

Icebreaker:

In Nehemiah 7, many family names are listed (as people who live in Jerusalem and nearby Judah). Are you named after someone in your family? How many generations can you go back with family names?

Spiritual Practice: Last week, we asked you to do the spiritual practice below. Discuss with your group if they did the practice and how it went.

“Identify a theme for yourself for the week. Some suggestions are: Choose joy; Be thankful; I belong to God. When you get distracted this week, return to your theme and see if that helps draw you back to God.”

Read this week's scripture and discuss:

1. In verse 2, “Hananiah feared God.” When is fear healthy; when is it not? Do you fear God? Why or why not? Why could fearing God be important to us as Christians?
2. In verse 3, why do you think Nehemiah gave strict orders about opening the gates and the setting of guards? Given his LORD's faithfulness, what did Nehemiah continually remember?
3. Do you find it easy or difficult to connect your story with this story in Nehemiah? Why is it important to our faith to hear stories like the one found in Nehemiah?
4. One commentary says, “Are Christians in today's church as aware as they should be of the people they belong to and the story they are part of?” Why do you think it's important to have connection with those who have gone before you? Do you think this has anything to do with why Nehemiah spells out in such detail (for those who would come later) who the exiles were who had returned to Jerusalem?
5. Family history matters to God (Nehemiah 3 and Nehemiah 7). Who is someone in your family that has impacted you the most? What has been passed on to you spiritually from your family? What would you like to pass on to your family members?
6. In verses 70-72, Nehemiah lists what heads of some ancestral homes contributed to the cause. What did they give? How could Nehemiah back then (or ZPC today) use financial gifts to honor God?

Prayer:

As you pray for one another, please pray for the following needs in our church family:

prayer requests

> Prayers of healing for Phil Isenbarger and continued healing for Theresa Beardsley, Jamie Jones, and John Lindenschmidt.

Nehemiah very much values names and history. He lists names of people working on the wall (ch. 3) and all the families who moved back to Jerusalem and Judah (ch. 7) and will list more names later in the book. Family history, history in general, and names matter to God. It is because God's people and God's story matters to God. We matter to God. You matter to God. So as Hananiah did, choose to have integrity and to fear God (respect and revere God). You have a part to play in God's story as well.

Please discuss the spiritual practice. Think of spiritual practices you might use in your home group to encourage one another. If some members missed last week, then encourage them to try this practice this coming week.

1. Fearing God or the “fear of the Lord” is a desired character trait in scripture (see Psalm 111:10, Ecclesiastes 12:13, Luke 1:50). To fear God means to revere God in his majesty, to respect God. When we fear God we desire to please God in a healthy way and to follow what God tells us to do and be.
2. Nehemiah was very specific about the times when the gates should be open and closed. Nehemiah cares about the details and getting things right. He is probably also still aware that Jerusalem could be attacked and wants the city to be ready and have guards to be ready. Nehemiah believes God is with them and will protect them as well. We also know God is with us and we should be ready for whatever may come our way.
3. Nehemiah is an ancient story happening in the Middle East about exiles returning home and rebuilding walls. In some ways it is very distant from our own story. Yet, Nehemiah and his friends deal with real problems and feelings. They get angry, tired, scared, and deal with obstacles and enemies. We can learn much from Nehemiah's story.
4. Today's culture is very immediate. We have a constant news cycle and can find out new information instantly on our phones. As Christians, most of us probably do not connect with our church and family stories and our history. Knowing history (for our families, our faith, and even our homelands) can have great value to develop pride, respect and humility for those who have gone before us.
5. Did your family go to church? Were they faithful – did someone in your family help you to know Jesus and understand the faith? Whether they helped you or not, you can learn from their example about what you want to pass on to your family members in the future.
6. The people gave much money, silver and gold, and priestly robes. They had the ability to give and so they did. Their gifts could have been used to help set up the temple for worship and the priests to be dressed and ready to serve. What can our gifts be used for today? Can they help us to worship and to help us serve the poor and those in need around us?