

A CONFESSING COMMUNITY

+ SESSION OUTLINE

1. Confession begins with a proper view of God (Neh. 9:5-8).
2. Confession acknowledges the reality of sin (Neh. 9:16-21).
3. Confession humbly seeks pardon and restoration (Neh. 9:32-35).

Background Passage: Nehemiah 9–10

+ WHAT WILL MY GROUP LEARN?

We are to confess our sin so that we might be restored with God.

+ HOW WILL MY GROUP SEE CHRIST?

Nehemiah confessed the sins of God's people, trusting the Lord to respond according to His righteousness and faithfulness. When we confess our sins and trust in Jesus, we have confidence that God responds by providing forgiveness and eternal life with Him.

+ HOW SHOULD MY GROUP RESPOND?

Because all sin is a reproach to God and harms us and others, we confess our sin on a regular basis, knowing and trusting that we are completely forgiven in Christ.

GROUP TIME

NOTES

INTRODUCTION

SETTING: In Nehemiah 8, we saw that God's people had begun to weep as they heard the words of the law, obviously realizing the gravity of their sins. But Ezra interrupted their time of consideration of sin because it was actually a time of festivity: time to celebrate God! And because God's Word is supreme, they obeyed. But when the festival was over and the booths had been put away, the tug of conviction was still strong. The people still needed to repent of their sin, and they did through a prayer recounting the mighty and gracious works of the Lord in contrast to the sinful works of His people, both past and present.

EXPLAIN: Share something in your life you put aside knowing you'll need to attend to it soon. (For example: cleaning baseboards or rugs, purging junk from the basement, weeding the garden, or gathering tax documents) Engage a few learners to consider things they set aside for a while knowing they will be on the forefront at some point soon.

DISCUSS: **When you know a task is waiting, how do you feel knowing you need to finish the job?** (tired; stressed; anxious; worried; lazy; determined; diligent)

TRANSITION: The exiled Hebrews who had returned to Jerusalem had begun to recommit their lives to the Lord. In chapter 8, we saw how they sought to hear and understand God's Word. They began to celebrate God's prescribed feasts. And though they paused their acknowledgment of sin in order to be obedient to enjoy and remember during the Feast of Booths, it was now time to back up and re-address their sin.

POINT 1

CONFESSION BEGINS WITH A PROPER VIEW OF GOD (NEH. 9:5-8).

5 Then the Levites, Jeshua, Kadmiel, Bani, Hashabneiah, Sherebiah, Hodiah, Shebaniah, and Pethahiah, said, “Stand up and bless the LORD your God from everlasting to everlasting. Blessed be your glorious name, which is exalted above all blessing and praise. **6** You are the LORD, you alone. You have made heaven, the heaven of heavens, with all their host, the earth and all that is on it, the seas and all that is in them; and you preserve all of them; and the host of heaven worships you. **7** You are the LORD, the God who chose Abram and brought him out of Ur of the Chaldeans and gave him the name Abraham. **8** You found his heart faithful before you, and made with him the covenant to give to his offspring the land of the Canaanite, the Hittite, the Amorite, the Perizzite, the Jebusite, and the Girschashite. And you have kept your promise, for you are righteous.

READ: Because of the names, read aloud **Nehemiah 9:5-8** yourself for this point.

EXPLAIN: Use the **VERSES 5-6** commentary to highlight the following point (*the bold words fill in blanks in the DDG*):

As they began their confession, the Levites led the people into an act of **worship** that began with a focused and accurate **gaze** at God Almighty.

DISCUSS: Who has God shown Himself to be thus far in our study of the storyline of the Bible? (God is the almighty and sovereign Creator of everything; the Lord is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love; the Lord is a faithful and caring provider; He is a deliverer; the Lord forgives; He is a covenant-keeping God; the Lord is truthful and cannot lie)

EXPLAIN: Use the **VERSES 7-8** commentary to emphasize the following idea (*the bold words fill in blanks in the DDG*):

As God’s people looked back at God’s **hand** in their lives and in their family story, they saw that He is **always** faithful.

DISCUSS: Looking back at your own life, in the good and the bad, what are some reasons you can say, “God is faithful”? (wait for a group member to respond first; only share your response as a conclusion to the discussion)

TRANSITION: The Jews had come with the intent to confess sins, but they knew that the proper perspective was imperative. God is perfectly holy, loving, and powerful, and He holds all authority. We lift our voices to praise His name, and we choose to see His faithfulness, leading us to thank God and confess our sin.

NOTES

UR OF THE CHALDEANS

Possibly a city on the Euphrates River, this was where Abram lived until God called him to leave to go to Canaan (Gen. 11:31) as part of God’s covenant to make him a great nation (Gen. 12:1-3).

VOICES from THE CHURCH

“He will always be I AM WHO I AM, which means He won’t necessarily be who we want Him to be. God exists within Himself. We have zero ability to define Him or shove Him into a box of our choosing . . . When you approach God on the basis of who He says He is, you’re ready to see Him as I AM WHO I AM—[Yahweh], the Relational God. And you don’t want to miss [Yahweh]. He offers a relationship that’s both powerful and deeply personal.”¹

—Tony Evans

COMMENTARY

VERSES 5-6 / A quick glance back to the beginning of Nehemiah 9 reveals that this gathering of the returned Hebrews in Jerusalem was in the same month they had come together for the reading of the law (Neh. 8:1-2). But this congregational gathering was because they were ready to confess. Their inward desire for repentance was expressed in their outward expressions: fasting, wearing sackcloth, and dust on their heads (Neh. 9:1). The foreigners had been dismissed, not out of malice or national pride but because they likely still worshiped other gods. So the gathered descendants of Abraham stood, heard the words of the law (v. 3), and verbally confessed “their sins and the iniquities of their fathers” (v. 2). Though this generation of Jews had not committed the sins of the generations before them, they stood where they were—subservient, rebuilding the shell of their formerly glorious city—because of the lingering effects of the unfaithful Hebrews who had preceded them.

But confession to God and worship of God go hand in hand (Neh. 9:3). Even when the guilt of our sin is great, we must begin our confession with a proper view of God. The Levites and other respected leaders began by telling the people to stand up to worship and acknowledge the Lord. First, they acknowledged that He is **“from everlasting to everlasting,”** an exact phrase used by David (Ps. 41:13). After acknowledging God’s eternal nature, the focus turned to His **“glorious name.”** The Israelites blessed the name of the Lord, exalting it with **“all blessing and praise.”** The name of the Lord is a reflection of all He is. When we praise the name of the Lord, we glorify Him for who He is comprehensively: all-knowing and still merciful, omnipotent and compassionate, holy and willing to dwell with us.

The Jews then began their prayerful song, turning their attention to God’s power and creativity while establishing His authority and indescribable control over all that exists. God’s authority over the heavens,

earth, and seas, as well as His power to maintain all life that exists within them, reveals His sovereignty and wisdom.

VERSES 7-8 / Once their minds and hearts were focused on God’s incomparable identity, they turned their attention to His actions throughout the history of the Israelites. Like the famous quote, “Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it,”² Jewish history can point to a similar truth: Those who forget the sins of the past may commit them just as their ancestors did. The Levites tried to help the people remember their history.

God called Abram out of Ur of the Chaldeans, promising to make him into a great nation, blessing him as well as all others on earth (Gen. 12:1-3). And as the Levites proclaimed, it was God who chose Abram, brought him out of the pagan people, and changed his name as his faithful heart was revealed.

God also made a covenant with Abraham, giving him the land that was occupied by a variety of other nations. God’s promise to Abraham revealed not only His power to shape history but also His long-reaching plan. Abraham would never see the day that he would occupy the land as its owner. Instead, he spent his days as a stranger and foreigner, just like the next two generations, living in tents but trusting in the promise that the land would belong to their people (see Heb. 11:8-10).

The time that lapsed between God’s promise to Abram and the actual conquest of that land by Joshua was around six hundred years! During that time, God’s people had been to Egypt as slaves and back, wandered in the desert for forty years for their unfaithfulness, and finally were able to dwell in the land God promised them. The Levites summarized it perfectly: **“You have kept your promise, for you are righteous.”** So now, with eyes clearly focused on the Lord, worship and confession began.

POINT 2

CONFESSION ACKNOWLEDGES THE REALITY OF SIN (NEH. 9:16-21).

NOTES

16 “But they and our fathers acted presumptuously and stiffened their neck and did not obey your commandments. **17** They refused to obey and were not mindful of the wonders that you performed among them, but they stiffened their neck and appointed a leader to return to their slavery in Egypt. But you are a God ready to forgive, gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and did not forsake them.

18 Even when they had made for themselves a golden calf and said, ‘This is your God who brought you up out of Egypt,’ and had committed great blasphemies, **19** you in your great mercies did not forsake them in the wilderness. The pillar of cloud to lead them in the way did not depart from them by day, nor the pillar of fire by night to light for them the way by which they should go. **20** You gave your good Spirit to instruct them and did not withhold your manna from their mouth and gave them water for their thirst. **21** Forty years you sustained them in the wilderness, and they lacked nothing. Their clothes did not wear out and their feet did not swell.

READ: Ask a volunteer to read aloud **Nehemiah 9:16-21** from his or her Bible.

EXPLAIN: Use the **VERSES 16-18** commentary to highlight the following point (the **bold** words fill in blanks in the DDG):

The Lord had rescued His people from slavery, provided for them, and blessed them with His guidance and law, but they **rejected** the Lord as God in favor of their own sin, and this is the **nature** of all sin—**turning** from God.

DISCUSS: How should we view our sin in light of the character and actions of God? (the more we see God’s goodness and faithfulness on display in His Word and our lives, the more egregious our sin should become in our eyes; sin against God is folly and nonsensical when we understand God as our Creator and Sustainer; the evil of sin becomes apparent when we recognize God’s grace to us)

EXPLAIN: Use the **VERSES 19-21** commentary to emphasize the following idea (the **bold** words fill in blanks in the DDG):

As we acknowledge and confess our sin against the **holy** God, we must take time to remember God’s unfailing love, **grace**, and mercy.

TRANSITION: In the wilderness, God was both merciful in not abandoning the Israelites and just in that the unfaithful died without seeing the promised land. God would continue to reveal judgment mixed with mercy for generations to come, including in the exile and the return to the promised land.

COMMENTARY

VERSES 16-18 / Verses 9-15 serve as a summary for us, recalling God's faithfulness to the descendants of Abraham as recorded in the book of Exodus. A glance through these verses reveals a pattern—every clause has the word "You" as the subject: You saw the oppression, You performed signs and wonders, You divided the sea, and many more. Looking back through the lens of time past, these worshipers could see that God was intimately present in everything that happened to their people at what many considered to be the most pivotal time of their history.

Verse 16, however, begins with one of the most jarring words in the English language: "But." The Levites placed it perfectly at the beginning of verse 16 to contrast the faithful, steadfast, perfect love and leadership of God with the faithless actions of Abraham's descendants: **"But they and our fathers acted presumptuously . . . and did not obey your commandments."**

Looking back at the actions of our own ancestors, we aren't usually quick to make judgments. Rather, we excuse them, saying that times were different, situations were extreme, and the world was a different place. But we serve a God who does not change, and neither do His standards—sin at the time of Babel is still sin today. Arrogance is always arrogance. So as we consider generational sin, we should consider not society's standards and situations but God's perspective. We have been given the clear instruction for thousands of years to love the Lord and love others. If our family members didn't live up to that standard, we can honestly say, as the Levites did, that they were stiff-necked and disobedient.

The ancient Israelites didn't lack for knowledge. Moses always taught them exactly what God had said. The problem was that they lacked obedience, refusing to listen to God and to remember His wonders done on their behalf. Their unbelief led them to faithless sin, to appointing a leader to

take them back to the slavery of Egypt, to making an image of a calf, and to committing **"great blasphemies."**

There's a second "But," though, almost hidden in the middle of verse 17: **"But you are a God ready to forgive, gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love."** First appearing in Exodus 34:6, this was God's description of Himself to Moses. It was repeated several times in the Psalms (86:15; 103:8; 145:8) and some of the prophets (Joel 2:13; Jonah 4:2). In spite of their stiff-necked rebellion, God was still gracious, still compassionate, still slow to anger. He was also still judge—still holy and still demanding holiness. But God's slow fuse revealed His patient mercy on His people even as they snubbed their noses at Him.

VERSES 19-21 / Beginning at the first words of verse 19, the attention turns back to the Lord. Just as the Levites had recognized His faithfulness in verses 9-15, they picked up with the **"you"** statements again, recounting God's faithful acts: You did not abandon them, You sent Your good Spirit, You did not withhold Your manna, You provided for them. God generously gave all this compassion, love, leadership, and provision even as His people were attempting to go back to their land of slavery and give credit to a handmade golden calf.

As with the Israelites, God's Spirit is a valuable resource that we take for granted as well. The Holy Spirit was not with every follower of God in those days; that is a post-Jesus blessing. But God had given His Spirit to instruct them, which would have helped them to believe and obey. On top of that, they passively observed the decades-long miracles before their very eyes: their clothes lasted forty years in the wilderness and their feet did not swell. God provided for His people as He still does today, and sometimes like the Israelites, we take it for granted, ignoring Him, leading us into sin that we must confess and repent from.

POINT 3

CONFESSION HUMBLY SEEKS PARDON AND RESTORATION (NEH. 9:32-35).

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32 “Now, therefore, our God, the great, the mighty, and the awesome God, who keeps covenant and steadfast love, let not all the hardship seem little to you that has come upon us, upon our kings, our princes, our priests, our prophets, our fathers, and all your people, since the time of the kings of Assyria until this day. **33** Yet you have been righteous in all that has come upon us, for you have dealt faithfully and we have acted wickedly. **34** Our kings, our princes, our priests, and our fathers have not kept your law or paid attention to your commandments and your warnings that you gave them. **35** Even in their own kingdom, and amid your great goodness that you gave them, and in the large and rich land that you set before them, they did not serve you or turn from their wicked works.

READ: Ask a volunteer to read aloud **Nehemiah 9:32-35** from his or her Bible.

EXPLAIN: Use the **VERSES 32-33** commentary to highlight the following point (*the bold words fill in blanks in the DDG*):

Confession requires a humble **agreement** on our part that we have sinned and **earned** God’s righteous discipline and judgment.

DISCUSS: How do humbling circumstances serve the purpose of bringing God’s people to confession of sin? (hardships and trials can force us to reckon with the consequences of our sin; hitting bottom reminds us of our dependence on God; humbling circumstances reminds us we need God’s mercy and grace)

EXPLAIN: Use the **VERSES 34-35** commentary to explain what repentance entails by contrast with the arrogance and pride of Israel’s ancestors (*the bold words fill in blanks in the DDG*):

ASSYRIAN KINGS

Multiple Assyrian kings threatened both Israel and Judah at various times: King Pul (2 Kings 15:19), King Tiglath-pileser (2 Kings 15:29), King Shalmaneser (2 Kings 17:3), and King Sennacherib (2 Kings 19:36). In 722 BC, the Assyrians defeated the Northern Kingdom of Israel in Samaria and took them into captivity and exile.

ESSENTIAL DOCTRINE #67: Repentance: Repentance is a response to God’s gracious call to salvation. It includes a genuine **sorrow** for one’s sin (Luke 5:1-11), a **turning** away from one’s sin toward Christ (Acts 26:15-20), and a life that reflects lasting change and transformation (Ps. 119:57-60). It is the human counterpart to God’s work of regeneration; in other words, the human side of our **conversion**.

COMMENTARY

VERSES 32-33 / In the verses preceding this passage, we see another summary, starting with the conquest in the book of Joshua and recounting the books of history and most of the prophets. The cycle of God's people in all these books follows this pattern: 1) They walk close to God; 2) they turn from God and toward idolatry; 3) God turns them over to their enemies; 4) they finally call out to God, repent, and He delivers them. Start over at step one, repeat for seven hundred years, and that's basically what verses 22-31 reveal: a cycle of sin, repentance, and deliverance.

God had warned (v. 29), God was patient (v. 30), and He sent prophets and the Spirit (v. 30). After so much rejection though, He decided it was time to turn them over to their enemies for exile. But He still didn't completely abandon them—a testimony to His grace and compassion (v. 31). But then verse 32 begins with the words **“Now, therefore,”** signaling that the Levites were wrapping up their time of worshipful confession, focusing again then on God.

In recounting their history, the people saw that God is a great, mighty, awe-inspiring, covenant-keeping God and that they weren't, so they confessed their sin. Confession is like a deep-cleaning. When we finally purge sin from our life, we are able to clearly see God and how He has acted in power, love, and faithfulness toward us.

As the humbled group of God-worshippers bowed before their awe-inspiring God, they asked for mercy once more: **“let not all the hardship seem little to you that has come upon us.”** In other words, please consider our punishment to be full because it's touched us all, from the highest to the lowly. Every descendant of Abraham had been touched by the judgment of God. They had been conquered, been exiled, and endured much suffering. But it worked. They had turned back to God. They saw His righteousness in the midst of their wickedness, and now their hearts were once again obedient.

VERSES 34-35 / Humbled confession agrees with God and gives Him the authority to determine right and wrong. Humbled confession never makes excuses, points fingers, or shifts blame to another. Humbled confession acknowledges sin honestly but still professes hope for tomorrow because of our faithful, merciful God.

The summary of the short-lived nation of Israel is brief in verse 34: In essence, everyone—kings, priests, and people—disobeyed God. Though occasionally a leader would come into power who would lead them to turn back to God, the conviction was not lasting. Once Joshua, David, Asa, or Hezekiah died, the people revealed that they weren't following God but only His appointed leader. And even with the **“great goodness”** and **“large and rich land”** given by the Lord, Abraham's descendants did not turn from their wicked ways because their hearts were hardened and they did not believe. This, of course, is the opposite of repentance, which includes turning from sin to love and serve the living God who has blessed us chiefly in the gift of His Son, Jesus, for our salvation from sin.

If we peek ahead one more verse, we see the cumulative effect of Israel's rebellion: **“Behold, we are slaves this day; in the land that you gave to our fathers,”** (Neh. 9:36). Basically, the Nehemiah-led Jews realized all the blessings they'd been given at the hand of the Lord and saw clearly that they had squandered them. Though the remnant had returned and God would never completely abandon His people, they were being ruled by a foreign power, and they knew they would never be the same.

But God always keeps His promises. He promised to make Abraham into a great nation and to be a blessing to all peoples on earth through his descendants (Gen. 12:1-3). As with the promised land, this didn't happen in Abraham's lifetime, but the seed of Abraham saw the fulfillment of that unbelievable covenant when Jesus was born.

MY RESPONSE



PACK ITEM 13: REPENTANCE AND FAITH: Hand out copies of this bookmark to help remind your group of the meaning and intent behind our repentance.

Because all sin is a reproach to God and harms us and others, we confess our sin on a regular basis, knowing and trusting that we are completely forgiven in Christ.

HEAD:

Knowing God is the first step in any kind of worship. In order to enter His presence and seek His face, we must know Him in spirit and truth (John 4:23-24). The guilt of our sin may draw us to confession, but we must always be aware of who we are approaching: Jesus, “the Holy One of God” (John 6:69). We come to know God daily through Bible study, for it is through His Word that He has revealed Himself to us through Jesus (John 17:6). As we know and see God clearly, our sin and need for repentance becomes evident and visible.

How are you getting to know God better through your study of God’s Word?

HEART:

We need not shy away from the feelings that sin brings. It is the Holy Spirit who convicts the world about sin (John 16:8), and since He is the Counselor (John 16:7), we can trust that our feelings that accompany that conviction will draw us closer to God and allow the process of healing and restoration to begin. However, we must also be aware that the Spirit’s conviction is not accompanied by condemnation if we are followers of Christ (Rom. 8:1). Jesus Himself was our sin offering, so our sin cannot condemn us. We should celebrate the desire to confess our sins, understanding that it’s the power of the Spirit within us that draws us to that acknowledgment.

What sins do you need to confess to the Lord, knowing there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus?

HANDS:

Keeping up an image of super-faith is exhausting—and false. None of us has a handle on every sin. Each time we feel we’ve conquered one, another will grow bigger muscles and pull us down. There is freedom in sharing our struggles and weaknesses with brothers and sisters in Christ who are also brave enough to admit their struggles. Even Paul—yes, the very one who took the gospel to the world—said, “Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost” (1 Tim. 1:15). He didn’t say that he was the worst but that he is the worst.

How will you help others find the freedom to confess their sins and be healed? How will you find others to hear your own confessions regarding sin and temptation?

NOTES

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

“In return for the love which brought the Son of Man down from heaven, in return for the love which led Him to die for us on the Cross, we cannot give Him holy lives, for our lives are not holy; we cannot give Him pure souls, for our souls are not pure; but this one thing we can give, and this is what He asks, hearts that shall never cease from this day forward, till we reach the grave, to strive to be more like Him; to come nearer to Him; to root out from within us the sin that keeps us from Him. To such a battle, brethren, I call you in His name.”³

—Frederick Temple (1821-1902)

POINT 1: CONFESSION BEGINS WITH A PROPER VIEW OF GOD (NEH. 9:5-8).

+ COMMENTARY

“In Nehemiah 9:6–37 we get the content of the way the people made confession and worshiped the Lord. What we have here in this passage is the fullest summary of the storyline of the Old Testament in the Old Testament . . . It’s as though Nehemiah is giving us a biblical theological summary of the Old Testament. This passage is full of phrases from earlier parts of the Bible. Nehemiah here retells the story of the Old Testament. He has selectively and strategically chosen what to include, referencing earlier parts of the Old Testament by using key phrases from those passages, adding some new material of his own, and thus re-presenting the whole of the Old Testament story.”⁴

+ ILLUSTRATION

Before starting Point 1, spend a few minutes sharing how your eyesight has changed over the years. Enlist a few volunteers to share the things they’ve done to help their eyesight: glasses, contact lenses, cataract surgery, corrective surgery, and beyond. Engage those volunteers to share how bad vision affects their lives, from driving to reading to working and more.

Say: “You may not believe me, but in a pinch, there’s actually a quick way to see things clearly when you don’t have your glasses with you.” Show the following video, which explains how making a small circle with your hand forces what you’re seeing to be clear: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OydqR_7_DjI.

Help learners take this illustration one step further by asking: “How might we see some spiritual truths from this talk about seeing clearly?” Point out that we are called to know God, seeing Him as He really is. Say: “There are a lot of false teachings about God in the world, but just like looking through a small circle you make with your hand, there’s a way to get a clear, focused picture of God: looking at Him accurately through His Word.”

Explain that just as we struggle to see with the physical eye when there is too much to take in, we sometimes struggle to view God properly when there are too many distractions in our world. Encourage learners to set aside time for private Bible study and worship that is silent (or as close to silent as they can manage), whether that’s in the early morning before anyone else is awake, in a room alone, or perhaps even in your car during your lunch break.

POINT 2: CONFESSION ACKNOWLEDGES THE REALITY OF SIN (NEH. 9:16-21).

+ **COMMENTARY**

“In this solemn and impressive prayer, in which they make public confession of their sins, and deprecate the judgments due to the transgressions of their fathers, they begin with a profound adoration of God, whose supreme majesty and omnipotence is acknowledged in the creation, preservation, and government of all. Then they proceed to enumerate His mercies and distinguished favors to them as a nation, from the period of the call of their great ancestor and the gracious promise intimated to him in the divinely bestowed name of Abraham, a promise which implied that he was to be the Father of the faithful, the ancestor of the Messiah, and the honored individual in whose seed all the families of the earth should be blessed . . . They confess their numerous and determined acts of disobedience. They read, in the loss of their national independence and their long captivity, the severe punishment of their sins. They acknowledge that, in all heavy and continued judgments upon their nation, God had done right, but they had done wickedly.”⁵

+ **ILLUSTRATION**

Bring a disposable plastic water bottle to class and be drinking it throughout the lesson. As you get to the start of Point 2, hold up the water bottle and say: “Has anyone ever thought about the environmental impact of plastic water bottles? My one bottle here in my hand may not be a problem, but let’s consider the real impact of bottle upon bottle upon our environment.”

Be ready to share some information from the following website that describes the pollution caused by plastic water bottles: <https://healthyhumanlife.com/blogs/news/plastic-water-bottle-pollution-plastic-bottles-end>.

Here are some of the key points:

- Only one in six bottles is recycled.
- It takes three times the amount of water in a bottle to make the bottle.
- It takes almost 2,000 times the energy to make a bottle of water as it does to produce tap water.
- Each week, 40,000 18-wheeler trucks are used just to deliver water.
- It takes up to 1,000 years for a single water bottle to decompose, leaking chemicals as it does.

Say: “Seeing the dangers of disposable water bottles clearly, I may rethink my decision to buy these. I should stop buying these, buy a reusable bottle, and refill it with water from the tap. When considering sin, we might make the comparison to this disposable water bottle: One sin doesn’t seem like that big of a deal to us. But one sin leads to more sin that leads to more sin in our lives and the lives of our family, polluting our lives and our faith.”

POINT 3: CONFESSION HUMBLY SEEKS PARDON AND RESTORATION (NEH. 9:32-35).

+ COMMENTARY

“When confessing our sins, it is good to notice the mercies of God, that we may be the more humbled and ashamed. The dealings of the Lord showed his goodness and long-suffering, and the hardness of their hearts. The testimony of the prophets was the testimony of the Spirit in the prophets, and it was the Spirit of Christ in them. They spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost, and what they said is to be received accordingly. The result was, wonder at the Lord’s mercies, and the feeling that sin had brought them to their present state, from which nothing but unmerited love could rescue them.”⁶

+ ILLUSTRATION

Ask: “Has anyone ever restored a piece of furniture?” Invite one or two volunteers to share the different steps necessary to take an old, seemingly valueless piece of wood and restore it to function and value.

As a group, consider the different steps for refinishing furniture found at this website: <https://www.homedepot.com/c/ah/how-to-refinish-furniture/9ba683603be9fa5395fab90140efad1a>.

The steps include cleaning, examining for repairs, removing the old finish, sanding, stripping with chemicals, sealing, staining or painting, and finishing. Point out that restoring a piece of furniture requires time, hard work, a careful eye, and willingness to peel back layers that have been added over time.

Say: “Our confession and restoration can feel like furniture refinishing. First, we’ve got to be able to admit that we are in need of repair or refinishing. We need deep cleansing and a careful assessment to see what damage has been done. After that, the difficult work begins: the scraping away of the habits of sin in our lives. This is the slow part; it doesn’t happen overnight. We allow God to strip away the ingrained sin that has stained us, and we are willing to endure the sometimes painful process so that we can get back to the genuine creation God made us to be. Once we’re to that point, we don’t want to go back to our old ways, so we consider the paint or stain that will protect us: spiritual disciplines such as Bible study, prayer, fellowship, Scripture memory, and solitude are a great place to start.”

References

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2. George Santayana, *The Life of Reason* (New York: Scribner’s, 1905), 284.
3. Frederick Temple, *Sermons Preached in Rugby School Chapel in 1858, 1859, 1860* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1861), 289.
4. James M. Hamilton Jr., *Exalting Jesus in Ezra–Nehemiah, Christ-Centered Exposition* (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2014) [Logos].
5. Robert Jamieson, A. R. Fausset, and David Brown, *Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible*, vol. 1 (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997), 299.
6. Matthew Henry, “Nehemiah 9,” *Matthew Henry’s Bible Commentary (concise)*, June 13, 2022, <https://www.christianity.com/bible/commentary/matthew-henry-concise/nehemiah/9>.