



**Sermon Based Small Group  
Leader Discussion Guide**

**Sermon Title: "Abiding in God's Word"**

**Sermon by Pastor Tom Harrington  
Week of January 23, 2011**

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<b>Session Objectives (Group Leader)</b>	<p><b>By the end of the session, group members should be able to:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>See how God's truth was communicated through his Word to the ancient Jews, to the early Baptists, and to themselves and/or others in the group today.</b></li> <li>• <b>Describe the Holy Spirit's work in God's revelation through Scripture.</b></li> <li>• <b>Identify at least one challenge they will need to overcome in order to read Scripture in a more disciplined and thoughtful way.</b></li> </ul>
<b>Personal Connection (Group Leader)</b>	<p><b>How does my story connect to the reading?</b>  <b>To prepare to lead this Bible study:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Reflect on the Icebreaker questions.</b></li> <li>• <b>Consider how God speaks through Scripture as well as biblically grounded preaching and teaching.</b></li> <li>• <b>Look up the word, "abide" in your dictionary.</b></li> <li>• <b>Pray for each member of your group by name.</b></li> </ul>
<b>Icebreaker</b>	<p>What are your earliest memories about the Bible? Who introduced you to the Bible and what experiences did you have with it?</p>
<b>Big Idea</b>	<p>God's Word can have a tremendous impact on your life.</p>

**Sermon Text**

Nehemiah 8:1-10 – New International Version

*All the people assembled with a unified purpose at the square just inside the Water Gate. They asked Ezra the scribe to bring out the Book of the Law of Moses, which the Lord had given for Israel to obey. <sup>2</sup> So on October 8 Ezra the priest brought the Book of the Law before the assembly, which included the men and women and all the children old enough to understand. <sup>3</sup> He faced the square just inside the Water Gate from early morning until noon and read aloud to everyone who could understand. All the people listened closely to the Book of the Law. <sup>4</sup> Ezra the scribe stood on a high wooden platform that had been made for the occasion. To his right stood Mattithiah, Shema, Anaiah, Uriah, Hilkiah, and Maaseiah. To his left stood Pedaiah, Mishael, Malkijah, Hashum, Hashbaddanah, Zechariah, and Meshullam. <sup>5</sup> Ezra stood on the platform in full view of all the people. When they saw him open the book, they all rose to their feet. <sup>6</sup> Then Ezra praised the Lord, the great God, and all the people chanted, "Amen! Amen!" as they lifted their hands. Then they bowed down and worshiped the Lord with their faces to the ground.*

*<sup>7</sup> The Levites—Jeshua, Bani, Sherebiah, Jamin, Akkub, Shabbethai, Hodiah, Maaseiah, Kelita, Azariah, Jozabad, Hanan, and Pelaiah—then instructed the people in the Law while everyone remained in their places. <sup>8</sup> They read from the Book of the Law of God and clearly explained the meaning of what was being read, helping the people understand each passage. <sup>9</sup> Then Nehemiah the governor, Ezra the priest and scribe, and the Levites who were interpreting for the people said to them, "Don't mourn or weep on such a day as this! For today is a sacred day before the Lord your God." For the people had all been weeping as they listened to the words of the Law. <sup>10</sup> And Nehemiah continued, "Go and celebrate with a feast of rich foods and sweet drinks, and share gifts of food with people who have nothing prepared. This is a sacred day before our Lord. Don't be dejected and sad, for the joy of the Lord is your strength!"*

### Learning more about the lesson

The book of Nehemiah, dated around 445 BC, can be divided into two basic parts: Part One (Chapters 1-7) has to do with “Rebuilding the Wall” around Jerusalem, which had been destroyed in 587 BC. Part Two (Chapters 8-13) has to do with “Reforming the People,” who were broken, discouraged, and largely ignorant of God’s law.

1. Why do you think the work of reforming the people would begin in the way described in our text?

**LEADER: Reform began when the people asked that Ezra bring out the Book of the Law of Moses, which the Lord had commanded for Israel (v. 1). “The Book of the Law” here is likely the Pentateuch – the first five books of the Bible. Recovering a sense of the holiness of God and focusing on his Word were the first steps in reforming the people.**

2. What evidence do you see that indicates that the people valued the Book of the Law and held it in high regard? Do you think that we, as believers today, look in awe at the Bible? When hearing someone read from it, do we respond the way they did in the passage? If not, why not?

**LEADER: The people asked for the reading (v. 1); everyone old enough to understand was there (v. 3); Ezra was on a high wooden platform built for the occasion (v. 4); the people stood up to listen (v. 5); the people bowed down and worshiped the Lord in a posture of repentance (v. 6); the people wept in repentance when they heard the word of the Lord (v. 9).**

3. Why do you suppose the people were weeping as they listened to the words of the Law (v. 9)? Have you ever wept over your Bible?

**LEADER: The people wept openly when they heard God’s laws and realized how far they were from obeying them. These were probably tears shed due to repentance for past sins and also perhaps fear of punishment to come.**

4. The assembly ends with a feast, including sending portions ‘to him for whom nothing is prepared’ (v. 10). Why would people celebrate the fact that the Book of the Law of Moses had been recovered?

Like the ancient Jews, Baptists place a strong emphasis on the Word of God revealed in sacred writings. One of the earliest Baptist confessions of faith begins with a statement about the authority of the Bible: “We believe that the Holy Bible was written by men divinely inspired, and is a perfect treasure of heavenly instruction; that it has God for its author, salvation for its end, and truth without any mixture of error for its matter; that it reveals the principles by which God will judge us; and therefore is, and shall remain to the

end of the world, the true center of Christian union, and the supreme standard by which all human conduct, creeds, and opinions should be tried.” – The New Hampshire Baptist Confession, 1833. Declaration of Faith, Article 1, “Of the Scriptures.”

5. What portion of this declaration strikes a responsive chord in you? Does any portion of this declaration raise a question?

**LEADER: People in your group may be in very different places in terms of their understanding of the authority of the Bible. Instead of shaming anyone who dismisses the Bible’s authority, let them see and hear how you and other Christians in the group understand the role of Scripture in your lives.**

Christians often refer to God speaking to them in a personal way through the ancient text of the Bible. When they open the Bible they pray for the Holy Spirit’s illumination, anticipating a dynamic encounter: *For the word of God is alive and powerful. It is sharper than the sharpest two-edged sword, cutting between soul and spirit, between joint and marrow. It exposes our innermost thoughts and desires* (Hebrews 4:12).

“The external letter must become an inner Word through the work of the Spirit. ... In one sense, of course, the Bible is a past text under our examining eyes. But in another sense it is an instrument of the Spirit peering into our lives and questioning us. The Word of God is ‘*at work*’ in believers and not merely something they have control over (1 Thessalonians 2:13). ... Though we interpret the Bible, in a sense it also interprets us if we are open to it. ‘*The word of God is not bound*’ (2 Timothy 2:9). ... God himself meets us in his Word and makes the truth live. – Clark Pinnock, The Scripture Principle, p. 156

6. Can you remember a time when God spoke to you through Scripture? How did that happen?
7. Do you have a “Life Verse,” or a favorite verse, a favorite book of the Bible or a favorite Bible story? How did that particular portion of Scripture become meaningful to you?

The Apostle Paul speaks of the ‘*Spirit of ... revelation*’ who operates in the believing heart to give a personal appreciation of all God has revealed and given (Ephesians 1:17). Consider for example the story of Lydia: *On the Sabbath we went a little way outside the city to a riverbank, where we thought people would be meeting for prayer, and we sat down to speak with some women who had gathered there. <sup>14</sup> One of them was Lydia from Thyatira, a merchant of expensive purple cloth, who worshiped God. As she listened to us, the Lord opened her heart, and she accepted what Paul was saying. <sup>15</sup> She was baptized*

	<p><i>along with other members of her household, and she asked us to be her guests. "If you agree that I am a true believer in the Lord," she said, "come and stay at my home." And she urged us until we agreed (Acts 16:13-15).</i></p> <p><i>"The God who caused light to shine out of darkness is able to send shafts of spiritual light into our hearts to disclose the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." – Pinnock, p. 162.</i></p> <p>8. Have you ever had an experience of the Spirit opening your heart to respond to a sermon or Bible lesson? What happened?</p> <p><i>"As Christians we must never deny that God speaks to individuals, but what he says is consistent with what he has already said to the church as a whole. The individuals through whom this revelation was given were specially chosen, and had an authority which no Christian today can claim. – Gerald Bray, <u>Biblical Interpretation</u>, p. 15.</i></p> <p>9. How do we know when a message is from God and not some other source?</p> <p><b>LEADER: The main point here is that the Bible is the key resource for discerning whether a message is or is not from God: Is the message consistent with biblical truth?</b></p>
<p><b>Taking it Home</b></p>	<p><b>How will I live it? Apply it?</b></p> <p>Do you have a personal time of regular Bible reading (or listening to Bible audio)? If so, when? If you were to begin or expand such a practice, what challenges do you imagine you would face? (Mark all that apply.)</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Too busy</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Lack of desire</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Lack of understanding what I read</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> I don't know how to apply what I read</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> I'm not sure I'm ready to hear what God might say</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____</p>
<p><b>Looking Ahead</b></p>	<p><b>How can I prepare for the next Small Group meeting?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Read 1 Corinthians 13 and prepare to explore the theme, "Living a Life of Love." (January 30, 2011)</li> <li>• For the week of February 6, read Matthew 5:1-16 on "Don't Hide Your Joy!"</li> </ul>

<p><b>Prayer Focus</b></p>	<p><b>How can I connect with God and others through prayer?</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Whenever you read or listen to Scripture, prayerfully invite the Holy Spirit to reveal God’s truth to you.</li> <li>2. How can this group pray for you and/or a need you have identified in this Bible study?</li> </ol> <p><b>Leader: Use the back of this page for recording prayer requests/praises. Encourage a group member to serve as the <u>Care Coordinator</u> by keeping track of these requests in a notebook and, if possible, emailing the list to group members.</b></p>
<p><b>Updates</b></p>	<p><b>Announcements from:</b>  Care Coordinator  Outreach Coordinator,  Social Coordinator</p>