



Bethany Forward Seven Day Devotional

Facing Reality. Reimagining Ministry. Renewing Leadership.

Reality → Renewal → Sustainability

Nehemiah 2:17–18

“You see...” → “Come...” → “Let us rebuild...”

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BEFORE YOU BEGIN

A Week to Let the Work Settle

This resource builds on the Bethany Forward Leadership Summit and Participant Workbook. It does not introduce a new curriculum. It is designed to help participants reflect on, apply, and continue the work already begun.

A summit can open a conversation quickly. Spiritual formation usually moves at another pace. These seven days offer a little room to pray about what you heard, notice what stirred in you, and bring yourself before God before deciding what you will do.

Read the Scripture passage for the day in your own Bible. Then read the reflection slowly. You may want to sit with the question without writing an answer. End with the prayer and a simple practice. If you miss a day, return when you can; this is an invitation, not another obligation.

The movement follows the summit's primary text, Nehemiah 2:17–18: “You see...” invites honest sight; “Come...” invites us toward one another; “Let us rebuild...” calls for shared responsibility. We read Nehemiah as a source of prayerful wisdom, not as a claim that Bethany's circumstances are the same as Jerusalem's.

A gentle rhythm

READ • NOTICE • PRAY • PRACTICE

You can use this devotional alone, with a prayer partner, or in a small group. The question is personal; share only what you choose. If a passage calls you back to something you wrote in your workbook, revisit it as a conversation with God rather than a new assignment.

May this week make space for truth, belonging, faithful service, and renewal.

DAY 01 / REALITY

See Clearly

SCRIPTURE TO READ Nehemiah 2:17–18

“You see...”

Nehemiah did not begin with a speech about how impressive Jerusalem used to be. He looked at what was before him and spoke plainly to the people who would have to live with it. His words were honest, but they were not an accusation. They opened a door to action.

It takes courage to look at a beloved church without editing the picture. We may be tempted to defend what is familiar or to make one person responsible for every difficulty. We may also overlook signs of grace because a loss feels so large. Prayer gives us room to hold both: gratitude for what Bethany has carried and truth about what this season requires.

The God who meets people in truth does not ask us to pretend. We can name what hurts without surrendering hope. Clear sight is an act of love when it helps us care for the people and place God has entrusted to us.

PERSONAL REFLECTION

What truth about Bethany can I name before God without blaming anyone or losing hope?

PRAYER

God of truth and mercy, steady my heart when I would rather look away. Help me see people and circumstances clearly, give thanks for what is strong, and speak honestly with love. Amen.

SIMPLE PRACTICE

Spend three quiet minutes in prayer. Name one gift at Bethany and one reality that needs attention; hold both before God without trying to solve either today.

DAY 02 / REALITY

Discern Faithfully

SCRIPTURE TO READ 1 Chronicles 12:32; Romans 12:2

Understand the times. Discern the good.

The people of Issachar are remembered for understanding their times and knowing what Israel should do. Paul calls believers to be transformed so they may discern God's will. Together, these passages ask more of us than a quick reaction to change. They ask for attention, humility, and a mind renewed by God.

Not every new idea is wise, and not every inherited practice has lost its purpose. Discernment listens for the life a practice is meant to serve. It asks what is faithful now, especially when people with different histories and expectations sit at the same table. We may have to listen longer than we prefer.

Wisdom rarely arrives as certainty about every detail. Sometimes it begins with a better question, a person we have not heard, or the courage to test a small change. The Spirit can meet Bethany in that patient work.

PERSONAL REFLECTION

Where am I holding tightly to a preferred answer before listening for God's wisdom?

PRAYER

Holy Spirit, renew my mind. Free me from fear disguised as certainty and from change pursued for its own sake. Teach me to listen, test, and choose what serves your people well. Amen.

SIMPLE PRACTICE

Before your next conversation about Bethany, pause and ask God for one question worth listening to the answer to. Bring that question into the conversation.

DAY 03 / RENEWAL

Make Room

SCRIPTURE TO READ 1 Corinthians 12:12–27

One body. Many members.

Paul's picture of the church does not allow any member to say, "I have no place," or "I have no need of you." The body belongs together because Christ has joined it together. Difference is not an inconvenience to manage; it is part of the life through which the body cares for itself.

Hospitality can begin before a program begins. It is the moment we notice someone standing alone, remember a name, ask a sincere question, or make space for a voice that usually waits to be invited. Belonging is felt when a person can bring their whole story into the room and be received with dignity.

The church's welcome is more than friendliness at the door. It is a willingness to be changed by the people God brings among us. Making room may require us to loosen our grip on the familiar seat, the familiar circle, or the familiar way of hearing whose voice matters.

PERSONAL REFLECTION

Who could experience a fuller sense of belonging if I made room in a relationship or conversation?

PRAYER

Christ, you have made us members of one body. Open my eyes to those I overlook. Make my welcome patient and sincere, and teach me to receive the gifts of people whose stories differ from mine. Amen.

SIMPLE PRACTICE

Reach out to one person you do not usually speak with. Ask how they are, listen without recruiting them for a task, and remember what they share.

DAY 04 / RENEWAL

Use What God Has Given You

SCRIPTURE TO READ Ephesians 4:15–16

Each part contributes to growth.

Paul describes a body that grows as each part does its work in love. The emphasis is not on a few exceptional people carrying everyone else. The whole body receives strength when members contribute and are supported in doing so.

A gift may be public or quiet. It may sound like teaching, organizing, visiting, welcoming, repairing, listening, praying, or noticing what others miss. Some gifts are still emerging. Others have been used so constantly that the person carrying them needs encouragement and rest. God's gifts are never a reason to use people up.

We honor a gift when we see the person who bears it. We can offer our own capacity honestly, with boundaries, and call forth another person's capacity without treating them as a vacancy to fill. Love shapes both the invitation and the work.

PERSONAL REFLECTION

What gift or capacity has God entrusted to me in this season, and how might I offer it with love and healthy limits?

PRAYER

Generous God, thank you for the gifts you have placed throughout your church. Help me offer what is mine to give, notice gifts in others, and value the person more than the task. Amen.

SIMPLE PRACTICE

Tell someone at Bethany the specific gift you see in them. Offer encouragement without attaching an immediate request.

DAY 05 / SUSTAINABILITY

Build With Others

SCRIPTURE TO READ Ephesians 4:11–12; Exodus 18:17–23

Equipped people share the work.

Ephesians speaks of leaders who equip the saints for ministry. In Exodus, Jethro sees that Moses cannot carry every matter alone and urges a wiser sharing of responsibility. Both passages describe leadership that makes room for others to serve faithfully.

Shared work requires more than handing someone a job. People need trust, a clear responsibility, the freedom to learn, and support when they encounter a hard decision. It also asks established leaders to make space for another person's judgment. That can feel vulnerable when we care deeply about the ministry.

No one person holds the whole church together. Christ does. When responsibility is shared, we bear witness to that truth and allow more people to mature in service. The load can become lighter, but the deeper gift is a stronger, more connected body.

PERSONAL REFLECTION

Where do I need to trust another person with meaningful responsibility, or ask for help with what I have been carrying?

PRAYER

God who calls many hands, loosen my need to control what I cannot carry alone. Give us the patience to equip one another, the humility to receive help, and the courage to share responsibility. Amen.

SIMPLE PRACTICE

Offer one specific act of support to a leader this week, or ask one trusted person to share a responsibility with you.

DAY 06 / SUSTAINABILITY

Receive Renewal

SCRIPTURE TO READ Mark 6:31

Come away and rest a while.

Jesus invited his disciples to rest after a demanding season of ministry. He did not wait until they had solved every need around them. The invitation recognized that people who serve are still people with bodies, limits, and souls in need of God.

Rest can be difficult for a church accustomed to meeting needs and keeping promises. We may mistake exhaustion for devotion, or assume that stepping back will disappoint others. Yet a rhythm of renewal can help us return with clearer attention and greater tenderness. Pastors need that rhythm. So do deacons, volunteers, caregivers, and members who quietly carry more than others can see.

Receiving rest is an act of trust. The church belongs to God even when one of us pauses. In the quiet, we may hear gratitude, grief, or a call we could not hear while rushing. We are free to bring all of it to Christ.

PERSONAL REFLECTION

What would it mean for me to receive rest as a gift from Christ rather than a reward I must earn?

PRAYER

Jesus, you know the work before us and the weight we carry. Give rest to our pastor and to every person serving while tired. Help me receive your invitation without guilt and return with a renewed heart. Amen.

SIMPLE PRACTICE

Set aside twenty minutes without a ministry task or a screen. Walk, sit, or pray slowly. Let that time be enough.

DAY 07 / REBUILDING TOGETHER

Let Us Rebuild

SCRIPTURE TO READ Nehemiah 2:17–18; Isaiah 43:19

“Let us rebuild...”

The people answered Nehemiah’s invitation together. Their response did not erase the work ahead, but it meant the work would not belong to one voice or one pair of hands. “Let us rebuild” is a commitment to one another as well as to a future.

Isaiah’s promise that God is doing a new thing invites us to pay attention. New life may appear in a person finding a place to belong, an older leader making room, a quieter member offering a gift, or a pastor receiving needed renewal. It may begin before anyone can see a finished plan.

We cannot manufacture renewal by force of will. We can respond to God with prayer, faithful choices, and shared care. Bethany’s future will take shape in the ordinary ways its people keep showing up for God and for one another. May we move forward with open eyes and open hands.

PERSONAL REFLECTION

What small act of shared faithfulness am I ready to offer as Bethany moves forward?

PRAYER

God of new beginnings, thank you for meeting us in the work before us. Unite Bethany across generations and ministries. Give us courage to begin, patience to build, and grace to rejoice in every sign of life you bring forth. Amen.

SIMPLE PRACTICE

Pray for Bethany by name. Then tell one person what gives you hope for its future and invite them to pray with you.

AFTER DAY SEVEN

A Prayer for Bethany Forward

God who sees us clearly and loves us fully, we give thanks for Bethany Baptist Church of Harlem: for the prayers that have carried it, the people who have served it, the neighbors it has known, and the witness it continues to offer.

Give us courage to tell the truth with gentleness. Teach us to hear the voices we have missed and receive the gifts of people we have not yet made room for. Keep us from making one person carry what belongs to the body. Equip us to share the work with humility and joy.

Grant rest to those who are weary. Renew our pastor, our leaders, our members, and our neighbors. Let our plans grow from love rather than fear, and let our actions honor the people they affect.

When the path is unclear, give us enough light for the next faithful step. When progress is slow, keep us patient with one another. When new life appears, teach us to notice and give thanks.

We offer you our eyes to see, our hearts to welcome, and our hands to build. Let us rebuild together under your grace. In Jesus' name, Amen.

The prayer continues in ordinary life

Notice someone. Offer a gift. Receive help. Make room for rest. Begin again.

When you are ready to move from reflection to shared action, return to the commitments and priorities already recorded in your Bethany Forward Participant Workbook.