

### Small Group Discussion Questions

#### THE WAY FORWARD – NO. 1 “Reflection” – Joel 1:1-4; 2:12-18

**Theme:** *There are times when the Lord prompts us to stop, slow down, and examine our hearts to prepare for a fresh meeting with Him. Several action steps are called for.*

Throughout history, whenever God’s people have lost sight of who He is and what He does, He has often called them back to Himself and moved them forward through an event known as a *Sacred Assembly*. In Bible times, Josiah, Hezekiah, Nehemiah, and Joel all called for Sacred Assemblies. This also occurred in times of revival in our own country.

The prophet Joel gives us a concise glimpse of a Sacred Assembly and, more importantly, how we go about the business of getting ready to meet God.

#### Gathering Together

Is thoughtful reflection a regular part of your life? What challenges make it difficult for you to reflect? What helps?

#### Growing Together

Read Joel 1:1-4; 2:12-18:

1. In your experience, has your love for someone ever “gone flat”? If so, what helped re-ignite your love?
2. Has your love for Jesus ever “gone flat”? If so, what factors may have contributed to it? What may have helped to re-ignite your love for Him?
3. In Joel 1 and 2, it is clear that the people had lost their way with God and needed to stop and reflect. It’s amazing how much God had to do to get their attention. Has God ever had to do something “bold” to get your attention? Why do you think people so rarely stop and take time to reflect? What is the impact of failing to reflect?

4. Share with each other about a time when you did reflect back on your life. What caused you to do so? What was the experience like? Was it difficult? If so, how? Did you find it to be helpful?
5. In Joel 1:13-14, God calls the people to have a Sacred Assembly. What are your initial thoughts about this? Are you hesitant to participate? If so, why? What might help you prepare to participate?
6. When the people of God let their love “go flat” God called them to gather together. Often, when we have spiritual “dry” times the tendency is to try and work through it as an individual, not as a group. Do you lean toward a more individual kind of faith experience or a group experience? Why? Are you ok with that or do you think you need to make some adjustments?
7. God calls the people to return to Him with all their heart. What is involved in giving God all of our hearts?
8. God is described as gracious and compassionate, slow to anger, and abounding in love. Is this how you view God? What has most influenced your view of God? Do you wish your view of God was different?
9. Our passage in Joel 1 and 2 encourages us to reflect thoughtfully on where we are spiritually, personally and as a church, to repent humbly of whatever God urges us to change, and to believe that He will do a new work. Which of these is most difficult for you to do? What is one thing you can do in each area to grow in these three practices?

#### Group Prayer Time

Pray for God to help each group member to reflect, repent, and receive God’s promise to work. Pray also that each group member, and their loved ones, may each give more of their heart to God.

## Small Group Discussion Questions

### THE WAY FORWARD – NO. 2 “Repentance” – 2 Corinthians 7:8-16

**Theme:** *If we want to meet God in a new and fresh way (which is the purpose of this series), that will only happen by being real with Him about our own stuff, and then tapping into His resources to change, and that includes repentance, sorrow, and regret over sin.*

It's clear from the Bible that *repentance* is to be part of the ongoing lifestyle of a Christ follower. It involves a genuine sorrow over our sin and then, as an act of faith in what Christ did for us on the cross, we move to change. It's a change of heart about sin. The kind of repentance is life-giving!

Biblical repentance frees us to deal with any issue in our lives. Why? Because the gospel announces that there's nothing we can do to make God love us any more. And there's nothing we've done that will cause Him to love us any less. Everything we need for real soul satisfying joy and salvation we find in Jesus. He frees us to admit our issues and then to let God do something about it. So repentance is a lifestyle rooted in what Christ has done for us on the cross. There is no true joy, salvation, or a relationship with God without it.

### Gathering Together

What is your most vivid memory of the season of fall from when you were a child? What do you most like now about this season?

### Growing Together

1. Have you ever been rebuked in a destructive way? In a constructive way? What was the impact in both cases?
2. Do you find it more difficult to give a rebuke or to receive a rebuke? Why? What do you learn from Paul's interaction and rebuke with the Corinthians? What most

grabbed your attention in 2 Corinthians 7:8-13a? Why?

3. What is your response to the statement that no one can become spiritually mature on their own?
4. Have you ever experienced godly sorrow? What impact did it have on your life and on others?
5. ~~When Martin Luther nailed his 95 theses (taking points) on the door at Wittenberg Castle in 1517, the first one read "We honour God and Master Jesus Christ said 'Repent,' he intended that the entire life of believers should be one of repentance." Why is it so difficult to make repentance a lifestyle?~~
6. What helps you repent well? What makes it hard? Is there anything from which you need to repent that you would be willing to share with your small group for purposes of receiving their prayer support?
7. We need intimate relationships, so we can give and receive godly rebukes, respond with godly sorrow, and practice repentance as a lifestyle. We have three choices we need to make regularly about commitment, forgiveness, and mindset. Which choice is hardest for you to make? Why?
8. ~~What would real repentance look like in your life? What would it look like in our church's life?~~

### Group Prayer Time

Pray for God to help each of you grow in your love for God and others, so you can give and receive godly rebukes. Finally, share and pray for the personal requests of group members.

### Small Group Discussion Questions

#### THE WAY FORWARD – NO. 3 “Forgiveness” – Colossians 3:12-14

**Theme:** *The importance of forgiving others of the wrongs done to us in order to move forward as individuals, families, and as a church!*

In this sermon series, we’re looking at practices which need to become part of our lives as individuals, families, and as a church if we’re to move forward in ways that reflect spiritual and emotional health. We’ve already considered such practices as *reflection* and *repentance*. We now come to consider the importance of *forgiveness*. Why forgiveness? Several reasons:

- A diagnostic study done last spring revealed the need to process our hurts and conflicts with people in ways that promote unity, healing, and reconciliation. To do that, we need to learn how to implement the Bible’s teaching on forgiveness.
- We’re also considering forgiveness because the reality is...we live in a world where people hurt us...sometimes in ways that scar us emotionally for life.

If there is to be true healing for us, we need to explore and apply the answers to the 3 questions which were addressed in the sermon: (1) What is forgiveness? (2) Why practice it? (3) What’s the motivation to do so?

#### Gathering Together

What is your most memorable experience or story of forgiveness? What was the outcome for the people involved?

#### Growing Together

Read Colossians 3:12-14:

##### What Is Forgiveness?

1. The Bible says that when we ask the Lord to forgive us, He does so. It also says that He “will never again remember our sins” (Jeremiah 31:34). If God is all-knowing, does He really forget? What does this mean? What are the implications for our forgiving others? Are we required to forget their offense against us?

2. Does forgiveness mean the immediate restoration of a broken relationship? Why or why not?
3. If individuals are forgiven for their wrong behavior, even crimes, should they be held accountable? See Romans 13:4.
4. When we say to the person who has wronged us, “I forgive you,” what are we doing? Should our behavior toward the person change? If so, how?

##### Why Practice Forgiveness?

5. How is our Heavenly Father’s forgiveness of us related to our forgiving others? See Matthew 6:12,14-15; Colossians 3:13.
6. What are some of the ways we may be affected by our holding onto hurts instead of granting forgiveness?

##### What Is the Motivation to Forgive?

7. How does the Bible describe how the Lord forgives us? See Nehemiah 9:17; Colossians 2:13-14; Matthew 18:21-22; Romans 3:23-24.

#### Getting Real with One Another

1. Growing up, how did your family of origin address conflict? How has the behavior of your parents in this area impacted you when you face conflict?
2. Think back to a recent experience when someone hurt you. How did you handle it? Looking back, what could you have done differently to promote healing and reconciliation?
3. What should motivate us to exercise a forgiving spirit?
4. Who do you need to forgive? What steps will you take before our Sacred Assembly (September 29, 6:00pm, WB campus), to promote peace?

#### Group Prayer Time

Pray that the Lord would use the service of Sacred Assembly to prepare our church for a bright, God-honoring future. Pray also for any in our church who are dealing with difficulties right now.



## Small Group Discussion Questions

### THE WAY FORWARD – NO. 4 “Sacred Assembly” – Nehemiah 8-9

**Theme:** *When God wants to reconstruct a life and a church, there are two actions we must do to join Him in that work. Both are tied to our participation in a Sacred Assembly!*

The book of Nehemiah could easily be divided into two distinct construction phases. Chapters 1-6 deal with the reconstruction of the wall around the city of Jerusalem. Chapters 7-13 deal with the reconstruction that needed to occur in the hearts and lives of the people. This project of heart reconstruction happens as the people get involved in a series of large group worship gatherings called sacred assemblies (Neh.8:18). In chapters 8-10, we have three of these large sacred assemblies, the first 2 of which are built around the high holy days in the Jewish calendar (the Feast of Trumpets and the Feast of Booths), while the third and last one is built around developing their relationship with God.

These sacred assemblies focused people’s attention on the rebuilding God wanted to do in them as individuals and as a community. The Lord also wants to engage in rebuilding our lives and church. That’s why we’re meeting in an evening service of sacred assembly (September 29). Like the service mentioned in Nehemiah’s day, it will include worship and confession as we seek the Lord’s blessing on the future ministry of our church.

#### Gathering Together

Recall an incident from childhood in which you confessed to your parents that you did something that you were told not to do. Was confession helpful? Why or why not?

#### Growing Together

Read Nehemiah 8:1-15:

1. What happens when Ezra the scribe and priest reads from the first 5 books of the Hebrew Scriptures – God’s law?
2. Why were the people specifically told to stop their mourning and weeping (see 8:9)?

3. The people are specifically encouraged to find their joy and strength in the Lord. What would the people understand this to mean? See Psalm 16: 11.
4. How would you define the joy that God makes available to us? See Galatians 5:22-23.
5. How does the joy that Christians can experience differ from the happiness that comes from good times and pleasurable experiences? See Romans 5:1-4; 1 Peter 1:3-6.

Read Nehemiah 9:1-3:

6. Following the celebration of Jewish feasts (Trumpets and Booths), the people again come together. This time, they meet to confess their sins and read from God’s law. Is there a connection between our regularly practicing confession and repentance for sin and our experiencing true joy? Does confession promote joy?
7. The 9<sup>th</sup> chapter of Ezra, Nehemiah and Daniel are each devoted to confessions of national sin and prayers for God’s mercy and grace. In each case, people not only confess their own sins but those of earlier generations. Is this appropriate? Why or why not? See Nehemiah 1:5-7; 9:2; Psalm 106:6.
8. What are some of the benefits that come to us when we make honest personal or corporate confession?
9. Some churches include a time for confession of sin in the weekly order of worship. Would this be a good practice for us? Why or why not?

#### Getting Real with One Another

1. The sermon drew attention to a number of things people pursue as the source of their joy instead of God. To what do you turn for your greatest joy?
2. What is a major takeaway for you from the study of Nehemiah 8-9 and the practice of gathering in a service of sacred assembly?

#### Group Prayer Time

Pray that the Lord would use the service of Sacred Assembly to prepare our church for a bright, God-honoring future. Pray also for God’s clear direction as we seek His wisdom to move forward.