

Discussion Guide

[For Small Groups]

Icebreaker

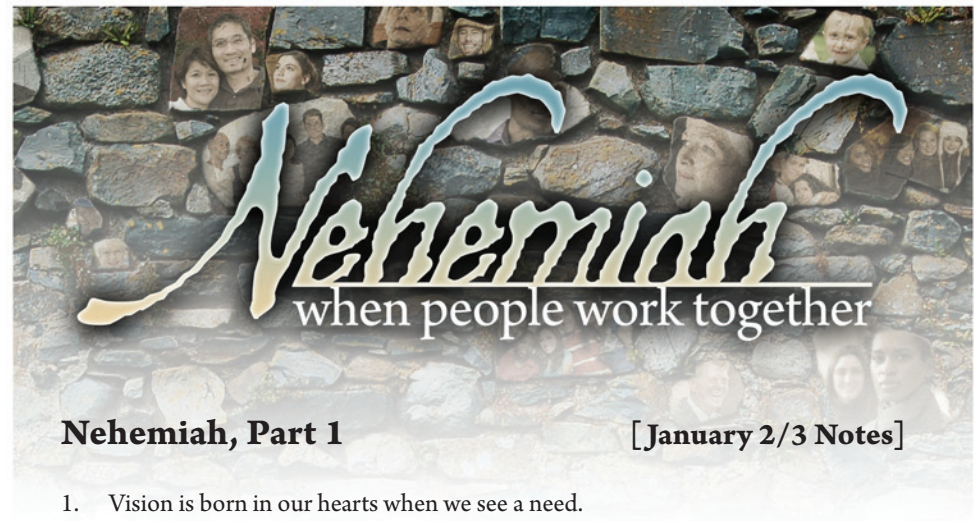
1. What is one thing that you would like to accomplish in 2010?
2. What are some things that you hope to do differently in the next year?

Group Discussion

1. **Read the first chapter of Nehemiah as a group...** In Nehemiah 1:1-11, Nehemiah sees the plight of his people and is compelled to action.
 - a. When have you been faced with a cause that has driven to action?
 - b. What steps did you take to follow the drive that was in your heart?
 - c. Share a vision that you have for your future.
 - What steps are you taking to follow your vision?
 - Share an obstacle that you have faced or are facing and how you are working to overcome that obstacle.
2. **Pastor Sam talked about having a plan for spiritual growth in 2010.**
 - a. Share one thing that you will do this year to enhance your relationship with Christ.
3. **Pastor Sam shared about the congregational 40-day fast.**
 - a. Discuss how you can be involved.
 - b. Consider committing to holding each other accountable to the fast.

Prayer Points

1. Pray for our congregation as we begin the 40-day fast
2. Pray that God would speak to each one of us throughout the next 40 days.



Nehemiah, Part 1

[January 2/3 Notes]

1. Vision is born in our hearts when we see a need.
2. Fulfilling our life's purpose depends on:
 - a. Having a vision - which calls for waiting on God until He reveals His plan for you.
 - b. Dedicating time and energy to it - which calls for patience and discipline.
 - c. Knowing how to overcome obstacles - which calls for good management.
3. Vision is a picture of the future that produces passion in you.
4. A vision gives you direction, creativity, and resilience.
5. Without a vision you become passive, aimless, and vulnerable to quitting.
6. When we ask God for a vision, we are likely to be placed in a field of opportunities hidden under obstacles. God will stand back and see how we engage in overcoming those obstacles.
7. The confidence and courage to boldly step into a vision comes through prayer and fasting.
8. Here are three duties of every Christian: giving, praying, and fasting.



Pretender or Contender

[Devotional]

If you're a sports fan you may have seen or recognized the title to this devotion. It's taken from a popular sports program that looks at several athletes and/or teams and asks the question, "Contender or pretender?" In other words, are they a fluke or are they for real? A panel of sports gurus dissects the highlighted subjects looking at everything from the history of the team or individual to strengths and weaknesses, schedule, heart, intellect, coaching, and so on.

As I watched one of these episodes I thought about the time I went to Bible school. I remember feeling so excited about being called into ministry and the opportunity to go to Oklahoma to be trained. But something happened through the excitement that changed my attention and focus. No longer was the excitement about ministry and what God was calling me into, it was about Oklahoma. I distinctly remember feeling the shift in my mind and heart, and I knew it wasn't right. I would say all the right things and pray all the right words, but they were so shallow, and I knew it. I had convinced everyone, even myself temporarily, that I was doing the right thing for the right reasons.

And then, after weeks of inner turmoil and unrest, I decided to come clean. I dropped to my knees in my bedroom and spilled my guts to God, pleading for forgiveness and begging for clarity in what I should do – go to Bible school or stay put? It was the first time that I actually wanted to hear His voice and what He had to say, and it felt so freeing. What happened next changed my life forever. I entered my bedroom wanting to go to Oklahoma, but not so much to Bible school. I left my bedroom wanting to go to Bible school, but not so much to Oklahoma.

Are you a pretender or a contender? Are you saying all the right things and praying all the right words but deep down inside, you know things aren't right? Just like an athlete or a sports team, we can have the appearance of looking good, of having it all together. We can cruise along our schedule undefeated, making everyone think and believe we're better than what we truly are. Has this way of living infected you? Is what people see and believe about you more important than what is actually true? Jesus says that we can't have two masters. We can't be obedient to one and to another. It's so important that we come face to face with our reality, especially with our relationship with God. Are we truly following and listening to Him, or are we swayed and enticed by the crowds and pleasing them?

May you drop to your knees, realizing that pretending won't win you rewards or applause from the only fan that really counts. As you meet with Him, may you leave differently than when you came.

For you died to this life, and your real life is hidden with Christ in God. –Colossians 3:3

By Josh Simmons

Bible Study

[Personal Response]

Nehemiah loved our Lord more than success, money, power, or prestige. He modeled a life of sacrifice for God and others. A key to living a life sold out to Jesus is growing spiritually. There is no end to how much we can know and love God! Each week during the Nehemiah series, we'll offer ways you can respond to the weekly message. This week we suggest taking a journey of developing a personal plan for spiritual growth in 2010. Here is how you can get started:

Listed below are devotional tools God has provided to help us be intentional about spiritual growth. Read over the different tools and suggestions. Spend some time asking God what you should plan for 2010 for each area. Write down His response below each practice. It will be helpful to share it with another person and ask for feedback. After you have finalized your plan, tape copies in one or two places where you'll regularly see them. The bathroom mirror is helpful to me. I also keep a copy in my Bible.

1. **Bible Reading** (consider 4-8 chapters a day from different parts of the Bible.)
2. **Scripture Memorization** (From your reading above, write down 1-3 key verses a week and memorize them.)
3. **Prayer** (Consider making a list and updating it weekly. Daily pray over the list.)
4. **Fasting** (Consider times of fasting at various points in the year, especially during the 40-day fast Pastor Sam is calling us to during the Nehemiah series.)
5. **Financial Giving** (Maybe God is asking you to create a budget, increase giving beyond the tithe, or some other area of sacrificial giving.)
6. **Community Life** (Consider getting to know others in a deeper way through small groups, a Wednesday night class, or a mentoring relationship. Also, set goals for family relationships.)
7. **Service** (Where can you give of your time inside and outside the church in a greater way?)
8. **Outreach** (Who are the key people far from God that He desires you to continue to reach out to?)
9. **Personal Vision** (Maybe God is calling you to a radical shift or a minor shift in your life focus. What are practical things you can do this year to step out in faith towards your vision?)

Consecrate your plan to the Lord daily this week by asking for the grace to reach your goals. Begin practicing the plan faithfully.

Send comments or questions to Pastor Joe at joec@worshipcenter.org.