

Small Group Material: New Walls, New Heart 5

Happy hearts, heavy hearts: Neh 8.1-12, 9.1-4

Welcome (10 mins) What has inspired or helped you to read the Bible? What part has the Bible played in leading you to confess your sins?

Worship (15 mins) Put an open Bible and a lighted candle in the centre of the group. Give everyone a post-it note or a piece of paper. Write on a piece of A4, 'We are sorry for...'. Ask each person to write down one or more things which we can 'say sorry for' as a group. After a few minutes of quiet, read out part of Nehemiah's prayer from Nehemiah 1.5-7. Then go round in the group making a prayer of confession together to God. Each person starts the prayer saying, 'We are sorry for....'

Watch this video: Kyrie Eleison by Vineyard music

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6T7n1j03UZA>

Remind yourselves that the blood of Jesus cleanses us from all our sins. *'If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous and will cleanse us from all unrighteousness.'* 1 John 1.9

Thank God for his forgiveness and the righteousness he gives us.

Word (40 mins)

The walls are finished and the people brought back from the surrounding villages where they've been scattered. Now they're all assembled the spiritual work of the community begins in earnest. The re-building of the walls was not an end in itself, but a beginning of a new stage in the life of God's people. They must now rediscover their identity through the reading of the law, and act accordingly.

Read 8.1-12

What was the occasion for assembling the people on the first day of the seventh month v1? (Leader's note: cf Lev 23.24, Num 29.1-6).

Why the public square rather than the temple for this activity?

Ezra first came to Jerusalem in 458BC for the purpose of teaching The Law to the people (Leader: Ezra 7.6-10). Why do you suppose it has

taken 13 years from that time to this general assembly in 445 BC for him to fully and publicly proclaim God's Law?

In what ways did the people respond to the Book of the Law of Moses, cf v3,5,6,9? How do you account for this response?

What is the make-up of this large historic bible study group? Who is there to help them to understand the Scriptures clearly? Why can't the lay people understand the Bible on their own? How is the community affected when they read and truly understand the Scriptures?

For discussion How important was the reading of God's Word in your own spiritual renewal? Which has had the greater impact on you, private bible study or public preaching?

When you 'saw the light' did you weep and mourn or celebrate with joy? Did you then give to the poor, or reach out to others on the margins of society? In what ways has the Bible changed your life?

If time, read 9.1-4. What is the occasion for this time of corporate confession? How did the Israelites prepare for this?

Why did the Israelites separate themselves from all the foreigners, v2? What is the relationship between the three parts of their worship - 1) instruction from the word 2) confession of sin 3) praise of God?

For discussion: In the East African Revival, they had to learn to confess secret sins secretly, private sins privately and public sins publically. In Wesley's class meetings, the people had to confess to one another their failings from the past week!

How easy do you find it to confess your sins? Share what you have learnt about confession. Is there an occasion that stands out for you?

Is there someone you need to say sorry to? Pray for humility to say sorry. And pray for greater transparency in your group so that you can hold one another accountable for 'walking in the light'. (You might want to split into single sex groups or pairs for this).

Witness (20 mins)

Pray for the work of The Bible Society

<https://www.biblesociety.org.uk/get-involved/pray-with-us/>

Pray for those who teach the Bible - in all situations large and small.
Pray particularly for the passing on of knowledge of God's Word to the coming generations.