

**Sunday 3<sup>rd</sup> July, 2022**

## **Service for Swansea & Charlestown Presbyterian Church**

### **Welcome & Prayer**

*"As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, my God. <sup>2</sup> My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When can I go and meet with God? <sup>3</sup> My tears have been my food day and night, while people say to me all day long, "Where is your God?" <sup>4</sup> These things I remember as I pour out my soul: how I used to go to the house of God under the protection of the Mighty One with shouts of joy and praise among the festive throng. <sup>5</sup> Why, my soul, are you downcast? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Saviour and my God." (Psalm 42:1-5, NIV)*

Let us pray.... Dear Lord, our soul pants for you this morning. We long to be in your presence. We long to worship you with others in person but today we can't, despite all our good intentions and so we come to you by ourselves this morning or with our family around us. We need you. We need you like we need our food and drink. We need your presence, your forgiveness, your love, your grace, your help and power. So give us more of you today. Let us see more of your glory as we sing our songs. Let us hear more your character as we listen to your word. Let us experience more of your goodness as we pray. And draw us closer to your people as we sing the same song, pray the same prayers, listen to the same sermon, even if we are in different locations today. Help us this day to truly worship you in spirit and in truth. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.

### **Song – Behold our God** [Behold Our God - \[Official Lyric Video\] - YouTube](#)

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| <p>1. Who has held the oceans in his hands?<br/>Who has numbered every grain of sand?<br/>Kings and nations tremble at his voice<br/>All creation rises to rejoice</p> | <p>3. Who has felt the nails upon his hands?<br/>Bearing all the guilt of sinful man<br/>God eternal, humbled to the grave<br/>Jesus, Saviour, risen now to reign</p> |
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Chorus: Behold our God, seated on his throne  
Come, let us adore him  
Behold our king, nothing can compare  
Come, let us adore him

Chorus

Bridge You will reign forever  
(let Your glory fill the Earth) x8

2. Who has given counsel to the Lord?  
Who can question any of his words?  
Who can teach, the one who knows all things?  
Who can fathom all his wondrous deeds?

Chorus

Chorus  
Behold our God, seated on his throne  
Come, let us adore him  
Behold our king, nothing can compare  
Come, let us adore him

### **Bible Reading – Nehemiah 9:1-37 (NIV)**

*"On the twenty-fourth day of the same month, the Israelites gathered together, fasting and wearing sackcloth and putting dust on their heads. <sup>2</sup> Those of Israelite descent had separated themselves from all foreigners. They stood in their places and confessed their sins and the sins of their ancestors. <sup>3</sup> They stood where they were and read from the Book of the Law of the LORD their God for a quarter of the day, and spent another quarter in confession and in worshiping the LORD their God. <sup>4</sup> Standing on the stairs of the Levites were Jeshua, Bani, Kadmiel, Shebaniah, Bunni, Sherebiah, Bani and Kenani. They cried out with loud*

voices to the LORD their God. <sup>5</sup> And the Levites—Jeshua, Kadmiel, Bani, Hashabneiah, Sherebiah, Hodiah, Shebaniah and Pethahiah—said: “Stand up and praise the LORD your God, who is from everlasting to everlasting.” “Blessed be your glorious name, and may it be exalted above all blessing and praise. <sup>6</sup> You alone are the LORD. You made the heavens, even the highest heavens, and all their starry host, the earth and all that is on it, the seas and all that is in them. You give life to everything, and the multitudes of heaven worship you. <sup>7</sup> “You are the LORD God, who chose Abram and brought him out of Ur of the Chaldeans and named him Abraham. <sup>8</sup> You found his heart faithful to you, and you made a covenant with him to give to his descendants the land of the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Jebusites and Girgashites. You have kept your promise because you are righteous. <sup>9</sup> “You saw the suffering of our ancestors in Egypt; you heard their cry at the Red Sea. <sup>10</sup> You sent signs and wonders against Pharaoh, against all his officials and all the people of his land, for you knew how arrogantly the Egyptians treated them. You made a name for yourself, which remains to this day. <sup>11</sup> You divided the sea before them, so that they passed through it on dry ground, but you hurled their pursuers into the depths, like a stone into mighty waters. <sup>12</sup> By day you led them with a pillar of cloud, and by night with a pillar of fire to give them light on the way they were to take. <sup>13</sup> “You came down on Mount Sinai; you spoke to them from heaven. You gave them regulations and laws that are just and right, and decrees and commands that are good. <sup>14</sup> You made known to them your holy Sabbath and gave them commands, decrees and laws through your servant Moses. <sup>15</sup> In their hunger you gave them bread from heaven and in their thirst you brought them water from the rock; you told them to go in and take possession of the land you had sworn with uplifted hand to give them. <sup>16</sup> “But they, our ancestors, became arrogant and stiff-necked, and they did not obey your commands. <sup>17</sup> They refused to listen and failed to remember the miracles you performed among them. They became stiff-necked and, in their rebellion, appointed a leader in order to return to their slavery. But you are a forgiving God, gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love. Therefore, you did not desert them, <sup>18</sup> even when they cast for themselves an image of a calf and said, ‘This is your god, who brought you up out of Egypt,’ or when they committed awful blasphemies. <sup>19</sup> “Because of your great compassion you did not abandon them in the wilderness. By day the pillar of cloud did not fail to guide them on their path, nor the pillar of fire by night to shine on the way they were to take. <sup>20</sup> You gave your good Spirit to instruct them. You did not withhold your manna from their mouths, and you gave them water for their thirst. <sup>21</sup> For forty years you sustained them in the wilderness; they lacked nothing; their clothes did not wear out nor did their feet become swollen. <sup>22</sup> “You gave them kingdoms and nations, allotting to them even the remotest frontiers. They took over the country of Sihon king of Heshbon and the country of Og king of Bashan. <sup>23</sup> You made their children as numerous as the stars in the sky, and you brought them into the land that you told their parents to enter and possess. <sup>24</sup> Their children went in and took possession of the land. You subdued before them the Canaanites, who lived in the land; you gave the Canaanites into their hands, along with their kings and the peoples of the land, to deal with them as they pleased. <sup>25</sup> They captured fortified cities and fertile land; they took possession of houses filled with all kinds of good things, wells already dug, vineyards, olive groves and fruit trees in abundance. They ate to the full and were well-nourished; they reveled in your great goodness. <sup>26</sup> “But they were disobedient and rebelled against you; they turned their backs on your law. They killed your prophets, who had warned them in order to turn them back to you; they committed awful blasphemies. <sup>27</sup> So you delivered them into the hands of their enemies, who oppressed them. But when they were oppressed they cried out to you. From heaven you heard them, and in your great compassion you gave them deliverers, who rescued them from the hand of their enemies. <sup>28</sup> “But as soon as they were at rest, they again did what was evil in your sight. Then you abandoned them to the hand of their enemies so that they ruled over them. And when they cried out to you again, you heard from heaven, and in your compassion, you delivered them time after time. <sup>29</sup> “You warned them in order to turn them back to your law, but they became arrogant and disobeyed your commands. They sinned against your ordinances, of which you said, ‘The person who obeys them will live by them.’ Stubbornly they turned their backs on you, became stiff-necked and refused to listen. <sup>30</sup> For many years you were patient with them. By your Spirit, you warned them through your prophets. Yet they paid no attention, so you gave them into the hands of the neighbouring peoples. <sup>31</sup> But in your great mercy you did

not put an end to them or abandon them, for you are a gracious and merciful God. <sup>32</sup> “Now therefore, our God, the great God, mighty and awesome, who keeps his covenant of love, do not let all this hardship seem trifling in your eyes—the hardship that has come on us, on our kings and leaders, on our priests and prophets, on our ancestors and all your people, from the days of the kings of Assyria until today. <sup>33</sup> In all that has happened to us, you have remained righteous; you have acted faithfully, while we acted wickedly. <sup>34</sup> Our kings, our leaders, our priests and our ancestors did not follow your law; they did not pay attention to your commands or the statutes you warned them to keep. <sup>35</sup> Even while they were in their kingdom, enjoying your great goodness to them in the spacious and fertile land you gave them, they did not serve you or turn from their evil ways. <sup>36</sup> “But see, we are slaves today, slaves in the land you gave our ancestors so they could eat its fruit and the other good things it produces. <sup>37</sup> Because of our sins, its abundant harvest goes to the kings you have placed over us. They rule over our bodies and our cattle as they please. We are in great distress. <sup>38</sup> “In view of all this, we are making a binding agreement, putting it in writing, and our leaders, our Levites and our priests are affixing their seals to it.”

## Announcements

**School Holidays.** The regular activities of the Church will all go into recess for the NSW government school holidays (Mon 4<sup>th</sup> – Sun 17<sup>th</sup> July). This will mean that IMPACT, Kids Church, SPARKLERS, Home Groups etc will have a two-week break. We are extremely thankful to all those who serve us in this way and we hope they will be able to have a good break and come back in term 3 refreshed.

**Holiday kids church:** A holiday kids church program is running during the school holidays for our children. Children 0-2 years old are able to go to the creche room. Children 3yo- year 2 are able to go to the hall. Children in years 3-4 have the option of staying in church or going to the hall. Children in years 5-6 are asked to stay in church. There will be activity sheets available at the back of the church for kids staying in.

**Focus for July – Hospitality.** “Show hospitality to one another without grumbling.” (1 Peter 4:9) The apostle Peter writes that we are to show hospitality to one another. Hospitality is not only for people we have recently met but also for people we regularly see! In what way can you share the good things that god has given you with others this month?

**COVID.** Many of our people and their families continue to contract COVID. As a Church we want to support and help you through this time by providing physical support, meals and our prayers. So if you get COVID please either let your home group leader or Stephen or Jon know so that we can organise such help and support.

**Small Leaders Meeting.** We will be having a small group leader’s meeting on Sun 24<sup>th</sup> July 11:30-12:30am.

**Building Renovations at Charlestown.** We are still awaiting a revised concept plan from our architects. When we receive it we will thinking through borrowings and repayment options and then present it to the congregation for discussion.

**Dementia Seminar:** Many thanks to Jo who organised a great time on Dementia last Sunday. If you were unable to make it and want to know how to access some of the materials that were presented, please give her a call.

**Men’s Ministry.** Once a month a few of the men from the church play a couple of games of ten pin bowling at Dullboys, Hillsborough Rd, Charlestown from 7pm on a Thursday night. If you would like a game or 2, please text Colin to find out more details.

## Song – Rock of Ages [Rock of Ages, Cleft for Me with lyrics - YouTube](#)

1 Rock of Ages, cleft for me,  
let me hide myself in thee;  
let the water and the blood,  
from thy wounded side which flowed,  
be of sin the double cure;  
save from wrath and make me pure.

3. Nothing in my hand I bring,  
simply to the cross I cling;  
naked, come to thee for dress;  
helpless, look to thee for grace;  
foul, I to the fountain fly;  
wash me, Savior, or I die.

2 Not the labors of my hands  
can fulfill thy law's demands;  
could my zeal no respite know,  
could my tears forever flow,  
all for sin could not atone;  
thou must save, and thou alone.

4. While I draw this fleeting breath,  
when mine eyes shall close in death,  
when I soar to worlds unknown,  
see thee on thy judgment throne,  
Rock of Ages, cleft for me,  
let me hide myself in thee.

## Pastoral Prayer Points

**Psalm 20:7:** “Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we will trust in the name of the Lord our God. They collapse and fall, but we rise and stand upright.”

**Prayer for Appleby's in Cambodia:** Praise God for the recent first centenary celebration event of the Khmer church. It was attended by 2000 people, with interviews and history of missionaries from the early days of the Bible School. Praise God for Gilbert's mum's health, and for the upcoming wedding of Jo and Michael in Sept, pray for a busy time in ministry with all the centenary publications & celebrations.

**Pray for Bahamas:** Pray for a hunger for God's riches rather than material wealth. Pray for righteous lawmakers who will not neglect the poorest residents. Pray for believers to humbly serve the Haitian immigrants in their midst.

**Pray for church leaders,** Pray the Lord would help the elders and other leaders to make wise and prudent decisions. Help with clarity of mind and vision. Give them patience and wisdom, and the spirit of humility and unity in Christ.

**Pray for those struggling with trials:** Pray for those doubting their significance in this uncaring world, that the immensity of God's love in Christ would come home to them. Pray for those struggling with rejection, loneliness, dealing with wayward children, the ageing and those grieving the loss of loved ones. Pray the astonishing wonder of Christ's death on the cross for us, and the unending tide of his love rest on us. Pray the Spirit would fill us with the hope of the resurrection and life everlasting.

## Bible Reading – Nehemiah 10:28-39 (NIV)

<sup>28</sup> “The rest of the people—priests, Levites, gatekeepers, musicians, temple servants and all who separated themselves from the neighbouring peoples for the sake of the Law of God, together with their wives and all their sons and daughters who are able to understand — <sup>29</sup> all these now join their fellow Israelites the nobles, and bind themselves with a curse and an oath to follow the Law of God given through Moses the servant of God and to obey carefully all the commands, regulations and decrees of the LORD our Lord.

<sup>30</sup> “We promise not to give our daughters in marriage to the peoples around us or take their daughters for our sons. <sup>31</sup> “When the neighbouring peoples bring merchandise or grain to sell on the Sabbath, we will not buy from them on the Sabbath or on any holy day. Every seventh year we will forgo working the land and will cancel all debts. <sup>32</sup> “We assume the responsibility for carrying out the commands to give a third of a shekel each year for the service of the house of our God: <sup>33</sup> for the bread set out on the table; for the regular grain offerings and burnt offerings; for the offerings on the Sabbaths, at the New Moon feasts and at the appointed festivals; for the holy offerings; for sin offerings to make atonement for Israel; and for all the duties of the house of our God. <sup>34</sup> “We—the priests, the Levites and the people—have cast lots to determine when each of our families is to bring to the house of our God at set times each year a contribution of wood to burn on the altar of the LORD our God, as it is written in the Law. <sup>35</sup> “We also assume responsibility for bringing to the house of the LORD each year the first fruits of our crops and of every fruit tree. <sup>36</sup> “As it is also written in the Law, we will bring the firstborn of our sons and of our cattle, of our herds and of our flocks to the house of our God, to the priests ministering there. <sup>37</sup> “Moreover, we will bring to the storerooms of the house of our God, to the priests, the first of our ground meal, of our grain offerings, of the fruit of all our trees and of our new wine and olive oil. And we will bring a tithe of our crops to the Levites, for it is the Levites who collect the tithes in all the towns where we work. <sup>38</sup> A priest descended from Aaron is to accompany the Levites when they receive the tithes, and the Levites are to bring a tenth of the tithes up to the house of our God, to the storerooms of the treasury. <sup>39</sup> The people of Israel, including the

*Levites, are to bring their contributions of grain, new wine and olive oil to the storerooms, where the articles for the sanctuary and for the ministering priests, the gatekeepers and the musicians are also kept. "We will not neglect the house of our God."*

## Sermon – History is HIS STORY

Presently we are in the middle of the three match State of Origin series. State against state. Mate against mate. And it is a remarkably even contest. It is almost always a close and exciting game. Its very different to any game involving the Harlem Globetrotters. Did you notice they are touring Australia at the moment? They always win. In fact, they have played 22,000 games in over 124 different countries and have only lost 3 times. And they always play the same side the Washington Generals. It is a complete and utter mismatch.

Slide 2

And so is the match made in heaven between the Lord our God and his chosen people the Israelites. That too is a complete and utter mismatch. Between a good, a great and gracious God and a weak, sinful people of God, who are a complete bunch of losers. Why are they still together? Why hasn't God moved on to another group of people?

That's what Nehemiah 9 & 10 is all about. Last week we saw that the people of God had spent the morning reading the word of God. And it brought them to tears. And they were told don't weep, this is a time of great joy and so they praised God in worship, they celebrated the festival of booths and their joy was very great. For there is a time to weep & a time to laugh as the book of Ecclesiastes says. And today we come to the time to weep.

Slide 3

*"On the twenty-fourth day of the same month, the Israelites gathered together, fasting and wearing sackcloth and putting dust on their heads. <sup>2</sup> Those of Israelite descent had separated themselves from all foreigners. They stood in their places and confessed their sins and the sins of their ancestors."* And this confession leads them to prayer. In fact, one of the longest recorded prayers in the Bible. And in this prayer, they have a close look at their history and as they do that, they get a bigger vision of what their God is like.

Slide 4

### 1. What is God like?

You probably have heard the story about the little boy who was in Sunday School & after the lesson was over, he started drawing something on a piece of paper. After a while his teacher asked him, "What are you drawing?" God! Was the reply. But no one knows what God looks like declared the teacher. "They will after I finish my drawing, came the reply."

And likewise, we will know more about God after we finish reading the Levities prayer in Nehemiah 9, a passage that tells us what our God is really like. It begins, *"Stand up and praise the LORD your God, who is from everlasting to everlasting."* *"Blessed be your glorious name, and may it be exalted above all blessing and praise."* <sup>6</sup> *You alone are the LORD."*

God is **unique**. There is nobody like Him, who always existed and whose name is greater than all the others. He alone is worthy of our praise.

Slide 5

And God is also **the creator**, for verse 6 says *"You made the heavens, even the highest heavens & all their starry host, the earth & all that is on it, the seas & all that is in them. You give life to everything, and the multitudes of heaven worship you."* God is the source of all life. And just one glance of the heavens and the earth tells us of his incredible power.

During the French Revolution, many people wanted to get rid of Christianity forever. On one clear night an atheist proudly boasted his secular beliefs to a poor peasant. He went on to say "Everything will be

abolished – churches, bibles, and the clergy. Yes, even the word ‘God’ itself. We shall remove everything that speaks of religion. To this the poor peasant gave a chuckle. The atheist got angry, why did you laugh at that statement? The peasant pointed to the start above and replied “I was just wondering how you’re going to manage to get all of those bright lights out of the sky that so clearly proclaim the majesty of God!”

Slide 6

The Levites continue **God has chosen His people.**<sup>7</sup> *“You are the LORD God, who chose Abram and brought him out of Ur of the Chaldeans and named him Abraham. <sup>8</sup> You found his heart faithful to you, and you made a covenant with him to give to his descendants the land of the Canaanites ... You have kept your promise because you are righteous”.* For God also **keeps His promises.** He raised up for Abraham many descendants. And then when he saw the suffering of these descendants, he sent them his servant Moses.

Slide 7

For **God cared** about the suffering of his people in Egypt and **he heard** their cry by the Red Sea and so he miraculously divided the Red Sea before them and they passed through on dry land & he hurled his pursuers into the depths and then led his people to Mt Sinai. Where **he provided** for them his law so they would know how to respond to their God **& he gave** them food and water and even made sure their clothes and footwear didn’t wear out.

God was **merciful** when the people of God became arrogant and refused to obey these commands. He was generous and good, as he led them through the desert, defeated their enemies and gave them fortified cities in the promised land, wells they hadn’t dug and crops they hadn’t planted. So much so that it says in Verse 25 *“They ate to the full and were well-nourished; they revelled in your great **goodness.**”*

God was **patient** with them when they turned away from him in the promised land. Eventually he handed them over in judgement to other nations so that they might learn their lesson but now under Ezra and Nehemiah He has brought them back home and given them another chance. God truly is a great God, mighty and awesome who keeps his covenant of love with his people. Only such a great God, a good God, a gracious God could relieve the great distress the people of God were currently experiencing.

So this passage paints for a big vision of who God is. A God who is in complete control. A God who keeps his promises. A God who reaches out to us in our distress. And friends this is the God we should want to worship now and every day. This is a God that can drive out our disappointment & despondency for he is in control. This is a God who is faithful, even when we are faithless. This is a God that is revealed to us in the Scriptures. A God we can know.

Slide 8

## 2. That is what God is like but **what are we like?**

Well, this prayer also tells us what the people of God are like also. And it is not a pretty picture. Compared to this God we are like the Washington Generals up against the Harlem Globetrotters. It’s a complete and utter mismatch. Now if we compare ourselves to others then we might look okay but compared to God we are completely wicked.

Just look at the people of God in the desert after all that God has done for them.<sup>16</sup> *“But they, our ancestors, became arrogant & stiff-necked & they did not obey your commands. <sup>17</sup> They refused to listen and failed to remember the miracles you performed among them. They became stiff-necked and, in their rebellion, appointed a leader in order to return to their slavery... they cast for themselves an image of a calf and said, ‘This is your god, who brought you up out of Egypt,’ ... they committed awful blasphemies.”*

After all that God had done for them, their response is a real slap in God’s face. They lacked nothing and yet appreciated nothing. They didn’t do what God commanded them to do. They didn’t want to go down the path that God wanted them to go. They didn’t want to follow the leader that God had provided for

them. So, they rebelled against God. And killed the prophets he sent to them and blasphemed against His name.

Wait a second Stephen I am not responsible for what those people did in the past! Just because they ate the sour grapes doesn't mean I should have my teeth set on edge? Well, that's true to a point but then the people of Nehemiah's time were confessing to God that they are just like their ancestors. They too didn't disobey in the desert but they can see the same sort of disobedience in their own lives. And so, they are confessing to God that they are just like their spiritual forefathers.

Slide 9

And doesn't the apostle Paul say something similar in 1 Corinthians 10? Talking about the behaviour of the people of God in the desert he says *"Now these things occurred as examples to keep us from setting our hearts on evil things as they did."* And then he repeats his warning in verse 11 *"These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the fulfilment of the ages has come. So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall!"*

You get it? That passage is saying I am like them. I am no better than them. I would have done what they did, if I was in their shoes. Because that is what I see constantly in my life. The Lord gives me good things and within the day I am feeling proud and arrogant and easily swept towards secret sins. I have been given so much from God and yet when something little goes wrong, I throw a pity party. I have God's word as clear as the day in front of me and I still do my own thing, I still want to lead my own life, I still serve other gods.

Slide 10

And isn't that true of our Church as well? Look at our history. We lost faith in God's word and went after liberalism. We have failed to obey the great commission to go into all the world and make disciples instead of saying send me we have send someone else. We have chased up money, careers, a social media acceptance, fashion, good looks & love. And not chased our God with the very same passion.

Slide 11

And isn't it true of our nation as well. The lucky country we call ourselves not the blessed country. A country where people were given a second chance and they on the whole have turned their back on the god of the second chance. We have God's word in our own language and yet most of us don't pick it up and read it on a regular basis. We were given godly laws and we are now trashing them in the name of inclusivity.

One author has said, "The story of the Old Testament... is grace pursues those who aren't looking for it, who don't deserve it, who continually resist it, and who don't even appreciate it after they have been changed by it." And isn't that our story? A story of a gracious God and a sinful people? As another author has put it, "Saints burn grace like jets burn fuel."

Slide 12

Isn't that true? We are like the Washington Generals. Mismatched when put in the same sentence as God. Full of ingratitude, inconsistent, fickle failures. And that is what Nehemiah is teaching us. Again and again, you see how far short the people of God have come up. And again, and again we marvel at the mercy of God, the goodness of God, the grace of God.

Slide 13

### **3. So, what should we do?**

We should do what they did in Nehemiah's time. They listened to the word of God. <sup>3</sup>*"They stood where they were & read from the Book of the Law of the LORD their God for a quarter of the day, and spent another quarter in confession & in worshiping the Lord their God."*

Friends it is when we hear the cycle of blessing, rebellion, distress, restoration, blessing, rebellion and distress in the Scriptures that we understand how the gospel finally works. Grace is not given to good

people but to those who realise they are not good enough. As we spend time, quality time & quantity time in worshipping God & in hearing & understanding God's word then we learn more and more what God is like and what we are really like.

Slide 14

Bible reading is how God speaks to us. And we respond in prayer as we speak back to God. We praise & confess. We thank & ask. And in this circumstance the prayer of God's people is filled with a brilliant mosaic of Biblical quotations, recollections, images & phrases. In fact, there is scarcely a sentence in this prayer that doesn't refer to one part or other of the Bible.

For as they pray back the words and the themes of Scripture their vision of God grows and their relationship with God also grows. You see some people can read the bible, and still remain distant from God, because it remains academic to them. But when you pray and seek God's face and desire to reach out to him and communicate to him and learn and trust more about him in prayer, then something happens, God becomes more and more real.

So, try that some time. Pray to God using the words of a Scripture passage. A psalm perhaps, a prayer of a man or woman of faith. Pray back Scripture to God. Make God's word your word to God. It will change your prayer life If you turn the bible you read into prayers and have your prayers shaped by the Bible.

Slide 15

And when you pray, confess your sins to God. And don't do it just in a general sense like we do when we say the Lord's prayer, "forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us." No be like the Levites in Nehemiah 9, be specific. We have been disobedient, we are arrogant and proud, rebellious, blasphemous, and we have followed the false gods that our society has put in front of us in all the advertisements that are constantly before us.

And don't just confess, repent. "I've been unfaithful. I've been unfaithful. You have every right to throw me out. You have every right to divorce me, Lord. But I want to start again.

I'll do anything to make it work. I love you.' I will start each day with you in prayer. I will read your word regularly, I will come to Church each week. I will take the sacraments, I will forgive others their sins, I will be generous with all that you have given me.

Slide 16

And then commit yourselves to God again. That's what they did here. They made a binding agreement with their God. They signed it. They made an oath & they pledged themselves to a different way of living life, *"to follow the Law of God given through Moses the servant of God and to obey carefully all the commands, regulations and decrees of the LORD our Lord."*

Whatever God's Law said, they now desire to do. They are making a wholesale, unapologetic, unreserved commitment to do what God commands them to do. From now on we will walk in God's ways. But what does that mean in real life?

Slide 17

We will make sure our home life puts God first. We will make sure our marriages reflect that we are going to service God wholeheartedly and that means we will not marry outside of the faith. We want our kids to be brought in the ways of the Lord. And it will affect our business life. We will keep the Sabbath and not work on that the seventh day. We will not even buy from foreigners on the Sabbath. We want to keep the Lord's Day for the Lord.

And we will forgo working on the land every seventh year. We will value God's world. We will not take all the goodness out of the land by working it constantly. It too needs time to rest. To be fallow. To be restored & if that means that every seventh year there is less to go around, then we are sure the Lord will



provide: & when we leave it fallow, anything it grows for itself will be available for the poor and needy as the Law prescribes. So, we will care for them as well & make sure debts are erased and loans don't keep mounting up on the poor.

And we will not neglect the house of the Lord. Nine times in these commitments, the people of God say they will support God's work. They will pay their temple tax to provide for all the things that are needed in worship. They will make their sin offering, they will bring their first fruits and their tithes, they will collect the wood for the sacrifices. The worship of God is important. It is what will remind them of how great their God really is and how sinful we really are. And so they make promises that will affect, their work, rest & play. Their business practise and their religious practices. They want to walk in God's ways all of their life.

Now that's all very well. To make your promises but why will this be any different? Last year I wanted to lose some weight and did well for a while but I soon went back to my old lazy practises? How is this going to be any different? Well, we are going to find out later on in this book that this time wouldn't be any different. But what we learnt from this prayer is that for God's people the very character of God is there only hope. Or as Peter Adam puts it "If the church is the problem, God is our only solution."

Slide 18

#### 4. What has God done?

Listen how the apostle Paul puts in Romans 7. <sup>14</sup> *We know that the law is spiritual; but I am unspiritual, sold as a slave to sin. I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do... For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out...* <sup>19</sup> *So I find this law at work: Although I want to do good, evil is right there with me. For in my inner being I delight in God's law; but I see another law at work in me, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within me. What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death? **Thanks be to God, who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord!***

Jesus Christ is God's answer to our problem. We know what we should be doing: reading God's word, praying, confessing our sins and committing to follow God's ways but we just can't do it. We need Jesus. Nothing in my hand I bring, simply to the cross I cling. Jesus lives the life we desire to live. And Jesus takes the punishment for the life we actually do live.

You see God breaks the cycle of grace, sin, forgiveness, grace by not staying aloof. Not separating himself from all the muck in the world. Instead, he draws near. He involves himself in our home life, our business practise, our social problems and our religious traditions. And he does it to show us that grace ultimately wins. For when sin abounds, grace abounds much, much, more. When sin wins, grace enables us to end up on the winning side. That when the Harlem Globetrotters end up playing the Washington Generals, it isn't a mismatch, it is an exhibition of how great and gracious God really is.

Slide 19

How does Paul put it in Ephesians 2, "As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins... Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath. <sup>4</sup> But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, <sup>5</sup> made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved. <sup>6</sup> And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, <sup>7</sup> in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Jesus"

Slide 20

That grace is ours free, completely free for us but costly for Jesus. So how should we respond to such grace. Listen to the words of Dietrich Bonhoeffer "Costly grace is the treasure hidden in the field; for the sake of it a man will gladly go and sell all that he has. It is the pearl of great price to buy which the merchant will sell all his goods. It is the kingly rule of Christ for whose sake a man will pluck out the eye

*which causes him to stumble. It is the call of Jesus Christ at which the disciple leaves his nets and follow him.*

*Such grace is costly because it calls us to follow and its grace because it calls us to follow Jesus Christ. It is costly because it costs a man his life and it grace because it gives a man the only true life. It is costly because it condemns sin and it is grace because it justifies the sinner. Above all it is costly because it cost God the life of his son and what has cost God much cannot be cheap for us.”*

*Slide 21*

*So let me end with these words from John Calvin, “Since it is the Lord who forgives, forgets and wipes our sins, let us confess our sins to him in order to find pardon. He is the physician: let us lay bare our wounds to him. It is he who is hurt and offended: from him let us seek peace. He discerns our hearts: let us hasten to pour out our hearts before him. He calls sinners: let us hasten to come then to our God.”*

## **Song – Nothing that my hands can do**

[Nothing That My Hands Can Do \[Official Lyric Video\] - YouTube](#)

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|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p>1. There's nothing that my hands can do<br/>To save my guilty soul<br/>I cannot cleanse my filthy stains<br/>Or make my spirit whole<br/>For nothing but the blood of Christ<br/>Can all my sins erase<br/>I dare not claim my righteousness<br/>But hide within His grace<br/>'Tis Christ who saved me from the depths<br/>God's pardon I've received<br/>I'm washed within His precious blood<br/>My heart is sprinkled clean</p> | <p>3. My life is but a fleeting sigh<br/>A tear within the sea<br/>But You are everlasting, Lord<br/>And You've predestined me<br/>To leave this fading world behind<br/>Not fearing death will come<br/>For then I'll look on Jesus Christ<br/>And to His arms I'll run<br/>And when I see Him face to face<br/>What glory that will be<br/>To look upon my Savior's scars<br/>And know they were for me</p> |
| <p>2. I'll praise the God of holiness<br/>Of justice, truth, and might<br/>Who guides me by His mighty hand<br/>To walk within His light<br/>While Satan weaves his shallow lies<br/>God speaks to me in love<br/>Reminding me His only Son<br/>Has bought me with His blood<br/>And Christ dispels my every doubt<br/>Through Him I am redeemed<br/>I love because He loved me first<br/>I live because He lives</p>                  |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |

**Closing.** *“Thanks be to God, who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord!” (Romans 7:19)*