

A while ago I heard a story from Dr. Clive Claver, who was the president of World Relief. He traveled to remote parts of Africa to help isolated tribes gain access to food, water, and medicine. He told about an experience he had in Sudan. When he arrived at a certain village for the first time, he discovered that this tribe had just come to faith in Christ when a traveling missionary brought them the gospel. Now he was there, running this humanitarian agency, to help with food, water, and medicine. It seemed as if God was really moving among this people, opening so many doors. Dr. Claver sat down with the chief and all the elders in the tribe and told them the organization was going to bring in machines to help them dig a well so they would have permanent access to clean water. He told them they were going to bring in agricultural equipment and seeds to help the tribe farm so they would have enough food and no longer be starving. He told them about the medicine they would provide so many of their children wouldn't die at a young age. The leaders of the tribe were unbelievably grateful. They were so, so happy. "But," they said, "We just placed our faith in Jesus, and we heard there is a book that tells us about him. Is that true?" Dr. Claver realized they were talking about the Bible. He said, "Yes, yes, that's true." The tribesman started dancing! There really is a book! It's true! Then they asked Dr. Claver if he had read it before. He said, "Yes, I've read it several times. I have several copies of it at my house." "Did you hear that? He's read the book before! He has copies of the book!" Then they said, "Sir, we are so grateful that you have offered to bring us water and food and medicine, but before you do anything else, could you bring us a copy of the book, first?"

Jesus said, "Man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God." When I heard that story I was cut to the heart and thought, what would it look like for me, what would it look like for our church, to desire God's word like those people did?

We are in a series on revival here at The Creek. Here's what we've seen so far:

- Week 1: Revival can happen!
- Week 2: Revival happens when God's people pray.
- Week 3: Revival happens when God's people worship him and him alone!
- [Week 4: Revival happens when God's people hunger for God's word.](#)

We are going to see how this happened in the Scriptures during the ministry of Nehemiah. If you have your Bible, turn to the book of Nehemiah. We are going to see how this happened in history, about 500 years ago during the Protestant Reformation, and then we are going to talk about how this can happen today, in our lives!

Let's set the stage with some history of God's people. Nehemiah lived in the fifth century before Christ, during a time when God's people were in a state of great political, economic, and spiritual destitution. It was the lowest point to which God's people had ever sunk. They had been conquered and were now living in exile in a foreign land. But the question understandably arises: if these are God's people, if God had made promises to them and a covenant with them, how could God let this happen to his people? Was God too weak to stand against the Babylonian army? The answer is of course not. In fact, God was the one who sent that catastrophe. He sent it specifically because God's people, generation after generation after generation, rejected his Word. They despised his Word. No matter what God told them, they insisted on doing things their own way.

Perhaps there is no story that better highlights that than Jeremiah 36, where we read that God sent his Word to the King of Israel, and told him he needed to repent, to change his ways, to humble himself, or

there would be serious consequences. “The king was sitting in the winter apartment, with a fire burning in the firepot in front of him” (Jeremiah 36:22). (It’s winter and it’s cold outside. They were a few years before HVAC, so they had a fire going in the house to keep warm.) “Whenever Jehudi had read three or four columns of the scroll, the king cut them off with a scribe’s knife and threw them into the firepot, until the entire scroll was burned in the fire” (Jeremiah 36:23). He heard the Word of God, but because he didn’t like what he heard, he cut it off and threw it in the fire. I thought about doing that today as a visual illustration, a teaching lesson—taking a Bible, cutting out a page, lighting it on fire. But that is so brazen, so offensive, so disrespectful, I couldn’t bring myself to do it. I cannot imagine desecrating the Bible to that extent. But that’s what the king did, which is symbolic of what the people had been doing for literally hundreds of years. Rejecting God’s word brought devastation. At a holistic level they were bankrupt and destitute. Their capital was destroyed, their king had to watch as his sons were murdered right in front of him, then he had his eyes gouged out so the murder of his sons would be the last sight he ever saw. The people were living in exile. Having a stubborn, rebellious, proud heart that rejected God’s Word brought utter devastation.

Then God raised up Nehemiah as a leader who helped rebuild the city of Jerusalem that had been destroyed long ago. God graciously provided everything that was needed for the work. Once the city was rebuilt, and the people were finally back home and safe, the first thing they did was recommit themselves to God’s Word.

All the people came together as one in the square before the Water Gate. They told Ezra the teacher of the Law to bring out the Book of the Law of Moses, which the Lord had commanded for Israel. So on the first day of the seventh month Ezra the priest brought the Law before the assembly, which was made up of men and women and all who were able to understand. He read it aloud from daybreak till noon as he faced the square before the Water Gate in the presence of the men, women and others who could understand. And all the people listened attentively to the Book of the Law. (Nehemiah 8:1-3)

Did you see how long they listened to God’s word? From daybreak until noon. Sometimes we think a forty-minute sermon is long—they listened to the Bible being read for five or six hours! They were desperate for God’s Word. Their souls had become like parched, dry ground in a drought. When they finally heard God’s Word, they drank it in. They soaked it in. They wanted all they could get. They listened attentively to the book of the Law. They weren’t distracted. They weren’t thinking about sports or shopping or social media—they gave God their undivided attention.

They didn’t only listen to God’s Word; they studied it. “The Levites...instructed the people in the Law while the people were standing there. They read from the Book of the Law of God, making it clear and giving the meaning so that the people understood what was being read” (Nehemiah 8:7-8). When these people read the Word, they discovered the same thing we discover: sometimes it’s complicated, sometimes it’s challenging, sometimes we don’t know what we are supposed to do with it. They had teachers to help it become clear, so they could grasp the meaning and fully understand it. That’s what we try to do in our sermons at The Creek, too.

They didn’t do this for only one day. “Day after day (for seven days) Ezra read from the Book of the Law of God” (Nehemiah 8:18). In the next chapter we see, “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 worshipping the Lord their God” (Nehemiah 9:3). They spent hours and hours reading God’s Word. When it convicted them of sin, they confessed their wrongdoing. When it inspired them to praise God and declare how great he is, they worshiped. They allowed God’s word to change them. All this time prioritizing God’s Word literally led to the reconstruction of their entire society. It changed their economy as they stopped doing business on the Lord’s Day. It changed their personal finances as they all

committed to giving their money to support the ministry at the temple. It changed their relationships, as they decided to quit intermarrying with people who didn't share their faith, knowing that those relationships were leading to idolatry. After reading the Bible and learning what God was asking from them, they made grand, sweeping, society-wide commitments to honoring God, and then they said, "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" (Nehemiah 9:38). They literally drew up a contract, and just like senators and congressmen and women, and the president sign bills into law for our nation, all their leaders signed this commitment into law and promised to do it.

They got off to a great start, and they experienced a spiritual revival, an awakening, but as you keep on reading in Nehemiah, you see that before long, things began to fizzle out. Nehemiah had to spend a few months away from the city on political business, and when he came back, he saw that the people had stopped listening to God's Word. They started breaking all the promises they made. Nehemiah had to hold them accountable and rein them back in, which teaches us an unbelievably important lesson: Revival happens when God's people hunger for God's word. Revival continues when God's people continually hunger for God's word. We must go back to the truth of God's Word again and again and again. It's like a good meal—no matter how delicious it is, we have to keep on eating or we'll grow weak and anemic. For us to grow strong and stay strong, for us to have spiritual richness and vitality, we must come back to God's Word again and again and bring every aspect of our lives under its authority and rule.

The role of God's Word in revival is not only seen in the Scripture, but throughout history, as well. Are you ready for a bit of a history lesson? This will be fun! Around the year 400 AD, the Bible was translated into Latin, so everyone in the Roman Empire could read it. It was a wonderful translation and allowed the common person to understand God's Word. In 476 AD, the Roman Empire fell when it was finally overthrown by German invaders. By the year 600 AD, Latin died out. And you might think it's no big deal for a language to become extinct; it would get replaced by German and Spanish and Italian and English. But the problem was, at this point in history, the Bible was only in Latin. So before long, no one in all of society could read or understand the Bible. You might think that's not too big of a deal because the people could go to church and hear the Bible preached in their language. But that's not true. For almost all of history, up until the 1960s, only several decades ago, the Catholic church insisted that every Catholic church service would be conducted in Latin, a language which only the priests understood and no common people could comprehend.

I want you to pause for a moment and try to put yourself in that situation. You believe in God. You love God. You want to honor God. But you've never had the chance to read the Bible for yourself, because a translation into your language doesn't exist. And now imagine you come to church every week, but the songs are in a language you can't understand, the preaching is in a language you can't understand—you literally can't make sense of any of it. Your soul would be starving for the Word of God, and there would be no way to satisfy that longing inside of you. There was literally a famine of the Word of God that lasted for nearly 1,000 years! That's one of the main reasons this period of history became known as the Dark Ages, because without the Word of God to lead and govern his people, darkness set in. The spiritual climate deteriorated nearly beyond comprehension.

Without people being able to read the Bible for themselves and know the truth, the leaders of the church had unchecked authority, and most of the time, they abused it. For hundreds of years, with the people in the dark, most of the leaders of the church abused their positions and used the church to serve their own interests, to amass wealth and power. The church lost its foundation on Scripture, it raised armies and sent crusaders to fight against the infidels. Its leaders developed doctrines, official teachings of the church, which go against key teachings in Scripture: praying to Mary, praying to dead people who the church recognizes as saints, baptizing infants, purgatory—none of these are anywhere in the Bible. In fact, some

of them are spoken against in the Bible, but no one knew the Bible, so there was no way of knowing the truth. One of the worst errors the church committed was using indulgences to amass money to build St. Peter's Basilica, and to line the pockets of the leaders of the church. In the 15th century, Pope Sixtus IV declared that you could pay money to get loved ones who had died into heaven. This was just a way to procure money from sincere worshippers because they needed more cash for their building projects. Again, spiritually speaking, it was a very dark time. The world was desperate for a revival!

Then came the reformers. Toward the end of the 14th century, John Wycliffe, "the Morning Star of the Reformation," translated the bible into English. It was the first time in nearly a millennium that an ordinary person could read the Bible. He trained ministers to preach God's word to people in the language they would understand. That set the stage for Martin Luther. He had studied in university to be a lawyer, but out of his love for God, he became a monk in the Catholic church. He had so much respect for the Catholic church and the Pope that he set out on a pilgrimage to Rome. But when he got there, he saw prostitutes in the halls of the churches and even in the Pope's living quarters. He understandably grew concerned. He went to confession one day, pouring out his soul and sharing his sins with a priest, and the priest told him what good things he needed to do to find peace with God. He set out to do his penance, but while he was trying to earn his forgiveness and his right standing with God, he felt the Holy Spirit bring a verse from the Bible to his mind: "Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand" (Romans 5:1-2). He realized in that moment that a person is not forgiven or made right with God or justified by good deeds, by saying enough prayers, by giving enough money, by trying harder. Rather, salvation is found through faith, and faith brings us into the life-changing, eternity-altering grace of God. This led Luther to re-read all the Scriptures, where he discovered many ways the "official church" had lost its way. In 1517, he posted 95 critiques against the church on the door to the university to begin public discussion about what God's Word really said. Then he gave the next five years of his life to translating the Bible into German, the language of the people, so they could read the Bible for themselves. Luther said, "The Word of God is the greatest, most necessary, most straightforward thing in the whole world... The Bible is a remarkable fountain: the more one draws and drinks of it, the more it stimulates thirst... The Bible is alive, it speaks to me; it has feet, it runs after me; it has hands, it lays hold of me." When people could read the Bible for themselves, by the millions and millions, they rejected the false doctrines they had been misled into believing, and they had a spiritual resurgence in their love for God and in their passionate commitment to him. There was renaissance across the entire continent of Europe. *God's Word turned the lights on the dark ages and sparked a revival that changed history.*

Where in our day has our society crumbled because we have not lived under the authority of God's Word? Where in our day has our church faltered because we have not lived under the authority of God's Word? Where has your marriage been compromised or your family weakened because you have not lived under the authority of God's Word? The problem today is not that we have limited access to the Bible, but that the Bible has limited access to us. We can access the Bible in 100 different English translations. We can download 10,000 theological volumes on our phones. We can listen to high-quality sermons and Bible studies from podcasts and stream them every moment of every day for the rest of our lives. Our problem isn't that we can't get to the Scriptures, but that we have not hungered for the Scriptures. We have not allowed God's Word to capture our imagination, to consume our focus, and to guide our steps in the way we live. We would never be so brazen, so sacrilegious as to cut out pages of Scripture and burn them in the fire like that wicked king of Israel, but is it actually that different when we just let the Bible collect dust on our night stands? Or when we read the Bible and listen to preaching from God's Word and we KNOW God is calling us to make a change in our lives, but we refuse to do anything about it? Aren't we, in effect, doing the same thing?

The last thing you need to hear today is a pastor making you guilty for not reading your Bible more. That's not my hope today. Guilt-induced reading of the Bible has never and will never spark a revival any

anyone's life. What I do hope that you'll see is that when God's people ignore, neglect, or disregard his word, there is always a calamitous price to pay. I hope you'd want to avoid that at all possible costs. Additionally, when God's people hunger for God's Word, cherish it, read it, respond to it, honor it, memorize it, implement it, there is always a spiritual enrichment that follows. We all want to turn the corner from the dark ages of our lives, we all want a personal renaissance. That will only come as we begin to honor God's Word.

I know most people have full lives with lots of commitments, but we are going to have to find a way to prioritize Scripture above other things. I remember when I was in high school my friend Paul Thompson swung by my house to pick me up to go to the theaters to watch a movie. We probably watched a movie together every other week. For some reason, that night, we randomly decided to not go see a movie, and we stayed in my living room and read through the entire gospel of Matthew. It took about the same time as watching a movie. As we read, we underlined and highlighted verses that stood out to us that we wanted to memorize and focus on. I wonder what might happen if this week you decided to cut out of your life something that was perfectly acceptable but perhaps not spiritually significant, and instead of doing random entertainment or one more project around the house, you came to our prayer room and decided to read through Matthew, Mark, Luke, or John, and you spent two or three hours soaking in the Scriptures, reflecting on the wisdom and love and majesty of Jesus, and asked God to show you verses to underline and highlight and a few to memorize. The people in Nehemiah's day literally spent three hours reading the Scriptures every day for a week. Maybe you can commit at least one day, if not more, to do the same thing this week.

I want to speak to the men of our church specifically with a very direct challenge. This does not apply to every man in this room, but I believe it applies to a lot. The truth of the matter is, you have loved and prioritized sports more than you have loved and prioritized God's word. You have loved and prioritized hunting more than you have loved and prioritized God's word. You have loved and prioritized video games more than you have loved and prioritized God's word. You have loved and prioritized work, business, and making money more than you have loved and prioritized God's word. One of the reasons revival has tarried, one of the reasons you still have not overcome certain strongholds in your personal life, one of the reasons your marriage isn't stronger, one of the reasons your kids don't value the Scripture as much as they should, is because you have not loved and valued and cherished and responded to God's Word. I invite all men of The Creek to come forward and use the stage as an altar to respond to God.