

REARRANGED

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Work in Progress / Nehemiah 10

Nehemiah 10 marks a turning point where conviction gives way to commitment and repentance becomes visible. The people don't just confess their sin. They begin to reorder their lives around what matters most. This week, we explore what it means to move from good intentions to real obedience. Because when God's Word takes hold, it doesn't just stir us. It rearranges us.

Introduction

- We've all heard the phrase before:
"Rearranging deck chairs on the Titanic."
 - It's one of those sayings that has worked its way into everyday language.
 - We use it to describe situations where people are making small, surface-level changes while ignoring a much bigger problem underneath.
 - Interestingly, no one on the *sinking of the Titanic* was actually saying that as the ship went down.
 - That phrase came later. But it stuck because it captures something deeply human.
 - There are survivor accounts that describe the early stages of the disaster.
 - Crew members moving about. Maintaining order.
 - Doing everything they could to keep things calm and prevent panic.
 - Passengers talking, walking, even hesitant to get into lifeboats at first because the severity of the situation hadn't fully set in yet.
 - For a time, things still felt manageable. Normal, even.

- There wasn't immediate chaos everywhere.
- There wasn't instant panic in every corner of the ship.
- In fact, for many people, there was a window of time where it felt like this might just be an inconvenience, a delay, something that would be resolved.
- But here's the reality - beneath the surface, there was chaos.
 - As you know, a catastrophe was unfolding.
 - And no amount of calm behavior, preservation of normalcy, no small adjustments could change that.
- That's why the phrase has endured.
 - Because it names something we all recognize— not just out there in the world, but in here, in our own lives.
 - We have a tendency to focus on what's visible.
 - What's manageable.
 - What feels fixable in the moment.
 - We make small adjustments.
 - We tweak a habit.
 - We clean up a few things around the edges.
 - We tell ourselves, "This is a step in the right direction."
And sometimes it is.
 - But sometimes, those small adjustments can actually become a way of avoiding the deeper issue altogether.
 - Because dealing with the deeper issue means more than just adjusting a few things.
 - It means reordering everything.
 - It means asking harder questions.

- It means moving things that have been sitting in place for a long time.
- It means letting God speak not just to what we do, but to what we prioritize, what we protect, what we refuse to move.
- Spiritually, we can do the same thing.
 - We can respond to conviction by making small changes.
 - We can respond to truth by shifting a few behaviors.
 - We can even feel genuine sorrow over sin, but never actually address what needs to be rearranged at the level of our priorities, our commitments, our daily lives.
- We preserve a kind of spiritual normalcy, while deeper things remain untouched.
 - We keep things looking steady on the surface, while underneath, nothing has really changed.
 - And eventually, life just settles right back into the same patterns.
 - That's why moments of conviction don't always lead to lasting change.
 - Because nothing was truly reordered.
 - Nothing was moved to the center that belongs at the center.
 - Nothing was pushed aside that needed to be moved out of the way.
 - Everything just, stayed where it was.
- Now, when we come to [Nehemiah 10](#), we are stepping into a moment where the people of God refuse to stay at the surface.
 - In chapter 9, they have confessed their sin.
 - They've looked back over their history.
 - They've acknowledged their rebellion and God's faithfulness.
 - It's a powerful moment.

- But [Nehemiah 10](#) is what comes next.
 - This is where the question becomes: “What are we going to do about it?”
 - And what we find is that they don’t settle for small adjustments.
 - They don’t just make a few emotional promises.
 - They don’t just tweak a few behaviors.
 - They begin to rearrange their lives.
 - They put commitments in place.
 - They reorder their priorities.
 - They structure their lives around obedience to God’s Word.
- In other words, this is not a “deck chairs” moment, this is a reordering moment.
 - Because when God’s Word truly takes hold of a people... it doesn’t just lead to reflection.
 - It leads to rearrangement.
 - And that’s exactly what we’re about to see as we dig into chapter 10 this morning.
 - I’ll start with the final verse of chapter 9 and then jump down to v. 28.

Scripture Reading

Nehemiah 9:38 ESV

³⁸ “Because of all this we make a firm covenant in writing; on the sealed document are the names of our princes, our Levites, and our priests.

Nehemiah 10:28–33 ESV

²⁸ “The rest of the people, the priests, the Levites, the gatekeepers, the singers, the temple servants, and all who have separated themselves from the peoples of the lands to the Law of God, their wives, their sons, their daughters, all who have knowledge and understanding,

²⁹ join with their brothers, their nobles, and enter into a curse and an oath to walk in God's Law that was given by Moses the servant of God, and to observe and do all the commandments of the Lord our Lord and his rules and his statutes.

³⁰ We will not give our daughters to the peoples of the land or take their daughters for our sons.

³¹ And if the peoples of the land bring in goods or any grain on the Sabbath day to sell, we will not buy from them on the Sabbath or on a holy day. And we will forgo the crops of the seventh year and the exaction of every debt.

³² "We also take on ourselves the obligation to give yearly a third part of a shekel for the service of the house of our God:

³³ for the showbread, the regular grain offering, the regular burnt offering, the Sabbaths, the new moons, the appointed feasts, the holy things, and the sin offerings to make atonement for Israel, and for all the work of the house of our God.

- Last week, we took a look at the first part of chapter 9 and reflected on the fact that God has been constantly faithful to a people who seemed to be constantly faithless.
 - They had moments, of course.
 - National revivals, victory over their enemies, righteous kings and leaders.
 - However, if you were to give it a percentage, it might break down to 70/30?
 - 70% of the time they were on the spiritual struggle bus, 30% of the time they were doing okay.
 - Obviously that is a gross oversimplification, because you're dealing with a nation of individuals, and even during times of national struggle, there were people who walked in righteousness.

- But you get the picture.
- In spite of the spiritual struggles of the people, God kept his word.
 - None of God's promises were broken.
 - He did everything he said he would do.
- And as we know from our journey through this book, we're now working with a people who are trying to get things put back together, but the struggle is real.
 - Now, they're in the middle of this revival.
 - It's been going on for a month.
 - But it's time to figure out what it means.
- That's a mark of true revival - it provokes lasting change.
- And that brings up the first thing I want us to see from this text - but not in chapter 10, rather the final verses of chapter 9.

Spiritual Change Begins with Honesty (9:32-38)

- Nothing ever changes without an honest assessment of reality.
 - I didn't get into these last few verses last week because they really help set the stage for what happens in ch. 10.
 - But if you flip back a few verses, you'll see this honest assessment of reality taking place among God's people.
 - They say in v. 33 - "we have acted wickedly"
 - V. 34 - our leaders "have not kept your law or paid attention to your commandments and your warnings" and in v. 35, they "did not serve you or turn from their wicked works" in spite of the obvious abundance and blessings that God displayed.
 - v. 36 recognizes that they were enslaved in their own land and v. 37 acknowledges that all of the abundance that God intended for his people is having to be sent out to pagan kings.

- This is a bleak assessment of reality.
- But notice what happens.
 - In spite of their reality, they never question God's faithfulness or character.
 - They recognize that the problem lies with them, not with God.
 - But then in v. 38, you get to the response.
 - They are going to enter into a written covenant, reaffirming their commitment to God regardless of their circumstances.
 - Because God is always greater than their circumstances.
- As it was true for Nehemiah's people, so it is also true for us.
 - Real, lasting spiritual change can only come when we are willing to take a hard look into our hearts.
 - And then we have to honestly confront what we find there.
 - The truth is, we might not like what we see when we start snooping around inside our hearts.
- But this is not foreign to our faith. The biblical authors constantly remind us of the ick that likes to make its home inside our hearts.
 - The prophet Jeremiah said [Jeremiah 17:9](#)

Jeremiah 17:9 *ESV*

⁹ The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?

- If you are a Christian today, you need to know that Christ has made you a new creature, but as long as you are on this side of eternity, you're going to have to constantly do battle with the flesh.
- That's what Jeremiah is saying.
- Jeremiah was a faithful man and was obedient to the LORD when obedience was a REAL challenge.

- For Jeremiah, his obedience had real consequences.
- But even this obedient man of God doesn't exclude himself from this diagnosis.
- An honest assessment of our hearts begins with a recognition that it is diseased.
- We know that God is working in us through the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit.
- But we just need to recognize that this kind of honest soul work means poking around in a place where we're going to find a lot of sickness.
- We're going to find a lot of things that we aren't pleased with and we know the LORD isn't pleased with either.
- But just because it is unpleasant doesn't mean it isn't essential for us as we seek to follow Christ.
- The Psalmist gave us some of the clearest instructions for how to do this work. It begins by praying:

Psalm 139:23–24 ESV

²³ Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts!

²⁴ And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting!

- Now, don't pray that prayer if you don't mean it.
- Don't ask for God to be honest with you if you don't really want Him to be honest.
- He's really good at being honest.
- But also baked into that prayer is the expectation that he's going to actually FIX that which is broken.

- He says to “see if there is any grievous way...and lead me in the right way.”
 - The only way to walk in the right way is to put to death the grievous way.
- As you can see, this is MORE than just changing a few surface things.
 - A few months ago, I had to do some physical therapy for a torn muscle.
 - I had tried all of the normal stuff that you do to avoid going to the doctor.
 - TENS unit, BioFreeze, etc.
 - I went to the doctor and he sent me to PT.
 - When I got to PT, I found out that all of the stuff I was doing wasn't actually addressing the torn muscle, it was just treating the symptoms at the surface.
 - And then he proceeded to inflict much pain, suffering, and torture on me to actually begin to address the root problem
 - We're really good at trying to treat symptoms because we know that fixing real problems takes real honesty and real work.
 - But it is good work to do.
- The Israelites looked at their situation and they came to terms with the reality.
 - There's a lot of sin and rebellion.
 - We've done a lot of dumb things.
 - We should be living in freedom and abundance and blessing, but we're living in subjugation because we didn't keep God's commands.
 - And all of these honest reflections on reality are what it takes to actually begin rearranging our lives so that they are in alignment with God's plan for our lives.

Spiritual Change is Supported by real accountability. (9:38-10:27)

- Chapter 9 ends with a simple response: “What are we going to do about this?”
 - And the answer is about as straightforward as you can get.
 - We’re going to put it in writing and we’re going to sign it.
 - If somebody down the road questions the terms - well, here it is in writing.
- You flip over to chapter 10, and you can actually see the names as they were signed on the document.
 - We look at this, and it’s a list of names.
 - But these names are significant - even if you don’t recognize any of them.
 - These names are a public testimony to the fact that the leaders don’t just agree with what was said in chapter 9.
 - They put their names on it.
- And when I read that, I can’t help but think about the Declaration of Independence.
 - When that document was written, it wasn’t enough for it to simply be read or discussed. It wasn’t enough for people to say, “We agree with this.” It had to be signed.
 - And those signatures weren’t decorative. They were deeply personal.
 - By signing it, those men were doing more than expressing agreement.
 - They were taking ownership.
 - They were saying, “You can point to my name. You can hold me accountable to this.”
 - They were binding themselves together in a shared commitment.

- And they were doing it knowing full well there would be consequences.
- That's why the closing line carries so much weight: "We mutually pledge to each other our lives, our fortunes, and our sacred honor."
- Those signatures marked a point of no return.
- And that's exactly what we're seeing in [Nehemiah 10](#).
 - This isn't just a moment of agreement.
 - This is a moment of accountability.
 - The people of God are moving from, "We know what's right"...to, "We are putting our name on it."
 - If we go off the rails, you can go back and say, "But you said..."
- There is something of an allergy in the modern church to this idea of accountability.
 - And part of that is just the air we breathe.
 - We've been shaped by a culture that constantly tells us that faith is something personal
 - It is a private matter.
 - It is something that belongs to us.
 - And to a degree, that's true.
 - Your relationship with God is personal.
 - No one else can believe for you.
 - No one else can follow Christ on your behalf.
 - But somewhere along the way, "personal" quietly became "private."
 - And what was meant to be deeply personal, became something we keep largely to ourselves.

- So we talk about our faith.
- We gather for worship.
- We might even share what God is teaching us, but we stop short of letting people actually see how we're doing.
- We stop short of inviting anyone into the places where change is supposed to happen.
 - Because the moment someone else can see it, the moment someone else can ask about it, it becomes real in a different way.
 - Now it's not just something I feel, now it's something I'm living.
 - And it is something that other people are invested in.
- And that's exactly where [Nehemiah 10](#) presses in.
 - Because the people don't just say, "We need to do better."
 - They put their names on it.
 - They step out of the private and into the public.
 - Out of general agreement and into shared accountability.
 - And that's where real, lasting change begins to take shape.
- The author of Hebrews challenged the church...

Hebrews 10:24–25 ESV

²⁴ And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works,

²⁵ not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.

- It's been an expectation from the beginning that we are to have the kind of community where this kind of provocation can take place.
- That word "stir up" can be positive or negative.

- That means the results of good works can be created by positive encouragement or by forceful exhortation.
- The reason is that some of us are in seasons where we need to be led.
- Some of us are in seasons where we need to be pushed.
- That's why this community is so important.
 - But not in the "we meet in the sanctuary for an hour or so a week" important.
 - But where we actually know and love each other.
 - Where we actually are invested in one another's lives.
 - Where we actually care about one another DEEPER than the surface affiliations we organize ourselves around.
 - And where we're not afraid to lead or push one another because we know our community is strong enough for whichever is needed.
- Every week we collect the connect cards.
 - And for those of you who are here every week, you've figured out that we've got your address and phone number, so you leave that part blank.
 - But a majority of you who just write your names, you also tend to check that little box, "I'm a member."
 - We place a high value on membership as a church, but it's got to be more than a name on a card.
 - It should also come with the significance of relationships that allow and value real accountability.

Finally, real spiritual change must be accompanied by rearranged priorities (10:28-39)

- The ESV places a heading before v. 28 that says, "The Obligations of the Covenant."
 - We've acknowledged the problem.

- We've agreed to be part of fixing it.
- But now the question is, what does the fix actually look like?
- And when you read the rest of the chapter, the answer might surprise you.
- Because the change doesn't look dramatic.
- It doesn't look emotional.
- It doesn't look like a big, sweeping moment.
- It looks like, are you ready for it, a list.
 - A list of responsibilities.
 - A list of commitments.
 - A list of things they are now going to do differently.
 - And if we're not careful, we can read that and think, "Is this really it?"
 - But this is where real change actually lives.
- Because spiritual change is not proven in what we say.
 - It's revealed in what we rearrange.
 - Look at what they commit to:
- They commit to distinctiveness (v. 30).
 - They refuse to intermarry with the surrounding nations—not because of ethnicity, but because of spiritual allegiance.
 - They are drawing a clear line: *We belong to God, and our lives will reflect that.*
- They commit to trusting God with their time and provision (v. 31).
 - They honor the Sabbath.
 - They let the land rest.

- In a world driven by survival and productivity, they are saying: “We will trust God enough to stop.”
- That’s not just obedience. That’s rearrangement.
- They commit to supporting the worship of God (vv. 32–39).
 - Offerings.
 - Firstfruits.
 - Tithes.
 - Provision for the temple.
 - And it all builds to that final statement:
 - “We will not neglect the house of our God.”
- What’s happening here?
 - They are taking the big idea of “We need to get right with God” and they are breaking it down into specific, lived-out priorities.
 - They are asking:
 - What needs to change in our relationships?
 - What needs to change in our schedule?
 - What needs to change in our resources?
 - What needs to change in our worship?
 - And then they actually move things around.
- Because here’s the truth:
 - Nothing changes until something moves.
 - If everything in your life stays in the same place - same priorities, same habits, same patterns - you can feel conviction all day long, but nothing will be different.
- And this is where it gets personal for us.

- We don't struggle with knowing what's right.
- Most of us know what it looks like to:
 - spend time with the Lord
 - prioritize worship
 - walk in obedience
 - live with integrity
- The question is not, "Do I know?"
 - The question is, "What have I actually rearranged?"
 - What has moved in your life as a result of what God has shown you?
 - What has been pushed to the center that used to sit on the edges?
 - What have you moved out of the way because it was competing with what matters most?
 - Because real spiritual change doesn't stay abstract.
- It shows up in:
 - Our calendars
 - Our relationships
 - Our habits
 - Our giving
 - Our priorities
 - It shows up in what we say yes to, and what we finally say no to.
- And that's why this chapter ends where it does:
 - "We will not neglect the house of our God."
 - In other words:

- “We’re not leaving this at the level of intention. We are rearranging our lives so that God is no longer neglected.”
- That’s the call.
- Not just to feel something.
- Not just to agree with something.
- But to rearrange our lives around what matters most.

Invitation

- There are two questions we’re left asking this morning.
- The first question is this - what fuels this?
 - Honestly, if left to our own devices, we mess this up every time.
 - Nehemiah’s people didn’t just arrive at this covenant out of the blue - it was a response to God’s overwhelming faithfulness recounted back in chapter 9.
 - We don’t obey to earn God’s favor or grace.
 - No - because we’ve received grace, we are delighted to obey.
 - Rearranging is a joy birthed out of grace, not a doomed attempt to earn it.
- The second question is this - What needs to be rearranged?
 - Not in theory.
 - Not in general terms.
 - Not “someday.”
 - What actually needs to move in your life?
- Because for some of us, the Lord has already been putting His finger on something.
 - Maybe it’s your time.

- Maybe it's your priorities.
- Maybe it's a relationship that's out of order.
- Maybe it's a habit that's been sitting in the center that has no business being there.
- And if you're honest...you already know it.
 - The issue isn't clarity.
 - The issue is whether anything is going to move.
- Because here's what we've seen:
 - Real change begins with honesty.
 - It is strengthened through accountability.
 - And it is proven through rearranged priorities.
 - And if any one of those pieces is missing, the change won't last.
- So I want to invite you to respond—but not just emotionally.
 - Not just with a feeling.
 - Not just with a moment.
 - I want to invite you to respond with movement.
 - For some of you, that begins with honesty.
 - You've been managing the surface for a long time.
 - You've been keeping things looking steady.
 - But you know there are things underneath that need to be brought into the light.
- Maybe your first step this morning is simply to say,
 - “Lord, search me...show me...be honest with me.”
 - For some of you, the next step is accountability.
 - You've been trying to do this on your own.

- You've kept your faith personal...but also private.
- And today might be the day you say
 - "I need someone to know."
 - "I need someone who can ask me, who can walk with me, who can help me follow through."
- And for some of you, the step is rearrangement.
 - You already know what needs to change.
 - The question is not "What should I do?"
 - The question is, "What am I going to move?"
- What needs to come to the center?
 - What needs to be pushed out?
 - What needs to be reordered so that God is no longer neglected?
- Because at the end of the day, that's what this is about.
 - Not just feeling convicted.
 - Not just agreeing with truth.
 - But becoming a people who can honestly say:
 - "We will not neglect the house of our God."
- So I want to give you a moment.
 - Not to rush past this.
 - Not to move on too quickly.
 - But to ask the Lord:
 - "What needs to be rearranged?"
 - And then, to take the first step toward moving it.
- At some point, it stops being something you agree with and becomes something you put your name on.

