. So actually, one of the Psalm says, "Lord, your law is perfect." God's law is perfect. You know what that means? We're not changing. It's you only change things that have a mistake or an error. If God's law is perfect, then there are no edits. So, God's law is this perfect unchanging. Certain people will be like, well, I feel like we've evolved beyond that. No we haven't. Well, sociologists all agree. Well, they're kindling. Don't worry about it. You know, at the end of the day, it doesn't matter what people think, it matters what God says. And God's looking for messengers, not editors. He's looking for messengers, not editors. So, God's law is His perfect unchanging external authority. The authority is not internal. I don't feel like that's right. I don't feel like one way to heaven is good. I don't feel like Jesus is the only way. I don't feel like I'm a boy. I don't feel like I'm a girl. I don't feel like this is right. I don't feel like an old book should tell me what to do. You're appealing to an internal authority. The law of God is an external authority and it judges everyone. It's over all the peoples, all the times, all the places and all the cultures. You can't say, well, that's not my culture. That's not how I identify. God's law is His perfect, unchanging external authority judging everyone. Now, people who don't believe in God's law tend to have a secular version. In our world, true or false, there are some people that still believe that certain things are right and wrong. Should be this way. We would call it the law. Rather than going to an external law like God's Word, they go internal. And what our culture has now is a predisposition toward people to try and be God. I will decide right and wrong. I will then go online and I will judge other people based upon my law. We call this social media, which is the Greek word for demon. And what happens is people, amen and amen, okay. What happens is people set up their little throne, which is a counterfeit of Jesus throne. They make their own laws, which are counterfeits of Jesus law. They then judge people according to their law, which is a counterfeit of Jesus judgment. And if you don't obey them, they're going to crucify you. We call that cancel culture. So, even people who don't believe in God, still believe in the law. And let me say this, every time they get angry, they're proving that they have some sense of what they think the law should be. For religious people, non-Christians, other religions, most religions have something like a law. Do this, don't do that, right. It's the to-do list and the don't do list. And every religion, except for

Christianity, thinks that the way that you are saved, forgiven, reconciled to God, granted eternal life, is by you keeping the law. You gotta do what it says and don't do what it says not to do. This is cold works, which is the counterfeit of grace. So, here's the problem. The law cannot save anyone. Your law cannot save you. Because you're not gonna die and stand before a mirror to give an account. You're gonna stand before the Lord Jesus. In addition, the law can't save anyone in a religious sense, because what we tend to think is, if God gives us a to-do list of 613 things, we tend to assume He must grade on a curve, right. So like, I'm not Hitler, I'm not Mother Teresa, I'm a C student. I'm fine, okay. The Bible doesn't have a grading curve. It has a pass-fail grading system. Jesus says, "Be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect." God is the perfect being. Heaven is the perfect place. God's Word is the perfect standard. And if you disobey one of God's laws, you fail. You fail. You can't look at another person and say, I'm better than them. You gotta look at Jesus and say, I'm not like that. Once you realize that you have failed, and then what some people will do, some people will get very religious like, I'm gonna try harder, I'm gonna do better, I'm gonna change my whole life. Guess what? It's too late. One sin is a failing grade. Some people don't like this, but I love this and I'll tell you why. Because what the law does, it names our sin. See, we like to name our sin. God names our sin. And what the law does, it temp's our sin nature, not that the law is bad, but we are. I'm summarizing a ton of biblical teaching here. Paul says this, he's like, I didn't know what coveting was. I read the Bible. It says, don't covet. What's coveting? Coveting is when you want something that's not yours. He's like, if I could drive any car, whose car would I want? If I could live anybody's house, whose house would I live in? If I could marry anybody's spouse, who would I marry? He's like, next thing I know, all I'm doing is coveting. This is where if you give people law but not the Spirit, they rebel against the law and it exposes their sin nature. How many of you are a parent? You're like, I don't know why they don't obey. I gave them a ton of rules. 'Cause they're evil, okay. Amen. So until they get a new nature, if you get laws, what does your old nature wanna do? Break the law. So, until they get a new nature, their old nature just wants to break the rules. So the more rules you make, the more rebellion you get. And sin is not just what I do. Sin is who I am. That's the broken realization that they come to. How many of you have had a shirt that had a stain in it and the stain got so deep into the shirt that you couldn't get the stain out of the shirt? The stain became part of the shirt. Sin is like that with our soul. It's not like our soul is clean and it's got a little sin on it. The sin is now in the fabric of the soul. And sin isn't just what we do, it's who we are. Sin includes, this will blow your mind, your thoughts. Do you know God knows your thoughts? So you're like, I didn't do anything. God is like, I saw what you were thinking. You're like, oh, it includes your thoughts, your words. How many of you have said something, I mean, I haven't but I'm praying for you. Oh, I have, right. Chief of sinners right here. Your thoughts, your words, your deeds. How many of you have done some things, you're like, that wasn't right? Some things you've done, you hope you don't get caught because you know you're guilty. It also includes your motives. Why do you do that? Well, I was doing that to impress a girl. Okay, so you were being dishonest. Sin includes commission where we do the wrong thing. Well, it's like, I shouldn't have done that. And this is very convicting. It includes omission where you didn't do the thing you were supposed to do. How many of us you're like, I should have said something, I should have gave something, I should have done something, but I didn't. So here's what happens. The 613 laws are taught and here's the quote. "All the people wept as they heard the

words of the law." By the end of the six hours, everybody is just looking at the ground like, oh boy. I came here thinking I was a good person and God was lucky to have me. And now I realize who He is and who I am. And this law convicts me and it reveals me and it breaks me. The question is, what next? They go from weeping to rejoicing. The leaders come along and they're like, okay, let me explain the rest of the story to you. Do not be grieved for the joy of the Lord is your strength. But they don't come up and say, don't feel bad. You're a good person. Hey, nobody's perfect. We all make mistakes. You're better than that guy. I'm sure you didn't mean it. Now, what they say is, you are now grieving because you know who you are. You should start rejoicing when you learn who your God is, okay. "Do not be grieved, for the joy of the Lord is your strength." And all the people went away to eat and drink. They're throwing a party, "And send portions to make great rejoicing." Like they got a band, it's a celebration. Everybody's really in a good mood now because they had understood the words that were declared to them. So they got the law and they got conviction, and then they got the gospel and they got salvation. Let me explain this. They told them about Jesus, friends, 'cause the whole point of the Bible is Jesus. The whole point of human history is Jesus. The whole point of our gathering is Jesus, Jesus Christ. They were rebuilding the city and opening the temple to prepare the way for the coming of the Lord Jesus. So, as the people heard about their sin from the law and they were convicted in the spirit, the leaders came along. They said, let me tell you the rest of the story. The whole reason we're rebuilding the walls, the whole reason that we're reopening the temple is Jesus Christ is coming to fulfill the law. Don't be sad, be glad. Be weeping about what you have done, but be rejoicing about what He can do. And so this is such good news. So, Jesus comes. God becomes a man. The creator enters into creation. And Jesus Christ says the most incredible things. He says, He's God. He's the only founder of any major world religion, Whoever said He was God. And then in John 8:46, He told a crowd. He said, "Which of you can prove me guilty of sin?" He got before a crowd and he said, I have never sinned once in my whole life. And anyone who can prove me different, now speak freely. Just so you know, I'm not gonna do that. How many of you would not stand in public and say, I am sinless, I am perfect, okay? All the wives are chuckling and given the I giving eye, giving the evil eye. And because Jesus said he was God and perfect without any sin, obeying all of God's laws, the religious leaders and the political leaders conspired to kill him because in saying He was God, He was ruling over the government in authority. And by saying He was perfect, He was saying that he was better than all the other religious leaders. So we took Jesus Christ, the most significant person in the history of the world, we crucified him openly, publicly, shamefully. And as Jesus died, the most amazing thing happened. He took my place and He put me in His place. Jesus said, in Matthew 5, "I didn't come to abolish the law, but to fulfill it." Now, I'll tell you what, I've not fulfilled God's law, neither have you. We've all seen him fallen short of the glory of God and disobey His law. Jesus said, I'm perfect. I'm here to do everything that is commanded and demanded in the Word of God. And He goes to the cross and He suffers and He dies in my place for my sins. Martin Luther, the great Protestant reformer, called this the Great Exchange. Second Corinthians 5:21 says it this way, "God made him who knew no sin, sinless and perfect to become our sin, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God." If you're here and you don't know Jesus, it's all about Jesus. It's only about Jesus. It's always about Jesus. The whole reason that you're here is Jesus knows you and you need to know Him. And you need to know that you are a

sinner, but He is a savior. And you can feel bad about what you've done, but you can move on to feel great about what He has done for you. And so on the cross, Jesus took our place and he put us in His place. He took condemnation so we could have salvation. He took death so that we could have life. He took separation from God the Father, so we could have reconciliation to God the Father. he's the one who experienced the wrath of God so that we could enjoy the grace of God. And Jesus died and He said, "It is finished." And all the work in obedience to the law was done. And three days later, He rose from the dead. Jesus Christ is alive right now. He is returned to heaven. He is ruling and reigning. He is forgiving sin. He is hearing prayer. He is lifting burdens and His name is Jesus Christ.

- Amen.

- [All] Amen.

- And so, when they hear about Jesus, they're like, ah, Jesus fixes everything. Jesus forgives all my sins. Jesus makes sense of my whole life. Jesus opens up my understanding of God. Jesus is the way, the truth and the life. And He's come because he loves me. Amen. And so the people respond with singing and rejoicing and gladness and worshiping Jesus, which is exactly what we're gonna do right now. So, I'll release the Real Faith Live show and let me explain what we're gonna do next.