

# [BUILD]

“... arise and build”

Nehemiah 2:20

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Family Devotion  
**Week Four**

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**COMMITMENT TO THE CHALLENGE**



## COMMITMENT – BECAUSE WE’RE FORGIVEN

At first they didn’t believe the reports of the women. Jesus was alive, they said. The disciples were troubled, filled with doubt. Then, one by one, they recognized Him, fell at His feet, and worshiped Him. He was alive! Hope was reborn!

But what about the past? Would He remember how they had deserted Him...how they had cut and run at the moment of danger? How could they have been so faithless and unbelieving?

Never one to upbraid or accuse, Jesus quietly reaffirmed His love for them. He spent time among them on several occasions. He allowed them to touch His hands and His side, to settle their doubts and be convinced of His reality. He helped them in their daily needs: directing them to the location of fish when they had caught nothing and fixing them breakfast on the shore. He opened their eyes to the Scriptures. He gave them the promise of His Spirit, to be with them forever. And then, He gave them a mission.

When the disciples were renewed in faith and secure again in His love, He gave them a charge. Those who had so glaringly failed Him in His moment of trial were entrusted with the greatest work the world would ever know: the spreading of the Gospel. The past didn’t sabotage the present or the future. Their failures would always be a reminder of the weakness of the flesh and the power of sin, but they would not be a barrier to further usefulness. These men, renewed by love and mercy, went on to turn the world upside down.

As we look back at all God has done for us in the life of our church, our hearts are filled with gratitude for the Lord’s goodness. He has always been faithful and forgiving! And, like our counterparts in the first century, we have a mission to carry His truth to our community and to regions beyond. In building our new home, we are not building a retreat; we’re constructing a new center of operations for that life-giving mission!

What is the most significant lesson God has ever taught you about the importance of staying committed and not giving up?

## COMMITMENT – BECAUSE WE’RE FREE

Several years ago in the unlikely town of Fulton, Missouri, the town fathers directed huge chunks of concrete to be hauled onto the local college campus. They knew there would be no better backdrop for a historic speech to be given in their little city.

As chunks of concrete go, they weren’t particularly attractive. In fact, they were pitted, scarred by blows, and smeared with garish graffiti. But to those who saw them, carefully situated behind a podium on the broad green campus lawn, they were beautiful.

The speech was by Mikail Gorbachev, former leader of the former Soviet Union, in commemoration of another speech given decades before in that same place by Sir Winston Churchill. In that earlier speech – on the same campus, behind the same podium – Churchill coined the phrase “Iron Curtain” to describe the conditions in Eastern Europe.

Half a century later, an ex-Soviet strongman stood at the microphone to talk about freedom...against a backdrop of large chunks from a fallen Berlin Wall, the actual remnants of that once-daunted “Iron Curtain.”

Freedom. What a wonderful word it is, and what a wonderful state to live in. Here in the U.S., we are blessed with a measure of freedom that is remarkable in the annals of modern history. Yet this social freedom pales in comparison with the spiritual freedom we know and experience in Jesus Christ. In Him, we have been liberated eternally. And because of that freedom He has given us, we are motivated to commit wholeheartedly and unreservedly to Him.

When we participate in the campaign to build a new home for our church, we are ensuring that the message of freedom in Jesus Christ continues to go forth from this place. It is because we are free that we must do everything possible to spread the message of freedom to our community and beyond.

What are some practical ways you can share the joy and reality of your freedom with others?

## COMMITMENT – BECAUSE WE’RE BLESSED

There are two seas in the Holy Land. The northern sea, called the Sea of Galilee, is one of the land’s most beautiful features. Fed by the Jordan River, it waters fertile valleys and helps produce a bounty of fruits and vegetables. Fishermen still ply its depths, finding sustenance and profit.

This is the sea that Jesus loved. He knew its waters in stillness and in storm. Upon its banks He taught many parables, spent many nights, and worked His miracles of love and compassion.

The southern sea, further down the Jordan River, differs greatly from Galilee. Its air is filled with the stench of debris and filth. No man or beast will drink from its bitter waters. No children play along its polluted shores, for this is a lifeless sea. Its very name reveals its nature: The Dead Sea.

Both seas are fed by the same river. But why the stark difference? It’s because the Dead Sea has an inlet to receive the fresh waters, but no outlet to send them on. The fresh waters pour in...only to stagnate and decay.

Can you think of people like this? People who are greedy and selfish, thinking only of getting more and more for themselves? They are like the man in the parable who sought to build bigger barns to protect his increase, never realizing the true nature of his riches.

Our challenge, and our commitment, must be to be “Galilee Christians” – giving out as freely and readily as we take in. For only by living in this way will we be as healthy and joyous as God desires us to be. As Proverbs 11:25 says, “A generous man will prosper; he who refreshes others will himself be refreshed.”

As we give freely and generously to expand the ministry of our church, we are living out the lesson of Scripture. We are discovering the joy of the Galilee principle. What is God calling you to do today? How will you express your commitment? Share with family and friends the burden God has placed in your heart.

## COMMITMENT – BECAUSE WE’RE JOYFUL

Prisons today are five-star resorts compared to those in which Paul languished. He enjoyed no heated cell with private toilet and sink. There was no mattress for sleeping, no TV room for relaxing, no well-stocked library for reading and study. There was only the dark encasement of roughly hewn stones, filled with putrid odors and the pungent reminders of human depravity. Perhaps worst of all were the chains, their rusty coarseness scraping his skin raw, constantly tugging at him.

As if imprisonment were not painful enough, Paul had to endure something worse: the stinging criticism of those who called themselves his Christian brothers. They dared to attack God’s apostle even while he was held captive. Stop and imagine yourself in Paul’s situation. Feel the weight of the chains on raw skin. Taste the nauseating swill that was his daily food. Listen to those dreadful sounds of suffering that filled his ears day and night. Look into the menacing eyes of the Roman prison guards.

You are there. You are suffering. You are chained. You are Paul the apostle. Now, what’s your attitude? What fills your heart through the weary hours? Here’s what Paul wrote to his friends in Philippi:

“Now I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel. As a result, it has become clear throughout the whole palace guard and to everyone else that I am in chains for Christ. Because of my chains, most of the brothers in the Lord have been encouraged to speak the word of God more courageously and fearlessly.”

What an attitude! Rather than being inflamed with furious self-pity, Paul is encouraged by the positive impact of his negative condition. In spite of the severity, he is joyful.

What a lesson Paul teaches us! We have troubles and trials, sure; but what is our attitude, and what is our commitment? Paul was joyful and he kept on giving. What is God teaching you today about joyfulness and the priority of giving?

## COMMITMENT – BECAUSE WE’RE LOVED

George Matheson was a bright, promising young musician when he received the most devastating news of his life.

He was going blind.

For several months, as his vision worsened, he had suspected the worst. But more painful than the crushing reality of his blindness was the reaction of his fiancée. When he told her of his condition, she tearfully returned the engagement ring. She said she could not live the rest of her life with a blind man.

Stunned by her reaction and overwhelmed with self-pity, Matheson was reeling like a boxer falling to the mat. Then, it was as if he were literally swept into God’s arms, encouraged and uplifted. Still disappointed, yet buoyed in spirit, Matheson sat down and composed a song.

In one poignant moment, George Matheson knew more deeply than ever what is the true mark of the Christian – the unmistakable mark of love.

That’s what his song was all about. It’s a song sung by believers all over the world, even to this day – the great hymn, O Love That Will Not Let Me Go! Through a hurtful trial, he was reminded of the love that would remain forever unaffected. In so doing, he was able even to love the one who had rejected him, as his Lord had loved those who took His very life.

There are so many reasons for us to express our commitment as members of this church family. We have been forgiven, blessed, protected, encouraged. But most of all, we’ve been loved. Our heavenly Father has demonstrated His love for us in that, while we were yet sinners, His own Son died for us! The commitments we make, the monies we give, the energies we devote, are simply expressions of thanksgiving for all He has done.

In these crucial days, let’s look with gratitude to the past, let’s exercise faith in the present, let’s have true vision for the future; but, above all, let’s show a commitment to the challenge before us because of the love He’s shown for us.