

Week 9: “Our God Who Forgives Our Sins”

Wk 9 - Day 1: Genesis 9

Explanation: Genesis 9 marks a new beginning after the flood. God blesses Noah and repeats the command to “be fruitful and multiply,” echoing Genesis 1 and showing that His purposes for humanity continue despite sin and judgment. God then establishes a covenant which was a binding, one-sided promise rooted in His faithfulness, not human performance. This covenant extends beyond Noah to all living creatures and future generations, with the promise that He will never again destroy the earth by flood. The sign is the rainbow. The Hebrew word *qeshet* (“bow”) is the same word for a weapon, and the image is powerful, God sets His bow in the sky, symbolizing that His judgment is restrained. It is a visible reminder of His mercy and His commitment. Yet the chapter takes a sobering turn when Noah becomes drunk, and his son Ham responds with dishonor, while Shem and Japheth respond with respect. This moment reveals that sin still remains in the human heart. A new world did not produce a new nature. Genesis 9 holds together both mercy and reality. God promises preservation, but the need for forgiveness still remains. The flood cleansed the earth, but not the heart, which pointed forward to the deeper transformation only God could provide.

Application: Genesis 9 speaks directly into how we view failure, forgiveness, and new beginnings. First, it reminds us that God’s mercy meets us after failure. Noah had walked with God and obeyed faithfully, yet he still fell. This should humble us. No matter how strong we think we are, we are still capable of stumbling. But it should also encourage us, that God does not discard people because of their failures. Second, it shows us that outward change is not enough. We often think, “If my circumstances were different, I’d do better.” But Noah’s story proves that even in a fresh environment, the same heart struggles remain. What we need is not just a new situation, we need forgiveness and transformation from within. Third, the rainbow reminds us that God’s mercy is not fragile. It is consistent. Even knowing humanity’s ongoing sinfulness, God still commits Himself to His people. His faithfulness is not based on our perfection, but His own!

- What does Noah’s story teach about the persistence of sin?
- What does the rainbow teach us about God’s mercy?
- Why is a “new beginning” not enough to solve our deepest problem?
- What does it mean that God’s promise is not based on human performance?
- How has God shown you mercy even when you didn’t deserve it?

Wk 9 - Day 2: Matthew 9

Explanation: Matthew 9 is a powerful display of Jesus’ authority, not just to heal bodies, but to forgive sins and restore lives. The chapter begins with a paralyzed man brought to Jesus. Instead of addressing his physical condition first, Jesus says, “**Take heart, my son; your sins are forgiven.**” Christ. This is a shocking moment. The religious leaders immediately accuse Jesus of blasphemy because only God can forgive sins. And they are right, only God can. That is exactly the point Jesus is making. He is not just a teacher or healer; He is God in the flesh with authority over sin itself. The chapter continues with a series of encounters that reveal the heart of Jesus. He calls Matthew, a tax collector who was someone viewed as corrupt and rejected by society. Jesus then eats with sinners, which draws criticism from religious leaders. His response is striking: “**Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick... I desire mercy, not sacrifice.**” The word *mercy* here carries the idea of compassion toward the undeserving. Jesus is emphasizing that God’s heart is not drawn to outward religious performance but to humble, broken people who recognize their need. Throughout the rest of the chapter, Jesus heals a woman who had been suffering for twelve years, raises a young girl from death, gives sight to the blind, and restores a man who could not speak. Each story highlights the same truth — Jesus moves toward the broken, not away from them. The chapter ends with Jesus looking at the crowds and feeling compassion. The word used means to be deeply moved, even in the gut. He sees people as “harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.” This is the heart of God toward humanity — not disgust, but compassion.

- How does Jesus redefine who is “worthy” of grace?
- What does “I desire mercy, not sacrifice” mean in practical terms?
- How does the Lord’s compassion change the way we interact with others?
- How can you grow in showing mercy instead of judgment this week?
- Where do you see “performance-based faith” in today’s culture?

Application: Matthew 9 reshapes how we think about forgiveness, both receiving it and living it out. We often focus on what is visible, whether it’s our circumstances, struggles, or outward needs, but Jesus consistently moves deeper. The paralytic came needing physical healing, yet Jesus addressed his sin. In the same way, our greatest need is not external change, but internal forgiveness and restoration. This chapter also challenges the idea that we must clean ourselves up before coming to God. The people Jesus called and helped were not the polished or put-together, they were broken, overlooked, and often rejected. That is exactly who Jesus moved toward. Grace meets us where we are, not where we pretend to be. At the same time, this passage confronts empty religion. The Pharisees were focused on appearances and rules, yet they missed the heart of God. It is possible to know the right things and still lack mercy. Jesus makes it clear that what matters most is a heart that reflects His compassion. Forgiveness is not just something we receive, it changes how we live and how we love.

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God

Wk 9 - Day 3: Ezra 9

Explanation: Ezra 9 reveals a moment of deep spiritual failure. After returning from exile, an act of God's mercy, the people once again drift into disobedience by compromising with surrounding nations. This was not just cultural, but spiritual, pulling their hearts away from God. Ezra's response is immediate and intense. He tears his garments, sits in shock, and prays with humility. He confesses the sin openly, saying, "I am ashamed to lift my face to You." This reflects true repentance, not just regret over consequences, but grief over sin itself. What stands out is that Ezra includes himself in the confession. He does not distance himself but identifies with the people. Ezra also acknowledges God's grace. He recounts how God had given them "a little reviving" after exile, which was a small but meaningful restoration. The fact that they had a temple and a place in Jerusalem was not something they earned; it was mercy. That is what makes their sin more serious, they were turning away after experiencing grace. This chapter shows us the difference between surface-level guilt and true repentance. Ezra is not trying to excuse sin or minimize it. He brings it fully into the light.

Application: Ezra 9 challenges how seriously we take sin and how honestly we bring it before God. In a culture that often minimizes or redefines sin, this chapter calls us back to clarity. Sin is not just a mistake or a bad habit, it is a turning away from God. When we lose sight of that, we also lose our understanding of grace. At the same time, Ezra models a healthy response. His sorrow is not rooted in self-hatred, but in a recognition of God's holiness and goodness. This is what Scripture calls godly sorrow, a grief that leads us back to God rather than away from Him. It also challenges our tendency to distance ourselves from sin. Ezra does not say "they have sinned" — he says "we have sinned." There is humility in recognizing that we are not above failure. This kind of posture keeps our hearts soft and dependent on God's mercy. Confession is not about staying stuck in guilt. It is about bringing sin into the light so that healing can begin. When we are honest before God, we make room for His forgiveness to work deeply in us. Ezra 9 reminds us that forgiveness is not something we take lightly, but it is something we desperately need.

- *What is the difference between feeling guilty and experiencing true repentance?*
- *Why do people tend to minimize or justify sin?*
- *How does understanding God's holiness change how we view sin?*
- *Why is it difficult to be completely honest with God about our sin?*
- *Where in your life might you be minimizing something God is calling you to address?*

Wk 9 - Day 4: Acts 9

Explanation: Acts 9 records one of the most dramatic transformations in Scripture. Saul, a fierce persecutor of Christians, is traveling to arrest believers when he is suddenly confronted by Jesus. A light from heaven stops him, and he hears the words, "**Why are you persecuting Me?**" This moment reveals something profound, to oppose God's people is to oppose God Himself. In that moment, Saul realizes he has been opposing the very God he thought he was serving. Saul is struck blind and led into Damascus, where he waits for three days without sight, food, or direction. This pause is significant. It is a moment of humbling and surrender, where Saul's confidence in himself is stripped away and he is forced to depend completely on God. God then calls Ananias to go to Saul. Understandably, Ananias hesitates because of Saul's reputation. But God makes it clear: Saul is a "chosen instrument." This shows that God's calling is not based on a person's past, but on His purpose. When Ananias obeys, Saul's sight is restored, he is baptized, and immediately begins proclaiming Jesus. The one who once tried to destroy the church is now building it. The transformation is not gradual behavior change, it is a complete redirection of life. Acts 9 shows that forgiveness is not just about removing guilt, it is about reshaping your identity and purpose.

Application: Acts 9 reminds us that no one is beyond the reach of God's grace. Saul's story confronts the belief that certain people are too far gone. His past was not just flawed — it was actively opposed to God. Yet grace met him there. This means that no failure, no sin, and no past disqualifies someone from being forgiven and used by God. This chapter also challenges how we view others. Ananias had to trust that God's grace was real in someone he feared. We often label people by their worst moments, but God sees what they can become through His grace. Forgiveness does not just change our past, it gives us a new direction. God does not simply erase sin; He repurposes lives.

- *Why do people sometimes feel like they are beyond forgiveness?*
- *What would you have thought if you were Ananias? Would you have trusted Saul's change?*
- *Who in your life might be difficult to believe could change?*
- *How can we guard against defining people by their past?*
- *Where have you experienced God's transforming grace in your life?*

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God

Wk 9 - Day 5: Psalm 32

Explanation: Psalm 32 is a reflection from David on the joy and freedom of forgiveness. It begins with a declaration: **“Blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered.”** The word *blessed* speaks of deep, lasting joy, not based on circumstances, but on being made right with God. David uses multiple words for sin (transgression, sin, and iniquity), each pointing to different aspects of rebellion against God. Yet he also describes what God does with sin: He forgives it, covers it, and does not count it against us. This is a complete removal of guilt. David then contrasts two experiences. When he kept silent about his sin, he describes feeling physically and emotionally drained when he says, “my bones wasted away... my strength was dried up.” Unconfessed sin weighed heavily on him. But when he confessed, everything changed: **“I acknowledged my sin... and You forgave the iniquity of my sin.”** The psalm then shifts from personal testimony to instruction. David encourages others to turn to God while He may be found. He describes God as a hiding place, not from Him, but in Him. The chapter ends with a call to rejoice, showing that forgiveness leads to restored joy.

Application: Psalm 32 reminds us that hidden sin leads to heaviness, but confessed sin leads to freedom. Many people carry guilt longer than they need to because they avoid bringing it fully before God. We may hide it, minimize it, or try to move past it without addressing it. But this psalm shows that silence only deepens the burden. Confession is not about earning forgiveness — it is about agreeing with God and bringing sin into the light. When we do, God responds with grace. He does not partially forgive or hold it over us; He removes it completely. This chapter also reminds us that forgiveness is meant to produce joy. If we continue to live in shame after being forgiven, we are not fully embracing what God has done. God does not just forgive to clear a record, He forgives to restore a relationship and renew our joy.

- *Why do people tend to hide or delay dealing with sin?*
- *Why do we sometimes hold onto guilt even after being forgiven?*
- *What does it mean that God becomes a “hiding place”?*
- *Is there anything in your life you have been avoiding bringing to God?*
- *How has unconfessed sin affected you emotionally and spiritually?*

Week 10: “Our God Who Unites Us”

Wk 10 - Day 1: Genesis 10

Explanation: Genesis 10 is often called the “Table of Nations.” At first glance, it reads like a long list of names and genealogies, but it carries deep significance. This chapter traces the descendants of Noah’s three sons — Shem, Ham, and Japheth — and shows how the nations of the earth were formed after the flood. The repeated emphasis throughout the chapter is on families, languages, lands, and nations. Humanity begins to spread across the earth, forming distinct groups with unique identities. What may seem like division is actually part of God’s design to fill the earth, just as He commanded. The word “nations” (Hebrew: *goyim*) refers to people groups which were communities with shared language, culture, and identity. This chapter shows that diversity among people is not accidental. It is part of how God structured humanity. At the center of the chapter is Nimrod, described as a “mighty man” and a powerful ruler. His kingdom includes Babel, which sets the stage for Genesis 11 and the story of the Tower of Babel. This hints that while humanity spreads, unity can also be misused when it is centered on human pride rather than God. Genesis 10 shows both diversity and connection. Though people are scattered into different nations, they all come from the same source. Humanity is divided geographically, but still united in origin.

Application: Genesis 10 reminds us that unity does not mean sameness. God created a world full of different people, cultures, and backgrounds. Diversity is not something to fear, it is something God designed. Yet even in diversity, there is a shared identity. Every person ultimately comes from the same human family. In today’s world, differences often lead to division — whether cultural, racial, social, or political. But this chapter reminds us that beneath those differences, we are connected. At the same time, it challenges us to think about what unites us. True unity is not built on power, control, or uniformity, it is rooted in God. This chapter invites us to see people not as “other,” but as part of a bigger story that God is writing, one that ultimately brings people together.

- *Why do you think Scripture includes a detailed list of nations and families?*
- *Why do differences often lead to division instead of unity?*
- *How can we celebrate diversity without losing unity?*
- *How does Genesis 10 show that God’s plan includes all people groups?*
- *Why is it important to remember that all people share a common origin?*

Wk 10 - Day 2: Matthew 10

Explanation: Matthew 10 records Jesus sending out His twelve disciples on mission. He gives them authority to heal, cast out demons, and proclaim that “the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” This is the first time they are sent out together, not just as followers, but as representatives. What is striking is who Jesus sends. The list includes fishermen, a tax collector (Matthew), and even Simon the Zealot, a political extremist. These men would not naturally associate with one another. Yet Jesus brings them together and unites them around a shared calling. Their unity is not based on background, personality, or agreement on everything, it is rooted in their connection to Jesus and their mission from Him. Jesus also prepares them for reality. He tells them they will face rejection, opposition, and even division. Families may be divided. Some will accept the message, others will reject it. This shows that following Jesus creates a deeper unity among believers, even when it causes tension elsewhere. He instructs them to depend on God, not on material provision, and to focus on faithfulness rather than results. Their job is to go, speak, and trust God with the outcome. Matthew 10 shows that true unity is not the absence of conflict, it is shared purpose under Christ.

Application: Matthew 10 reminds us that unity is found in mission. The disciples were very different, yet Jesus brought them together for a common purpose. In the same way, the church today is made up of people with different backgrounds, personalities, and perspectives. What unites us is not similarity — it is Jesus. This chapter also challenges our expectations. We often think unity means everyone agrees or gets along perfectly. But Jesus makes it clear that following Him can actually create tension with those who refuse to receive his message. True unity is deeper than comfort, it is commitment to Christ. It also calls us to focus on faithfulness. The disciples were not responsible for how people responded, only for being obedient. In a world that measures success by results, God measures it by faithfulness. Unity grows when we are focused on the same mission, trusting the same God, and moving in the same direction.

- *What does this chapter teach about what truly unites believers?*
- *Why is unity often difficult even among people with the same faith?*
- *Why does Jesus focus more on faithfulness than results?*
- *If the church focused more on mission than preference, how might it change relationships?*
- *Where might you be tempted to prioritize your preference over unity?*

Wk 10 - Day 3: Ezra 10

Explanation: Ezra 10 continues directly from the sorrow and confession of Ezra 9. What began as grief over sin now moves into action. As Ezra prays and weeps, a crowd gathers, and the people begin to recognize the seriousness of their disobedience. A leader named Shecaniah speaks up and acknowledges that the people have been unfaithful, but also expresses hope: **“Yet now there is hope for Israel in spite of this.”** That statement is key. Even in failure, restoration is possible. The people make a covenant to turn from their sin. This involves separating from foreign wives and practices that had drawn them away from God. While this is a difficult and often challenging part of the passage, the central issue is not ethnicity, it is spiritual compromise. The concern is about protecting devotion to God and restoring the people’s identity as His covenant community. The process is not rushed. It takes time, accountability, and careful examination. This shows that real repentance is not just emotional, it leads to intentional change. Ezra 10 highlights a hard but important truth: unity with God must come before unity with others. When the people realign themselves with God, it restores the foundation for true unity among them.

Application: Ezra 10 reminds us that unity is not built on ignoring problems, it is built on addressing them honestly. We often think unity means avoiding difficult conversations or keeping peace at all costs. But this chapter shows that real unity sometimes requires correction, repentance, and change. Without dealing with what is broken, unity becomes shallow and temporary. This passage also teaches that shared commitment to God creates stronger unity than shared comfort. The people came together not because it was easy, but because they were willing to pursue what was right. At the same time, this chapter calls for humility. The people did not defend themselves or shift blame — they owned their sin and moved toward restoration together. Unity grows when people are willing to be honest, take responsibility, and pursue God above everything else.

- *Why is it difficult to address problems instead of avoiding them?*
- *What is the danger of trying to maintain unity without dealing with sin?*
- *Can unity exist without truth? Why or why not?*
- *How can you pursue unity without compromising what is right?*
- *What would it look like to align your life more closely with God this week?*

Wk 10 - Day 4: Acts 10

Explanation: Acts 10 marks a major turning point in the early church. Up to this point, the gospel had primarily spread among Jewish people. But in this chapter, God makes it clear that His plan includes all nations. The story centers on two men: Cornelius and Peter. Cornelius is a Roman centurion (a Gentile) described as devout and God-fearing. One day, he receives a vision from an angel telling him to send for Peter. At the same time, Peter has a vision of a sheet filled with animals that were considered unclean under Jewish law. A voice tells him to eat, but Peter resists, saying he has never eaten anything unclean. The response comes: **“What God has made clean, do not call common.”** This vision is not ultimately about food, it is about people. God is redefining Peter’s understanding of who belongs. When Peter arrives at Cornelius’ house, he says something remarkable: **“God shows no partiality.”** This is a breakthrough moment. Peter realizes that the gospel is not limited by ethnicity, culture, or background. As Peter shares the message of Jesus, the Holy Spirit falls on the Gentiles just as it had on Jewish believers. This confirms that God is uniting people through the same grace, not separating them by differences. Acts 10 shows that the barrier between groups is removed through Christ. What once divided is now brought together.

Application: Acts 10 challenges how we see people. We all have categories, assumptions, and boundaries — whether cultural, social, or personal. Sometimes we don’t even realize them. But this chapter reminds us that God does not show favoritism. He does not value one group over another. Unity in God’s kingdom is not based on similarity, it is based on grace. This also means we must be willing to let God reshape our thinking. Peter had to unlearn deeply held beliefs in order to align with God’s heart. In the same way, we may need to examine our own attitudes and ask if they reflect God’s view of people. Finally, this chapter shows that unity is not something we create, it is something God establishes. Our role is to recognize it, embrace it, and live it out. God brings people together who would not naturally come together and He does it through the gospel.

- *What does it mean that “God shows no partiality”?*
- *What does it mean that “God shows no partiality”? How does the gospel break down those divisions?*
- *Why is it sometimes difficult to let God reshape our thinking?*
- *How can you reflect God’s heart toward people who are different from you?*

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Wk 10 - Day 5: Psalm 133

Explanation: Psalm 133 is a short but powerful song of David that celebrates the beauty of unity among God's people. It begins with the well-known words: "Behold, how good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell in unity!" The word *good* speaks of what is morally right and pleasing to God, while *pleasant* refers to something enjoyable and refreshing. Unity is not just beneficial, it is something God delights in. David then gives two vivid images. The first is oil being poured on Aaron's head, running down his beard and onto his garments. This refers to the anointing of the high priest. The oil symbolized consecration, blessing, and God's presence. The image shows unity as something sacred, set apart, and flowing from the top down, something initiated by God. The second image is the dew of Mount Hermon falling on the mountains of Zion. Hermon was known for its heavy dew, which brought life and refreshment to dry land. This picture shows unity as life-giving, renewing, and sustaining. The psalm ends with a powerful statement: **"For there the Lord has commanded the blessing, life forevermore."** Unity is not just a nice idea, it is a place where God chooses to pour out His blessing.

Application: Psalm 133 reminds us that unity is valuable, but it is not automatic. It is easy for relationships to drift toward tension, misunderstanding, or division. Unity requires intentional effort, humility, and a willingness to put others before ourselves. It is something we must pursue, not assume. At the same time, this chapter shows that true unity is not something we manufacture on our own. It flows from God. Just like the oil and the dew, it comes from above. When our lives are aligned with Him, unity begins to grow naturally. This also challenges us to see unity as more than just "getting along." Biblical unity is deeper, it is being connected in purpose, in heart, and in devotion to God. Where unity exists, God's blessing follows. Not because everything is perfect, but because hearts are aligned with Him and with one another.

- *Why is unity so valuable in relationships and in the church?*
- *What are common things that disrupt unity?*
- *What does it mean that unity flows "from above"?*
- *Where in your life is unity strong right now? Where might there be tension or division that needs attention?*
- *What is one step you can take this week to pursue unity with others?*

Week 11: “Our God Who Is Abundantly Merciful”

Wk 11 - Day 1: Genesis 11

Explanation: Genesis 11 records the story of the Tower of Babel. At this point, humanity shares one language and begins to settle together. Instead of spreading across the earth as God commanded, they unite with a different purpose: **“Let us make a name for ourselves.”** Their goal was not to honor God, but to elevate themselves. They build a city and a tower “with its top in the heavens,” likely symbolizing human pride and self-sufficiency, an attempt to reach God on their own terms. God responds by confusing their language and scattering them across the earth. At first glance, this may seem like judgment alone, but it is also mercy. If humanity had remained united in pride, their rebellion would have deepened even further. By disrupting their plans, God limits the spread of sin and redirects them toward His original command to fill the earth. The chapter ends with a genealogy leading to Abram. This shift is important. After showing humanity’s collective failure, God begins focusing on one man through whom He will bring blessing to all nations. Even after rebellion, God’s redemptive plan continues.

Application: Genesis 11 reminds us that God’s mercy sometimes looks like interruption. We often equate mercy with ease, success, or open doors. But sometimes God’s mercy shows up when our plans fall apart. When something we were building doesn’t succeed, it may not be because God is against us, it may be because He is protecting us. This chapter also challenges our motives. The people wanted to “make a name” for themselves. In subtle ways, we can do the same by building our lives around recognition, control, or self-sufficiency. God’s mercy calls us back from that. Even when God disrupts our plans, He is still working out a greater plan. His mercy does not always feel comfortable, but it is always purposeful.

- *What does this chapter teach about the dangers of pride?*
- *How can we tell if our goals are centered on God or ourselves?*
- *What are some modern “towers” people build today?*
- *Have you ever experienced a time when your plans were disrupted? Looking back, can you see God’s mercy in it?*

Wk 11 - Day 2: Matthew 11

Explanation: Matthew 11 captures several moments that reveal both the reality of doubt and the depth of Jesus’ mercy. The chapter begins with John the Baptist, who is in prison, sending messengers to ask Jesus, **“Are You the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?”** This is striking because John had previously boldly declared Jesus as the Messiah. Now, in a moment of suffering and uncertainty, he wrestles with doubt. Jesus does not rebuke John. Instead, He responds with evidence, pointing to the works He is doing: the blind receive sight, the lame walk, the poor have the gospel preached to them. Then He speaks highly of John, affirming his role and faithfulness. This shows that Jesus is merciful even toward those who struggle.

The chapter then shifts as Jesus addresses cities that had witnessed His miracles but refused to repent. Here we see another side where mercy rejected leads to accountability. God’s mercy is abundant, but it is not meant to be ignored. The chapter ends with one of the most well-known invitations in Scripture: **“Come to Me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.”** Jesus describes Himself as “gentle and lowly in heart.” The word *gentle* carries the idea of strength under control, while *lowly* speaks of humility and approachability. This is the heart of Jesus — not distant or harsh, but welcoming and compassionate.

Application: Matthew 11 reminds us that God’s mercy is personal and accessible. There are moments when faith feels strong, and there are moments when questions rise. Like John, we may find ourselves wondering, struggling, or waiting on God in difficult circumstances. This chapter shows that doubt does not push Jesus away, He meets us in it with truth and compassion. At the same time, it challenges us not to ignore God’s work. The cities Jesus rebuked had seen evidence of who He was but chose not to respond. Mercy is not just something to admire, it is something to receive. The invitation at the end of the chapter speaks directly to the weight many people carry. Life can feel heavy — expectations, struggles, guilt, and pressure all add up. Jesus does not offer more burden; He offers rest. God’s mercy is not just about forgiveness, it is about relief, renewal, and relationship. He invites us to come as we are and find rest in Him.

- *Why do even strong believers experience doubt at times?*
- *What stands out about John the Baptist’s question to Jesus?*
- *Is doubt something to avoid, or can it actually lead to deeper faith?*
- *Where in your life do you feel weary or burdened right now?*
- *What does it mean to “come to Jesus” in a practical sense?*

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God

Wk 11 - Day 3: Nehemiah 1

Explanation: Nehemiah 1 takes place after the events of Ezra. The temple has been rebuilt, but the walls of Jerusalem are still broken down, leaving the city vulnerable and the people discouraged. When Nehemiah hears this report, his response is immediate, he sits down, weeps, fasts, and prays. His reaction shows a deep burden, not just for the condition of the city, but for the spiritual state of the people. In his prayer, Nehemiah confesses sin and not just the sins of others, but including himself and his family. He acknowledges that Israel's suffering is connected to their disobedience. Yet at the same time, he appeals to God's mercy and His promises. Nehemiah reminds God of His word, that if His people return to Him, He will restore them. This is not because they deserve it, but because God is faithful. The chapter ends with Nehemiah asking for favor as he prepares to act. God's mercy is not only seen in forgiveness, but in opening the door for restoration. Nehemiah 1 shows that God's mercy meets us in brokenness and invites us into restoration.

Application: Nehemiah 1 reminds us that God's mercy is often experienced through honest prayer. When Nehemiah saw what was broken, he didn't ignore it or distance himself, he brought it to God. In the same way, we are invited to bring the broken areas of our lives honestly before Him. This chapter also challenges us to take responsibility. Nehemiah didn't shift blame, he included himself in the need for mercy. That kind of humility opens the door for God to work. It also shows that mercy leads to movement. Nehemiah didn't just pray, he prepared to act. God's mercy doesn't leave us where we are; it moves us toward restoration. God is not distant from brokenness, rather He is ready to restore it.

- *What stands out about Nehemiah's response to the news?*
- *Why is prayer often the first step in restoration?*
- *What "broken places" in your life need to be brought before God?*
- *Why is it important to remember God's promises when we pray?*

Wk 11 - Day 4: Acts 11

Explanation: Acts 11 continues the events of Acts 10 and shows how God's mercy extends to the Gentiles, people who were once considered outsiders. When Peter returns to Jerusalem, he is questioned by other believers for associating with Gentiles. This reveals how deeply rooted their assumptions were. Peter then carefully recounts his vision and what God did in Cornelius' house, emphasizing one key truth: **God gave them the same gift of the Holy Spirit.** Peter concludes, **"Who was I that I could stand in God's way?"** This is a turning point. The early church begins to realize that God's mercy is not limited to one group. It is for all who believe. The response is powerful, instead of resisting, the believers glorify God, saying, **"Then to the Gentiles also God has granted repentance that leads to life."** The chapter then shifts to the church in Antioch, where believers from different backgrounds come together. This becomes one of the first multi-ethnic, unified churches. It is also here that followers of Jesus are first called "Christians." We also see Barnabas, whose name means "son of encouragement," recognizing God's grace at work and encouraging others to remain faithful. He brings Saul (Paul) alongside him, and together they teach and strengthen the church.

Application: Acts 11 reminds us that God's mercy is bigger than our expectations. It is easy to assume that grace fits within our understanding and applies to certain people, certain situations, or certain types of stories. But this chapter challenges that thinking. God's mercy reaches further than we often realize. It also calls us to humility. Peter had to recognize that God was working in ways he did not expect. In the same way, we must be careful not to limit who we think God can reach or use. This chapter also highlights the importance of encouragement and unity. Barnabas didn't question what God was doing — he affirmed it and helped it grow. When we recognize God's mercy at work in others, we should support it, not resist it. God's mercy is not just something we receive, it is something we celebrate when we see it in others.

- *Why do people sometimes struggle to accept that God's grace extends to everyone?*
- *Are there people you subconsciously feel are "less likely" to receive God's grace? Why?*
- *How can we avoid putting limits on what God can do?*
- *What does it look like to support what God is doing in others?*
- *What would it look like to live this week with a bigger view of God's mercy?*

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God

Wk 11 - Day 5: Psalm 103

Explanation: Psalm 103 is a heartfelt song of praise from David that focuses on the character of God, especially His mercy, forgiveness, and compassion. David begins by speaking to his own soul: **“Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits.”** He is intentionally reminding himself of who God is and what He has done. He then lists those benefits: God forgives sin, heals, redeems, crowns with steadfast love, and satisfies. This is not just about what God gives, but who He is a God rich in mercy. David describes God as **“merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.”** The phrase *steadfast love* comes from the Hebrew word *hesed*, which refers to loyal, covenant love, a faithful love that does not give up. One of the most powerful statements comes in verse 12: **“As far as the east is from the west, so far does He remove our transgressions from us.”** Unlike north and south, east and west never meet. This is a picture of complete and total forgiveness. David also reminds us of our weakness: **“He knows our frame; He remembers that we are dust.”** This shows God’s compassion. His mercy is not given because we are strong, but because He knows we are not.

Application: Psalm 103 reminds us that we often forget what God has done for us. Life can quickly shift our focus toward problems, pressure, or disappointment. David shows us the importance of intentionally remembering God’s mercy. Gratitude grows when we rehearse His goodness. This chapter also challenges how we carry our past. Even after being forgiven, we can still hold onto guilt or shame. But God does not relate to us based on our past failures. He removes our sin completely. Holding onto what God has already removed keeps us from living in the freedom He offers. It also speaks to how we view God. Some people see Him as distant, harsh, or easily angered. But this psalm paints a different picture — a God who is patient, compassionate, and full of love. God’s mercy is not just something we receive once — it is something we live in daily.

- *What does it mean that God is “slow to anger”?*
- *Why is it easy to forget God’s goodness?*
- *Why do people continue to carry guilt after being forgiven?*
- *What is one specific way God has shown you mercy?*
- *Where do you need to stop holding onto what God has already forgiven?*