

Unwavering Resolve

The God-Centered Life

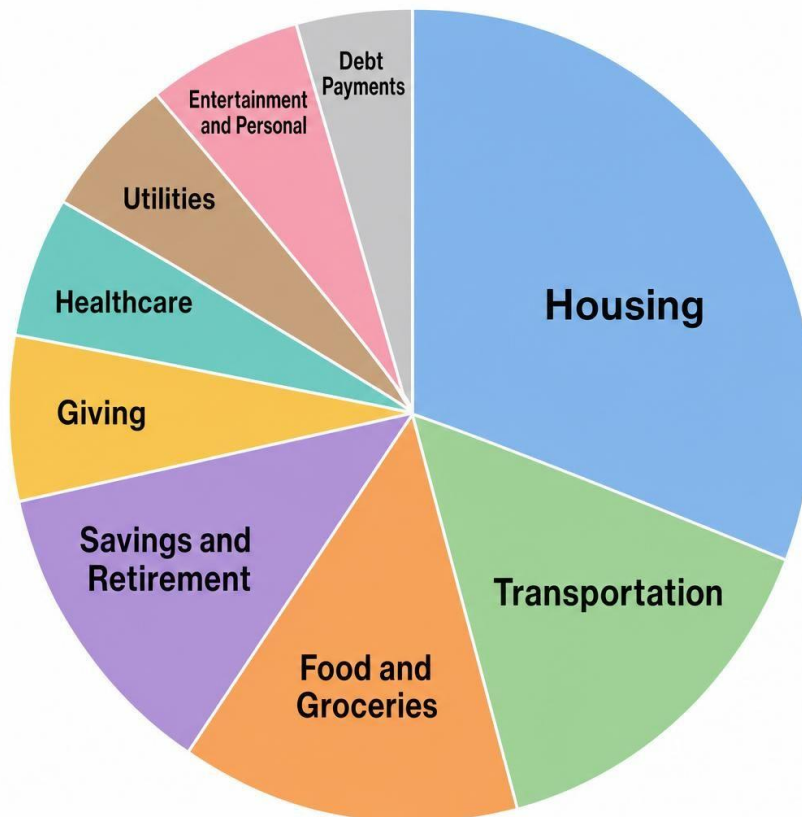
Nehemiah 10

July 19, 2026

Introduction

I was recalibrating our family budget this week in preparation for our school year rhythms, and to help me get an accessible, visual representation of our spending, I created a pie chart that looked something like this.

Now, this is not my actual pie chart. But this is a typical middle class family pie chart. **(SLIDE)**



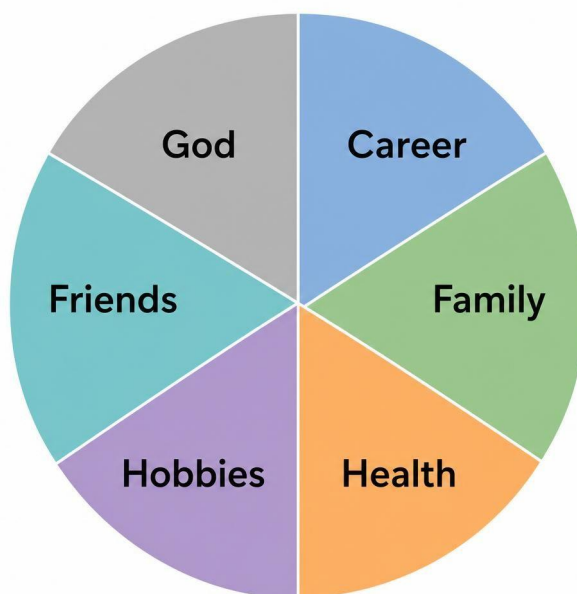
Hopefully you have a budget. Hopefully you have looked at your finances in this way because it does shed a good deal of light on what's important to you and where you might be spending in areas that are no longer necessary (among other things).

But there are some downsides to this pie chart view. I won't get into all of them, but here is the one that matters most for us this morning. **(SLIDE) A pie chart quietly assumes the pie**

belongs to you. You are the one drawing the lines and deciding the categories. But the reality is something different. We don't own the pie. God owns the pie.

Body

Even if you don't budget or look at your budget through a pie chart like this, I think it's fair to say that you carry around the picture of another kind of pie chart in your head, even if you never draw it. It looks something like this. **(SLIDE)**



It's got a slice for career. One for family. One for health and hobbies. One for friendships. And somewhere in there, usually not the biggest piece, a slice labeled GOD.

Many Christians live by that chart. God gets a slice. And like my budget, how much of a slice God gets fluctuates. Some weeks it is a healthy slice. Church on Sunday, a few minutes of prayer before bed, a decision here or there run through a filter of "what would God want." Other weeks the slice shrinks down to almost nothing and life goes on just fine without anyone noticing, because faith was never anything more than one piece among several.

This model feels balanced at first. We praise people for having "a good work life balance" and "healthy priorities," and God usually gets filed under one of those priorities, sitting next to exercise and family time as one more good thing a well-rounded person makes space for.

(TITLE SLIDE)

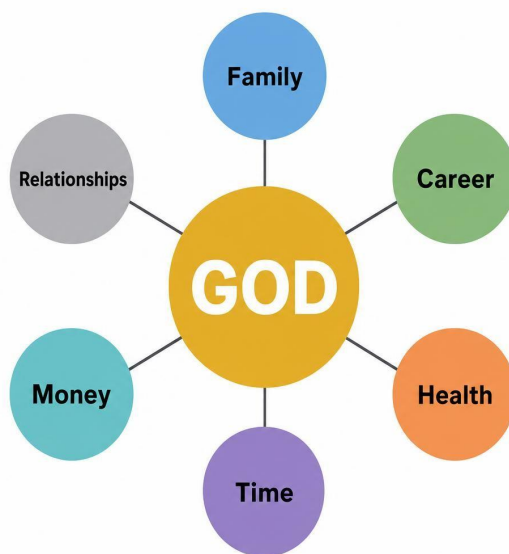
Here is the problem. We're talking about GOD here.

Not a vague spiritual concept. Not a comforting phrase we reach for at dinner prayers and hospital bedsides. The actual living God.

- **Isaiah saw God seated on his throne and melted like a marshmallow over a fireplace (Isa 6:5).**
- **Paul describes God as the one "who alone has immortality and dwells in unapproachable light, whom no one has seen or can see" (1 Tim 6:16).**
- **The writer of Hebrews calls God "a consuming fire" (Heb 12:29).**
- **And around his throne right now, the living creatures relentlessly proclaim that God is "Holy, holy, holy" (Rev 4:8).**

That is who we are talking about. Not a respectable option. Not a slice. The one being in all of existence too holy to look at directly, too consuming to approach carelessly, too holy to ever be filed away as an obligation. He has never asked to be considered alongside your career and your calendar as one respectable option among many.

Therefore, the chart for your life should look a lot more like this one. (SLIDE)



God is not a slice, but the center. The One in which all of the other aspects of our lives submit to.

This is unmistakably clear in our text today. The repentance that Eric preached about from Nehemiah 9 last week wasn't a generic, sentimental, "We'll do better from now on" kind of repentance. There are specific categories mentioned that, taken collectively, represent a people who put God at the center of all of their lives. And you can roll those categories up into two: **relationships and resources**. I want to walk through some of the details today, because I think they show us where we may have quietly let God be a slice in our pie rather than the center of our lives.

Relationships

The first category is our relationships. Look at the vow they make in v. 30. **(SLIDE)**

We will not give our daughters in marriage to the surrounding peoples and will not take their daughters as wives for our sons. (Nehemiah 10:30, CSB)

On the surface this can sound like nationalism or tribalism or even ethnocentrism, but neither of those things is true. This is about ALLEGIANCE. Marriage in the ancient world was always a religious act (still true for Christians today). When two people got married, their households merged not just their furniture and their checking accounts and their toothpaste, but also their gods. If an Israelite married into a family devoted to other gods, the pressure to blend worship, to let one more god ask for their allegiance, was constant.

Paul tells the single Corinthians something almost identical to what these Israelites vowed: do not be "yoked together with unbelievers" (2 Cor 6:14). Not because unbelievers are beneath us. Because two people yoked to pull in different directions will eventually stop, or one will drag the other off course.

This touches more than dating and marriage, though it certainly touches that. We all know what it feels like to let a relationship slowly reshape what we believe and how we live, without ever making a formal decision to change. We become like those we hang around. Those we love the most are the ones we submit to most often. They are the ones who influence us more than anyone else. So what the Jews were saying in this vow was that their closest relationships, starting with marriage, would only be with those whose first allegiance was God Almighty.

Illustration - More Spear Fishing

This week our church got a live example of exactly what I am describing. **(SLIDE - phone screenshot)** A message went out to dozens of people in our congregation, and it looked like it came from me. It used my name, referenced an "urgent and discreet request," and asked the person to text back right away. **Someone was counting on the fact that if a message appears to come from a person you know and trust, you will act on it before you examine it.**

Think about what almost worked there. The scammer **borrowed the weight of a relationship you already trust, and it asked you to act quickly, quietly, and without checking the claim against anything else you knew to be true.** Our closest relationships have the most influence, hence the vow here in Nehemiah 10.

Consider this question, church family **(SLIDE): Are my closest relationships with people submitting to Jesus?**

Resources

It's not just our relationships that must submit to God, but also our resources (time, money, and effort). Look at v. 31 with me as one example. (SLIDES)

When the surrounding peoples bring merchandise or any kind of grain to sell on the Sabbath day, we will not buy from them on the Sabbath or a holy day. We will also leave the land uncultivated in the seventh year and will cancel every debt. (Nehemiah 10:31, CSB)

And on it goes. And at the end of that list, there is this summary statement in v. 39. (SLIDE)

We will not neglect the house of our God. (Nehemiah 10:39b, CSB)

In total, the people vowed to dedicate their resources faithfully by honoring Sabbath rest, supporting the temple with regular giving to ensure that the church never lacked what it needed. They committed to managing their possessions, productivity, and provision so that worship of God would remain their highest priority. Every resource we have (time, money, effort) is a gift

Illustration – Drivewise by Allstate

(TITLE SLIDE) I shop for our home and car insurance every year in pursuit of savings, and 6 months ago we moved to a company that uses an app on all drivers' phones to track our driving habits. And the app keeps a log of every drive by every driver and provides a report, so I can see how many hard brakes someone's had, how often they exceed the speed limit, and so on. (It's been great for our marriage and my relationship with my adult children!).

The app exposes the gap between what we say about our driving and how we actually drive. That is what Nehemiah's vow does for a whole community. It forces an honest look at where the resources are really going rather than where we assume they are going.

(SLIDE) Consider this question, church family. ***Who actually owns your calendar, your bank account, your capacity to help someone with less than you?*** The Israelites' vow says God does, and their behavior with time, money, and generosity became the evidence.

Conclusion/Application

(TITLE SLIDE) Here is what I cannot get past when I read these vows. This was not a halfhearted people. They wept over God's Word in chapter 8. They confessed centuries of national failure in chapter 9. They put pen to paper and signed their names to a covenant that touched their marriages, their calendars, their land, their money, and their worship.

And in about a decade, it all came apart. When we get to Nehemiah 13, you're going to see mixed marriages back, Sabbath trading back, the Levites left unsupported and drifting back to

their farms because too few if any kept the promise. The same people, the same signatures, the same collapse that had always haunted Israel's history.

You see, a vow, however sincere, however specific, however costly, is never going to be strong enough to permanently keep God at the center of our lives. We need more than resolve. We need someone who could actually keep the law and the covenant we keep breaking.

That is exactly what you are about to receive at this table.

The bread and the cup in front of you are not a reward reserved for people who finally managed to keep God at the center of their relationships, their time, their possessions, and their worship.

They are the sign and the seal of the one who did keep every one of those commitments, in your place, and then gave his body and his blood so that people who fail these vows constantly could still belong to him completely.

As you come to this table, you are not proving that God is the center of your life. You are receiving the one who already is, and who is patient enough to keep drawing you back to center every time you drift.