



CANYON HILLS

COMMUNITY CHURCH

Series: Nehemiah

November 20, 2016

God Makes a Name for Himself **Dr. Steve Walker**

We've had a wonderful time of worship and incredible testimonies in the baptistry, and now we're going to turn to God's Word to let him speak to us, but we also want to receive our tithes and our offerings this morning. I'm going to ask the ushers to come forward. This is our expression that we really, truly believe God provides and everything we have comes from him, so I just want to encourage you. Be preparing, right now, to give of our offerings to the Lord's work.

I'm going to ask you, at the same time, to get your Bibles open to the book of Nehemiah. If you're new with us this morning, we're working our way through this Old Testament book, verse by verse, in essence. It's an amazing Old Testament book. Last week, when we were in chapter 8, we came into what I would just want to call an epic moment in Jewish history, because after seven decades of enduring God's judgment and discipline, the Jewish people repent and turn their hearts back toward God.

By God's loving and merciful sovereignty, he begins to steer the nations he had used to exert his judgment on his people to allow the Jewish people to slowly return from their captivity back to Jerusalem and back to Judea, the surrounding towns around Jerusalem. They begin to slowly rebuild their lives. They rebuild the temple and their worship over a period of several years. In chapter 6, we see that they rebuilt the walls around their capital city of Jerusalem.

The highlight, last Sunday, in chapter 8, was when the people called Ezra, their priest, to bring the book of God's laws out amongst the people and to read it to them. For the first time in 70 years, they hear God speaking to them again through his Word, and it was, as we saw last week, a revival of both joy and tears, filled with tears and spontaneous worship. The separation between God and his people was over.

Now we come to chapter 9. The end of chapter 8 is actually when they go away from that moment. They celebrate a feast they hadn't gotten to celebrate in 70 years. It was a week-long feast. Then chapter 9 begins with all of the people coming back together for what the Scripture calls a solemn assembly.

You'll see that at the end of verse 18, in chapter 8. It says, **"They kept the feast seven days, and on the eighth day there was a solemn assembly, according to the rule."** These solemn assemblies were very somber services. It was when the people would acknowledge their sinful past, confessing the rebellion that brought about God's judgment and punishment on their lives to begin with. Then this solemn assembly concludes with a very formal ceremony of recommitting their lives, expressing their vow to be faithful to the covenant of God.

The specifics of their recommitment are coming up in a couple of Sundays. It's very powerful, what they highlight as they make their promise to follow God and to serve him. Until then, though, today and next Sunday, we're going to enter into this solemn assembly, this very special scene that the Jewish people gathered together to have. If your Bibles are open now, I want you to stand for the reading of some of the verses in this scene, in chapter 9.

"Now on the twenty-fourth day of this month [September] the people of Israel were assembled with fasting and in sackcloth, and with earth on their heads. And the Israelites separated themselves from all foreigners and stood and confessed their sins and the iniquities of their fathers.

And they stood up in their place and read from the Book of the Law of the LORD their God for a quarter of the day; for another quarter of it they made confession and worshiped the LORD their God. On the stairs of the Levites stood Jeshua, Bani, Kadmiel, Shebaniah, Bunni, Sherebiah, Bani, and Chenani; and they cried with a loud voice to the LORD their God.

Then the Levites, Jeshua, Kadmiel, Bani, Hashabneiah, Sherebiah, Hodiah, Shebaniah, and Pethahiah, said, 'Stand up and bless the LORD your God from everlasting to everlasting. Blessed be your glorious name, which is exalted above all blessing and praise. You are the LORD, you alone.

You have made heaven, the heaven of heavens, with all their host, the earth and all that is on it, the seas and all that is in them; and you preserve all of them; and the host of heaven worships you. You are the LORD, the God who chose Abram and brought him out of Ur of the Chaldeans and gave him the name Abraham. You found his heart faithful before you, and made with him the covenant to give to his offspring the land of the Canaanite, the Hittite, the Amorite, the Perizzite, the Jebusite, and the Girgashite.

And you have kept your promise, for you are righteous. And you saw the affliction of our fathers in Egypt and heard their cry at the Red Sea, and performed signs and wonders against Pharaoh and all his servants and all the people of his land, for you knew that they acted arrogantly against our fathers. And you made a name for yourself, as it is to this day.'"

Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Thy kingdom come; thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Father, we stand today, 3,000 years after this happened, with our hearts united, that

your name is different, that you are different from all others. God, we believe you are not one of many gods, but you are the one true God, and we stand now in reverence, awe, and hope, as we know you personally through your Son, Jesus Christ. We ask, God, now, that you would draw us nearer to you. Help us to know you better. We pray in Christ's name, amen.

You might remember several weeks ago I mentioned that the book of Nehemiah captures a monumental 25-year snapshot of Jewish history, not a very long period in 4,000 years, when you think about it. Nehemiah is just talking about a little 25-year kind of Snapchat, if you would, of what was happening in this time in Jewish history. It's the story of a merciful God redeeming his people through the door of genuine repentance.

Yet I also said the book of Nehemiah has a much more eternal message in view. It isn't just talking about what was happening in that day. It's pointing toward something forward. In verse 10, as we just ended, we see the ultimate purpose of God in creating the Jewish nation was to make a name for himself. His plan all along was to show himself good to the Jewish people so one day, all the nations may delight themselves in the great goodness and love of God.

The Jewish nation was formed by God to put all of his glory, goodness, and love on display for the world to see. Chapter 9 is a chapter, first and foremost, about the goodness of God, but I want us to see how it all points to his ultimate goodness as revealed in the life, death, and resurrection of his Son, Jesus Christ.

We're about to enter into a very solemn, lengthy prayer in chapter 9. I've actually divided it into two Sundays. We're going to see every reference to God they make in this prayer actually points forward to the person and work of Jesus Christ. In fact, I would say to you that every book in the Old Testament points to the person and work of Jesus Christ.

I'm going to just pull apart this prayer, piece by piece. We're going to look at a lot of pieces between now and the end of next Sunday, but I feel like it's good for us to remember who our God is and who Jesus is in relationship to him.

1. *God is holy.* God made a name for himself by making sure the people knew it was their sin that separated them from him. They needed to know that. There is no way to come close to God without repentance. That is the picture here. If you notice, right there in verse 1, it says they came to him in sackcloth and with earth on their heads. Some of your Bibles say *sackcloth and ashes*. They just threw dust all over themselves as they entered into this moment of prayer, coming near to God again.

This sackcloth and ashes is symbolic of their shame and humiliation in the presence of a holy God. Shame and humiliation, throwing dirt on themselves, representing the sin on their hearts, representing the fact that they are lower than the earth, lower than the ground, when it comes to approaching a holy God.

You remember James 4, verse 6, where it says, "**God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.**" In Romans, chapter 3, verse 23, we are told, "**...all have sinned and fall short of the**

glory of God..." There are no exceptions. Every single human being is humbled when compared to the glory and holiness of God. We've all sinned. So, does it make sense when Jesus brings this message in Matthew 18, verse 3? He says, **"...I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven."**

Jesus said unless we become like a child... What is that a picture of? A child is humble. A child is completely dependent. A child is defenseless. They are unable to defend themselves. That's how we must approach God: humble, dependent on his mercy, and completely unable and unwilling to defend our sin in the presence of a holy God. We see that right there, right at the beginning of this solemn assembly.

We also see that they came with fasting and acknowledgment that nothing was more important than having peace with God, not even food. This is what they're expressing here. The most important thing about you and me is what we think of God. They showed what they were thinking of God by fasting and basically saying, "Nothing in human life is more important than having a right relationship with almighty, Holy God."

Is it any wonder the Old Testament says, **"...man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD."** We have our life, not by food alone, but by the very permission and creation of God, we have life. We see here in verse 2 that they **"...separated themselves from all foreigners..."** That shows us that God calls us out of the world into a very unique and special relationship with him as our King.

That's why Jesus said, in John 15, verse 19, **"If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you."** Jesus came and basically said, "When you follow me, you will still be *in* this world, but you will never be *of* it again."

That's what this is all pointing to here. They separated themselves from the world because the Jewish people in Nehemiah 9 knew they were entering back into a relationship with God, and their relationship with him was unique and special to the rest of the world. It's the same for you as a follower of Jesus. The apostle Peter captures it this way in 1 Peter, chapter 2, verse 9. He says, speaking of us who love and follow Jesus,

"But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light." Then, in verses 2 and 3, we see them confessing their sin. They're making confession, symbolic of their guilt before a holy God. Jesus said, in John, chapter 9, verse 31, **"We know that God does not listen to sinners..."**

There was no hope for the Jewish people to come back into a right relationship with God until they repented and confessed their sin. The apostle John, in 1 John 1:8, says, **"If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us."** This whole solemn assembly, right here at the beginning of chapter 9, serves as a picture of the unregenerate condition of the human heart in the presence and in relationship to a holy God.

In other words, to draw near to God, everything about us must change, and that's exactly what they are doing and saying, and that's exactly what points toward the beauty of the gospel of Jesus Christ. We'll get into that more as we move along. God is holy. Everything begins there.

2. *God is eternal.* In verse 5, the Levites stand up and shout with a loud voice, telling the people, "Get on your feet! Stand up and bless the Lord your God, who is from everlasting to everlasting!" God made a name for himself by revealing that he has no beginning and no end. God is not a myth. He is not a religious invention that we get to naively either eliminate or manipulate with our own imaginations.

God is for real, and he was before and he will be after, and we don't have the right to define, eliminate, or change him according to our culture, our whims, or our desires. He is eternal. The exact same thing is true about Jesus, our Savior. Jesus himself declared, "**I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end.**" Jesus is no less than eternal.

3. *God is exalted.* As we move through verses 5 and 6, we see in verse 5, Ezra launches into the prayer. They gather, come together, and confess their sins, and then Ezra begins to pray at the end of verse 5, and he declares that God is above every and all beings, real or imagined. He says God is "**...from everlasting to everlasting...which is exalted above all...**" God made a name for himself by proving that no one, nothing, no person is worthy of his glory. No other god, no other person, no other religion...just him.

Look what they say about his exaltation. First of all, they call his name glorious. God's name was so glorious and so powerful that the Jewish people were reluctant even to speak it out loud for fear that they might accidentally take his name in vain. Speaking of Jesus, the New Testament tells us in Philippians 2, verse 9, "**Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name...**"

The God in Nehemiah which they are proclaiming has a glorious name. That God bestows on Jesus, the Son of God, the name that is above every name: the name of Jesus. In Acts, chapter 4, verse 12, we're reminded that there is no other name under heaven by which anyone can be saved. The name of Jesus, *Yeshua*, our Messiah.

We move along to verse 6 in the prayer and we notice that Ezra acknowledges in his prayer that he is God alone. He is the Lord alone. The Jews were establishing that there is only one God. Isn't it interesting that Jesus comes along in John, chapter 10, and says, "**I and the Father are one**"? Then he also says, in John 14, "**Whoever has seen me has seen the Father.**"

So as the Jews are praying, as Ezra is praying that there is only one God, Jesus comes along and says, "I am him." He didn't claim to be another god. Jesus didn't come along and claim to be *like* God, *as* God, or *kind of like* God, or *sort of* God. He said, "I am him in flesh and blood. You see me, hear me, and follow me and you see, hear, follow, and love God," a powerful declaration.

Once more, in verse 6, look. In his prayer, he declares and remembers that God created the heavens, the earth, the seas, and everything in them and on them. Not only that, but he preserves them all. He keeps it all going. Ezra is saying, "We are standing, now, in the presence of, not just a god, but *the* God who created the universe and holds it all together, the one and only."

Yet speaking of Jesus, looking forward into the New Testament, the apostle Paul says, in Colossians 1, "**For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible...**" making Jesus God again, the Creator.

4. *God rewards faith.* In verses 7 and 8, the prayer continues in the solemn assembly, and his prayer reveals that God rewards faith. Ezra continues to pray, but now his prayers shift from adoring who God is to remembering what God has done. He starts recalling the days of Abraham and Moses.

If you'll remember, in verses 7 and 8, he says, "**You are the Lord, the God who chose Abram and brought him out of Ur of the Chaldeans and gave him the name Abraham. 8 You found his heart faithful before you, and made with him the covenant to give to his offspring the land [the Promised Land]...**" God said, "Abraham, I see you are faithful. You trust me. You are relying on me. I am bringing you to a place. I'm going to turn you into a nation and I'm bringing you to a place that'll be just for you, where we will reside together."

God made a name for himself by rewarding Abraham for trusting in him. Now listen to what Jesus says in John 11. "**Jesus said to her, 'I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me...'**" There's the faith. "**...will live even if he dies...**" There's the reward. Look again. "**...and everyone who lives and believes in Me...**" There's the trust and faith. "**...will never die.**" There's the reward. "**Do you believe this?**" he asked her.

Jesus comes with the same reward. "Follow me. Believe in me, and you will never die. Even though you will die in this physical life, you will live forever." This is the risen Jesus, resurrected with power over death and the grave. Ezra keeps praying. Remember, they're coming together, this big crowd, to renew their relationship with God after 70 years of rebellion. What do we see next?

5. *God keeps his promises.* In verse 8, it says, "**And you have kept your promise, for you are righteous.**" God made a name for himself in that he never breaks a promise. Did you know there are 3,573 promises in the Bible? That's 3,573 promises from God to you, and not one single promise has ever been broken, and never will be. Why? Because God cannot lie. Exactly as God promised, Abraham grew into that mighty nation of Jewish people and God gave them a special home, a promised land.

Now point forward to Jesus, and what does Jesus say? In John, chapter 14, he says, "**Do not let your heart be troubled; believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father's house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you. If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself, that where I am, there you may be also.**" What is Jesus saying?

He is saying, "You can trust God, so you can trust me." That was his message. "Trust me. I and the Father are one. When you see me and hear me, you see the Father. You hear the Father." God keeps his promises, and his ultimate promise to all of us was his Son, Jesus Christ. Keep going in the prayer. In verse 9, we see...

6. *God is compassionate toward our sorrows and our suffering.* He's praying and he says, "**You saw the affliction of our fathers in Egypt, and heard their cry by the Red Sea.**" God made a name for himself, church, not only because he is eternal, holy, and exalted above all else but because he is the God who loves us and cares for us.

God is personal. He is not distant. He doesn't have his back toward us. He's not out there somewhere, just hoping we make it through this life and get ourselves to heaven, not at all. The prayer here reveals that God hears and sees the hurts and pains of his children. They start praying through the days of Moses. They bring up the Red Sea.

Listen to the description of Jesus in Matthew, chapter 9. When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Isaiah reminds us, along with the New Testament and the Gospels, that Jesus came to bring sight to the blind. He came to make the lame walk, the deaf hear, and the dumb speak.

That is not really about the physical part of life. It is the fact that Jesus came out of compassion for those who are spiritually deaf, spiritual blind, confused, with hardened hearts, hardened by sin, who can't find God on their own. He came not to save those who were well but to come and save those who are spiritually sick. Jesus is the ultimate compassion of God in human flesh.

7. *God avenges his people.* The prayer continues in verses 10 and 11 that God made a name for himself because he will not allow those who persecute his people to go unpunished. They will experience the white-hot fury of God's wrath. I want you to see verses 10 and 11.

"[You]...**performed signs and wonders against Pharaoh and all his servants and all the people of his land, for you knew that they acted arrogantly against our fathers. And you made a name for yourself, as it is to this day. And you divided the sea before them, so that they went through the midst of the sea on dry land, and you cast their pursuers into the depths, as a stone into mighty waters.**"

You know the story of the Red Sea. God avenges his people against those who brought 400 years of suffering upon them, and it was full and complete. In John 5:22, we hear Jesus say, "**For the Father judges no one, but has given all judgment to the Son...**" God raises Jesus from the dead and hands over the judgment of every soul to Jesus. The apostle Peter graphically describes that judgment here in 1 Peter 4.

He says those who do not believe in Jesus "**...are surprised when you do not join them in the same flood of debauchery [sin], and they malign you...**" They mock you, they persecute you because you will not deny Christ and live immorally. "**...but they will give account to him who**

is ready to judge the living and the dead." There will be an account for every person who mocks and maligns followers of Jesus for wanting to love him, please him, and live in a way that glorifies his name.

8. *God leads us to his salvation.* God doesn't just call us to trust him and then disappear. He doesn't just leave his people to flounder in confusion and say, "Okay, so I believe all this. What now? What next?" and we just kind of walk around, bumping into each other, going, "I don't know, but man, when this is over, I hope he's there." No, God does not do that to us.

God made a name for himself by showing his people the way they should go. If you look at verse 12, "**By a pillar of cloud you led them in the day, and by a pillar of fire in the night to light for them the way in which they should go.**" He guided the Jewish people to follow his specific direction to his Promised Land, and what a picture of Jesus this is.

Jesus said, in John 8, verse 12, "**Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, 'I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.'**" Then Jesus said, in John 14:6, "**I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.**" Jesus is the Light of God. There are no more clouds of light and pillars of fire for us to follow around. He has sent Jesus Christ, and Jesus says, "Follow me. You will no longer walk in darkness. I am the Light of the World."

He says, "I am the Way." What I love about Christianity, church, is there's no confusion. There are no multiple options. There is no, "Just grab what you believe and kind of throw it into a pot, stir it up, and come up with what you want." There's none of that. It is clear. God has put on flesh and blood and appeared to us in his Son, Jesus. He pays the price for our sin for us, rises from the dead, and then says, "Follow me. Live for me."

9. *God shows us how to live holy lives.* God made a name for himself by showing his people the most joyful and satisfying way to live life on this earth. He loves us too much to just let us live any way we want to. Isn't that a wonderful God? He knows our natural selves. He knows the nature of sin.

As we're walking in this life through the process of sanctification, being changed, slowly, but surely, into the likeness of Christ, there are pieces and parts of us that still don't have victory, that want to pull us backward into a life of sin, so God shows us how to live the most satisfying way.

In verses 13 and 14, we see here that the prayer is making recognition that God "**...came down on Mount Sinai and spoke with them from heaven and gave them right rules and true laws, good statutes and commandments, and you made known to them your holy Sabbath and commanded them commandments and statutes and a law by Moses your servant.**" He's saying, "God, you came to us and showed us how to live the most satisfying, joyful life."

Jesus comes and preaches a sermon called the Sermon on the Mount. You're familiar with it. Many believe the Sermon on the Mount is a recipe for how to live in a way that is pleasing to God. At the end of that sermon, listen to how Jesus concludes it.

He says, **"Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock."** What a glorious message from Jesus Christ.

He says, "Life is not going to be easy in this fallen world. Sin and evil are all around us, but I want to tell you how to live your life in this world in a way in which you will be stable and strong when the storms come and beat against your family or your life in general. They're going to come, but you are not going to crumble when you live this way." The whole Sermon on the Mount is that glorious depiction of how to live holy lives. Again, everything in Nehemiah is pointing to what Jesus came to do.

10. *God provides for our greatest needs.* God made a name for himself by providing everything they needed. If you look at verse 15, it says, **"You gave them bread from heaven for their hunger and brought water for them out of the rock for their thirst, and you told them to go in to possess the land that you had sworn to give them."** In verse 21, it says, **"Forty years you sustained them in the wilderness, and they lacked nothing. Their clothes did not wear out and their feet did not swell."**

Isn't that amazing? What a warranty on their clothes! In 40 years, they never outgrew them. They never wore out. Their feet didn't swell. They had water from the rock and bread from heaven. That is the glorious God who takes care of his children. Listen to Jesus. In John, chapter 6, verse 35, he says, **"I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst."**

Again, he's not talking about physical hunger and thirst. He's talking about the ultimate life, eternal life, where there will be an eternal provision of God to live forever in his presence. Jesus is saying, "I am he who will bring you there. You will have everything your soul needs for forgiveness and a right relationship with God." He is the Bread of Life.

11. *God is lovingly merciful.* In verse 16, the whole prayer turns on a dime. They are recalling the greatness of God, remembering the faithfulness of God and everything he has done, and then in verses 16 and 17, it says,

"But they and our fathers acted presumptuously and stiffened their neck and did not obey your commandments. They refused to obey and were not mindful of the wonders that you performed among them, but they stiffened their neck and appointed a leader to return to their slavery in Egypt. But you are a God ready to forgive, gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and did not forsake them."

How many of you need to hear that this morning? How many of us need to recall that God is a merciful God? On their worst day, he was faithful to forgive them when they turned back to him in repentance, and that is the very message of Jesus. Jesus comes and says, **"Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn**

from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and YOU WILL FIND REST FOR YOUR SOULS." What is going on here?

With such a God as this, there is hope that we'll get the help we need. When we stumble and repent, he will forgive us and have us back, and we will press on and get up again in the promises we have made. Where sin abounds, grace abounds all the more for those who love and trust Jesus Christ. He is a merciful God.

Some of you just need a reminder today that God has not turned his back on you. You may have turned your back on him, but the minute you turn and come back to him in repentance and walk away from what you have thought was more delightful and better for you than him, you are met head-on with a God with open arms, full of grace, full of mercy.

12. *God puts his very Spirit in us.* God made a name for himself by giving his Spirit to his people. That's what it says in verse 20. **"You gave your good Spirit to instruct them..."** He's still praying, and he's saying, "God, we look back and we see you didn't leave them alone. You put your Spirit inside of them. The third person of the Holy Trinity was their teacher.

Let me help you understand the Trinity a little bit better. The doctrine of the triune God, three distinct persons but one God. We know the Father is God *for* us, we know the Son is God *with* us, and we know the Spirit is God *in* us: three distinct persons yet all the same one God, manifested in different ways that bring us and keep us in relationship with him. Jesus, speaking of himself and those who believe in him, said, in John 14,

"And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you."

If you have put your faith and trust in Jesus Christ by repenting of your sins and believing in the death and resurrection of Jesus to save you, the promise of God is that the Holy Spirit now lives in you as a down payment, guaranteeing the inheritance of eternal life that is already yours. The Holy Spirit is inside us.

13. *God blesses his children with abundant life.* Right in the middle of the prayer, he says the people rebel, but God is slow to anger. He continues to provide by giving them his Spirit. Verses 22-25 basically are this long list of the blessings of God in his people's lives. God made a name for himself because he makes sure his people are blessed with his provision, his protection, and his presence through his Spirit.

Is it any wonder Jesus says, **"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life"**? It says, at the end of verse 25, **"So they ate and were filled and became fat and delighted themselves in your great goodness."** God wants us to delight in him.

There is a certain hedonism to Christianity. The hedonism is in the fact that God comes into relationship with us when we turn toward him humbly for forgiveness and salvation, and in that relationship with God, he wants to provide us with his power, provision, presence, and protection forever. That is where our delight is found.

I want to ask you to think today about walking away from any sin or question in your life that causes you to think there is something else that will bring you more delight than God himself. I want to call you to walk away from whatever it is you're worshiping more than God or trusting in more than God.

If there's any sin going on in your life where you have somehow been convinced that there will be more joy and delight in that sin than in God himself, I want to call you and plead with you to walk away from that forever. Come back to God, trusting that he is holy, eternal, exalted, and compassionate, and he provides for your greatest needs. He will never leave you. He will never break a promise. He tells you how to live. Come back to him.

If you have never come to him in the first place, it simply requires the humility to say, "I'm a sinner. I cannot save myself, and this Jesus, who is God, died for me. I will put all my trust in him and live for him the rest of my days. I'll follow him in baptism, walk with him and allow him to change me into the person he wants me to be." That is the greatest invitation of your life. Let's bow our heads, please.

Father in heaven, I praise you that you are not a God with your arms crossed. You are not a killjoy God who wants to make life here on this earth less than what it could be. God, we pray that you want your children to be the most content, fulfilled, satisfied people on the earth for all eternity. God, I thank you that that life is possible through Jesus, your Son. I pray, God, that we would be a church filled with people delighting in your goodness, that we see and believe in Jesus. In his name, we've gathered, amen.

If you want to talk to someone about what it means to take that step of faith and follow Jesus as your Lord and Savior, there are going to be some people up front here at the conclusion of this service. They would love to talk to you about taking that step of faith. I hope you'll do that before you go home. God bless you. We'll continue next Sunday in this prayer.