

Community Group Discussion Questions

THE WAY FORWARD – NO. 7 “Sacred Assembly” – Nehemiah 8-9

Theme: *When God wants to reconstruct a life and a church, there are two actions we must do to join Him in that work. Both are tied to our participation in a Sacred Assembly!*

The book of Nehemiah could easily be divided into two distinct construction phases. Chapters 1-6 deal with the reconstruction of the wall around the city of Jerusalem. Chapters 7-13 deal with the reconstruction that needed to occur in the hearts and lives of the people. This project of heart reconstruction happens as the people get involved in a series of large group worship gatherings called sacred assemblies (Neh.8:18). In chapters 8-10, we have three of these large sacred assemblies, the first 2 of which are built around the high holy days in the Jewish calendar (the Feast of Trumpets and the Feast of Booths), while the third and last one is built around developing their relationship with God.

These sacred assemblies focused people’s attention on the rebuilding God wanted to do in them as individuals and as a community. The Lord also wants to engage in rebuilding our lives and church. That’s why the Elders are leading us in an evening service of sacred assembly (Feb.21). Like the service mentioned in Nehemiah’s day, it will include worship and confession as we seek the Lord’s blessing on the future ministry of our church.

Gathering Together (Icebreaker)

Recall an incident from childhood in which you confessed to your parents that you did something that you were told not to do. Was confession helpful? Why or why not?

Growing Together (Truth/Equipping)

Read Nehemiah 8:1-15:

1. What happens when Ezra the scribe and priest reads from the first 5 books of the Hebrew Scriptures – God’s law?
2. Why were the people specifically told to stop their mourning and weeping (see 8:9)?
3. The people are specifically encouraged to find their joy and strength in the Lord? What would the people understand this to mean? See Psalm 16: 11.

4. How would you define the joy that God makes available to us? See Galatians 5:22-23.
5. How does the joy that Christians can experience differ from the happiness that comes from good times and pleasurable experiences? See Romans 5:1-4; 1 Peter 1:3-6.

Read Nehemiah 9:1-3:

6. Following the celebration of Jewish feasts (Trumpets and Booths), the people again come together. This time, they meet to confess their sins and read from God’s law. Is there a connection between our regularly practicing confession and repentance for sin and our experiencing true joy? Does confession promote joy?
7. The 9th chapter of Ezra, Nehemiah and Daniel are each devoted to confessions of national sin and prayers for God’s mercy and grace. In each case, people not only confess their own sins but those of earlier generations. Is this appropriate? Why or why not? See Nehemiah 1:5-7; 9:2; Psalm 106:6.
8. What are some of the benefits that come to us when we make honest personal or corporate confession?
9. Some churches include a time for confession of sin in the weekly order of worship. Would this be a good practice for us? Why or why not?

Getting Real with One Another (Accessibility)

1. The sermon drew attention to a number of things people pursue as the source of their joy instead of God. To what do you turn for your greatest joy?
2. What is a major takeaway for you from the study of Nehemiah 8-9 and the practice of gathering in a service of sacred assembly?

Group Prayer Time (Supplication)

Pray that the Lord would use the service of Sacred Assembly to prepare our church for a bright, God-honoring future. Pray also for God’s clear direction this new week when a candidate for the position of senior pastor will be at Prairie Hill.