



Discussion Questions **LEADER GUIDE**

Week of 5/12/24

Text: Nehemiah 7-8

Note: The Erie campus is focusing mostly on chapter 6 this week. Questions 4-5 from last week's set may be helpful for Erie LifeGroups this week.

Icebreaker: Do you prefer to read or to listen to (an audio Bible) the Bible? Why?

1. Read Nehemiah 7-8 (You might want to skim 7:8-73!). What stands out to you from the sermon or from the chapters?
2. How would you describe the attitude of the assembly toward God's Word in the first few verses of chapter 8?

The assembly gathers "as one man," which depicts a great unity among them. They initiate the reading of God's Word as they tell Ezra to come and read it before them. They're hungry to know it and are willing to stay for half the day to listen and hear it explained. Notice how they stand when it's read as well—a sign of reverence for what it written. Verse 4 says they were attentive, meaning that they gave their full attention to hearing it. In addition, we might point out that this is the full community—men, women, and children. They see God's Word as something that's relevant for all of them and they want to hear it first-hand.

Application: What are some potential advantages of reading or listening to God's Word in a community with other people rather than only in a personal, private setting?

This does not negate the value of reading God's Word "privately," but it is good to focus here on how it can be helpful to read it in a community setting. Hopefully your experience in your LifeGroup can help you think of how to answer this!

3. The word "understand" is repeated throughout chapter 8. What steps are taken to help ensure that God's Word is understood by the people?

Ezra employs two different groups of 13 people to assist. The role of the first group of 13 is less clear, but the second group—the Levites—is there to help the people understand what's being read. They appear to go throughout the crowd to help interpret and explain the text.

*Building Christ-centered communities of people fully devoted
to loving God and loving others.*

Application: Do you find the Bible to be simple to understand or is it a challenge? What kind of things help you better grasp what you read or hear?

We live in a day of unprecedented access to resources that can help us understand Scripture. Historically, we Protestants hold to belief that the basics of the gospel contained in the Scriptures are clear (called *perspicuity*). In one sense, we can read it on our own. Even so, it does not mean that everything is easy to understand! We should remember that the Bible was written thousands of years ago in different languages and to different cultures. Our English translations are so good that they hide some of the complexities that are inherent to an ancient text.

4. Verses 9-12 describe how the people began to respond to what they understood. Why were they first grieved and what do you think it means that “the joy of the LORD is your strength” (v. 10)?

We’re not told why they’re grieved but it’s likely due to their new awareness of how they have lived contrary to God’s Law and have squandered God’s blessings along the way. It might seem strange that they’re told not to grieve, but they happen to be doing all of this on a day that is designated as a celebration of God’s grace and provision. It’s appropriate that they encounter grace when they’re mourning over their sin! This leads to joy because of all God has done. God’s grace protects them like a refuge protects (what “strength” means here) from the despair of sin.

Application: How does joy in what God has done for us serve as a source of strength and protection for us in life?

5. Verses 13-18 describe what happened when the people celebrated the Feast of Booths. Why do you think this caused “very great rejoicing” for the people (v. 17)?

They participate in a reenactment of God’s deliverance of Israel in the Exodus. Although they lived in temporary shelters, they were protected or provided for by God. The people in Nehemiah 8 would have seen how God had done something similar for them as they rebuilt the walls and now inhabit the city that was itself a sign of God’s presence and provision. In short, the festival was full of vivid displays of God’s grace, which is always a cause for rejoicing.

Application: How can or do we also remember and “reenact” God’s deliverance and salvation?

Remembering is a big part of our faith. As just an example, think of what we do when we take the Lord’s Supper. We do it in remembrance of Jesus and proclaim his death until he comes.