



11

SESSION ELEVEN

God's People Gather

SESSION SUMMARY

In this session, we see how God's people were shaped by God's Word. As Ezra proclaimed God's Word, the people honored the voice of God, responded with repentance, and were renewed. Likewise, biblical fellowship today must be centered on God's Word. As we gather together to listen to God speak to us through the Scriptures, we are challenged to repentance, strengthened in our fellowship, and empowered for our mission.

SCRIPTURE

Nehemiah 8:1-12

THE POINT

Biblical community must be centered on God's Word.

INTRO/STARTER 5-10 MINUTES

Option 1

Every year on December 31, masses of people cram together into Times Square, in the heart of Manhattan. As midnight approaches, all eyes turn upward and millions around the world fix their gaze upon the ball at the top of a pole. A countdown begins, the ball drops, and as soon as the clock strikes midnight, everyone collectively ushers in the new year! People describe the atmosphere as electric.

There is something special about being gathered together with other people for one purpose. Whether it is a college or professional sporting event, an outdoor music festival, or a holiday celebration, people love to gather together for one focus. The same is true whenever believers gather to hear God's Word.

Nehemiah 8:1-2 presents a powerful example of gathering to hear God's Word. Here we see the nation of Israel gathered together, not to see a ball drop or to cheer on their favorite team, but to hear the Word of God being read.

- **What are some fun activities you gather together with others to celebrate?**
- **How can you change your attitude to view studying God's Word the same way?**

Option 2

Gather students in groups of three to four, and ask them to think of different events or holidays they celebrate by getting together with others. List these events and holidays on a white board or poster board at the front of the room.

- **What is the focus of each one of these events and holidays? Why is it important to know the focus and remember it as we celebrate?**

In Jerusalem, a prophet named Ezra read the law of God aloud to the people as commanded in the Law of Moses. All of the Israelites gathered just to hear God's Word read aloud. In the same way, it is also important for us to gather together to study God's Word with other believers.

- **Why do you think it is important for us to study God's Word with other believers? How will this help you grow in your relationship with God?**

HIS STORY

15-20 MINUTES

THE POINT

Biblical community must be centered on God's Word.

CHARACTERS

- **The Triune God** - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit
- **Ezra** - a prophet who returned to Jerusalem in order to help reestablish the Jewish community and remind them they were still God's chosen people

PLOT

God was faithful to His people—to sustain them during their years in exile, to bring them back to rebuild the temple, and to allow them to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem under Nehemiah's leadership. With the walls and the temple rebuilt, God's people were ready to experience a revival—they heard God's Word and sought to obey it.

TIMELINE

THE CENTRALITY OF THE WORD

The people gather to hear God's Word.

SHALLOW WORSHIP

The people fail to give God their very best.

**Beginning Spring 2017*

FROM ABRAHAM TO JESUS

The arrival of the Promised One.

GOD'S PEOPLE ARE CENTERED ON THE WORD

Throughout Israel's history, idolatry was at the root of their rebellion against God. Because of their sin, God's people spent over 70 years in exile. Once they moved back to Jerusalem, they were able to gather publicly and worship the Lord by listening to His Word. The event was timely, because the Law required the nation to gather to hear the Word of God read every seven years (Deut. 31:9-13).

And all the people gathered as one man into the square before the Water Gate. And they told Ezra the scribe to bring the Book of the Law of Moses that the LORD had commanded Israel. So Ezra the priest brought the Law before the assembly, both men and women and all who could understand what they heard, on the first day of the seventh month. (Neh. 8:1-2)

As Christians, we do not have to wait for the availability of God's Word. We're blessed to hear God's Word proclaimed, not every seven years, but every seven days. That doesn't even include our ability to read God's Word on our own throughout the week. The beauty of gathering together to hear a pastor teach God's Word (2 Tim. 2:15; 4:2) is that we are then equipped for every good work God has called us to do for His glory (Eph. 2:10; 4:11-16).

- **How can you tell if a church is centered on the proclamation of God's Word or centered on something else? Why is gathering to hear God's Word so important for believers?** (p. 78, PSG)

99 ESSENTIAL DOCTRINES

Inspiration of Scripture (p. 79, PSG)

The inspiration of Scripture refers to God's direction of the human authors of the Bible so that they composed and recorded His message to humankind in their original writings (2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Pet. 1:19-21). Occasionally, this inspiration was achieved through dictation, where God directly spoke to the original authors. Most of the time, however, this inspiration was achieved through the supernatural influence of the Holy Spirit through the personalities of the authors so that their writings can be considered the very words of God.

GOD'S PEOPLE REVERE THE WORD TOGETHER

We live in a culture where it's sometimes hard to hold a person's attention. It seems our attention spans are getting shorter and shorter. We quickly turn to electronic devices whenever we face a moment of boredom. Consider the contrast with the people of Israel and how they listened to God's Word on this day:

And he read from it facing the square before the Water Gate from early morning until midday, in the presence of the men and the women and those who could understand. And the ears of all the people were attentive to the Book of the Law. And Ezra the scribe stood on a wooden platform that they had made for the purpose. And beside him stood Mattithiah, Shema, Anaiah, Uriah, Hilkiah, and Maaseiah on his right hand, and Pedaiah, Mishael, Malchijah, Hashum, Hashbaddanah, Zechariah, and Meshullam on his left hand. And Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people, for he was above all the people, and as he opened it all the people stood. And Ezra blessed the LORD, the great God, and all the people answered, "Amen, Amen," lifting up their hands. And they bowed their heads and worshiped the LORD with their faces to the ground. (Neh. 8:3-6)

The Israelites' response was probably an amazing sight. First, all the people stood when Ezra opened up the Scriptures. Ezra opened in prayer and declared praise to God, causing the people to raise their hands and proclaim, "Amen, Amen."

Second, the people expected God to bless them through the reading of His Word. This ushered in a sense of humility evidenced by the people bowing and placing their faces on the ground while worshiping the Lord. It's a beautiful thing to take part in when the people of God gather as one, declaring praise to Him and worshiping Him.

Third, note that they listened to God's Word together. True biblical revival is experienced in community. In addition to confessing our sins to God, perhaps the next step we must take is confess our sins to one another, in order to extend forgiveness to others in the same fashion we've been forgiven by God. Then and only then will we experience the joy of revival in community!

GOD'S PEOPLE RESPOND IN REPENTANCE AND ACCOUNTABILITY

True revival causes God's people to gather to hear His Word, render Him genuine praise, and then desire to obey His commands. Throughout Scripture, we see God calling His people to repent and walk in righteousness together. In Nehemiah 8:7-12 we glimpse what a national revival looks like, and make no mistake, the call to national repentance and accountability are both present.

Also Jeshua, Bani, Sherebiah, Jamin, Akkub, Shabbethai, Hodiah, Maaseiah, Kelita, Azariah, Jozabad, Hanan, Pelaiah, the Levites, helped the people to understand the Law, while the people remained in their places. They read from the book, from the Law of God, clearly, and they gave the sense, so that the people understood the reading. And Nehemiah, who was the governor, and Ezra the priest and scribe, and the Levites who taught the people said to all the people, "This day is holy to the LORD your God; do not mourn or weep." For all the people wept as they heard the words of the Law. Then he said to them, "Go your way. Eat the fat and drink sweet wine and send portions to anyone who has nothing ready, for this day is holy to our Lord. And do not be grieved, for the joy of the LORD is your strength." So the Levites calmed all the people, saying, "Be quiet, for this day is holy; do not be grieved." And all the people went their way to eat and drink and to send portions and to make great rejoicing, because they had understood the words that were declared to them. (Neh. 8:7-12)

Here we see Ezra reading the Scriptures. Some people may not have understood the language the Scriptures were written in because they had grown up in a foreign land, where Hebrew was not spoken, read, or written. In response, the Levites walked among the people and took time to explain the Scriptures to them in a language they were able to understand. Once the people understood God's Word they began to weep—they were broken by their heritage of disobedience.

God provided His people with an opportunity to demonstrate their repentance. They were to celebrate the Feast of the Trumpets. This seems to be God's pattern for His people: God speaks, His people listen with open ears and hearts, He corrects them, the people are broken by their sin, and God comforts them with His Word and shows them how to live righteously.

As believers today, we take heart when we read 2 Timothy 3:16: "All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness." Since God is the Author of Scripture, and it is not in His character to lie (Num. 23:19; Heb. 6:18), we know His Word is absolutely true. When God's Word is taught faithfully, it confronts our errors and shows us the way to live.

TIMELINE

MARY PRAISES GOD

God works in the heart and life of Mary.

GOD WITH US

The good news of Jesus' Incarnation.

JESUS' EARLY YEARS

Jesus grows in favor with God and men.

CHRIST CONNECTION

The comfort we have today is in the gospel. Jesus provides salvation and sanctification for all who embrace Him as Savior. The gospel promises that those who have trusted Christ as Savior are forgiven of their sins (Eph. 1:7) because Jesus, who never sinned, became sin on our behalf so we could be declared righteous by God (2 Cor. 5:21).

But this isn't the end of the story. Now, we are blessed with the ability to walk in righteousness because God the Holy Spirit has taken up residence in believers (Rom. 8:9-13). He provides us with the ability to understand God's Word as it is read and preached. The Spirit convicts us of our sin and strengthens us to confess our sins and put to death the desires of our flesh (Rom. 8:13).

YOUR STORY 10-15 MINUTES

GROUP QUESTIONS

God's Story has always been designed to connect with your story. It is because of His Story that our stories make sense, have meaning, and carry on into eternity. Use the questions below to help think through how His Story connects with your own.

- **What things may be filling up your heart and life and preventing you from having a hunger and thirst for God's Word?** *Answers will vary.*
- **What are some ways we can hold each other accountable as we seek to obey God's Word?** *Answers will vary.*
- **What benefits follow from reading and studying God's Word?** *Answers will vary.*
- **How has this session encouraged or challenged you when it comes to your own personal study of God's Word?** *Answers will vary.*

HIS STORY

*God's Story of
Redemption,
through His Son,
Jesus Christ.*

YOUR STORY

*Where your story
meets His.*

YOUR MISSION 10-15 MINUTES



HEAD

It is interesting to note that the people of Israel stood there and listened to the reading of Scripture for over six hours. No cell phones, no social media, and no electronic devices to fiddle with when they got bored. They were not able to have a public reading of Scripture for decades, but through Ezra's reading, God's voice spoke again. Why were they so hungry to hear God's Word? Because they knew they were hearing the actual words of God.

- **Why do we so often fail to crave God's Word as we should?** *Answers will vary.*
- **What are some ways we can increase our desire to read and listen to God's Word?** *One way might be to develop the habit to listen to good sermons, whether in the car or through your smartphone. Exposure to solid biblical teaching will directly affect one's desire for the Word.*



HEART

We experience revival when we focus on hearing from God through His Word as it is read and explained to us. Revival happens in community, never in isolation. It also happens when God's people repent and hold each other accountable. When we discipline ourselves to gather together to hear God's Word, we can expect the Word to impact the way we think and view the world around us. We will develop a deeper burden to know God more intimately. We will grow in our desire to share the gospel with those who don't know God and are not pursuing Him.

- **Why do you think God chose His Word to be the main source for bringing revival?**
Answers will vary.
- **What area(s) mentioned above do you need to re-prioritize in the coming weeks—God's Word, experiencing community with other believers, repentance, and accountability?**
Answers will vary.



HANDS

The leaders of the nation of Israel influenced the people by leading them in the reading of Scripture, offering explanation to those who did not understand the language (Neh. 8:4-6). The people observed the nation's leaders as God's Word was being read. Ezra praised God, and the people followed his example. The leaders in this scene were shaping culture by humbly listening to God's Word with people they were leading.

- **When has someone helped you understand something in Scripture that was difficult to understand?** *Answers will vary.*
- **When have you helped someone else understand something in Scripture?** *Answers will vary.*

► ADDITIONAL INFO

LEADER PACK

For this session, refer students to pack item #10, which contains an artistic poster that symbolizes the centrality of God's Word in the life of believers.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Check out the following additional resources:

- **Leader Training Videos**
- **One Conversations**
- **Midweek Studies (to access your Midweek Study, go to lifeway.com/TGPWIN17Dan)**
- **Circular Timeline Poster**
- **App (for both leader and student)**



Additional suggestions for specific groups are available at

GospelProject.com/AdditionalResources

And for ***free online training*** on how to lead a group visit

MinistryGrid.com/web/TheGospelProject