

Sounds 2024 Week 14

Introduction / Context

- **538 BC** — Cyrus's decree; **first return** begins (Ezra 1).
- **536 BC** — Altar rebuilt; **Temple foundation** laid (Ezra 3).
- **520–516 BC** — **Haggai/Zechariah** preach; **Darius I** orders support; **Temple finished** (Ezra 5–6).
- **458 BC** — **Ezra** arrives (7th year of **Artaxerxes I**) to **teach the Law** and lead reforms (Ezra 7–10).
- **445 BC** — **Nehemiah** arrives (20th year of Artaxerxes) to **rebuild the walls** (Neh 1–6).
- **c. 460–430 BC** — **Malachi** prophesies **after the Temple** is rebuilt and likely **during/around Nehemiah's era**

The Favor of God

Ezra

Ezra 7:6

6 this Ezra came up from Babylon. He was a teacher well versed in the Law of Moses, which the Lord, the God of Israel, had given. The king had granted him everything he asked, **for the hand of the Lord his God was on him.**

Ezra 7:9–10

9 He had begun his journey from Babylon on the first day of the first month, and he arrived in Jerusalem on the first day of the fifth month, **for the gracious hand of his God was on him.** **10** For Ezra had devoted himself to the study and observance of the Law of the Lord, and to teaching its decrees and laws in Israel.

God's **favor** doesn't fall at random.

Ezra's repeated experience of God's hand is **predicated on posture**: he *set his heart* to **study** God's Word, **practice** it, and **teach** it.

Ezra 7:27–28

27 Praise be to the Lord, the God of our ancestors, who has put it into the king's heart to bring honor to the house of the Lord in Jerusalem in this way **28** and **who has extended his good favor to me** before the king and his advisers and all the king's powerful officials. Because **the hand of the Lord my God was on me,** I took courage and gathered leaders from Israel to go up with me.

Ezra 8:18

18 Because **the gracious hand of our God was on us,** they brought us Sherebiah, a capable man, from the descendants of Mahli son of Levi, the son of Israel, and Sherebiah's sons and brothers, **18** in all;

Favor doesn't replace diligence; ***it energizes it.***

The gracious hand of our God is on everyone who looks to Him, but His great anger is against all who forsake Him" (Ezra 8:22).

Ezra 8:31

31 On the twelfth day of the first month we set out from the Ahava Canal to go to Jerusalem. **The hand of our God was on us,** and he protected us from enemies and bandits along the way.

So how do we posture for God's favor today?

Here's what Ezra shows us:

1. **Devotion to the Word:** adopt Ezra's pattern—**study** → **practice** → **teach**. Read with intent to obey; share what you live.
2. **Humility before God:** practice rhythms of fasting and prayer that declare dependence.
3. **Commitment to God's work:** notice gaps and step in. Favor fuels courage to lead and to give.

Nehemiah

Faith isn't fearlessness, it's **obedience in fear**.

Nehemiah 2:8b

Because the gracious hand of my God was on me, the king granted my requests

Nehemiah 2:18

18 I also told them about the gracious hand of my God on me and what the king had said to me. They replied, "Let us start rebuilding." So they began this good work.

Ephesians 4:15—16

15 Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ. **16** From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.

Nehemiah 3:5

5 The next section was repaired by the men of Tekoa, but their nobles would not put their shoulders to the work under their supervisors.

How do we walk in favor under fire?

1. **Favor fuels initiative, not passivity.** Pray hard, plan well, **ask boldly**.
2. **Opposition is not a sign of curse.** Sometimes it's proof you're building what matters.
3. **Watch and work.** Spiritual people **pray** and **post a guard**; trust does not cancel tactics.
4. **Participate, don't spectate.** Everyone has a section; don't be a Nehemiah 3:5 noble.

"The gracious hand of our God is on us."

Nehemiah 5:6–7

6 When I heard their outcry and these charges, I was very angry. **7** I pondered them in my mind and then accused the nobles and officials. I told them, "You are charging your own people interest!" So I called together a large meeting to deal with them

Nehemiah 5:12

12 "We will give it back," they said. "And we will not demand anything more from them. We will do as you say." Then I summoned the priests and made the nobles and officials take an oath to do what they had promised.

1 Timothy 6:17—19

17 Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. **18** Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and

willing to share. **19** In this way they will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of the life that is truly life.

“Remember me with favor, my God, for all I have done for these people.” (Nehemiah 5:19)

Nehemiah 6:3

3 so I sent messengers to them with this reply: “I am carrying on a great project and cannot go down. Why should the work stop while I leave it and go down to you?”

Nehemiah 6:8—9

8 I sent him this reply: “Nothing like what you are saying is happening; you are just making it up out of your head.”

9 They were all trying to frighten us, thinking, “Their hands will get too weak for the work, and it will not be completed.”

Important principle here:

Some meetings you **do not** take. If access only multiplies **chaos, gossip, and harm**, wisdom says: **keep building**. Let **fruit**, not **fighting**, answer slander.

Nehemiah 6:15

15 So the wall was completed on the twenty-fifth of Elul, in fifty-two days.

16 When all our enemies heard about this, all the surrounding nations were afraid and lost their self-confidence, because they realized that this work had been done **with the help of our God**.

***Out of reverence for God, we will not act like that.
We will give back, build up, and carry our section of the wall.***

Nehemiah 5:15—16

15 But the earlier governors—those preceding me—placed a heavy burden on the people and took forty shekels of silver from them in addition to food and wine. Their assistants also lorded it over the people. But **out of reverence for God I did not act like that**. **16** Instead, **I devoted myself to the work on this wall**. All my men were assembled there for the work; we did not acquire any land.

Nehemiah 8:8

8 They read from the Book of the Law of God, making it clear and giving the meaning so that the people understood what was being read.

Romans 3:20

“through the law **we become conscious of our sin**.”

Nehemiah 8:17

17 The whole company that had returned from exile built temporary shelters and lived in them. From the days of Joshua son of Nun until that day, the Israelites had not celebrated it like this. And their joy was very great.

In view of all this, **we are making a binding agreement**, putting it in writing..." (9:38)
marriage holiness (10:30), **Sabbath integrity** (10:31), **house of God support**—offerings, firstfruits, tithes (10:32–38)—and the banner line:
"We will **not neglect the house of our God.**" (Nehemiah 10:39)

Malachi

- Worship that Honors vs. Worship that Insults

Cursed is the cheat who has an acceptable male but vows a blemished one (Malachi 1:14).

Favor follows first and best; curse follows cheap and contemptuous.

Robbing God vs. Resourcing His House

Malachi 3:7–10

7 Ever since the time of your ancestors you have turned away from my decrees and have not kept them. Return to me, and I will return to you," says the Lord Almighty.

"But you ask, 'How are we to return?'

8 "Will a mere mortal rob God? Yet you rob me.

"But you ask, 'How are we robbing you?'

"In tithes and offerings. **9** You are under a curse—your whole nation—because you are robbing me.

10 Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this," says the Lord Almighty, "and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that there will not be room enough to store it.

- Two groups, Two Outcomes

God's favor rests where His people **honor His name** with **first-and-best worship** and **storehouse generosity**. His curse (discipline) lands where worship is **burdensome**, leadership **compromised**, and resources **withheld**.

Closing Announcement:

Commitment Weekend call. This Sunday, we answer Malachi's invitation in two concrete ways:

- **Worship:** bring God your **first and best**, not leftovers.
- **Generosity:** "Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse," so there is **food in His house**—ministry funded, mission advanced, mercy supplied.

We are not buying favor; we are **returning** to it. As we turn in our commitment cards, we are writing our own "scroll of remembrance": a people who **fear His name**, honor His house, and trust His promise to **pour out** grace.