# Responding to God's Faithfulness Part II

*God is faithful to provide, to show mercy, and to warn*

**Nehemiah Chapter 9**

A Sermon by Christopher Patton
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This morning we continue our series, "God's Mission, God's Community & You", an expository series through the book of Nehemiah.

Last week we considered from the prayer of praise in Neh.9 various expressions of God's faithfulness to His people. We saw that they praised God for:

1. **His choosing them**
2. **His making and keeping his covenant with them**
3. **His giving them good boundaries**

This week we will consider three more ways from this passage that God's faithfulness is expressed towards his people. But before we do, let's just reflect on what it means that our God is a faithful God.

On my hand I have this ring. This ring stays on this finger all the time. I never take it off, except perhaps for 5 or 10 seconds -- and then I put it right back on. This ring is a symbol. It is a symbol of a covenant that I made with my wonderful, beautiful bride Fibia on April 29, 2000. On that day I vowed to Fibia:

*I Chris take you Fibia to be to be my wedded wife*
*Forsaking all others, I do promise and covenant before God and these witnesses*
*To be your loving and faithful husband from this day forward,*
*for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer,*
*in sickness and in health until death do us part.*

She made the same solemn promise before God and witnesses, to me. By God's grace, we have kept those vows and we fully intend to keep them until death do us part.

Brother, sister, do you realize this morning that if you are a believer in Jesus Christ, you are in a covenant relationship with the Great God of the Universe and that He promises to keep that covenant with you, not just for a day or for a season, but *forever*? Let that thought just sink in for a moment.

Some of you here today may be tempted to subtly fear that God *might fail you in some way*. I have to tell you, I can relate to feeling. However, you need to know that even though people often forsake their covenants with each other, God is different. God will never break the New Covenant that Jesus inaugurated and sealed in His own blood shed for you and for me on the Cross; a covenant symbolized not by a ring, but by the sacraments of communion and baptism.

God has covenanted with you and with me. Consequently His faithfulness to us will never fail and will find expression throughout our lives in a variety of incomprehensible and wonderful ways. My prayer is that our text this morning will

awaken in our hearts fresh affection for God and passionate praise to God for this faithfulness!

So continuing from last week we now observe yet another aspect of God's faithfulness to his people as they praise God for:

**4. His provision for them**

I was talking with my friend Dave Johnston a few weeks ago and told him how much I have been enjoying the OT recently. He then asked me the very good follow-up question, "So what is it about the OT that you like so much?" To which I replied: "I love seeing how God related to and dealt with his people over a substantial period of time." I went on to share with Dave that by reading the OT, I come to know God better and understand how he relates to his people.

In this prayer of praise, the people exalt God for his lavish provision over the course of a significant period of time – a period of time dating all the way back to when God delivered Israel from the hand of Pharaoh.

In verses 9-11, the people praise God for how he miraculously provided escape from slavery in Egypt.

Moving along to verse 12, we see that God provided guidance through a pillar of cloud to lead them during the day and a pillar of fire to lead them during the night.

In verse 15, the people praise God for providing their forefathers with bread from heaven and water out of the rock for their nourishment and sustenance.

In verse 20, the people praise God for providing the Holy Spirit to instruct them in God's ways. Aren't you thankful God has given us the Spirit to instruct us, as He illuminates His holy Word to our hearts?

Moving along to verse 21, notice that the people praise God for providing for their physical needs during the years of their wilderness wanderings. They declare or perhaps even sing in reference to those days: "they lacked nothing. Their clothes did not wear out and their feet did not swell."

In verse 22, the people praise God for all the kingdoms and peoples of the land that God gave into their possession.

In verse 23, the people praise God for the provision and gift of children.

In verse 25, they praise God for providing the land and vineyards and the olive orchards in the land of Canaan, the Promised Land that God gave them.

And there are to be found yet more ways in this passage that God provided for His people. The point is, God provided for them.

Which reminds me of Jesus' words to us in the Sermon on the Mount, when he said:

*25 "Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing?*

*26 Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?*

Brothers and sisters, I think it's important for us to remember that God has been providing for His people for a long time and he is not going to stop now, even in difficult economic times. He provided for His covenant people in our story; rest assured He will be faithful to provide for you as well!

As I prepared this sermon, I remembered that my Great-Grandparents, who were strong believers, lived through the Great Depression. They were both born in the year 1900. I never met my Great Grandparents as they died tragically in car accident in the early 1960's.

But anyway, I emailed my Grandpa a few days ago, who was their child during the Great Depression, and asked him to tell me how his parents, saw God provide for them during the Depression. Here is what my Grandpa wrote:

*My Dad was a mortgage broker specializing in finding potential investors willing to invest in mortgages on commercial and industrial properties. The problems that he faced in his business in the depression years was failing banks and failing businesses. Some time in 1932 or 1933, he went for more than a year with no income at all. He had some savings that supported the family. There were four of us and we lived on a very tight budget.*

*I remember clearly watching Dad put a $5 bill on a dining room buffet at the beginning of a week that was for all of the food and household items for the family for a week. I never heard either my mother or father complain even once about money. We were not alone; every family in town was struggling financially. The local Springfield Bank went bankrupt and closed that year. I remember the bank and the shock and concern in town when it closed. There was no FDIC then, so everybody in town who had money there lost it all.*

*When the savings were gone, mother agreed that Dad should sell her diamond engagement ring. The sale brought enough to live on for a few more months. During that trying time, we were living on the least expensive food possible. I remember dinners where baked eggplant or breaded, fried tomatoes replaced meat. Dad always gave thanks for our food and everything else; we did not take anything for granted. Dad frequently reminded us that God was in control and that He would care for us.*

*Then one day, Dad came home from work with the news that he expected to have an opportunity to find a mortgage lender to finance the purchase of the Drake Hotel in downtown Philadelphia by a new potential buyer. It could be a big deal. It took a long time, but things worked out and a settlement took place and Dad earned a significant broker's commission as a result. As soon as he possibly could and after he had paid the bills that had built up over time, Dad replaced mother's diamond ring with one that was a little larger than the one they had sold. It was a clear testimony to my brother and me that God does indeed, take care of His own. [Incidentally, that ring became my mother's engagement ring, which she wears to this day]*

Grandpa goes on to say…

*I saw both my mother and father reading their Bibles and heard the discussions about the Lord with their friends who came to visit. God was an integral part of our*

*every day lives. Whether we were to experience financial hardship or prosperity made little difference. It was evident to my brother and me this world is not our home and that our parents were looking forward to eternity with Jesus and that their real treasure was there in safe keeping.*

I thank God for the legacy of parents, grandparents, and even great grandparents whose lives give glory to God – and I pray that my children and grandchildren, someday, will remember our Bible reading, our conversations about Christ with friends; that they will recall how God was an integral part of our everyday lives and they will remember how we trusted God through good times and bad.

Folks, I think if we are wise, we won't waste this present economic crisis, or any periods for that matter of financial stress or difficulty. By that I mean, we shouldn't just endure the times, get through them, and come out of it the other side unchanged -- just as self-reliant as we were prior to the difficulty. Instead let's use this opportunity, lets harness it, as George and Ruth Patton did, to grow in our trust in our God who provides; to set an example for those who will come after us, should the Lord tarry.

So let's praise God today for his faithfulness to provide.

The next expression of God's faithfulness that the people in our story praise Him for is…

**5. His mercy toward them**

Our text shows us 6 different ways that God's covenant faithfulness is evident. I find it interesting that the most emphasized of them all is God's mercy -- God's faithfulness as expressed in His mercy towards His people.

Now here's a specific biblically derived definition of mercy, so that you can have something specific in your minds as we talk about God's mercy from this passage. This is from Paul Tripp, from the Sovereign Grace Marriage conference back in January:

*Mercy is the kind, sympathetic and forgiving treatment of others that works to relieve their distress and to cancel their debt.*

Keeping that definition in mind, here's some places in our text where God's people worship God for His mercy.

In v.9 the people declare *9*

*9 "And you saw the affliction of our fathers in Egypt and heard their cry at the Red Sea, 10 and performed signs and wonders against Pharaoh and all his servants and all the people of his land*

Here the people recall how their forefathers were in distress as slaves in Egypt, yet God was sympathetic towards them and delivered them from the hand of Pharaoh – folks that's God's mercy on display!

At the end of vs17 after recalling how that former generation stiffened their necks in the wilderness against God and appointed a leader to take them back to Egypt, the people declare:

*But you are a God ready to forgive, **gracious and merciful**, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and did not forsake them.*

They continue their praise of God's mercy in vs.18 saying…

*18 Even when they had made for themselves a golden [2] 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.*

So there it is again.

Moving along to verse 27, the people praise God because even when their ancestors cast off God's law and killed God's prophets, when the people would in their distress cry out to the Lord, we read,

*"And according to **your great mercies** you gave them saviors who saved them from the hand of their enemies."*

Looking at verse 31, the people recall how their forefathers failed to heed the many warnings God had given them to repent of their idolatry and their sins, yet verse 31 reads…

*"31 nevertheless, **in your great mercies** you did not make an end of them or forsake them, for you are a gracious and merciful God."*

As we said moments ago, mercy is the kind, sympathetic and forgiving treatment of others that works to relieve their distress and to cancel their debt.

God's people of old again and again experienced the mercy of God. God's fundamental disposition towards them was kind, sympathetic, and forgiving. God worked to relieve their distress and to cancel their debt! For this reason, in chapter 9, the people lift their voices in a loud chorus of passionate praise to God! And so should we, because in the New Covenant, God's mercy has been disclosed to us through Christ in a way that far surpasses any old covenant expressions of God's mercy.

For as God gave His people many "little s" saviors (as vs.27 indicates) – people like Moses, Joshua, Samson and David, He has given us the ultimate Savior that all of those men were intended by God to point to. You see Moses, as great of a rescuer he was, couldn't rescue God's people from spiritual death, from the wrath of God for their sins…and the same goes for Joshua, Samson, David and others...

But as the Apostle Paul writes…

*God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved— and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus,*

Oh brothers and sisters, that day as Christ hung suspended on the Cross for our sins, he hung there in order that we, who would come to believe in Him, might not be eternal objects of God's wrath but instead eternal objects of His mercy…He hung there so that we could know in this life day after day His mercies which are new every morning! – Great is His faithfulness!

So throughout our Christian lives, because of Christ's finished work on the Cross, God now relates to us out of a fundamental disposition of mercy. But sadly, we often forget this!

On his son's thirteenth birthday, CJ Mahaney, who leads our family of churches, asked some of his friends to write some words of wisdom to his son Chad.
In one of those letters, author and biblical counselor David Powlison, who some of you are familiar with wrote as follows:

*"Don't ever forget: God is merciful to you.*

*God's mercy is not a theory, a bunch of words, or stories from a long time ago. It Is the reality upon which your life depends. Mercy is a reality that anchors you into the life and death of Jesus Christ. He has come for us. He has come for you.*
*You need help from outside yourself. Ask for help. A small child who is well loved knows this intuitively: "I trust in my parents' love. I ask for help when I need something. I delight that they take care of me!" That experience gives a picture of your whole life, even as you grow more and more independent of your earthly parents. You'll need help from outside yourself for your entire life – from God himself (and, in a secondary way, from wise people who can be his*
*Instruments of good, including your parents). But often in growing up, young adults and full adults forget this. They don't want it to be so. In blind pride they think that they can take care of themselves. It's a tendency in all of us, our most grievous tendency, and a lie. We need God's many mercies. We always need our greater Father to take care of us.*

*Because he is merciful, you look outside of yourself. Be willing to need help and to ask for help.*

*Don't ever forget, Chad.*

*God himself will never forget to be merciful. He cannot forget and deny himself."*

May we heed David Powlison's excellent counsel. May we not forget that our God is merciful, but instead lets consider God's mercy and be moved and affected by His mercy. Let's Praise God today that he is always, faithfully, a merciful God.

The final expression of God's faithfulness that the people in our story praise Him for is…

### 6. His Repeated Warnings

In verses 29 and 30, the people praise God because of how He persistently warned them to heed and obey God's law in order that it might go well with them.
Lets read these verses together.

*29 and **you warned** them in order to turn them back to your law. Yet they acted presumptuously and did not obey your commandments, but sinned against your rules, which if a person does them, he shall live by them, and they turned a stubborn shoulder and stiffened their neck and would not obey.*
*30 Many years you bore with them and **warned them** by your Spirit through your prophets. Yet they would not give ear. Therefore you gave them into the hand of the peoples of the lands.*

You know folks, one of the things that we need to be increasingly grateful for are the warnings that God gives us in His Word. When I was a teenager, I'll never forget my Dad lovingly but sternly warning me against a particular sin that some of my unbelieving friends were engaged in. At the time, I couldn't comprehend all that was behind this warning. Why it was so stern, so serious.

However, by the grace of God, I listened to my father's warning. Later, as I grew older, I realized the wisdom of His warning as I've seen others experience consequences of engaging in the very sin my Dad warned me against. Now, over the course of my life, I haven't always done as well as I did in that instance of heeding a warning rooted in scripture; and I regret those times that I failed to heed God's warnings as I ought.

But the point is, God is worthy of praise for how *He is faithful to warn us*, repeatedly, when we are tempted to go down paths that dishonor him. So when God convicts us through a sermon, through Bible reading, or through the loving words of a friend or a spouse, let's see that as an *expression of God's faithfulness to us.* Thank God, he doesn't just let us go our own way. Through his warnings, God hems us in. I am reminded of the words of the psalmist who said:

*139:1 O LORD, you have searched me and known me!*
*2 you know when I sit down and when I rise up;*
*you discern my thoughts from afar.*
*3 you search out my path and my lying down*
*and are acquainted with all my ways.*
*4 Even before a word is on my tongue,*
*behold, O LORD, you know it altogether.*
*5 you hem me in, behind and before,*
*and lay your hand upon me.*

Listen folks, let us not resent God's warnings, but learn to embrace them, to receive them with thankfulness and praise to God, even when his warning humbles us. Perhaps some of you have been warned by God repeatedly against unbelief. Perhaps you've been warned against anger. Perhaps you've been warned repeatedly against lust…perhaps looking at things online that are inappropriate. Maybe you've been warned time and again against sloth and laziness in spiritual discipline.

I think you feel the same way I do: I want to be the kind of man that doesn't spurn warnings from Scripture, from my friends, from my wife – but a man who receives warnings with gratitude and praise to God for His faithfulness as expressed in those warnings.

Aren't you thankful, that in his great love for us, God warns us? Let's praise him today for his faithful warnings.

To summarize, this morning we've talked about three more expressions of God's faithfulness as found in this prayer of praise: His provision for us, His mercy towards us, and His warnings to us.

Let's praise God for these things.  Please stand and pray in your hearts with me…