

Icebreaker:

What is a favorite family tradition you have for a holiday or celebration?

Read this week's scripture and discuss:

1. How do people respond to the Book of the Law in verses 3, 5, 6, 9? Why would they respond in these ways?
2. In Nehemiah 8, the people weep and mourn after hearing scripture (verse 9). Why do you think the people would weep or be grieved at the reading of scripture? How do Nehemiah and Ezra respond?
3. In Nehemiah 8:2 and Ezra 10:1, children are included in worship and in hearing the scripture read. Did you grow up hearing the stories of the Bible? What stories stood out to you? If you have children, how do you (or did you) help them try and understand scripture?
4. How important has God's Word been in your own spiritual journey? Which has been most impactful: personal Bible study, public preaching, or small group study?
5. The Message paraphrase of Nehemiah 8:12 says, "So the people went off to feast, eating and drinking and including the poor in a great celebration. Now they got it; they understood the reading that had been given to them." As the holiday season begins, how might you include the poor (be they physically, emotionally, or spiritually poor) in a celebration you are having?
6. Nehemiah and Ezra encourage the people to be joyful, and then to celebrate the Festival of Booths for a full week. Why do you think God made celebrations like this one in Nehemiah 8 so important? How can we celebrate God and our faith even today? How can we do that as families or in homes or in church?

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 Tracy Conner.

After finishing the wall (ch 6), assigning guards, and getting a count of all who returned from exile (ch 7), Nehemiah and Ezra now gather the people to hear God's Word. It is a powerful time as the people are moved to tears at hearing God's Word in this great communal setting. Part of the Word commands the people to celebrate God's goodness. So the people celebrate the Festival of Booths for a week, which remembers how God had provided for them in the wilderness. We are reminded of the importance of studying God's Word, learning from it, and applying it even in celebration.

1. The Book of the Law is the Pentateuch, the first 5 books of the Old Testament. The people are attentive and stand to hear the reading. They are given interpretation and understand it and then weep at its reading. The reading of God's Word is obviously very important to Ezra and Nehemiah (they build a platform for the reading and gather everyone). The people show great respect and care by standing and weeping at hearing it.
2. Most likely they wept because they were convicted that they were far from following God's commands in his book. They could have wept simply at hearing God's Word maybe for the first time ever or the first time in a worship setting in Jerusalem. Nehemiah and Ezra tell them instead to celebrate. They know that the people probably haven't been able to hear God's Word, and so they are not fully at fault for not obeying it. And they can celebrate the completion of the wall and the Festival of Booths for God's provision.
3. In Nehemiah it says "all who were able to understand" meaning children and Ezra specifically mentions children. It is important to note that children matter to God and they are important to God and to the leaders. Share your favorite Bible stories as children and share how you have shared the Bible with the children in your life.
4. The people in this story stand at the reading of the Bible and weep at what they hear. When we as contemporary Christians hear the Bible, sometimes it sounds boring because it was written so long ago and we have heard it so many times. We can work to read and listen carefully to God's Word and then ask, "What does this mean for me?"
5. It is one of the wonderful parts of our faith that is affirmed in the Bible that all should be included, even included in celebration. God's Word and God's love is for everyone who will hear it and receive it. This includes the poor, whether poor spiritually or emotionally or poor in resources. How specifically can we include someone who is poor in an upcoming holiday celebration?
6. The Festival of Booths is also called the Feast of Tabernacles, or Sukkot in Hebrew. The people were instructed go out and gather tree branches to make booths, or little tabernacles, almost like tents. This remembers that God helped provide for the Israelites when they wandered in the wilderness for 40 years, including helping them to find or make shelter. Remembering how God has provided is for important in the Bible and for us. Think of how and why we celebrate the Lord's Supper, or Christmas Eve, or Easter. We remember and celebrate God's goodness to us as individuals and as a church.