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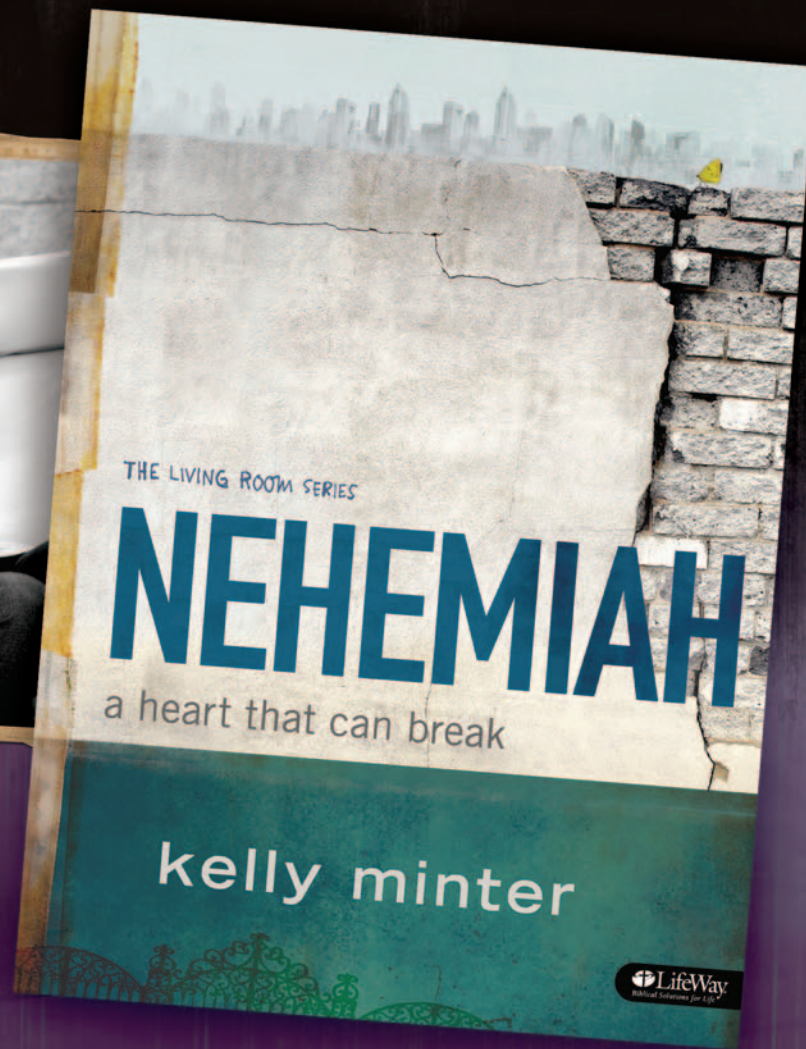
THE LIVING ROOM SERIES

NEHEMIAH

a heart that can break

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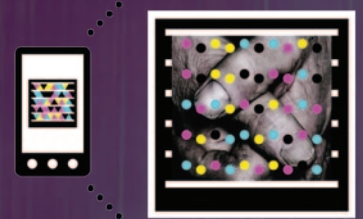
BE THE HANDS & FEET OF JESUS WITH NEHEMIAH NEW FROM KELLY MINTER!

Nehemiah's heart was so broken for those in need that he left the comfort of his Persian palace to help them. Like Kelly's other studies in the Living Room Series, you'll find authentic Bible teaching, recipes, and a relational approach. But this third study also includes seven 20-minute video sessions with short interviews and real-life ways to put action to your faith. *Nehemiah* will position your heart to let God break it for a hurting, lost world and move you in compassion to be the hands and feet of Jesus.

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MEET THE AUTHOR KELLY MINTER

**KELLY MINTER IS AN AUTHOR,
SPEAKER, SONGWRITER, AND SINGER.**

SHE IS PASSIONATE ABOUT WOMEN DISCOVERING CHRIST THROUGH THE PAGES OF SCRIPTURE. SO WHETHER IT'S THROUGH A SONG, BIBLE STUDY, OR SPOKEN WORD, KELLY'S DESIRE IS TO AUTHENTICALLY EXPRESS CHRIST TO THE WOMEN OF THIS GENERATION. IN A CULTURE WHERE SO MANY ARE HURTING AND BROKEN, SHE LOVES TO SHARE ABOUT THE HEALING AND STRENGTH OF CHRIST THROUGH THE BIBLE'S TRUTH.

Her first Bible study, *No Other Gods*, which helps women unveil the false gods in their lives for the ultimate purpose of discovering freedom in the one, true God, is the first installment of *The Living Room Series*. *Ruth: Loss, Love & Legacy* focuses on the inspiring story of Ruth presented in the same *Living Room Series* format (studies can be done in any order).

Kelly writes extensively and speaks and leads worship at women's conferences, retreats, and events. She recorded *Loss, Love & Legacy* to complement *Ruth*. She also has a worship record entitled *Finer Day*. To view more of Kelly's music projects, books, studies, and calendar, visit www.kellyminter.com.



SESSION 1 WHAT MAKES YOU WEEP?

I WAS SOMEWHERE IN THE AMAZON RAINFOREST WHEN OUR JUNGLE GUIDE MILTON STRUCK HIS MACHETE AGAINST THE THICK TRUNK OF AN INNOCENT TREE, CAUSING IT TO BLEED A MILKY LIQUID ONLY HE COULD HAVE ANTICIPATED. LIKE A SAGE DETECTIVE MILTON KNEW WHAT HE WAS LOOKING FOR, A PARTICULAR TREE THAT PRODUCES A WHITE MEDICINAL SUBSTANCE THAT SETTLES UPSET STOMACHS. THIS WAS GOOD TO KNOW IN THE EVENT I EVER MISPLACED MY TUMS IN THE JUNGLE—I COULD NOW FALL BACK ON THIS TREE AND A MACHETE, WHICH I FOUND MINIMALLY COMFORTING.

A few steps beyond the medicine tree Milton spotted what looked like a gargantuan coconut shell. But lest you think about cracking one of these open, let me save you the trouble by letting you know it was home to approximately 42 zillion ants. Our other jungle guide Tiago tapped on this "coconut," a minor disturbance in our minds but for these miniature creatures, the equivalent of a 7.2 earthquake on the ant Richter scale. Like candy falling from a pinata, tiny ants rained all over his body. Wasting no time he smothered them onto his head, face, and arms, as if he were lathering on sunscreen. He explained that this created a natural insect repellent while neutralizing his body's scent, which is a good idea when hunting. You'd hate to have one of those panthers sniff you out—the one that woke up thinking how good a Tiago wrap would be for lunch.

Beyond the heap of ants was the impressive walking tree. As other trees around it cast their shade, the walking tree grows new roots or "legs" on the side in the direction of the sunlight. Meanwhile the legs left in the shade dry up, thus it walks around. Before you get too excited, this is not the kind of tree you'd ask to be your walking buddy because it only moves a few feet a year, and this pace has not been scientifically proven to burn calories. But give it time—the "Walking Tree Diet" could eventually catch on.

Past the walking tree we saw animal prints, bugs brand new to my eye, florescent birds, nuts, you name it. In fact, the Amazon is the place where I held my first unprocessed cashew nut. I know now why they cost so much—why when the outside packaging boasts of mixed nuts, the container's

inventory is made up of approximately 87 percent peanuts, 6 percent walnuts, 5 percent Brazilian nuts, and two cashews that are the first to go like the prize out of a Cracker Jacks box. While still on the tree, the cashew is attached to a pear-sized fruit and is technically a seed encased in a hard shell that is toxic and will make your mouth break out in sores. See, this is why God stuffed the cashew with so many calories and then stored it in a sheath of poison, so we would pace ourselves.

After a few mouth blisters you may decide you're only in the mood for one cashew, which is a good thing because more than three will make you fat. Then of course we, in all our brilliance, came up with processing machines and roasting techniques that now allow us to bypass the toxic shell as we reach into a tin can and pop cashews at 9 calories apiece, doing nothing but having cracked a lid. Ah, the genius of westernization.

Each time I visit the Amazon, I explore whatever our jungle guides point out to us, knowing full well we are only scratching the surface of the treasure the rainforest has to offer. As we work our way through a book like Nehemiah we will similarly see wondrous things, but we won't see it all. As Milton and Tiago highlighted what we needed to know about the Amazon, so I will tug on the threads in Nehemiah I find especially significant. My goal is not to uncover every word but to follow missional themes about service, kingdom work, tender hearts, prayer, love of the poor, the sacredness of Scripture, and others God has been stirring in my heart over the past few years. These themes run straight into our daily commission as New Testament believers.

WHILE STANDING WITH MY CASHEW ON THE EDGE OF A PRECIPICE OVERLOOKING THE RIO NEGRO, I HAD A MOMENT WITH GOD IN THE MIDST OF HIS CREATION.

In our processed, technologically spun world sometimes we can get so far removed from the origin of things—and this goes for even our spiritual diets. As we spend focused time with the Lord in the Book of Nehemiah, my prayer is that we will hear His voice and see His path for our lives with finer clarity. I know we all have more to do than we can fit in daylight's hours, but try not to rush. Sit with Him long enough for the treasures of His Word to emerge like rainforest creatures sneaking out of their protective logs or leaping from their nests in plain enough view for you to be in awe of their splendor. I would tell you to grab your machete and a handful of ants, but I am thinking your Bible and a pen will do. So many surprises are waiting.

VIDEO 1

*The time line
Kelly references
is on page 13.*

NOTES:

How does Nehemiah's compassionate heart stir your own heart to love and service?

How did it affect you to learn that Nehemiah heard about the Jews' suffering while living in a Persian Resort?

What about Gloria's interview struck you the most? How did she inspire, challenge, encourage you?

Video sessions are available for download at www.lifeway.com/women

DAY 01

A HEART THAT CAN BREAK

Whenever we begin studying a new book of the Bible, especially an historical one like Nehemiah, we need to get an understanding of the landscape. What was the cultural climate? What was going on in the world at the time? Were the people at war or at peace? How did they like their eggs? As we settle into the Book of Nehemiah we'll consider the setting of Jerusalem and the history of the Jews, making our journey through this book all the more meaningful. Read Nehemiah 1:1-4.

A Sketch of Jerusalem: To understand the significance of Jerusalem's broken-down walls, we must know the significance of Jerusalem itself. The first mention of Jerusalem (Salem) appears in Genesis 14:17-20 where we meet Melchizedek, the priest of Salem. Approximately 30 years later, God told Abraham to offer his son Isaac as an offering on Mount Moriah (see Gen. 22). Abraham's offering foreshadowed what would one day happen on the same mountain, where God would offer up His own Son, Jesus Christ. Several hundred years after Abraham's offering, King David conquered Jerusalem, driving out the Jebusites. Already, we can see the significance of Jerusalem mounting.

Read 1 Chronicles 11:4-9. What two other names did King David give Jerusalem in verses 5 and 7? "Z _____" and "the _____ of _____"

In 1 Chronicles 15:1-16, David brought the ark of God into Jerusalem. Since the ark represented the place of God's dwelling, this event marked another significant milestone in Jerusalem's history. After bringing the ark to Jerusalem, David had a heart to build a more permanent dwelling place for the Name of the Lord (see 1 Chron. 22:6-10).

Though David's desire pleased God, it was His will that David's son Solomon be the one to build the temple. After Solomon's death, Israel was divided into two parts: Israel became the Northern part of the Kingdom and Judah became the Southern Kingdom—Jerusalem was the capitol city of Judah. A succession of 20 kings ruled Judah from 979–586 B.C., many of whom were evil and disobedient. In 586 B.C. the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar conquered Jerusalem and forever marred its history.

Read 2 Chronicles 36:15-23. What did Nebuchadnezzar do to the city of Jerusalem?

What did he do with the people living there?

The people lived in exile until what other kingdom came into power (see v. 20)?

Approximately 70 years after the Jews were carried into captivity, King Cyrus of Persia conquered Babylon. He granted the Jews freedom to return to their homeland and rebuild their temple (see Ezra 2:1). Approximately 71 years after the exiles returned, Nehemiah heard of Jerusalem's tragic condition. This brings us up to where we left off in Nehemiah 1:1-4. See the time line in the margin.

So many fascinating elements reside in God's authoring of Jerusalem, and He's still writing its story. It's a story that covers not only a physical Jerusalem but also the Jerusalem from above. We'll look more closely at this in days to come, but for now take another look at Nehemiah 1:1-2.

How did Nehemiah learn the condition of Jerusalem?

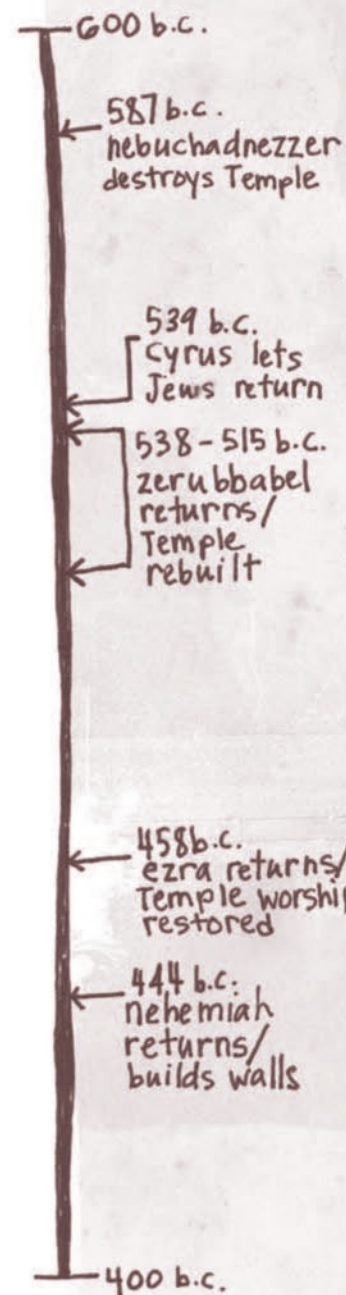
- He received a letter from Jerusalem's king.
- He asked his visiting brother Hanani.
- A messenger delivered the information.

We're not even two verses in, and I'm immediately hit with a distinctive quality about Nehemiah: He wanted to know. Sometimes I shield myself from finding out what's really going on with people for fear I'll be held responsible. Because with information often comes responsibility; if we know, we might be required to *do* something.

We'll get to this later, but note that Nehemiah was a Jew, born in Persia during the exile, meaning he had relatives in Jerusalem. Though the suffering of the Jews would have naturally been of some concern to him, technically this was not his problem. He didn't live there.

Reread Nehemiah 1:3-4. What did Nehemiah do in response to the news about Jerusalem?

PERSONAL TAKE: What does his response tell you about his heart?





Nehemiah had to have a heart that could break to restore a wall that was broken. Over the years many have pegged Nehemiah as a phenomenally skilled leader because of what he accomplished in Jerusalem. I agree with this assessment, but sometimes I wonder if Nehemiah was a great leader because of his skills or because he had a God-inspired heart that couldn't bear the thought of letting his fellow Jews suffer—a heart that had no choice but to *do something!*

Many naturally gifted leaders exist, but those who lead out of a sheer necessity have a zeal that can't be quenched. So often we exalt the most skilled, the strongest leaders, the deeply resourced and connected. But we can't underestimate the power that pours forth from a broken heart. Think of what has been accomplished over the years by ordinary people simply because they were moved over the hurting, the poor, the outsider, the sick. Think of the world-impacting organizations that have been started by leaders with little education, mediocre communication skills, or zero dollars. Sometimes the most accomplished people aren't the ones with the most ability but with the most breakable hearts.

III

GROUP DISCUSSION:
Write your thoughts about one of the following:

1. Describe a time when you didn't want to know something because you didn't want to be responsible to carry another burden.
2. Describe a time when you opened yourself up to the struggle of someone else and how this affected you.

I wrote in my journal, "Perhaps many could have done the work of Nehemiah, but his heart was tender enough to break. Maybe no one else cared that much." Most of us have hearts that can break for matters personally affecting us, but how many of our hearts break over the suffering of others? If I see anything in today's study, it's that Nehemiah had a heart that could break for others. End today by praying that God will give you compassion in the areas where your heart may be a little cold or numb, that He would develop in you the heart Jesus has for others. It's what I'm praying for myself. Lord, keep breaking our hearts!

| <i>What breaks your heart?</i> | <i>Where could you be more tender?</i> |
|--------------------------------|--|
| | |

DAY 02

THE FIRST PLACE YOU TURN

A couple of years ago I started praying one morning a week with some of my dearest friends because I figured that doing prayer is probably the best way to get better at it. Since I've never found prayer to be the easiest or most natural part of my Christian life, I love when I get the chance to be around a true pray-ER.

I talked with one of these enviable souls while strolling the English city of Lewis on a break from a worship conference where I was speaking. Karin is now my dear friend from Sweden, but at the time I was just getting to know her as we walked the steep roads of Lewis. I'll never forget when Karin casually mentioned that she prays for an hour every morning as part of her regular routine.

"Oh yeah, me too" was what I wanted to come tumbling out of my mouth as I cradled my latte, except this would have been what the Brits call a falsehood. Since that afternoon, I've asked Karin a lot of questions about prayer while spending time praying with her, because I'm really moved by this kind of intimacy with Jesus.

If the thought of an hour of prayer a day makes you cave with guilt, the idea is not to seek a magical time frame but the fellowship, closeness, and power that comes along with an ever-deeper prayer life. For the next two days we're going to study Nehemiah's prayer as recorded in 1:5-11. These verses serve as a summary of the substance of the prayers he prayed "day and night" (v. 6) for several months. They express the content and themes of his petitions, which often drew from passages in Deuteronomy that had become well-known liturgical prayers of his day. Still, Nehemiah interspersed personal pleas that are not found elsewhere, so we see that while he leaned on Israel's liturgical traditions, he was free to petition God about his specific circumstances.¹

Ask the Holy Spirit to reveal His Word to you today and read Nehemiah 1:5-11. Write anything that stands out to you.

Oswald Chambers has been credited with saying, "Too often we treat prayer as the preparation for the work of the church. Do you not see? Prayer is the work of the church."²

If we can absorb this quote into our thinking it will radically change the way we view prayer. Notice that when Nehemiah heard about Jerusalem's tragic state he didn't call a meeting, gather his smartest friends together for a think tank, or take a poll about what should be done. Though these may have been valuable options for later, the first thing he did was pray. I think he knew that prayer was just as much a part of the work as any physical action he might one day take. 📌

Is your knee-jerk reaction to cry out to the One who is all-powerful, who is merciful, and who deeply loves you? Or do you turn to your own resources, closest friends, most powerful relationships? Do you shy away from prayer because of a lack of trust or intimacy with God? Do you feel safer keeping things in your own hands and under your own control? Take time to consider these areas of unbelief, and ask God to work out in you a greater trust in Him.

When you look closely at Nehemiah's prayer, it's clear he gained his reference point from Scripture. I find this reliance on God's Word impactful because it shows how valuable a working knowledge of the Bible is to our prayers. Nehemiah petitioned God based on what had been revealed about Him in the Old Testament. We are free to do the same—only with a much bigger Bible from which to pull.

PERSONAL TAKE: In what ways does your knowledge of the Bible play a part in your prayers? How can you strengthen this?

For the rest of today's study, we'll focus on the names and attributes by which Nehemiah addressed God, reminding us that the way we approach Him is as important as what we ask of Him.

Nehemiah opened his prayer with the divine name:

- LORD (Yahweh)
- Jesus
- Father
- El Roi

When you see LORD in all caps, it's the personal name God gave Himself in relation to His chosen people Israel, a name based on love and familiarity. It's the name Yahweh.

GOD OF HEAVEN: After Nehemiah opened his prayer with this personal name, he then addressed Him as the "God of heaven" (v. 5). The distinction of our Father reigning in heaven versus only on earth may seem obvious, but we must remind ourselves that we do not serve a human king with feet of clay, bound by the limitations of flesh and sin. He lives outside of time, beyond our limited strength, and holds all things in His hands. Yes, He invites us to invoke Him on a personal level as Yahweh, but simultaneously He remains the God of all heaven. Think of Jesus's words in Matthew 6:10, "Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven."

GREAT AND AWESOME GOD: Nehemiah attributed the word "awesome" to the Lord (1:5, NIV). The Holman Christian Standard Bible translates it as "awe-inspiring."

In the margin describe the last time you were awestruck by God.

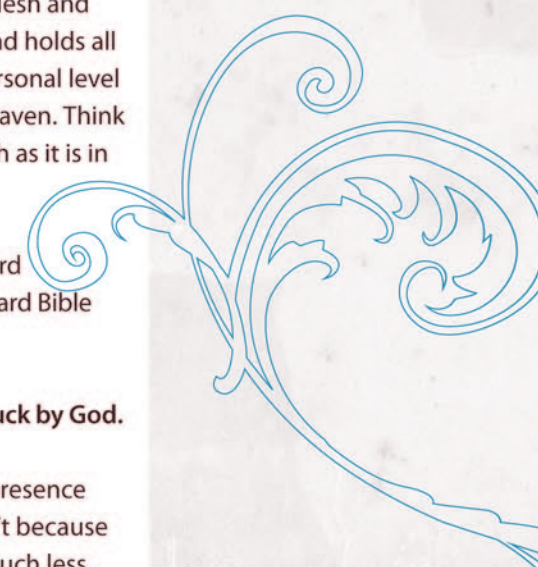
I'll be the first to admit that I long to be *awestruck* in God's presence more than I am. I believe my lack of awestruck moments isn't because God is lacking in awesomeness but because I settle for so much less. I'm willing for my worship experience to be mediocre as long as I'm eating at a fabulous restaurant with friends after church. I'll settle for far less than awestruck in my prayer time, assuming I've got other forms of community planned for the day. When our bills are being paid, our children are behaving, we've got multiple outlets of fun to plug into, and life is generally fulfilling, do we really need something as dramatic as awestruck? This can often be the mentality, but being entertained by earthly pleasures cannot compare to being awed in God's presence. My prayer is that you and I won't settle for substitutes, because we all need to be regularly astounded by His majesty if we are to truly know Him and testify to others about who He is.

The following verses have this same word *awesome* in them. Identify what God's awesomeness is attached to in each.

Genesis 28:16-17
Exodus 15:11
Psalm 65:5
Psalm 99:3

+
PERSONAL REFLECTION:
When faced with a difficult situation, to whom or what do you normally turn first?

///
GROUP DISCUSSION:
What gets in the way of your turning to God first? Feel free to discuss external as well as internal obstacles, such as lack of trust, fear, lack of intimacy, and so forth.



THROUGH LOVE AND FAITHFULNESS SIN IS ATONED FOR; THROUGH THE FEAR OF THE LORD A MAN AVOIDS EVIL. PROVERBS 16:6, NIV

HESED: Consider one more aspect of Nehemiah's prayer in 1:5.

Fill in the blanks: "O LORD, God of heaven, the great and awesome God, who keeps his _____ of _____ with those who love him and obey his commands" (NIV).

Bible translations differ slightly here, but the Hebrew word for God's covenant of love is *hesed*, which means, "unfailing love, loyal love, devotion, kindness, often based on a prior relationship, especially a *covenant relationship*" (emphasis added).³ The word *hesed* is often translated in our Bibles as "love" or "kindness" because we don't have an English word that accurately expresses it. One of the best ways to understand the meaning of *hesed* is to pull out a concordance and look up its usages in various places. After seeing it used in different lights, your understanding of its meaning will begin to take shape. Read the verses below, noting that anytime you see the word "love" in the following passages, the translation is *hesed*.

Read Psalm 31:21-22. According to the psalmist, in what kinds of circumstances can we experience God's *hesed*?

What tangible benefits of God's *hesed* appear in Psalm 40:11; 119:76?

True / False: *Hesed* atones for sin (see Prov. 16:6 in margin).

According to Isaiah 54:10, *hesed* is:

- conditional predictable
 unshakable fickle

You may have wondered, *if God's hesed is so unconditional and free why does He keep it "with those who love Him and keep His commands?"* (Neh. 1:5). The idea is not that God's *hesed* for us is conditional but that His love compels us to love Him back with affection and obedience. It's a gracious circle that begins and ends with God, enabling us to love Him in return, a love that doesn't allow us to live cheaply but fully! A bit of a mystery perhaps, but one worth embracing.

Write below the four highlighted names and attributes of God we discussed today. I'll fill in the first one:

1. LORD (*Yahweh*)
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.

PERSONAL REFLECTION: In closing, which of these four is the most meaningful to you right now, and why? After recording your thoughts end with a prayer of thanksgiving.

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READY TO BE THE HANDS & FEET OF JESUS?

Making meals with your small group is a great way to connect. Whip up a few recipes and serve together in your community. Take baked goods to new church members, offer meals to new moms, or take dinner to shut-ins. Want more recipe cards? Find them (as well as invite cards, a customizable poster & bulletin insert, and more) online.

1. Go to lifeway.com/kellyminter
2. Click on the Nehemiah study
3. Click on "Support Materials"
4. Download, customize, and print as many as you like.

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BILLY'S BANANA PUDDING

SERVES 8

- 3/4 cup sugar, divided
- 2 tablespoons all-purpose flour
- 6 medium-sized ripe bananas, sliced
- 1/4 teaspoon salt
- 2 cups milk (whole milk works best but I have used skim)
- 4 eggs, separated
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract
- vanilla wafers

DIRECTIONS: Combine 1/2 cup of sugar, flour, and salt in top of double boiler; gradually stir in milk. Cook over boiling water, stirring constantly, until it thickens. Cook, uncovered, 15 minutes more, stirring occasionally. Remove from heat. Beat egg yolks; gradually stir into hot mixture. Return to double boiler; cook 5 minutes more, stirring constantly. Remove from heat; add vanilla (this is your custard). Line bottom of a 1 1/2 quart casserole with vanilla wafers; top with sliced bananas then custard. Beat egg whites stiff gradually adding in 1/4 cup sugar. Pile on top of pudding. Put under broiler and let it brown.

If you're a banana pudding fan, this one might become your new standard. Everything's from scratch except the vanilla wafers, which we may never get away from.

SOUTHWEST CHICKEN SOUP

SERVES 4 (EASILY DOUBLES)

- 1 (12 oz.) can salsa verde (you can get in the grocery store or from a Mexican restaurant)
- 3 cups cooked chicken
- 1 (15 oz.) can cannellini beans, drained
- 3 cups chicken broth
- 2 green onions chopped
- 1/2 package frozen corn
- 1 teaspoon ground cumin (more or less to taste)
- 1 teaspoon chili powder (more or less to taste)
- sour cream
- torilla chips

DIRECTIONS: Empty salsa verde into large saucepan. Cook 2 minutes over medium-high heat. Then add chicken, beans, broth, cumin, corn, and chili powder. Bring to a boil; lower heat to simmer and cook 10 minutes, stirring occasionally. Top each bowl with onions, sour cream, and chips. Use more broth for souper mixture.

like to buy a whole chicken from the farmers' market, boil it, and make my own chicken broth for this soup. If you don't have that much time, buying a rotisserie chicken works well for the 3 cups of cooked chicken needed.

This has become a standby for me. You will love this! (Note the exclamation point at the end of that sentence.)

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