Weekly Study of Sunday's Message
November 1, 2026 ***"Clean Slate: The Journey Towards Renewal" Examination.***

I Intro.
We're moving into November, and this new series will pair with our Advent series which will begin the Sunday after Thanksgiving. This will almost be a parallel two-part set of series. There's a lot going on at NCC and you'll want to keep up with everything that's happening. Stay connected through our social media to keep up with everything that's going on. This is our companion devotional to Sunday's message. It's just a part of all we have to offer to you. Whether you were able to participate in this service or not, this devotion is free-standing. We hope you find this tool helpful on your spiritual journey. We don't want you to miss out on anything. We consider you part of our community. We have many ways you can plug into life at NCC. You can find all those through our website, app, and social media sites. Our app is the best way to livestream our services, but you can also livestream on FaceBook and YouTube. You can revisit past services, sign up for events and even give. We're encouraged by your presence when you gather with us. New and familiar faces join us every Sunday. If you join us online, we appreciate your presence. We are fully committed to our virtual attenders. We are your church family. If there is anything you need, prayer, or anything else, please let us know.

II Sunday.
I need to set a few things up before we move into the message. I want to let you know, there will be a longer time of meditation than we normally do in this devotional. If you're interested in doing it, you can just read it, or actually watch it in the service. We'll do this each Sunday.
Let's talk about the overall theme. First, **What does renewal mean?** It can be in general or specifically for you. And then; **What would a commitment to renewal look like in your daily life?** This is how a life dedicated towards renewal would look in your daily life, pursuing renewal..

I want to first unpack the idea of *"Renewal"*. Renewal is an intentional commitment to 'returning'. Renewal is not stopping, fixing, starting over, or getting away from. Renewal is not a pause or a Sabbath. Renewal is the process of restoring for your greater good. Doing the work to bring the original 'luster', newness, and purpose, out of something that has been worn down through time. Or has picked up unnecessary things through use. Renewal is finding the inner real you…by removing all that's not you. Renewal restores; vision, strength, perspective, recharges your soul, reorients your heart, reconnects you to the pure source of life, and reinforces what we deep down know to be truth. This theme will be the center of what we do over the next several weeks. Renewal prepares us for the work of Advent. Seeking: **Hope, Joy, Peace,** and **Love**. We're going to create a 'meeting place' to abide with God through each of the Sundays of this series. To restore and renew us the way we were created to be. Not adding to our list of stuff and things to do. But by helping us strip away all of the buildup that clings to us as we go through life. This will come from four essential practices in our relationship with God.

First Step- Examination. Today's theme in the 'movement of renewal' is the movement from judgment towards wholeness. To help remove shame, the need to produce, to put on a happy face, which all are intertwined with judgment. It's finding those barriers to renewal. The first step in renewal is the work of Examination. So, let's talk about Examination.

Examination is NOT: Examination is not judgment or condemnation. To measure if you're good enough. (Doing all the 'do's' and none of the 'don'ts'). It's not to see if you're worthy, made the cut, in or out. This is also not self-analysis or psychology. It's not figuring out what's wrong with you. Or how you need to be 'fixed'.
Examination IS: Examination is the first step in becoming whole. Like this entire series, it's the first step towards renewal, restoration. To see if you're connected to Christ. Examination is finding out where you might be disconnected. Inviting God into that process. Which makes this a sacred work. But it takes radical honesty to admit you're; depleted, disconnected, and actually hunger to be restored…renewed. Trust this: Jesus is already in you. No matter where you are in your spiritual journey, this isn't to step and fetch to earn his presence. But to recognize Jesus is already in you. You are worthy. Examination is to claim this truth.

This work will prepare us for Advent. Which prepares us for Christmas. We are going to observe and practice the four classic ordinances of many churches that prepare people seeking Go…to be with God. These are: **Examination. Confession. Absolution. Repentance.** Each of these ordinances invites us to face something…in order to receive something. As always, we're talking about the process, and the work of transformation. I don't want you to just know about being renewed, restored. This isn't just informational. I want you to deeply feel, and experience the freedom and Hope, Joy, Peace, Love that comes from practicing each of these ordinances. God wants you to live deeply into these gifts from him.
This is in preparation for Advent. So, what is Advent? Advent is a liturgical (work of the people) season. The four Sundays before Christmas, we prepare for the coming of the Christ. And to wait. Our theme, ***"Clean Slate: The Journey Towards Renewal"***, will prepare us for Advent which begins November 29th. Let's begin the work of renewal, being restored. Creating a ***"Clean Slate"***. So we can be ready for The Waiting.

I want to give some context for this passage we're going to dig through today. There were people who didn't like Paul's teaching. Who were questioning his authority. Paul once was Saul, a Pharisee among Pharisees. Enthusiastically killing new followers of Jesus…in the name of God. Doing really horrible things, and then tying it back to God. (Which seems to be pretty prevalent today) He had a dramatic conversion experience. Was discipled for years. Then he went out and planted churches. People were wondering, since Paul wasn't an original apostle, if he could he be trusted. So, BEFORE he responded to these accusations, Paul most likely practiced a little Matthew 7. *"BEFORE you take the plank out of someone's eye, look for the plank in your own eye."* To make sure he was right with God. Paul did this to make sure that the people who were questioning him weren't right. He was doing this for Jesus. Don't hear this as defensiveness. Hear this as an invitation to examination. Because I'm pretty sure Paul examined himself before he wrote this.
2 Corinthians 13:5-9 (**MSG**) ***Test yourselves to make sure you are solid in the faith. Don't drift along taking everything for granted. Give yourselves regular checkups. You need first hand evidence, not mere hearsay, that Jesus Christ is in you. Test it out. If you fail the test, do something about it. I hope the test won't show that we have failed. But if it comes to that, we'd rather the test showed our failure than yours. We're rooting for the truth to win out in you. We couldn't possibly do otherwise. We don't just put up with our limitations; we celebrate them, and then go on to celebrate every strength, every triumph of the truth in you. We pray hard that it will all come together in your lives.***

First some specific phrases in the passage. Interesting: there is no mention of 'sin' of any kind, anywhere in this passage. This examination is not to find all the things that are wrong with you. This is not to see how bad you are, or to judge yourself harshly. ***"Failed the test"*** isn't that you're sinful (we all are all the time) But it's to see if you're ***"solid in the faith"***. To see if you've become disconnected, detached, allowing the world to just overburden you with…world stuff.
Are you in a life-giving regular relationship with Jesus?
Or have you just drifted, and let the things of life fill your soul?
This is the starting place of testing the understanding that Jesus is already in you.

Barriers to honest examination. There are some things we have to overcome in order to do examination well.
1. Shame is one of the major barriers to renewal, a clean slate. The fear that when we drift, allow things into our life that cause us to disconnect with God, then it just shows how messed up we are. We've messed things up too much for God to help us. And there's no sense in trying to renew or restore our relationship with God. We've allowed things into our life that created distance between us and the hope that God wants to offer us. And we just sit in the shame of poor choices.
2. Fear of judgment is the belief that examination will take our poor choices and label us a bad person. Many of us grew up in a harsh, condemning, very judgmental church culture. It was full of judgment and condemnation for how 'human', (a slave to flesh), we are. God's holiness can't handle our fallenness. So, we live in the shadows, hiding because we don't want to be found out. Just like Adam and Eve.
The antidote to shame is radical honesty. You're not really hiding from God. He already knows and hasn't changed his love for you at all. The antidote to fear of judgment is the continual loving presence of God. And the admission that you're not broken and need to fix yourself. But you've been hiding and God is simply waiting for you to see what you have allowed in your life that causes you to hide from him, and miss out on the hope that's available to you.

It was at this point we sang a song, and transitioned into a guided meditation of examination. This is where you're doing this examination with God. This is sacred work. That's what makes examination and the other three ordinances we're going to do in this series so important. They're similar to baptism, communion, and marriage. You're recognizing the presence of God in this act. You are doing this yourself…with God. But with others too. We are all joining together in this liturgy to do the work of God's people whom he loves. This time and work is to help you find patterns in your life that keep you from being close to God and his grace. Relationship issues. Image about yourself issues. And shame or unworthiness, fear of judgment, you may be carrying.
Remember: this isn't about finding all your sins and shortcomings. This is like a medical checkup. But it's not going to be a list of all the things wrong with you in your spiritual MyChart. This will be a; *"Hey, we noticed some things within you that are disconnected from God. Places where you're just not as close with God, leaning into him, receiving what God wants to give you and you need."* A movement towards closeness and trust in God. We want you to enter into a time of just being with God. God is already with you. He's been with you the whole time. His desire is to be close to you. For you to feel his love and presence.
Here was the meditation we led the congregation through.
Feet flat on the floor, eyes closed, palms up. Closed fists are resistance and a sign of hiding. Take several slow deep breaths and relax. Let me give you a heads up. If you feel a question is too heavy,

or find yourself uncomfortable with the question, feel free to not answer it. But make note of that question, and examine this week why that specific question sat heavier than the others.
Picture yourself where you live. Every room, every nook and cranny in your place. Now picture yourself alone, in your favorite place where you live. Look all around you in your mind, and fully be in your place. Picture Jesus sitting there next to you. What does he look like?
How do you feel about Jesus being right there?
Tell him about why that place is special to you.
What do you want Jesus to know, that you have not told him?
Feel any discomfort that surfaces, shame, or fear of judgment. Share that with Jesus. Name the things to Jesus that just cling to you, and are so heavy to carry. Hurts, behaviors, burdens, past things that you haven't been able to let go of, current struggles that seem to have a hold on you, disappointments, fear**.** Let all those things come to the surface. And hand each one of them to Jesus.
Where do you want to be closer and more connected to Jesus?
Ask Jesus to reveal to you what you need from him.
Now just sit with Jesus and finish anything you need to take care of.

Here we closed in prayer and finished the song from the beginning of the meditation.

III Challenge.
The process of examination. Letting the Holy Spirit do the work of revealing the things inside of us that we need to get rid of leads us to…HOPE. Through examination, God crawls inside of our messes, and molds those things that cause us to feel shame and fear of judgment into something beautiful. Honest examination is not something to be afraid of or hide from. This work fills us with HOPE because we are reassured God is pursuing us, and we are RENEWED by our honest work of Examination.
I've teased this specific theme all through today's message. Each of these Sundays going through the ***"Clean Slate"*** series will prepare us for each of the Sundays in Advent. Today was the Ordinance of Examination, that leads to real hope. Next week it will be Confession which leads us to peace. Each of these tie together, and will lead us to Advent. Another season of preparation.
God is not ashamed of you or eager to judge you.
God just wants you to feel the freedom of a relationship with him.