

MANAGING FINANCES AND REST

JULY 24, 2022 | BUILDING TOGETHER | NEHEMIAH 10:31-39 | PASTOR SCOTT TURANSKY

[PRAYER] Heavenly Father, we do thank you for the families represented here, for the children that attend GraceWay. We thank you for their participation in the life of the church. We thank you that they love you and they're learning how to love you more. We ask, Lord, as we're planning for fall, that you would have the right teachers in place for them, that you would have the right curriculum in place for them. We ask that you would be directing the course of their steps and that you would use their parents as the primary educators of them in their lives. Lord, give us wisdom as a church as we support those parents. We ask that you would guide us in that leadership of those children. We also pray for the other various needs that people experience – many people out of that stage where they're raising children right now, but still dealing with challenges and facing the challenges of life. So we ask, Lord, that you would bless each of us here at GraceWay. Thank you for the ministries that exist here, for the excitement about VBS and Push the Rock tomorrow with over thirty people signed up for the basketball camp. We thank you for the various ministries that are being planned now for fall and we ask that you would oversee all of that. We entrust it to you and ask for your grace to be demonstrated in all that we do. Father, now as we turn our hearts to your word, we ask that you would speak to us and lead us and teach us. In Jesus' name we pray, amen.

What's next, Lord? I think that's the question we need to ask ourselves regularly. What's next, Lord? What are you going to do in my life next? But I think some people approach that kind of a statement with fear and trepidation. You've heard the statement: Don't pray for patience because God will send you trials. And so I think people have this attitude about life, "Well, what's next, Lord?" as if they're afraid of what's next. But we must realize that God has next things for us that are for our good, to grow us, to develop us, to help us to be stronger in our faith. The Christian life is an adventure and the more we get to know God, the more we're able to apply His truths to our lives. Great things happen as we get to know Him more.

That's what the Nehemiah believers were realizing as they're getting to know God. They read the scriptures and they realize we need to make some changes in our lives. So the first changes that they made (we saw a couple of weeks ago) was that they separated themselves from the world, so to speak. They separated themselves from the culture and had their identity found in the relationship with God. We also saw that they walked with the Lord. Now, the next thing that they did was that they committed their lives, marriage and sex, and they made that a priority in their lives. We talked about that last week.

What's next? You've got to ask the question, what's next? if you're committed to the Lord. Lord, what are you going to do next in these believers in Nehemiah's time? Well, what's next is that God is going to work in their work, in their money, in their rest. He's going to put all these things

together in this next few verses. We're going to look at those today and we're going to gain some principles that we can apply to our own lives no matter what you do. Whether you work or you don't work, or you have a to-do list for the day, or maybe you're working at home or you're retired, whatever it is, you have these things that you do and you manage your rest and your work. Accordingly, we're going to take some principles from God's word today and we're going to apply them to our work, our money, our rest, and see what God has to say. We're going to walk with the Nehemiah believers as they are growing in their own faith and see how we might apply some principles in ours.

Now when we look at God's word, we have to realize that some of the material we're studying is very culturally bound. In other words, there's a lot of cultural things going on. Remember last week we talked about arranged marriages. But we took some principles out of that and applied it to our lives. Today, we're going to see something similar. We're going to see a lot of culture involved. We're going to see people in a different theological time zone. We're going to see cultural practices taking place that are different than ours. But we're going to dig into those and we're going to find the principles, those timeless truths, and we're going to bring them over to our lives. And then from there, they're going to scatter into the applications for each one of our lives. The application that you go out of here with today might be different than the person sitting next to you. Applications are many. There are a few principles. There's only one interpretation to God's word, and that's understanding what it was meant at the time and in that place that it was written.

So bear with me now as we go through this passage. I'm going to have you stand in a moment. I want you to watch me read these nine verses. We're going to then look through the cultural stuff that's there. We're going to identify some principles for our lives and apply them to rest, apply them to our generosity, apply them to our personal lives in the area of work. Stand with me please as I read these nine verses from Nehemiah 10.

This is right after they dedicated themselves in marriage, okay. Now they're saying – *And if the peoples of the land bring in goods or any grain on the Sabbath day to sell, we will not buy from them on the Sabbath or on a holy day.* We're going to sanctify this day of rest, they said. And we're not going to let the merchants take over. *And we will forego the crops of the seventh* (that's the environmental protection plan that God had for the ground) *and the exaction of every debt.* That's the social finance issues that would be taken care of as well.

Verse 32 – *We also take on ourselves the obligation to give yearly a third part of a shekel for the service of the house of God.* If you think about the house of God for them, it had things like *for the showbread, the regular grain offering, the regular burnt offering, the Sabbaths, the new moons, the appointed feasts, the holy things.* They're just thinking of all the ministry things that have to do with the purposes of God. *The sin offerings to make atonement for Israel, and for all the work of the house of our God. We, the priests, the Levites, and the people, have likewise cast lots for the wood offering.* Have you ever heard of the wood offering? I never saw that before. Here it is. *The wood offering, to bring it into the house of our God, according to our fathers' houses, at times appointed, year by year, to burn on the altar of the Lord our God, as it is written in the Law.*

We obligate ourselves to bring the firstfruits (that's going to be interesting – the firstfruits offering) of our ground and the firstfruits of all fruit of every tree, year by year, to the house of the Lord; also to bring to the house of our God, to the priests who minister in the house of our God, the firstborn of our sons (we're going to dedicate our firstborns to the Lord) and of our cattle, as it is written in the Law, and the firstborn of our herds and of our flocks; and to bring the first of our dough (that's getting pretty personal, pretty daily), and our contributions, the fruit of every tree, the wine and the oil, to the priests, to the chambers of the house of our God; and to bring to the Levites the tithes (now we've moved from just looking at the needs that exist to the tithes) from our ground, for it is the Levites who collect the tithes in all our towns where we labor. And the priest, the son of Aaron, shall be with the Levites when the Levites receive the tithes. And the Levites shall bring up the tithe of the tithes (so they too are tithing on the tithes that they receive) to the house of our God, to the chambers of the storehouse. For the people of Israel and the sons of Levi shall bring the contribution of grain, wine, and oil to the chambers, where the vessels of the sanctuary are, as well as the priests who minister, and the gatekeepers and the singers. And then here comes the key probably phrase in the whole section. We will not neglect the house of our God. We're going to come and talk about that as well.

Oh, sit down. This is going to be good. We're going to talk about several things here.

Let's talk about the Sabbath day. We have to start there because the Sabbath day in their time was Saturday, and the purpose of the Sabbath day was rest. Now in our practice as Christians, we do not take a day of rest like they did. We certainly don't worship on Saturday, but their Saturday was not a day of worship. It was a day of rest. We do take Sundays, but it's still not the same thing. The whole Sabbath idea is something that changed when the old covenant moved to the new covenant.

We better talk about this for a moment. Because maybe you're asking the question, why don't we have a Sabbath? Why don't we celebrate the Sabbath like they did in the Old Testament? Let me answer the question for you so you understand it. The Sabbath day was created in creation, that God rested on the Sabbath day. But that idea of the Sabbath was taken into the Mosaic Covenant, the covenant with Moses, to be the symbol of the covenant with Moses, that *this is all the law but the seventh day this Sabbath day is to be holy to the Lord*. You are a separate people, you are to keep this day separate. It is the sign of the Mosaic Covenant. Now there are signs for each of the covenants.

If you think back about Noah, you remember Noah was given a promise by the Lord that He will not destroy the earth by water again. He gave him a covenant, a sign to that covenant. The sign was the rainbow. So we have a sign for the covenant.

When God chose Abraham and a family through which he was going [garbled] the family. This family, Abraham's family, He chose a sign and that sign was circumcision.

When we get to David, we see that David had this throne, and it's talked about his throne is going to be forever. The throne that...there's someone going to be on the throne forever, and we know that that person on the throne is Jesus Christ. So it takes on this whole new motif as we get into

the understanding of Christ, to fulfill that promise made to David. But the throne becomes the emblem or the symbol of that covenant.

When we get to Jeremiah, we learn that there's going to be a new covenant. That's the covenant we're in now. Jeremiah says we're going to have a new covenant and it's going to contrast with the old covenant. The old covenant being the Mosaic Covenant with Moses and the Law and the tabernacle and the priests and the Sabbath and all those things. Now we're going to have a new covenant. We have an Old Testament covenant. Now we're going to have a New Testament, a new covenant. And the writer, Jeremiah, as he writes about this new covenant, he says there's going to be a time when the Law of God is not written on tablets anymore, tablets of stone, it is written on the hearts of people. There's going to be a time when we're going to know God personally. That is the new covenant. That's where we are today. So Jesus at the Last Supper took the cup and when He had supped he said, "This is the new covenant in my blood." The sign of the new covenant is communion. It represents and it's the symbol of this new covenant.

Now what happens is when we move through that membrane from the Old Testament or the old covenant into the New Testament or the new covenant, some things change. The law isn't abolished, but Christ fulfilled all of the requirements of the law, all of the sacrificial system, all of the priestly duties are satisfied in Jesus Christ. And so when we come to this idea of Sabbath, the New Testament believers in our Bible times are wrestling with this idea. What do we do? What are we going to do with the Sabbath? What are we going to do with circumcision? How will we handle the law? And so we see in the scriptures the dialogue that they're having about the purpose of the new covenant and how it fits into their lives. What do we do with the old covenant?

Well Hebrews 4 is going to be a key passage when you're trying to understand the Sabbath for today, because Hebrews 4:1-13 really lay out for us that the Sabbath today is Christ's rest inside of our hearts. That we actually experience a Sabbath rest inside of our hearts. It's not a physical day anymore. Now it's a special place in our hearts where we can experience rest inside of our hearts. It's a beautiful thing that God allows for us. He allows us to experience rest, a rest that comes not by works and duty, but it comes because of the work of Jesus Christ that we now have rest in Jesus Christ. And we can enjoy that Sabbath rest, as Hebrews 4 tells us. Well that is sure interesting. It changes from a physical day to a spiritual emotional experience inside of our hearts.

So now, let's take this principle that the Nehemiah believers are saying. They're saying when the merchants come and they try to buy and sell on the Sabbath, we are going to say no because we want to protect that rest, that Sabbath rest that God has for us. We're going to say no to the merchants, we're not going to allow that because we want to protect the rest that God has given to us. Well let's take that over to the New Testament. There are merchants that want to rob us of the rest that God has. Some of those are money things, like I want to put money in my life so much that it robs us of the rest that God has for us. But I think one of the big things that robs us of rest is the merchant of busyness. The busyness comes on in our lives and it just kind of takes over and we don't have that rest that God wants us to enjoy. I would suggest that busyness is allowing the endless choices of life to crowd out the rest that God has for us. God wants us to experience this rest in our lives. This is one of benefits of being a Christian is that we can

experience peace in our lives. We can enjoy this in a really special way. Jesus came and He told us about this peace. He says – *My peace I give to you, not like the world gives*. In other words, there's this bigger peace, this better peace that He gives to us. This is the rest that we need.

And so the merchants come in. Some of those are about working more or doing some other things that have to do with money. But sometimes they're things that rob us from peace. That person that's irritating to you. Maybe lives in your home, maybe it's at your work, maybe it's at the grocery store, maybe cut you off in traffic. I don't know. But all of those are the merchants that are trying to rob you of rest. What these Nehemiah believers are saying is the same thing we need to say when I get up in the morning. I'm going to dedicate my heart to rest. That's what I'm going to do. That's my number one priority today when I get up. I'm going to serve the Lord and rest is going to be my priority. Rest internally. That doesn't mean I'm not going to work, but it means I'm not going to let anything shake me off my centered place with God on the throne of my life. I'm going to allow God to be right there in the center. I'm going to allow Him to work deeply in my life. I want Him to be in control of me. Everything that I do. That's the Sabbath rest that God provides.

Now, I don't want to suggest that means we don't take physical rest. Because I do think in creation God had a cycle of work and rest that He designed. And we need to participate in that somehow. But it doesn't necessarily mean setting aside a Saturday for that. But we all must have ways that we participate in that idea of rest.

The reason we worship on Sunday is because when the disciples... First of all, Jesus Christ rose on the first day of the week. And the disciples, it seems, started to worship then on the first day of the week and the church started to meet. In all of these places as the missionaries went out, they met on the first day of the week. So we've continued that. And we meet on the first day of the week to celebrate the resurrection of Jesus Christ every Sunday.

The Sabbath rest is very important. That God would have us to experience this rest inside of our hearts. We don't want to allow busyness to crowd that out. So what God has done for these Nehemiah believers is brought them to this understanding and this conclusion, that that's what's next. We need to dedicate ourselves to the Lord in this special way so that nothing is going to crowd this out. I think there's a sense of margin that we put in our lives that allow this to take place. We'll talk more about margin in a moment, but that's really the rest side of things.

But he goes on. And let's look at this passage. Let's look at this next part. Because now I've underlined and I've tried to take advantage of this obligation. We're going to create an obligation for ourselves that have to do with *offerings*. That's the first word that's mentioned here, then we're going to also look at the word *tithes*.

So what we're talking about in this first word *offerings* is they're looking at the different needs that the faith community had. We're going to bring the wood offering to take care of the wood problem that they have, so they can burn the burnt offerings. And so when we look around, sometimes in our giving, as we establish our giving patterns, we look at the needs that exist. And we say I'm going to give to that need or I'm going to help out in that area. That's one of the ways

that we financially provide is through the offerings. And then also it talks about the tithes that they're going to give.

But I want to talk about this one special idea, this idea about the firstfruits. This is such a key idea when it comes to managing our money. Because the firstfruits means that we take the first part, even the dough. I thought that was really an interesting statement. I'd never seen that in the Bible before. The firstfruits of your dough. The dough isn't money there, that's your actually kneading dough. Okay? It's the firstfruits of your stuff. So when they started the harvest, the barley harvest, they would take the first bucket and they would bring that to the Lord and they'd dedicate that to the Lord. It wasn't like a percentage, because you didn't know what the percentage was because you didn't know what the whole harvest was going to look like. But they still wanted to set apart the first part. It was the margin in their lives. It was a statement that says, "Lord, I want to acknowledge that you're in control of our productivity, you're in control of our finances, you're in control of everything that we're doing. Lord, I want to acknowledge that you're the one who is providing for us on a regular basis." And so there was this setting apart first, and then letting everything fit in.

Sometimes when I'm helping young people understand this idea of tithing, which is giving 10% of your income, sometimes a young person will say, "Whoa, that's so much. I've got to give that much to the Lord?" Well, you can say I've got to give that. But here's what happens. In fact, here's what Dave Ramsey suggested. As far as biblical principles, he says, 10% to the Lord, 10% to savings. That leaves you 80%. That means I don't get that 20%? 80%. But here's what I say to young people, here's what happens with most people is they make this much money and they spend this much money. You know what the difference is? Debt. Credit cards. We think we have more money than we have. What we need to do is learn to bring our expenses underneath our income. One of the gifts that God has given to us is this privilege of giving to Him, which sets aside margin in our lives, so it becomes the firstfruits. When we say, "God, you're the number one in my life. I'm going to give to you first," and that firstfruit sets the margin.

It really helps us deal with another problem. Rest helps us deal with busyness. Giving helps us deal with greed. Every time that you give away money, then you're giving away a little bit of your own selfishness. It's just a statement. I'm not going to hoard it all. Greed is the belief that money and things will satisfy the needs that only God can fulfill. Greed is this idea of hoarding, keeping it all to myself. But God wants us to have this margin in our lives where we have more.

This idea of margin is so strategic for us as we're trying to understand God and what He wants for us. Because margin... When you're writing a document, you set your margins first. And that's what we need to do. We need to block out the rest. We need to block out the money in our lives first. So we don't let the busyness or greed dictate our lives. We are actually determining, we're deciding we're going to serve the Lord in this way.

That's what's happening with the Nehemiah believers. They're saying, we're going to do this. We're going to make God the Lord of our lives in this particular area of our lives. You see, God has all of this grace, all of these blessings available to us, but we don't take advantage of a lot of what He had for us. He wants us to be able to experience so much. But margin allows us to just have more rest inside of our hearts. It allows us to have more. See, margin allows us to have

more money at the end of the month. Have more time at the end of the day, more energy at the top of the stairway, so to speak. I think some people feel like in their live they have like twenty pounds extra backpack, you know, they're carrying in life. And so feeling overwhelmed is the key that says, you know, maybe I need to reorganize my life. What's happening with the Nehemiah believers is maybe I should reorganize my life so that God is number one and that I can be able to put these things together in a different way than I have been.

I think it's really sad when some people say, "You know, I don't have enough time in my life, so I'm not going to go to church anymore." Or I'm going to take a break from church or something. Here's what happens when you do that. God has designed this church experience that we have to lighten our burden. You know that. If you're gone from church for a while and you come back and you said, "I really needed that." And it does. It lightens our burden for the week. It lightens our burden in life. When you're fellowshiping, and you're serving, and you're listening to Bible teaching, and you're growing spiritually, it creates the margin in your life. You don't have enough time not to go to church, you don't have enough time not to read your Bible because that's part of what lightens the load. So that's why you feel you have this twenty-pound backpack. You feel like, "Oh, I'm so overwhelmed in my life." And you get involved in a faith community in a church like this and we bear one another's burdens. And so it makes the load lighter for us so we can just enjoy the blessings of that.

Does that mean we're not going to experience problems in our lives? No, it doesn't mean that. We're still going to have hard times. It's going to be difficult. If you're raising young children and you're at home, you never get a break. My heart goes out to moms who don't get to take a fifteen-minute break or a lunch hour or something like that. I mean, they're always on duty. And that's not going to stop when you've got margin in your life. But what happens is, you're able to manage it differently.

Oh, Paul knew this. This is why he wrote these words in 2 Corinthians. He says – *But we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us.* This is so crucial. When we establish the margin in our lives, we realize that we're just jars of clay. We've got Jesus Christ inside of us. He's the treasure. *We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies.*

If you're feeling overwhelmed in your life, that's a clue that says maybe, maybe I need to reorient my life so that I have more margin in my life. Maybe I need to reorient my life so that I have some spiritual energy to empower me to do what God has for me. Wow, very interesting idea. As these Nehemiah believers are saying, "What's next, Lord?" God is saying, "Alright. Well, let's deal with your pocketbook. Let's deal with your day-timer. Let's look at these things. Because there's some blessings I want to give you in the midst of that, that require the reorienting of your life. You can't buy into the current culture. You can't have the merchants coming to you all the time. You have to say no to some things." That's what they're doing in their lives.

Why are they doing all of this? Let's go to the last statement. In this passage. He says – *We will not neglect the house of our God.* Now I know maybe you're thinking, Oh, that's the church. It's

not the church. Not the church building. You see, in the Old Testament we had the temple that was designed. These people were bringing things to it because now the temple is being rebuilt and they've rebuilt the walls and they're bringing all the stuff that needs to keep the spiritual faith community going. All of those things are important. And they are important to us. And the church is important to us. But as we pass through this membrane into the New Testament, God says this. He says – *Your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit*. So you know what this is? This is our hearts. We will not neglect our own hearts. We will not neglect the house of our God when we take it over and we put it into the principle for our lives.

Your heart is a such a sacred place. It is the most sacred place on earth because God wants to live there. And when God is living inside of your heart, He has so many things He wants to give you and to me, so many blessings He wants to provide for us, so many things that are so special for us. But it often means that we have to block out our lives in ways that don't just go along. They're tiny. Every once in a while we just need to clean stuff out. Maybe that every once in a while is daily, as we open God's word and we say, “Lord, what do you want to do next in my life? How do you want to work in my heart today? What do you want to do in my life today?” As God does that, He establishes these places of refuge inside of us. We have to learn how to live differently, we have to learn how to process life differently.

That's what's happening with these people. The Nehemiah believers are coming to this conclusion that we must also take the Lord and bring Him to every area of our life, even our day-timer and our pocketbook. That means when we leave here, we take Jesus home with us. We take Him into every area of our life. He affects all of the small things that we do in our lives. That's what He does. God wants to show us His love, He wants to provide all these for us, but we need to make room for it. We need to make room for the grace of God to come into our lives because God's grace is wanting to fill us and provide us with so much.

So I want to show you one more verse where Paul takes this idea in 2 Corinthians 9 and he describes this. Here's the point, he says. The point is this. *Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly*. What that means is, if you just give a little bit, then you're just going to get a little bit back. If you just make a little bit of room for God in your life, you're only going to get a little bit of the blessing. God has all kinds of blessings He wants to give you. But you're only get to reap a little bit if you sow a little bit. That's what he's saying. *And whoever sows bountifully will reap bountifully*. That's what I want to do, I want to reap bountifully. That means I need to sow beautifully. That means I need to place these margins, I need to block out the margin in my life so that God can fully bless me in my life.

Oh, it gets better. Look at verse 7. *Each one* (that's each of us) *must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under obligation...* Now this is talking about money. That's what he's talking about. But he's going to broaden it here. So we do need to allow God to work in our finances. *Each one must give as he decided in his heart, for God loves a cheerful giver.*

Verse 8 (this is the key) – *And God is able to make all grace*. You want all of God's grace, you don't just want a piece of it. God has all. It's a big storehouse of grace. But sometimes we only get a little bit because we only sow in a small way, we only make room for God in a small way of our life. God wants to give us so much more in our lives. We have to set our schedule, we

have to set our finances so He can bless us, so we can enjoy this piece that He has. Look at the word *all*, how many times it's repeated here. He says – *And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work.* Oh man, I love that. That's what God wants to do in all of the areas of our lives.

But how do we get this grace? Well, he describes it here in this passage as reaping bountifully after sowing bountifully. The Nehemiah believers are blocking their lives in ways that allow God to work. I think sometimes we need to reorient ourselves, we need to put the margin in our lives. Now you might be in a place in your life right now where you're a very busy person and you can't just say, "Oh, I'm not going to do that," because that's part of your life right now. It doesn't mean necessarily removing parts from your schedule (although some of us would benefit from that). Often it means tying our emotions and our spirituality to something that isn't related to some of that stuff. That we're really finding our grace in God. That we're waking up in the morning and saying, "Lord, I want to serve you today, number one," and then we go about doing all the busy things we have to do. But we're continually thinking about the Lord. We're making room for the Lord in our lives to do this amazing thing because He wants to give us all grace. *He wants all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work.* God wants to do that. He wants us to block out our schedule.

It's sad for me to see someone who says, "Oh, you know, we're not going to come to church for a while because we're too busy or I've got to do overtime." I'm not saying you can't do overtime. I'm not saying you can't stop coming to church for a while. I'm saying is you're in danger when you do. Because God has provided our church, a Christian community, as a place where we can be reenergized. It's sad for me when someone says, "I'm going to not come to church for a while, I'm not going to serve for a while because I'm going to get involved in sports." What in the world? I mean, maybe we just need to be careful about how we're orienting our lives. Because it becomes really sad when those children grow up who've been heavily involved in sports and dropped out of church, and then they miss out on the grace of God working in their lives, and we're surprised – why did they leave the faith when they graduated from high school? This is all about blocking this out in our lives and the people we influence and how we work with them.

One man said he was getting ready to get baptized, and one guy said, "Hey, you got your watch on."

He says, "Oh, yeah." He takes his watch off.

"Hey, you've got your wallet in your pocket."

He says, "No, that's going in the water with me." I think sometimes we need to baptize our wallets too. Because when we do that, we move into this place that we're not caught up in this world, that system that's driving us continually to make more, to have more. Because our faith isn't placed in money. It's not placed in things. Our faith is placed in God Himself, who is all sufficient in all things at all times, to provide us with what we need.

I don't know how God's going to apply this to your life. You're going to have to look at this and say, "Alright, God, how do I orient my life differently?" I think you're going to ask the same questions that the Nehemiah believers asked. And the question is this: "What's next Lord? What place in my life do you want to bless me more? What place in my life do you want to touch me in ways that I need to be touched?" And when you obey the Lord, then you're sowing

bountifully, and you will reap bountifully. That's just all part of God's design. It's not just about money. It's about time. It's energy. It's all the things we do. We want to make God number one in our lives. We want Him to affect our lives in so many different ways. That's the beauty of following the Lord. And that's what the Nehemiah believers are discovering. They're going, wow, this is what I need. It's an amazing thing that we all need.

Would you stand with me? Let's pray together before we sing this last song together.

[PRAYER] Father, we come before you now and we ask you to touch us each in ways that we need to be touched. We ask you, Father, to prompt us in ways that we need to create that mark, make you first in our lives. Whatever that looks like in each of our hearts, you know what it is. Lord, I pray for those who are particularly burdened today with challenges that seem overwhelming. I ask that you would use your church, you would use your Spirit, you would use your word to bring the refreshment necessary in those people's lives today. Father, thank you for the privilege of serving you and knowing you and loving you. In Jesus' name we ask, amen.