

# TERM THREE SERIES | LIFE GROUP BOOKLET

GATEWAY BAPTIST CHURCH

enter

return

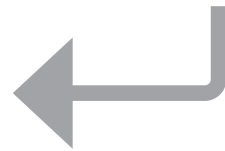


“They will be my people, and I will be their God, for they will return to me with all their heart”.

Jeremiah 24:7

# return & rebuild

## part 1



1. What has been the most difficult part of our 'exile'? What are you looking forward to most about returning to worship together?
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When the people of God began to return from exile in Babylon, God gave Nehemiah a vision to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem so the city would once again be a safe place for families to raise their kids and to worship God together. Before He does any work to rebuild, He prays for God to give Him favour, as the vision that God had put in his heart was too big for him to achieve in his own strength.

**Read Nehemiah 1:1-5, 2:11-12**

2. What was Nehemiah's response to the news of the state of Jerusalem? What was the first thing he did?
  3. How can we apply this approach to the challenge we are facing as a church in this season?
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There was a lot of work to be done and Nehemiah and the people faced great opposition, but they succeeded because many people worked with all their heart and they were strengthened by God in prayer until the walls were rebuilt and their enemy was defeated.

4. What were the factors that contributed to Nehemiah's success? How did they overcome the opposition they faced?
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As we return from a forced exile, there is some significant rebuilding to be done and we will face great opposition from our enemy. If many people work with all of our heart and pray together for power from heaven, Jesus will build His church and the

gates of hell will not prevail against it. Our God will strengthen our hands to fulfil the vision He has put in our heart.

**Read Ephesians 2:8-10.** Read it a second time in a different translation.

5. Share what these verses mean to you in your own words.
  6. Do you know what good work God has called you to do? If so, how did you discover your calling? If not, how can you explore what God is calling you to do?
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Read the prayer in **Nehemiah 1:5-11.**

7. What is the prayer God is birthing in your heart to see a broken and hurting world restored in Jesus name?
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### response:

Find your place to serve. Use the resources below to express interest in a volunteer position at Gateway or to discover your spiritual gifts.

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### further resources:

Find Your Place to Serve at Gateway: <https://gatewaybaptist.com.au/next-steps/volunteer/>

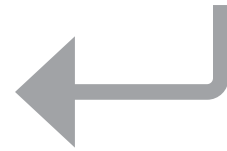
Discover your Spiritual Gifts: <https://spiritualgiftstest.com/spiritual-gifts-test-adult-version/>

### prayer nights:

Come along to our Multi-Campus prayer nights on Sunday 26 July and 2 August at 6pm at Mackenzie. Register on your Campus Events page on the website.

# return & rebuild

part 2



## how did you go?

1. Did you do the “Discover your Spiritual Gifts” test? What spiritual gifts has God given you? How are you using your gifts?
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When the Israelites returned to Jerusalem from exile, they didn’t only need to rebuild the walls. They also needed to rebuild their lives on the world of God. When they finished rebuilding the walls, Ezra read the law to all the people for the whole morning. They renewed their relationship with God and rebuilt their lives upon His word.

### Read Nehemiah 8:1-12

2. What stands out to you about this passage? What does this demonstrate about the character of God? Why do you think the people responded as they did?
  3. The people had an emotional response as they heard and understood the word of God. Can you relate to this experience? Have you ever been impacted by a message in a similar way? Share your experience.
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600 years later Jesus sat on the side of a hill and preached a really long sermon while the people listened. He taught them, and us, not to build our lives on wealth or worldly standards but to build our lives upon His words. When we return to God and rebuild our lives on His Word, He will renew our mind, restore our joy and strengthen us to resist the enemy.

When we build our lives on moving ground, lives are destroyed, joy is eroded, and families are broken. Our nation needs to rebuild on the strong foundations of the unchanging word of God.

### Read Matthew 7:24-27

4. What are some of the things that can make life feel like we are in a storm?
  5. What are some of the sandy foundations we are in danger of building our lives upon?
  6. How do we build our lives on the foundation of rock?
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## response:

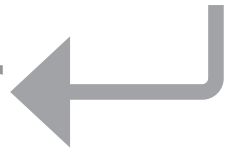
Read the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew chapters 5-7. How can you put Jesus’ teaching into practice?

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## prayer night:

Come along to our Multi-Campus prayer night on Sunday 2 August at 6pm at Mackenzie. Register on your Campus Events page on the website.

# return & rejoice forever



## how did you go?

1. Did you read the Sermon on the Mount?  
What did you find most encouraging?  
What did you find most challenging?
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Jesus most famous story is of a wayward son that strays so far from His Father's standards and was filled with so much shame that he thought that he would never be welcome to return home to his family. When the son returns, hoping to become a servant, His father is filled with compassion for His wayward son. He runs to embrace him and welcome him home. He reinstates him as a son and celebrates with the whole community.

Jesus is making the point that nothing causes more joy in heaven than when one sinner repents and returns home to a relationship with their heavenly Father.

Read **Luke 15:11-32**

2. As you read this familiar story again, what stands out to you? What does this story demonstrate about the character of God?
  3. How can we emulate the heart of the Father in the way we respond to people? What makes this response challenging?
  4. What can we learn from the response of the older brother?
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The places you shop will only allow you to return items that are in original condition, but our Father in Heaven has a very generous return policy. You can return to Him soiled and broken and He will exchange your shame and pain for a new heart and a fresh start.

The sacrifice of the Son of God on the Cross enables us to return to our original position in the family and the loving arms of the Father restores us to our original condition.

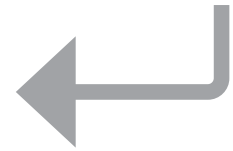
Whatever condition you are in, you are welcome to return home to God. Your friends and family are welcome to return home to God. When you do, there will be no finger pointing or shaming, but a party in heaven and on earth in His church.

5. Share about a person in your life who is far from God. Spend some time praying together for their return home to the arms of the Father. Pray for each other as you seek to share the love of God with them.
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## response:

On Sunday 9 August we are returning to worshiping together! Who will you invite to come to church with you to hear the life-changing message of Jesus?

# return & renew



## how did you go?

1. Who did you invite to join you for church last week? What was their response? Share your experience.
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Jeremiah prophesies that God will do a good work in the exiles even though they have been sent away from their spiritual home. He will continue to watch over them and care for them while they are away, and He will bring them back with a new heart to know Him and worship Him as God. He promised to build them up and plant them in good soil to grow deeper in their relationship with Him and produce good fruit in their lives.

Read **Jeremiah 24:4-7**

2. What did God promise the people in exile?
3. What does this passage demonstrate about the character of God?
4. In what way does this prophecy give the people hope for the future?

We have been away from our spiritual home and God has watched over us and done a good work in us, in the midst of our difficult circumstances. Now is the time to get planted in God's church where He will build us up in our faith, renew our heart and produce good fruit in our life and ministry.

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Read **Romans 8:28-29** and **Galatians 5:22-23**

5. How have you seen God working in this season? What are some of the good things God has been doing in your life?

6. In what ways are the fruit of the Spirit evident in your life? How has this changed during the Pandemic season?

7. How can you prepare your life for a season of greater fruitfulness? In what areas do you need to make room for God to work in your life?
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## response:

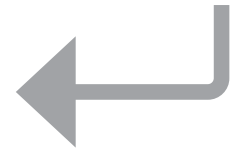
Where is God planting you to be built up and renewed in your faith? Ask God to show you how you can cultivate the Fruit of the Spirit in your life.

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## further reading:

Read the Parable of the Sower in **Mark 4:1-20**

# return & repent



## how did you go?

1. Did you spend time reflecting on how you can cultivate the Fruit of the Spirit in your life? What did God say? What are you doing about it?

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When the church was enduring their greatest storm of the 1st century, Jesus gave John some messages from heaven to deliver to the church in their time of need. The letter that Jesus wrote to the church in Ephesus is full of encouragement for their hard work and perseverance for the gospel, yet they had forsaken their first love. Simply: they didn't love God with the same passion and joy as they did at the beginning of their relationship. Jesus was calling them to repent and return to Him with all of their heart. This is not a passive change but requires deliberate discipline to worship and walk with Jesus daily.

### Read **Revelation 2:1-7**

2. In what areas were the church at Ephesus doing well? In what areas did God challenge them?
3. Imagine you received a 'Spiritual Report Card' from Jesus. In what areas would you receive encouragement? In what areas would you need to improve?

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In recent times, the Church has endured one of our greatest storms of the 21st century. We have persevered and endured hardships and I believe that Jesus would cheer us on as we continue to share the gospel in our community, nation and world. As we return to worshiping together, Jesus would also say to us, do not forsake your first love but return to me with all your heart.

Choose to worship and walk with Jesus daily. We begin our human relationships giving the one we love all of our affection and attention, but over time other priorities can diminish our first love. Similarly with Jesus, we can lose our first love when we forsake our initial devotion. We are invited to return to Jesus with all of our affection and attention, just like when we first loved Him.

4. What are some different ways that people connect with God? Brainstorm as many as you can.
5. How do you demonstrate your love and devotion for God?
6. What spiritual practices are in your regular routine? What areas of your devotional life are you enjoying right now?
7. What new spiritual practices would you like to embrace?

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## response:

Reset your daily discipline of worship and walking with Jesus. From the different spiritual practices you have discussed today, decide on one you would like to try this week.

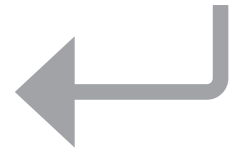
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## further resources:

"Sacred Pathways: Discover your Soul's Path to God" by Gary Thomas

Sacred Pathways test: <http://storage.cloversites.com/soulcitychurch/documents/Sacred%20Pathways%20Assessment.pdf>

# return & remain



## how did you go?

1. How did you reconnect with God in the last week? What new spiritual practice did you try?
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Jesus calls the Church not only to return to Him, but also to remain in Him. In John 15, Jesus uses the picture of the vine to illustrate our total dependence on God and the importance of being connected to Himself. It is a beautiful picture of God as the gardener, Jesus as the vine, and we, the Church, as the branches that bear fruit.

The gardener cuts away the dead and fruitless branches and prunes the branches that bear fruit to make them even more fruitful. Jesus, the vine, provides the nutrition, the power we need, to be fruitful for the Kingdom. And we become a fruitful people when we submit to the pruning of the Father and remain connected to the vine.

Read **John 15:1–8**

2. What does it mean that God cuts off fruitless branches and prunes fruitful branches? Share examples of what that looks like in our lives.
3. Looking through the passage, what are the results of both remaining in God, and not remaining in God?
4. How do we ‘remain in Him’? What are the practical things that we can do to stay connected to the vine?

Read **John 15:9–12**

5. How do we remain in God’s love? What is the outworking of this in our personal lives and in our church?
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God has been at work in a powerful way through the season of crisis and exile. As we return there are truths that God wants us to remember, to remain in our hearts and lives.

6. What parts of your life has God been cutting away or pruning during this season of exile? What is now in the past that God is asking you to let go of?
  7. What has God been doing in your life in this season that you want to hold on to?
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## response:

Spend some time with God and ask Him to search your heart. Identify what is in the past that needs to be pruned and what are God’s words that must remain. Write them down in your journal.