"Putting First Things First (Nehemiah, Part 8)"

Text: Nehemiah 9:1-38

After giving God's Word their central attention in Nehemiah 8, in Nehemiah 9 the people responded in prayer with genuine sadness about their sins. This prayer recorded in Nehemiah 9 expressed both the people's disappointment with themselves and their confidence in God.

Nehemiah 9:1-6 deals with **the greatness of God**. Nehemiah 9:3 says they spent three hours reading the Bible and then three hours in confession and worship. The Levites divided themselves into two groups—some were standing on the stairs on one side of the assembly and the other group stood across from them. These two groups called back and forth to the congregation, with one group confessing the sins of the people and the other group praising God for His greatness. Adoration is the heart of true prayer. Glory in the incomparable magnificence of our grand God!

Nehemiah 9:7-30 focuses on **the goodness of God**. This part of the prayer recalls the history of Israel, revealing God's goodness to His people and their repeated failure to appreciate His gifts and obey His will. In Nehemiah 9:7-18 God's goodness is seen in *forming*. God formed the heavens and the earth and everything in them, and He formed the nation of Israel. In Nehemiah 9:19-21 God's goodness in seen in *leading*. He led them every step of the way through their 40 years in the wilderness. In Nehemiah 9:22-25 God's goodness is seen by the way He *provided*. God provided His people with everything they needed and helped them defeat their enemies. In Nehemiah 9:26-30 God's goodness is seen in His *correction*. God disciplines those He loves. Some of us mistakenly thank God for His goodness only when things to the way we want them to go. The real test of our discipleship, though, is to thank Him for His goodness even when we experience pain and loss. *Corrie Ten Boom wrote: "Deep in our hearts we believe in a good God. Yet how shallow is our understanding of His goodness. How often I have heard people say, 'How good God is! We prayed that it would not rain for our church picnic and look at the lovely weather!' Yes, God is good when He sends good weather. But God was also good when He allowed my sister Betsie to starve to death before my eyes in a German concentration camp."*

Nehemiah 9:31-37 deals with **the grace of God**. God does not treat His people as they deserve because He is such a gracious and merciful God! Because He is gracious, He is good to His people even when they are not good to Him. In His mercy God did not give them what they deserved. In His grace He gave them favor they did not deserve. God wants us to break out of cycle of sin and live victorious, overcoming lives. He has given us the powerful Scriptures to wield like a sword against the enemy; Jesus has joined us in the process; and we have a faithful, powerful Companion in the Holy Spirit!

Discussion Guide/Action Steps

1. Spend time in God's Word, which will lead to: conviction and Godly sorrow → confession and repentance → forgiveness → joy → worship.

2. Always begin with the greatness of God (not what He gives you or what you want Him to do for you).

3. Acknowledge the Lord as your Maker, Leader, Provider, and Corrector.

4. Declare: *God is good, all the time; and all the time, God is good!*

5. Use all of the spiritual tools and weapons God has provided in order to overcome sin and temptation.