

WELCOME:

Take a few minutes as people to come in to hear how their holiday season went.

- What was their favorite memory of Christmas?
- How have they been able to catch up?
- Is there anything they are focusing on in the New Year?

VIDEO:

Take a few minutes to review the video and Life Group Guide before your group meets. It will help you to feel prepared for your time with your group. It can also help you prepare for the things you would like to share.

SCRIPTURE:

Have everyone read the two passages for this week. Genesis 1:1-31 and Nehemiah 8:9-12.

- After reading the passages, provide a couple of minutes for people to think about the passage.
- Encourage them focus their thoughts on what questions come to their minds when they read this?
- What feelings do they have when they read these passages? What do they think this passage is trying to explain to us?

Genesis 1: In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. 2 Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.

3 And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. 4 God saw that the light was good, and he separated the light from the darkness. 5 God called the light "day," and the darkness he called "night." And there was evening, and there was morning—the first day.

6 And God said, "Let there be a vault between the waters to separate water from water." 7 So God made the vault and separated the water under the vault from the water above it. And it was so. 8 God called the vault "sky." And there was evening, and there was morning—the second day.

9 And God said, "Let the water under the sky be gathered to one place, and let dry ground appear." And it was so. 10 God called the dry ground "land," and the gathered waters he called "seas." And God saw that it was good.

11 Then God said, "Let the land produce vegetation: seed-bearing plants and trees on the land that bear fruit with seed in it, according to their various kinds." And it was so. 12 The land produced vegetation: plants bearing seed according to their kinds and trees bearing fruit with seed in it according to their kinds. And God saw that it was good. 13 And there was evening, and there was morning—the third day.

14 And God said, "Let there be lights in the vault of the sky to separate the day from the night, and let them serve as signs to mark sacred times, and days and years, 15 and let them be lights in the vault of the sky to give light on the earth." And it was so. 16 God made two great lights—the greater light to govern the day and the lesser light to govern the night. He also made the stars. 17 God set them in the vault of the sky to give light on the earth, 18 to govern the day and

the night, and to separate light from darkness. And God saw that it was good. 19 And there was evening, and there was morning—the fourth day.

20 And God said, “Let the water teem with living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the vault of the sky.” 21 So God created the great creatures of the sea and every living thing with which the water teems and that moves about in it, according to their kinds, and every winged bird according to its kind. And God saw that it was good. 22 God blessed them and said, “Be fruitful and increase in number and fill the water in the seas, and let the birds increase on the earth.” 23 And there was evening, and there was morning—the fifth day.

24 And God said, “Let the land produce living creatures according to their kinds: the livestock, the creatures that move along the ground, and the wild animals, each according to its kind.” And it was so. 25 God made the wild animals according to their kinds, the livestock according to their kinds, and all the creatures that move along the ground according to their kinds. And God saw that it was good.

26 Then God said, “Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals,[a] and over all the creatures that move along the ground.”

27 So God created mankind in his own image,
in the image of God he created them;
male and female he created them.

28 God blessed them and said to them, “Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground.”

29 Then God said, “I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food. 30 And to all the beasts of the earth and all the birds in the sky and all the creatures that move along the ground—everything that has the breath of life in it—I give every green plant for food.” And it was so.

31 God saw all that he had made, and it was very good. And there was evening, and there was morning—the sixth day.

Nehemiah 8: 9 Then Nehemiah the governor, Ezra the priest and teacher of the Law, and the Levites who were instructing the people said to them all, “This day is holy to the Lord your God. Do not mourn or weep.” For all the people had been weeping as they listened to the words of the Law.

10 Nehemiah said, “Go and enjoy choice food and sweet drinks, and send some to those who have nothing prepared. This day is holy to our Lord. Do not grieve, for the joy of the Lord is your strength.”

11 The Levites calmed all the people, saying, “Be still, for this is a holy day. Do not grieve.”

12 Then all the people went away to eat and drink, to send portions of food and to celebrate with great joy, because they now understood the words that had been made known to them.

OBSERVATION:

Did you notice in Genesis 1 that at the end of most every day, God sees that His work was good. God was doing two things.

- He was assessing the quality of His work.
- He was celebrating His completed work.

QUESTION:

What is something, that after you completed, you celebrated?

- How did you celebrate?
- Did you celebrate alone, or did you invite others to celebrate with you?
- Do you think it is a good thing to celebrate work that is completed? Why?

QUESTION:

Have you ever completed an assignment and then wanted to quit?

- Why did you want to quit? What made the experience so difficult or unsatisfying?
- If you quit, how did you feel about it afterward? Regret or relief?

OBSERVATION:

Nehemiah had returned to Jerusalem with a mission to rebuild the walls of the city. Jerusalem had not been able to defend itself from its enemies for decades.

- The walls were finally rebuilt and the gates of the city were reinstalled.
- The first thing the people of Jerusalem did was to gather to worship. For many, it was the first time in their lives to hear God's Word proclaimed. As they listened, they began to weep and cry?
- They may have felt they missed out on so much of life, because they did not know God's Word.
- They may have felt convicted as they learned God's ways to live.
- When Nehemiah heard the crying, he encouraged people to stop weeping. He explained this was a day of celebration – not a day of sorrow.

QUESTION:

Do you think there are times when people should be encouraged to stop crying?

- Are there are times when it is okay to cry and to be sad?
- How can you tell the difference?

Are Christians supposed to pretend that everything is wonderful even when it isn't?

- When are Christians allowed to be sad?
- Have you ever been told by someone to stop being sad or to stop crying? How did it make you feel? How did you respond?

OBSERVATION:

There are times when it is appropriate to be sad.

- We have all experienced loss and disappointment.

- God does not require us to put on a happy face just to make others feel more comfortable around us.

But this situation in Jerusalem was different.

- There were reasons to rejoice, but people were not focusing on what God had done, but on what they had missed out on earlier in their lives.
- God had restored them as a strong people, but they couldn't see it.
- All they could see was lost decades and limited potential.

QUESTION:

Do you think a person is more susceptible to temptation when they are sad? Why?

OBSERVATION:

God doesn't ask us to pretend. He does encourage us to notice the blessings we receive and the work we accomplish.

- When we celebrate the good things in our lives, it helps us to have a healthier perspective.
- When we don't take the time to celebrate the good in our lives we can forget the many ways God blesses us and uses us to bless others.

QUESTION:

What are some ways you could become more aware of the blessings of God in your life?

- What might be some ways to celebrate those things?

OBSERVATION:

When we pay attention to the blessings of God, we are far less likely to yield to temptation.

- The joy of the Lord becomes a strength to us.

PRAYER:

It might be good to take a few minutes to thank God for some of the good things in our lives.

- Then, take a few minutes lifting up the challenges and concerns members of your Life Group may be facing.