

Together for the

**FUTURE**



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[FBCA.org/WordAndDeed](http://FBCA.org/WordAndDeed)

Together for the

# FUTURE

**“Come, let us rebuild . . .”**

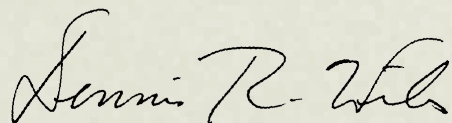
This is the message from Nehemiah to the people of Jerusalem in 445 BC. Here we are in 2024 – some 2,469 years later, and the message is still relevant to us today!

We are going to spend 9 weeks reading through the books of Ezra and Nehemiah. Actually, in the Jewish Bible, they are combined into one book entitled, Ezra. We are going to learn some valuable lessons about building or re-building for the future. There is much to glean from these two ancient accounts about a pivotal period in the life of God’s people.

Our weekly readings will consist of a Narrative Reading that will result in both books being read in their entirety by the conclusion of the series. The Together in Word readings will be drawn from various supporting texts from both the Old and New Testaments.

I believe God is leading us to a new future as a church. This Fall series will give me the opportunity to address this reality and point us into that new future. It will also provide me the chance to offer pastoral counsel for people who want a new future!

Blessings this Fall Season,



Dennis R. Wiles



## *TOGETHER IN WORD:* **Matthew 7:24-27**

As we contemplate how to build our lives towards the future, let's reflect on the value of a strong foundation of faith. As Christians, we must anchor our lives in the truths God has already revealed to us. Consequently, our faith is both historic and futuristic. In other words, we are anchored in our historic faith first. As we begin our journey in reading through Ezra and Nehemiah and contemplate how to build for the future, let's be reminded of the teachings of Jesus about building anything. In this closing section to the Sermon on the Mount, our Lord cautions us about negligence in choosing the foundation for our lives.

Take some time this week to reflect on the foundation of your life. How seriously do you consider the value of God's revealed truth? Are you building your life on the Solid Rock?

### **Parent Spotlight**

Parents, this is a great week to talk with your family about a firm foundation. Everyone must build their life on something. For families with teenagers, this is a great talking point. On what foundation are you basing your identity? Help them see that many things a teenager bases their identity on (sports, clothing, popularity, music) will all change. When we choose Christ as our foundation, we build our lives on something solid and enduring. Focusing on outward things like appearances or material success is easy, but those can shift and change. Christ's love and His promises, however, are unchanging and dependable.

For younger families, consider walking around your house and showing your child your home's foundation. Help them see that the most crucial part of the house isn't the walls or the roof—it's the foundation. Even the most beautiful home can crumble without a strong base when faced with storms. In the same way, we need a solid foundation to withstand life's challenges. Read Matthew 7:24-27 with your family. Jesus tells us that when we build our lives on His teachings and love, we are like that wise builder who chooses rock over sand.

# ***TOGETHER IN DEED:***

## **Choose a Practice**

- Jesus' words in Matthew 7:24-27 come at the conclusion of the Sermon on the Mount, and Jesus says whoever hears these words and puts them into action will have a solid foundation. What is one thing in Matthew 5-7 that you can concretely put into practice this week, and how will you do it?
- Memorize Matthew 5:13-14.
- Some of our church families are away at 'Family Getaway.' Pray for those families today as they spend time growing together in faith.

## ***REFLECT:***

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## ***TOGETHER IN WORD:*** **Matthew 6:5-13**

Both Ezra and Nehemiah were men of prayer. Their prayers recorded in their journals reveal a deep faith in God and a profound desire to know His direction for their lives. Their prayers also reveal a sincere humility in their relationship with God. We would do well to follow their example. In our focal passage this week, Jesus offers us instruction about prayer. He even has given us a model prayer to guide our efforts in prayer.

Take time each day this week to pray through The Lord's Prayer. Reflect on each phrase as you find yourself in God's presence. Time spent in His presence in humility is never wasted!

### **Parent Spotlight**

Parents, this is a good week to talk to your children about the purpose of prayer. Prayer can be confusing for children and teenagers. "How am I supposed to talk to someone I can't see?" Even Jesus's disciples needed someone to teach them how to pray, which is what Jesus does in Matthew 6:5-13. Read that passage with your family and then teach them that prayer is a gift from God. It's a direct line of communication with our Heavenly Father. It's not just a routine or a ritual; it's a way to invite God into every part of our lives.

A good way to think about prayer is like a family meeting. In prayer, we get to share our joys, worries, and dreams with God. It's an opportunity to seek His guidance, express gratitude, and ask for His help. When we pray together as a family, we strengthen our relationship with God and one another.

Don't just teach prayer this week; practice it! Sit down with your family and pray over them. Let them hear your hopes and desires for them. Families of teenagers should consider asking them to write their own prayer based on Matthew 5.

# ***TOGETHER IN DEED:***

## **Choose a Practice**

- Pray the Lord's Prayer every morning this week. What do you notice changing about how you view God? Yourself? The world?
- One of the things we pray for in the Lord's Prayer is forgiveness, but it comes with the reminder that we are called to forgive others. Are there people in your life that you resent or who have hurt you? How can you move toward forgiving them this week?
- As our church honors and celebrates grandparents this week, spend time celebrating and honoring the grandparent figures in your life. If you are a grandparent, spend time encouraging parents as they go about the work of raising children.

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## ***TOGETHER IN WORD:*** **Haggai 1:1-11**

The prophet Haggai prophesied in Jerusalem during the time of the first section of the Book of Ezra. It was 520 BC, and the Jewish exiles had been back in Jerusalem for about 18 years. However, they had not begun the re-construction of the Temple. Haggai was about 70 years old, and God gave him a message for the people. It was time to consider their situation. Many of them had re-built their homes, but God's house was not yet under construction. He challenged them to be honest about their reality and begin the work of re-building the Temple!

For us this week, perhaps it is a time to think about what we are "building" during this season of our lives. How might God be speaking to you about your investment in His Kingdom's work? Is it time to consider some adjustments to your life so that God's work might be more prioritized?

### **Parent Spotlight**

Parents, this is a good week to talk to your child about their purpose in life. The great news about this is they have one! The even greater news is that this purpose is God-given. For parents of teenagers, this is a crucial message to convey. God has a purpose for their life that is bigger than anything they can imagine for themselves. Just as a puzzle piece fits perfectly into its spot, each person has a special place and purpose in God's design. He is building us into something extraordinary.

However, you must help your child temper their expectations of what this "building" looks like. For example, God doesn't promise them a life without challenges. However, He does promise that His plans are for our good. This means that every experience, whether joyful or challenging, can be used by God to shape us and fulfill His purpose for our lives.

This week, spend some time discussing as a family how each person can use their gifts and passions to fulfill God's purpose. Encourage each other to pursue your individual callings and celebrate how you see God's purpose unfolding in your lives.



# ***TOGETHER IN DEED:***

## **Choose a Practice**

- As you enter the places where you live, work, study, or play this week, ask God, “What are you doing here, and how can I join?” When you feel the Spirit’s prompting, take it seriously and follow through.
- Where are you? Who are the people in your life that need to encounter the Good News of Jesus? Sit down this week and ask God to bring to your mind all of the people in your world who need to encounter Jesus. As God brings them to your mind, write their names down. Spend time asking God to help you focus on five people that you need to work on sharing the Gospel with.
- This Sunday (15th) our church is hosting First Steps, a class where people can learn more about what it means to be a part of First Baptist Arlington and become members of our family. Pray for these people as they make decisions about following the Jesus way with us at First Baptist Arlington.

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## ***TOGETHER IN WORD:*** **Jeremiah 29:1-14**

While many Jews were in exile in Babylon, God gave Jeremiah a prophetic message for them. Even though the situation seemed dire, God had a future planned for them. Jerusalem was destroyed, the Temple burned to the ground, and the wall around the city was broken down. However, God was not done with His people! Ezra and Nehemiah tell the rest of the story! God delivered His people from exile and returned them to Jerusalem. He had plans for them. He has plans for you!

As you contemplate the story of Israel, take some time to reflect this week on your own life. What is God planning for you? Is it time for you to make some changes to prepare for His future for you?

### **Parent Spotlight**

Parents, this is a great week to continue the lesson from last week on one subject – what do we do when life doesn't go our way? Your child and teenager are going to face disappointments. Eventually, they'll have to stop playing the sport they love. They won't make the cast. They may not get into the college they want. In these moments, a text like Jeremiah 29:1-13 is beneficial. It teaches us that God is still moving in our lives even though things don't work out the way we want. His plans are always for our good, even when the path is unclear.

Imagine trying to navigate a map with only part of the directions. It would take work to get where you want to go. For younger families, if you can get a physical copy of a map, this would be a helpful illustration. Help them understand that God sees the whole thing, even if we can only see a piece of the map. He knows the best route and has a purpose for every step of our journey. This week, take some time as a family to discuss your current plans and dreams. Share any uncertainties or concerns and pray together for God's guidance.

# ***TOGETHER IN DEED:***

## **Choose a Practice**

- God promised his people that when they searched for him, they would find him if they searched for him with all their hearts. What would it look like if you whole-heartedly searched for God in your daily life? How can you go about doing that this week?
- Is there an area of your life where you need God's guidance? Consider fasting from food from dinner one day to dinner on the next. As you do, use your hunger as a reminder to turn to God in prayer as you seek God's will.

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## *TOGETHER IN WORD:*

### **Haggai 1:12-2:9**

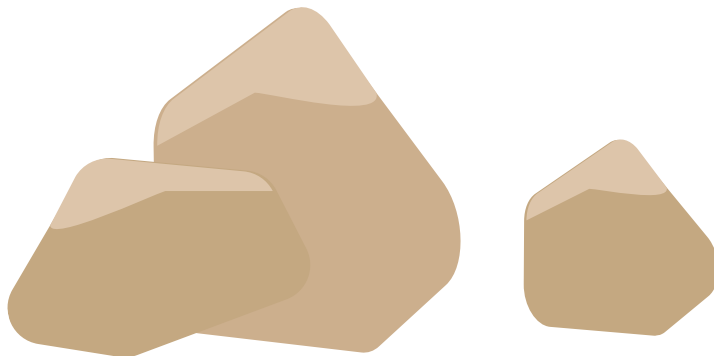
Haggai prophesied to the people of Israel during the time of the re-building of the Temple recorded in the Book of Ezra. In our text this week, God spoke through Haggai to encourage the people to continue the good work of building. He promised to bless their efforts. As Israel faced the obstacles of their day, this word of encouragement was a welcome and refreshing message.

As you face the obstacles in your life, bring those challenges to the Lord. Give Him a chance to speak to you, encourage you, and renew you in the midst of your challenges.

### **Parent Spotlight**

Parents, this is a good week to help your child and teenager learn to face challenges in life confidently. Read Philippians 4:10-13 and point out that Paul says this famous statement amid setbacks and disappointments. Obstacles are a part of life; your kids need to know that. While facing difficulties can feel overwhelming, the good news is that we don't face them alone. God promises to give us the strength we need to overcome.

This week, identify current obstacles your family is facing and discuss them together. Share how you can support each other through these challenges, and pray for God's strength and guidance. Remember that with God's help, you can overcome any difficulty, and your family can grow stronger through the experience.



# ***TOGETHER IN DEED:***

## **Choose a Practice**

- Haggai's prophecy tells the people that the Temple's coming glory is going to be greater than it was before. How often do we live and think like the glory days of the church are in the past and grieve for what was? Our glory days aren't behind us - they're ahead of us in God's great future. How can you root your perspective in God's hope for the future?
- Is there something in the future that causes you anxiety? How can you turn that anxiety about the future over to God in prayer this week?

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## ***TOGETHER IN WORD:*** **Matthew 6:25-34**

I love this text! In the midst of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus challenges His followers to stay focused on our pursuit of the Kingdom of God. As we seek to build for our future, it is tempting to get distracted by any number of pursuits. In this text, Jesus uses the example of focusing on and worrying about our basic needs being met. He challenges us to trust Him as we follow Him.

Spend some time this week reflecting on your own pursuit of the Kingdom of God. Are you distracted right now? Is it time to renew your commitment to God's Kingdom pursuits?

### **Parent Spotlight**

Parents, this is a good week to talk with your child about what worries them. In Matthew 6:25-34, Jesus tells us not to worry about our lives—what we will eat, drink, or wear. Instead, He asks us to trust that God, who takes care of the birds and the flowers, will also take care of us. Worrying and distractions can often cloud our minds and keep us from focusing on what truly matters: our relationship with God and His kingdom. As a family, share some things you worry about or that distract you. As you discuss these things, think about how you can remind your family that God is faithful and trustworthy – we can trust in God when we feel anxious. Pray together, asking God to help you release these worries and trust Him more. Throughout the week, encourage your kids to take a moment to pray and give that worry to God whenever they feel anxious or distracted. Remind yourself of God's promise to care for you!

# ***TOGETHER IN DEED:***

## **Choose a Practice**

- We live in an age of distraction – devices, media, screens, cable news, and entertainment all keep us in a constant state of distraction. How can you carve out more space in your life? What would reducing your consumption of entertainment (including social media and cable news) do for your spiritual life?
- What would it look like for you to put the Kingdom of God first in your life? What are the things that get in the way of you putting the Kingdom of God first? Spend time praying and asking God to help you align your priorities to the Kingdom.
- This coming weekend, our Median families will go on a retreat. Pray for these families as they plan to spend time together growing in faith as a family.

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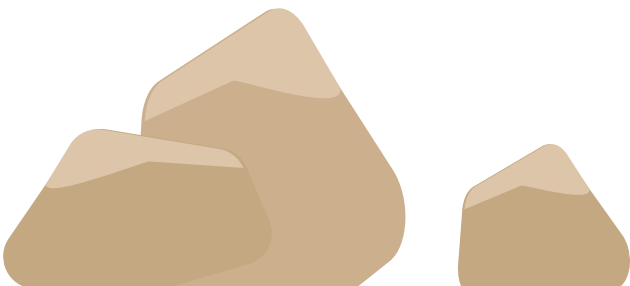
## ***TOGETHER IN WORD:*** **2 Timothy 3:14-16**

Ezra and Nehemiah led the people of God in a time of dedication and consecration. At the heart of this time was the acknowledgment of the authority of the Word of God. In our lives, as followers of Jesus, we must be engaged with the Word of God. We are to read, study, memorize, discuss, and meditate on God's Word. This is God's revealed truth to us.

Are you regularly engaging God's Word? Do you read daily? Do you study? How much Scripture have you memorized? Do you reflect on God's Word? This week is a great time to renew your commitment to allowing God to shape your life through His Word.

### **Parent Spotlight**

Parents, this is a good week to discuss doing the word and not just reading it. As a family, we are on a journey together. Each day presents new challenges, decisions, and opportunities. In these moments, we have a choice: to rely on our own understanding or to lean on the wisdom of God's Word. In 2 Timothy 3:14-16, Paul reminds Timothy of the importance of continuing in the truth he has learned from the Scriptures. Just as a house needs a solid foundation to withstand storms, our families need the firm foundation of God's Word to navigate life's challenges. The Bible is not just a book; it is God's living Word, able to guide us, teach us, and shape our character. In essence, Paul tells us that the Bible is our manual for life. By committing to read and study it together, we allow God to shape our thoughts, attitudes, and actions. As you read our Together in Deed passage this week, discuss what it means and how we can apply it. Let's encourage each other to let God's Word shape our thoughts and actions.





# ***TOGETHER IN DEED:***

## **Choose a Practice**

- Memorize 2 Timothy 3:14-16.
- If you don't have a regular habit of engaging with Scripture, it can be overwhelming to know where to begin. Utilize the narrative readings in this booklet to help build a habit of reading Scripture if you haven't already done so.
- Touch-a-Truck is this coming weekend. Make a plan to invite a family with preschoolers who don't go to our church to join you for this event (the 19th at 4 PM).

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## ***TOGETHER IN WORD:*** **Habakkuk 3:17-19**

Habakkuk prophesied in Jerusalem some 140 years before Ezra arrived with exiles from Babylon. Habakkuk prophesied about the impending Babylonian invasion of Judah and the conquering of Jerusalem. However, in the midst of the challenging message of judgment, he shared incredible insights of faith that still resonate with us today. One of those insights is found in our text for this week. Habakkuk declares the depth of his faith when he testifies that he will find joy in his relationship with God in spite of his circumstances. What a message!

As you reflect on your journey this week, how joyful are you? Where do you find your joy today? Look beyond your circumstances and discover true joy in the life offered to you by your Lord and Savior!

### **Parent Spotlight**

Parents, this is a good week to discuss joy. Even though things around us may seem difficult, we can find true joy by looking beyond our circumstances and trusting in God. Habakkuk reminds us that life may not always go as planned. Sometimes, we might feel like everything is going wrong. But Habakkuk shows us that even in those times, we can still find joy by remembering that God is our strength and our Savior. Consider reading Habakkuk 3:17-19 with your family from a version of the Bible they can understand.

This week, have each family member write down three things you are grateful for. Then, share them with each other. This exercise helps us shift our focus from what's going wrong to what's good in our lives. Remember, true joy doesn't come from our circumstances but from our relationship with God. Let's strive to keep our hearts and minds focused on Him, finding joy in His unchanging love and strength.

# ***TOGETHER IN DEED:***

## **Choose a Practice**

- Pray Romans 15:13 over our church this week: “May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing so that you may abound in the power of the Holy Spirit.”
- The joy we find in Jesus should cause a natural overflow in our lives that drives us to sharing Jesus with others – this week, let your joy shine through and give you the courage to have a conversation with someone you know about Jesus.
- Halloween is coming soon, and is a great opportunity to connect with neighbors and show the love of God to families who are out and about that evening. Make a plan to have a front yard party on Halloween so you can meet and chat with people, and consider inviting them to church!

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## *TOGETHER IN WORD:*

### **1 Corinthians 15:58**

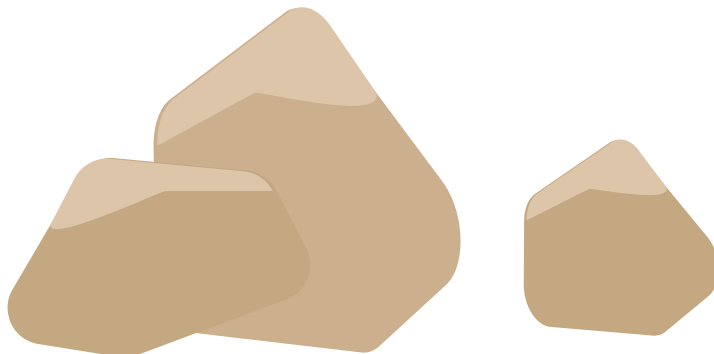
The quality of endurance remains an admirable trait today. The Apostle Paul challenged the Corinthian Christians to demonstrate a resilient faith in their service to Christ. Nehemiah exhibited this quality in his leadership in Jerusalem some 500 years earlier.

As we contemplate this text this week – and reflect on the stories of Ezra and Nehemiah, perhaps this is a week to re-commit ourselves to remaining steadfast in our faith. How resilient are you? How determined are you to continue to be faithful as God leads you into a new future?

### **Parent Spotlight**

Parents, this is a good week to help your child understand that faith is a marathon, not a sprint. In our faith journey, we often face challenges that can test our commitment to God. 1 Corinthians 15:58 encourages us to be steadfast and immovable and dedicate ourselves to the Lord's work. This verse reminds us that our efforts in serving God are meaningful and will bear fruit. Take time this week to draw a tree, and on the leaves, write ways you can stand firm and serve God as a family. Each leaf can represent a different aspect of your faith journey, like prayer, reading the Bible, helping others, etc.

Remember, our journey with the Lord is not in vain. Every step of faith, every act of love, and every moment of service is valuable and has a purpose in God's plan. Let's encourage one another to stay resilient in our commitment to God and His work.



# ***TOGETHER IN DEED:***

## **Choose a Practice**

- The labor God has called us to is to represent the Good News of the Kingdom of God to the world. As the political season builds to a fever pitch, how can you live into the true work that God has called you to, and because of it become steadfast and immovable?
- Memorize 1 Corinthians 15:58.
- Are you taking kids trick-or-treating this week? Consider joining other families from church, and invite some families who don't go to our church. Work on building relationships, and sharing the love of Jesus with the people you're trick-or-treating with.

## ***REFLECT:***

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# MIDWEEK

[FBCA.ORG/MIDWEEK](http://FBCA.ORG/MIDWEEK) FOR MORE INFO

A PLACE FOR EVERYONE TO GROW & LEARN  
EMOTIONALLY, PHYSICALLY & SPIRITUALLY

**EVERY WEDNESDAY THROUGH NOVEMBER 20**

## UPCOMING EVENTS

SEPT  
08

Grandparents Day!

SEPT  
28

All Church Prayer Breakfast

OCT  
11

Stovall Park Family Picnic Night | 5:30pm

OCT  
19

Touch A Truck | 4pm

NOV

Missions Month: Together For The People

NOV  
03

Worship & Prayer Night | 5pm

NOV  
22-24

Youth Man Camp & Dwell Weekend

DEC  
01

Advent Begins: Together In the Light

DEC  
08

Advent Worship Program | 5pm

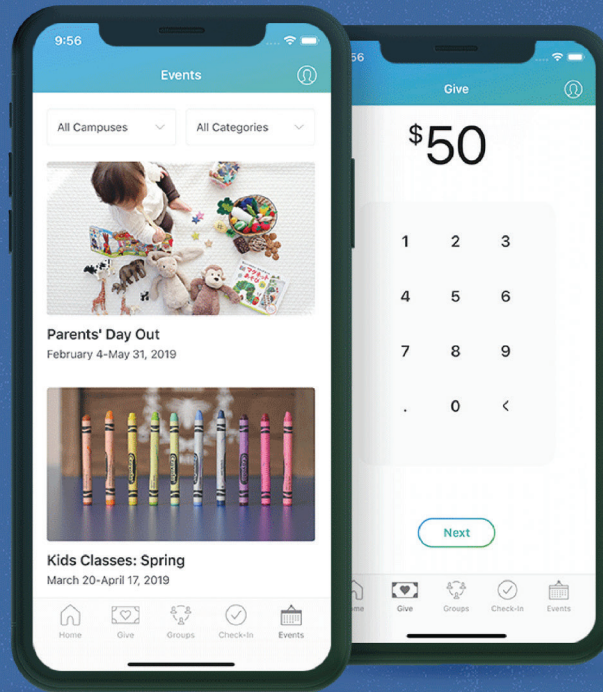
DEC  
15

Christmas ADVENTure | 4pm

DEC  
24

Christmas Eve Services

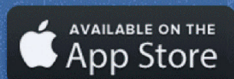
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