

SACKCLOTH AND DUST

unit 18 | session 3



CHRIST CONNECTION

God's people remembered all He had done and promised to be faithful. God is gracious and compassionate. All along, God has been faithful to people who are unfaithful. We experience God's grace and compassion in Jesus, who gave His life so we can receive mercy and life forever.



GIFT OF WORSHIP

This week, we're covering the passages and main points below. But we encourage you to dig in and read all of the content on this timeline.

Nehemiah 9–11

CONFESsION PROMPTS WORSHIP

NEHEMIAH 9:1-3, 26-29, 33-38

1 On the twenty-fourth day of this month the Israelites assembled; they were fasting, wearing sackcloth, and had put dust on their heads. 2 Those of Israelite descent separated themselves from all foreigners, and they stood and confessed their sins and the iniquities of their ancestors. 3 While they stood in their places, they read from the book of the law of the LORD their God for a fourth of the day and spent another fourth of the day in confession and worship of the LORD their God. . . . 26 But they were disobedient and rebelled against you. They flung your law behind their backs and killed your prophets who warned them in order to turn them back to you. They committed terrible blasphemies. 27 So you handed them over to their enemies, who oppressed them. In their time of distress, they cried out to you, and you heard from heaven. In your abundant compassion you gave them deliverers, who rescued them from the power of their enemies. 28 But as soon as they had relief, they again did what was evil in your sight. So you abandoned them to the power of their enemies, who dominated them. When they cried out to you again, you heard from heaven and rescued them many times in your compassion. 29 You warned them to turn back to your law, but they acted arrogantly and would not obey your commands. They sinned against your ordinances, which a person will live by if he does them. They stubbornly resisted, stiffened their necks, and would not obey. . . . 33 You are righteous concerning all that has happened to us, because you have acted faithfully, while we have acted wickedly. 34 Our kings, leaders, priests, and ancestors did not obey your law or listen to your commands and warnings you gave them. 35 When they were in their kingdom, with your abundant goodness that you gave them, and in the spacious and fertile land you set before them, they would not serve you or turn from their wicked ways. 36 Here we are today, slaves in the land you gave our ancestors so that they could enjoy its fruit and its goodness. Here we are—slaves in it! 37 Its abundant harvest goes to the kings you have set over us, because of our sins. They rule over our bodies and our livestock as they please. We are in great distress. 38 In view of all this, we are making a binding agreement in writing on a sealed document containing the names of our leaders, Levites, and priests.

WORSHIP PROMPTS COMMITMENT

NEHEMIAH 10:28-29

28 The rest of the people—the priests, Levites, gatekeepers, singers, and temple servants, along with their wives, sons, and daughters, everyone who is able to understand and who has separated themselves from the surrounding peoples to obey the law of God—29 join with their noble brothers and commit themselves with a sworn oath to follow the law of God given through God's servant Moses and to obey carefully all the commands, ordinances, and statutes of the LORD our Lord.

MAIN POINT.

Confessing our sin frees us;
worshiping God changes us



THEOLOGY CONNECTION

WORSHIP

While many reduce worship to an event or the singing of worship songs, worship is first and foremost something of the heart and extends to all areas of life. The aim and focus of worship is God, giving Him the praise and adoration He deserves. Worship should be carried out not only at a personal level within a Christian's life but also in joining with other Christians in the corporate act of worship and stewarding our gifts for the glory of God. Corporate worship serves to uplift and strengthen other Christians, but it also serves as a witness to nonbelievers of the greatness of God.

DISCUSSION

CONFESsION PROMPTS WORSHIP

NEHEMIAH 9:1-3,26-29,33-38

- How do you react when someone calls you out? Instead of becoming defensive, how can we think differently about conviction?
- Why did remembering their history prompt the people to confess their sin? Why did it result in worship?
- What does it show about God that He kept rescuing His people when they kept turning from Him? How do we get caught up in the same cycle?

WORSHIP PROMPTS COMMITMENT

NEHEMIAH 10:28-29

- Do you more easily obey people you trust? How might this apply to obeying God?
- Why do we easily make promises to God at camps or other events yet struggle to follow through? What needs to change?
- How could writing down their oath (9:38) make the people accountable? How can we create accountability for ourselves today?



DO YOU FEEL LIKE GOD GETS TIRED OF FORGIVING YOU FOR THE SAME SINS? HOW DOES THE PASSAGE REASSURE YOU?

CULTURAL CONNECTION

Who helps you to be a better version of yourself? Who brings out your best qualities by motivating you and inspiring you? Whose commitment to Jesus influences you to desire a closer walk with Him? These are the people who call us up to a higher standard than what we'd settle for on our own. They call us out too, helping us see where we've allowed sin to creep into our lives. Here's the deal: Worship makes us better. That may sound odd because worship isn't a person, but worship places us in God's holy presence. We can't come away unchanged. Now, God is with us at all times, but when we worship God in spirit and in truth (John 4:24), we intentionally lift up God's name, draw closer to His heart, and position ourselves to hear His voice more clearly. Worship is an invitation for the Holy Spirit to expose our rough edges, and through the power of conviction, to smooth them. And we're better because we're made more like Jesus in the process.



DAY ONE

PSALM 32:3-5



Have you ever kept a secret, especially something you felt guilty about? Maybe you broke something or said something hurtful, and you just hoped no one would find out. It feels heavy, right? Like a knot in your stomach or a weight on your shoulders. It might even consume your thoughts, making you irritable or distracted.

King David knew exactly what that feeling was like. In today's psalm, he powerfully described the crushing weight of unconfessed sin. His was so utterly torn apart by this sin that it physically hurt him and zapped his strength. Sin takes a physical and emotional toll on everyone. It pulls you away from God. It steals your joy. It leads to anxiety and depression. It drains your energy—like carrying a huge, invisible backpack full of rocks. Every rock is a secret sin, and the longer you carry them, the heavier they get. But David realized that the moment he stopped hiding and trying to pretend that these sins didn't exist, the heaviness was lifted. He openly confessed his sin to God, was forgiven, and was made whole again. Here's the thing: Confessing your sins isn't just about feeling better; it's about being freed. When you confess your sin to God, you're not telling Him anything He doesn't already know. You're choosing to be honest, agreeing with God about your sin, leaving behind the lie, and stepping into His grace. He is faithful and just, and He will forgive you. This freedom allows you to experience God's love fully and to feel the peace and assurance He so freely gives.

- **HAVE YOU EVER EXPERIENCED THE "HEAVY" FEELING DAVID DESCRIBES BEFORE YOU CONFESSED SOMETHING YOU FELT GUILTY ABOUT? WHAT WAS THAT LIKE?**
- **WHY IS IT SO DIFFICULT FOR US TO CONFESS OUR SINS TO GOD, WHO ALREADY KNOWS THEM? HOW DOES IT HELP TO UNDERSTAND THAT CONFESSION IS AGREEING WITH GOD ABOUT YOUR SIN?**

PRAY

HEAVENLY FATHER, THANK YOU FOR YOUR FORGIVENESS. I CONFESS THAT SOMETIMES I HOLD ON TO MY SINS, BUT I ASK FOR THE COURAGE TO BRING THEM TO YOU.



DAY TWO

PROVERBS 28:13

Yesterday, we talked about how heavy secret sins are, but when we confess our sins to God, who already knows what they are, He takes the heaviness from us. Today's passage reinforces this message. When we don't confess our sins and keep them concealed in the dark, we're burdened and "will not prosper." What does that mean? It means we don't flourish; we don't truly thrive. Our hidden sin becomes like a poison, affecting our peace, our relationships, and our connection with God. It creates a wall, a barrier, and we can't fully experience God's blessings or true freedom when we're holding on to our sins. It's like trying to run a race with a heavy backpack on—you're just not going to perform your best.

But here's the good news. We are promised incredible freedom in the second part of the verse: "Whoever confesses and renounces them will find mercy." We must openly admit what we've done and call it what it is: sin. "Renounce" means to turn away from the sin, to decide you're not going to keep doing it. This isn't just an apology; it's a genuine change of heart and a change in direction.

When you do these things, God promises "mercy." Mercy is getting what you don't deserve—His compassion, His forgiveness, and a fresh start. Confession isn't about God trying to punish you. Hear that again: Confession isn't punishment! It's God offering you a way to be truly free, to lighten your load, and to restore your relationship with Him. It takes courage to confess our sin, but the freedom and peace that follow are worth it every single time.

- **WHAT DO YOU THINK IT TRULY MEANS TO "RENOUNCE" A SIN, BEYOND JUST SAYING YOU'RE SORRY?**
- **WHY DO YOU THINK CONFESSING OUR SINS TO GOD (AND SOMETIMES TO OTHERS) BRINGS "MERCY" AND MAKES US "PROSPER"?**

PRAY

GOD, THANK YOU FOR THE PROMISE OF FREEDOM THROUGH CONFESSION. SHOW ME YOUR MERCY AND PEACE AS I SEEK TO WALK IN YOUR TRUTH. HELP ME TO CONFESS MY HIDDEN SIN.



DAY THREE

1 JOHN 1:8-10

Let's be real—no one is perfect, even though many people try to act as if they are. And today's passage tells us that if we pretend we don't sin, we're basically fooling ourselves. It's like wearing a mask, trying to convince everyone (and maybe even ourselves) that we're something that we're not. But masks get heavy. They keep us from true connection with God and others. They're barriers, building walls of guilt and shame.

But verse 9? This is where the freedom comes in! "Confess" means to agree with God about our sin. It's throwing off that mask, admitting what we've done, and laying it all out before Him.

And what does God do when we do that? He's faithful—He keeps His promises. He's righteous—He makes things right. He forgives us completely, wiping the slate clean. Not only that, but He purifies us from all unrighteousness. It's like a spiritual scrubbing, leaving us clean and fresh. That heavy feeling? Gone. The guilt? Lifted. The shame? Replaced with peace. And though our sinful choices may result in consequences, when we confess them to God, we aren't condemned by them.

Trying to deny our sin (v. 10) isn't just fooling ourselves; it's calling God a liar. His Word clearly states that we are all sinners in need of grace. Embracing that truth and stepping into confession is the doorway to incredible freedom and to a restored relationship with God. You don't have to carry the burden of hidden sin; you can stop pretending and find freedom in His forgiveness today.

- **WHAT DOES IT MEAN THAT GOD IS "FAITHFUL AND RIGHTEOUS" WHEN IT COMES TO FORGIVING OUR SINS?**
- **WHAT ARE SOME OTHER WAYS CONFESSING SIN MIGHT FREE US IN OUR RELATIONSHIPS WITH GOD AND WITH OTHERS?**

PRAY

**GOD, THANK YOU FOR THE INCREDIBLE FREEDOM
FOUND IN CONFESSING MY SINS. FORGIVE ME WHEN
I FALL SHORT.**



DAY FOUR

2 CORINTHIANS 3:12-18

Have you ever looked at something really bright, like the sun, but then had to look away because it was just too intense? Or maybe you've tried to see through a foggy window? It's hard to get a clear picture, right? In 2 Corinthians 3, Paul talks about something similar. He brings up Moses, who had to put a veil over his face after being with God because his face was literally glowing from being in God's presence! But Paul explained that this glory faded, and the veil kept people from truly seeing. Unlike Moses, we don't need a veil. Through Jesus, the "veil" that separated us from God's full glory has been taken away. We can look directly at the Lord's glory—not just a temporary glow, but the full, awesome, radiant glory of God. How? Through Jesus! His character perfectly reflects God's character and His glory!

When we genuinely worship God, something incredible happens. We are "being transformed into the same image." We are being changed into His likeness. This isn't a one-time event; it's a process known as sanctification. The more we gaze at who God is, the more we start to reflect His character. Have you ever noticed that when you spend a lot of time with someone, you start to pick up their habits? But with God, it's deeper. It's a spiritual transformation, making us more like Jesus Himself. When you worship, remember you're not just singing songs or saying words. You're opening yourself up to God's glorious presence, allowing Him to change you from the inside out and make you more and more like His Son—amazing transformation!

- **CAN YOU THINK OF A TIME WHEN WORSHIP OR PRAYER CHANGED YOUR ATTITUDE OR PERSPECTIVE ABOUT SOMETHING OR SOMEONE?**
- **WHAT SPECIFIC DETAILS OF JESUS'S CHARACTER (LIKE LOVE, PATIENCE, OR SELF-CONTROL) DO YOU WANT TO SEE "INCREASE" IN YOUR OWN LIFE?**

PRAY

JESUS, THANK YOU THAT I CAN COME BEFORE YOU WITH AN UNVEILED FACE. TRANSFORM ME EVERY DAY TO BE MORE AND MORE LIKE YOU, AND TRANSFORM ME FROM THE INSIDE OUT.



DAY FIVE

PSALM 34:1-5

You know those days when everything just feels off? Maybe you woke up on the wrong side of the bed, or something frustrating happened at school, or you just generally feel down. It's easy to let those feelings dictate our whole day. But what if you could shift your perspective and brighten things up, even when circumstances are tough?

Psalm 34:1-5 gives us a powerful clue. In the first verse, David wrote, "I will bless the LORD at all times," emphasis on all! Not just when things are going your way or when you feel good about how life is going. ALL times! But it doesn't come naturally. It's a daily choice to actively praise God, no matter what. When we choose to praise Him, even when we don't feel like it, something shifts inside us. When David said, "I will boast in the LORD," he meant he would boast about God—His goodness, His power, His faithfulness. When you focus on God and His greatness, your problems start to shrink. They don't disappear, but your perspective on them changes because you realize that the God who created the universe, who loves you unconditionally, is bigger than anything you're facing. And the result? "The humble will hear and be glad." Your worship isn't just for you! It encourages others who are also struggling. When people see you praising God through your difficulties, it gives them hope that God can do the same for them. Finally, David says in verse 5, "Those who look to him are radiant with joy; their faces will never be ashamed." When we turn our eyes to God in worship, He lifts us up. The worries, the anxieties, the shame we might feel about our mistakes or insecurities start to fade. Instead, we become "radiant," glowing with His presence and peace. Worship truly changes us from the inside out, making us shine with His light.

- **HOW DOES BOASTING ABOUT GOD CHANGE YOUR MOOD OR PERSPECTIVE ON A DIFFICULT DAY?**
- **HOW CAN YOUR PERSONAL WORSHIP ENCOURAGE SOMEONE ELSE WHO IS STRUGGLING?**

PRAY

LORD, HELP ME TO CHOOSE TO BLESS YOU AT ALL TIMES AND TO LET MY SOUL BOAST IN YOUR GOODNESS. TRANSFORM MY HEART THROUGH WORSHIPING YOU SO I MAY BE RADIANT WITH YOUR PRESENCE.