

Intro: Heritage's mission is "*making disciples here and around the world.*" The elders have created *The Discipleship Wheel* to define discipleship for Heritage.

I'm grateful to Justin for sharing about giving last week, a discipline modeled by Christ and practiced by his people.

Today I'd like to share why Community Groups are an important part of discipleship.

First: Small Groups as a Divine Paradigm

- a) Adam - Genesis 2:18 - *It is not good that the man should be alone*
- b) Adam and Eve – Genesis 4:1 - *Now Adam knew Eve his wife, and she conceived and bore Cain*
- c) Abraham – Genesis 12:1 - *Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house*
- d) Israel – Exodus 4:22 - *Israel is my firstborn son...*
- e) Jesus – the disciples

The four lists of the Twelve appear in Matt 10:2-4; Mark 3:16-19; Luke 6:13-19; Acts 1:13

The Bible groups the 12 disciples in three groups of four

Across all four lists, Peter is *always listed first* and Judas Iscariot is *always listed last*

In Matthew and Mark, they are listed in three groups of four, consistently led by the same person:

1. Peter, Andrew, James, John
2. Philip, Bartholomew, Matthew, Thomas
3. James, son of Alphaeus, Thaddaeus, Simon the Zealot, Judas Iscariot

The internal order shifts, but the *group leaders remain constant*.

And then, there is the inner circle of three of Peter, James and John.

There is meaningful consistency in the way Jesus organized the disciples.

Summary: Small Groups, which we define as Community Groups, are not a modern strategy; they reflect a layered pattern of belonging where faith is learned, lived, practiced, and sustained.

Second: God ‘Moves’ His People in Large Groups and Small Groups

1. The Exodus

- a) Large Group - Exodus 13:21–22 - *The LORD went before them by day in a pillar of cloud... and by night in a pillar of fire.*
- b) Small Group - Numbers 2:34a - *So the people of Israel did according to all that the LORD commanded Moses; so they camped by their [degel/tribal] standards,*
- c) Even Smaller Groups – Numbers 2:34b - *...and so they set out, each one in his clan, according to his father’s house.*

Deuteronomy 29:10-11 - *You are standing today, all of you, before the LORD your God: the heads of your tribes, your elders, and your officers, all the men of Israel, your little ones, your wives, and the sojourner...*

There is a deliberate placement that gets smaller and smaller:

- all Israel
- tribal heads
- families
- households

2. The New Church –

Acts 2:41-42 & 46 - *So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls. ⁴² And they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.... ⁴⁶ And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts...*

- a) Temple & Homes - There is a necessary grouping in large and small groups since 3,000 believers could not be ‘devoted’ to the apostles’ teaching, nor could they ‘fellowship,’ or ‘break bread’ in the large group

b) This gives us a sense of what could happen in community groups –

- Teaching
- Fellowship
- Breaking Bread
- Prayers

Summary:

- Adam was not created to live alone.
- Abraham was called out *with* a household.
- Israel moved as a nation, but camped by tribes, clans, and families.
- Jesus formed the Twelve, then invested deeply in smaller circles.
- The early church gathered in the temple and in homes.

This shows that spiritual formation happens most effectively where people are known and accountable, not absorbed into an institution. Community Groups give shape to that biblical reality.

Third: Nehemiah as a Model for Community Groups

a) The context. **Nehemiah 8:1-4**

Nehemiah 8 takes place after Israel's return from seventy years of Babylonian captivity, when the restored community, intent on rebuilding Jerusalem, gathers to hear the Law read and explained so that spiritual renewal would accompany physical restoration.

- b) Scripture wasn't absent but limited during those 70 years so this is the first public, national reading of the Old Testament in 70 years
- c) Ezra sent 'teaching priests' into the congregation to teach the people in small groups

Nehemiah 8:7 - *Also Jeshua, Bani, Sherebiah, Jamin, Akkub, Shabbethai, Hodiah, Maaseiah, Kelita, Azariah, Jozabad, Hanan, Pelaiah, the Levites, helped the people to understand the Law, while the people remained in their places = small groups.*

d) The teaching priests did three things:

Nehemiah 8:8 - *They read from the book, from the Law of God, clearly, and they gave the sense, so that the people understood the reading.*

- Sense = make the text plain – “this is what it means”
- Understanding – a grasp that results in a response – “this is how to apply it”

Nehemiah 8 shows a deliberate process:

1. The text is read publicly.
2. The sense (explanation) is given.
3. Understanding is produced (comprehension that shapes the heart and will).

e) The people respond accordingly –

Nehemiah 8:9-12 - *And Nehemiah, who was the governor, and Ezra the priest and scribe, and the Levites who taught the people said to all the people, "This day is holy to the LORD your God; do not mourn or weep." For all the people wept as they heard the words of the Law. ¹⁰ Then he said to them, "Go your way. Eat the fat and drink sweet wine and send portions to anyone who has nothing ready, for this day is holy to our Lord. And do not be grieved, for the joy of the LORD is your strength." ¹¹ So the Levites calmed all the people, saying, "Be quiet, for this day is holy; do not be grieved." ¹² And all the people went their way to eat and drink and to send portions and to make great rejoicing, because they had understood the words that were declared to them.*

- a) They wept to hear how far they were from God v 9
- b) They rejoiced to know God was re-covenanting with them. v 12

APP: From the very beginning of CGs at Heritage, Nehemiah 8 has formed the foundation for why and how we gather in small groups. The Scripture is at the center of who we are, what we do and why we do it.

Rather than hearing one thing in the sanctuary and then studying a Bible lesson based on a different text in small groups, our elders have committed us to one text each week for listening, studying, and applying.

Hearing the Scripture together and then discussing the Bible in small groups interprets and applies the Bible to our lives by reinforcing what we have heard. This is a solid biblical pattern.

In all we do, the Bible should have the priority. It should never be minimized or treated lightly, considered secondary or inconsequential. This commitment must be spoken, practiced and reiterated without end.

For instance, in our text, Israel didn't even know how to weep correctly without instruction from the teaching priests. Our fellowship, breaking of bread, prayers...everything should be based on and emanate from the Bible. We should not just give it lip service (Matt 15:8).

An important text: (Paul's final words to the Ephesian elders)

Acts 20:32 - *And now I commend you to God and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified.*

The Bible must have priority in everything the church does because:

- it is God's voice to his people,
- it creates and governs the church,
- it forms souls rather than merely producing effects,
- and it keeps Christ at the center.

For instance - Nehemiah 8 does not begin with rebuilding plans, leadership training, or renewed resolve. It begins with Scripture read aloud. Israel does not gather because they are already spiritually strong; they gather because they are spiritually fragile.

The Word of God *precedes* renewal because it *creates* the people before it directs them. God does not rebuild Israel by first fixing their behavior, but by re-covenanting them as a listening people.

Scripture is not a supplement to community; it is the foundation of it. The people leave the gathering and live differently because the Bible forms the obedience that shapes our daily lives.

The church not merely informed by Scripture. It is formed by Scripture.

Summary: Nehemiah 8 is the clearest biblical picture of why small groups matter: the Word is heard publicly but grasped personally in community.

Conclusion:

- In the sanctuary, we are inspired and informed.
- In Community Groups, we are instructed and transformed.

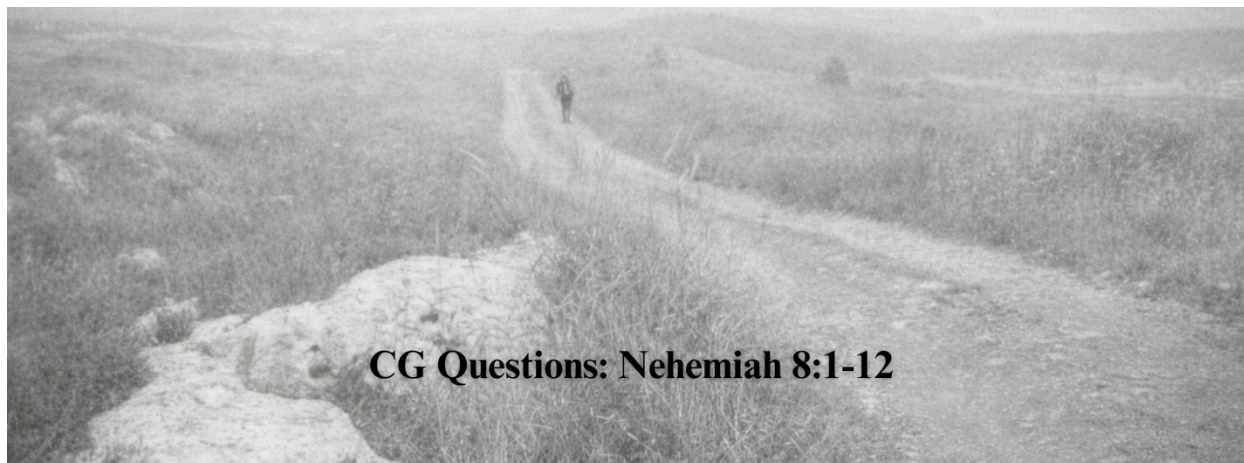
People should be in a Community Group because that is where the Bible does its full work. Not just informing minds but forming lives, through the Word, fellowship and prayer.

Community Groups ensure that Scripture is not merely heard but:

- explained,
- discussed,
- applied,
- prayed,
- and lived out together.

The Community Group ensures you hear the Bible and have the opportunity to be shaped by it.

This is why Community Groups are not optional. They are essential to discipleship.



CG Questions: Nehemiah 8:1-12

Observation

(What does the text say and what do we see happening?)

1. In Nehemiah 8:1–8, what happens in the public gathering, and what happens among the people “in their places”?
2. According to Nehemiah 8:7–8, what two actions do the Levites take with the Law, and how are those actions described?
3. What responses do we see in Nehemiah 8:9–12, and how are those responses explicitly connected to the people’s “understanding”?
4. How do the smaller teaching interactions in Nehemiah 8 resemble the way Israel moved by tribes and households in Numbers 2:34, rather than only as a single mass?

Interpretation

(What does this mean? Why does God work this way?)

1. Why does Nehemiah 8 show that public Scripture reading alone is not sufficient for spiritual renewal?
2. What does the distinction between “giving the sense” and producing “understanding” tell us about how Scripture is meant to function in God’s people?
3. How does Nehemiah 8 help explain why God consistently forms his people through layered groups, from nation to household to even smaller groups, as seen in the Exodus and covenant renewal passages?
4. Why is the people’s movement from weeping to rejoicing a sign of proper Scripture-shaped formation rather than emotional reaction alone?

Correlation

(How does this pattern repeat across Scripture?)

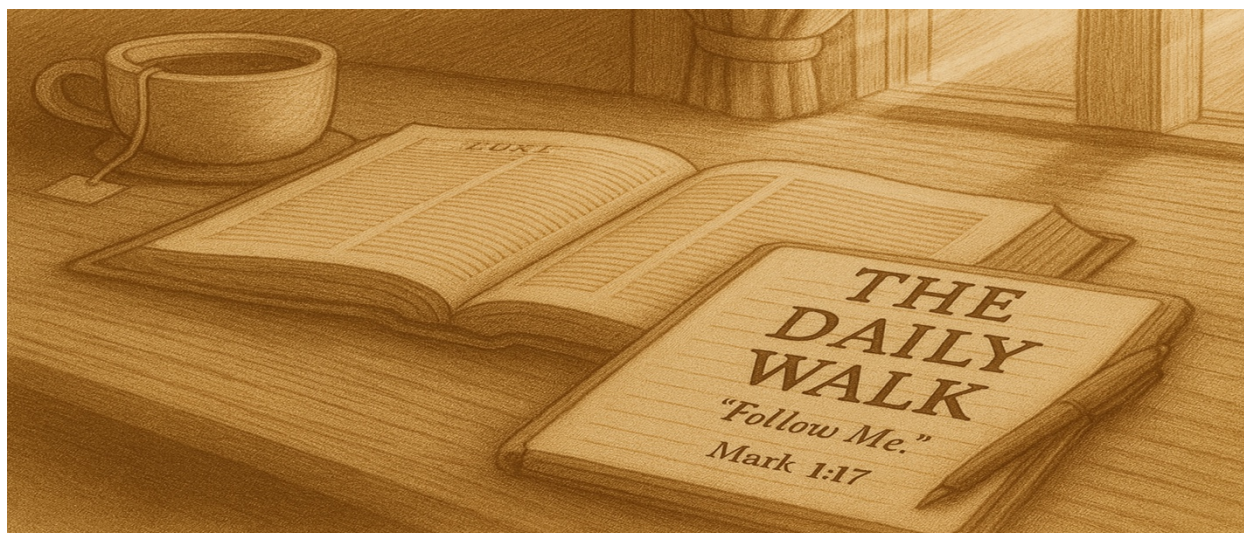
1. How does Nehemiah 8 reflect the same large–small group pattern seen in:
 - Israel’s movement in the Exodus (**Exodus 13:21–22; Numbers 2:34),
 - Jesus’ formation of the Twelve and the inner circle,

- and the early church's life together in Acts 2:41–46?
2. How does Acts 20:32 reinforce Nehemiah 8's claim that the Word of God, not structure or outcomes, is what truly builds and sanctifies God's people?
 3. What do these repeated patterns reveal about God's design for discipleship across both Testaments?

Application

(How should this shape our discipleship and church life?)

1. Based on Nehemiah 8, what happens when Scripture is heard but not explained, processed, and applied in community?
2. How do Community Groups function today in the same way the Levites did, helping God's people move from hearing the Word to understanding and obedience?
3. What does this passage suggest about our responsibility to place ourselves in settings where Scripture can shape us, not just inspire us?
4. In light of this sermon, what does committing to a Community Group say about trusting God's design for formation rather than relying on individual or institutional approaches alone?



Monday - The Word Creates the People of God. *(Nehemiah 8:1–3)*

Think. Nehemiah 8 does not begin with rebuilding plans, leadership training, or renewed resolve. It begins with Scripture read aloud. Israel does not gather because they are already spiritually strong; they gather because they are spiritually fragile. The Word of God precedes renewal because it *creates* the people before it directs them. God does not rebuild Israel by first fixing their behavior, but by reconstituting them as a listening people. Scripture is not a supplement to community; it is the foundation of it.

Reflect. This passage confronts the modern instinct to treat Scripture as personal inspiration rather than communal authority. God forms his people together by hearing his Word together. Faith weakens when Scripture becomes private preference rather than shared submission. Nehemiah 8 reminds us that God speaks most formatively when his people are gathered under his Word, not merely scattered with access to it.

Apply. This week, take one concrete step to place yourself under Scripture *with others*:

- Commit to attending your Community Group without distraction or partial presence.
- Bring a physical Bible, not only a phone.
- Write down one sentence during the reading that captures what God is saying, not how you feel.

Pray. God, you speak before I respond. Re-form me as someone who listens with your people, not apart from them. Let your Word shape me before I attempt to shape my life. Amen.

Tuesday. Understanding Requires Help. (*Nehemiah 8:7–8*)

Think. The Levites do not replace the reading of Scripture; they serve it. They explain, clarify, and make plain what God has already spoken. Scripture assumes that understanding often requires mediation, patience, and humility. God does not shame his people for needing help; he provides teachers so that his Word can be grasped and obeyed. Growth in understanding is not a private achievement but a communal gift.

Reflect. Nehemiah 8 exposes the pride behind the assumption that spiritual maturity means needing less instruction. In reality, mature faith recognizes how much help is needed. God often uses ordinary conversation, explanation, and repetition to shape obedience. Community Groups exist because God knows that Scripture requires shared processing to become formative.

Apply. During your Community Group this week:

- Ask one clarifying question about the text, even if it feels basic.
- Listen without interrupting when someone else speaks.
- Write down one insight you did not arrive at on your own.

Pray. God, free me from the illusion that I grow alone. Teach me through your Word and through your people. Shape my humility as much as my understanding. Amen.

Wednesday. The Word Exposes Before It Heals. (*Nehemiah 8:9*)

Think. When the people understand the Law, they weep. Scripture reveals the distance between God's holiness and their lives. This grief is not manipulation or despair; it is clarity. The Word forms us by telling the truth before offering comfort. Conviction is not condemnation, but preparation for grace.

Reflect. Many resist Scripture because it disrupts comfort. But Nehemiah 8 shows that honest grief is a sign of real understanding. God's Word wounds only to heal. Formation requires the courage to remain present when Scripture confronts us.

Apply. Identify one specific area where Scripture has recently exposed your misalignment to the body of Christ:

- Confess it directly to God using the language of the text.
- Share it with one trusted believer this week for prayer and accountability.

Pray. God, let your Word search me without fear. Where I am exposed, meet me with mercy. Teach me to receive conviction as grace. Amen.

Thursday. Joy Is Rooted in Covenant Grace. (*Nehemiah 8:10*)

Think. Nehemiah redirects the people from mourning to joy, not because sin is insignificant, but because God's covenant mercy is greater. Joy is commanded because grace has been restored. Scripture does not leave God's people bowed down; it lifts them by reminding them who God is and what he has promised.

Reflect. Biblical joy is not emotional avoidance. It is confidence that God remains faithful even when his people fall short. Scripture forms joy by anchoring hope in God's character, not personal performance.

Apply. Practice joy concretely today:

- Think of three specific evidences of God's grace in your life.
- Express gratitude to God aloud, not silently.
- Do one intentional act of generosity toward someone in need, reflecting verse 10.

Pray. God, restore my joy where shame lingers. Let your grace strengthen me more than guilt ever could. Amen.

Friday. Understanding Leads to Obedience. (*Nehemiah 8:12*)

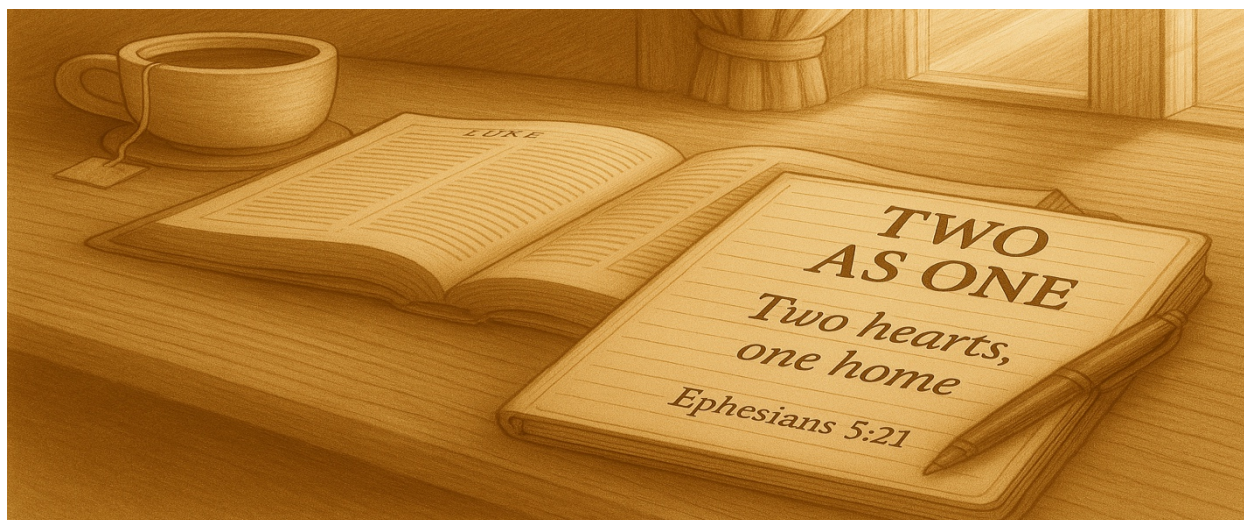
Think. The people do not remain in the assembly. They go and live differently. Understanding produces action. Scripture completes its work not when it is heard, but when it is embodied. Formation is visible.

Reflect. Nehemiah 8 reminds us that obedience is not the price of grace but the fruit of it. God's Word reshapes daily life, not merely religious moments.

Apply. Choose one concrete obedience flowing from this week's text:

- Adjust your weekly schedule to protect Community Group attendance.
- Commit to Scripture reading and study with others, not only alone.
- Begin a habit of weekly generosity or hospitality shaped by God's Word.

Pray. God, help me live what I have heard. Form my habits, not just my thoughts. Make your Word visible in my life. Amen.



Monday. A Marriage Gathers Under the Word. (*Nehemiah 8:1–3*)

Think. Nehemiah 8 begins with a people gathering to hear the Word, not as isolated listeners but as a covenant community. Renewal does not begin with individual resolve but with shared attention to God’s voice. For a marriage, this means growth is not sustained by affection alone, but by mutual submission to what God has spoken. Scripture is not an accessory to marriage; it is the authority under which a marriage learns how to live.

Reflect. Many couples drift spiritually not because they reject Scripture, but because they consume it separately. Nehemiah 8 confronts the assumption that parallel private devotion equals shared spiritual formation. God forms his people by calling them to listen together. A marriage shaped by Scripture must first become a marriage that *gathers under Scripture*.

Apply. This week, establish a fixed, shared Scripture time, even if brief:

- Choose a specific day and time.
- Read Nehemiah 8:1–3 aloud together.
- Agree that this time is protected, not flexible.

Pray. God, teach us to listen together. Shape our marriage not by our habits or preferences, but by your Word. Form us as one people under your voice. Amen.

Tuesday. Understanding Requires Shared Humility. (*Nehemiah 8:7–8*)

Think. The Levites help the people understand the Law. Scripture assumes that clarity often comes through explanation and conversation. This applies directly to marriage. God often uses a spouse to illuminate blind spots, deepen understanding, and correct misreading. Growth requires humility, not expertise.

Reflect. Spiritual tension in marriage often emerges not from disagreement with Scripture, but from unspoken assumptions about what it means. Nehemiah 8 shows that understanding grows

when God's Word is explained and received together. A marriage grows when both spouses are learners under the same authority.

Apply. During your shared Scripture time:

- Each spouse states one observation from the text.
- Each spouse names one question or confusion.
- Resist correcting each other. Listen first.

Pray. God, guard us from pride. Teach us through your Word and through one another. Let understanding grow where humility is practiced. Amen.

Wednesday. The Word Exposes Our Marriage Before It Heals It. (*Nehemiah 8:9*)

Think. When the people understand the Law, they weep. Scripture exposes distance between God's will and their lives. In marriage, the Word often reveals patterns of selfishness, avoidance, or control. This exposure is not failure. It is grace telling the truth before offering healing.

Reflect. Couples often avoid Scripture together because it feels threatening. But Nehemiah 8 shows that exposure is a necessary step toward renewal. A marriage shaped by Scripture must allow God's Word to name what is broken before it restores what is wounded.

Apply. Together, name one area where Scripture has recently challenged your marriage:

- Speak it without blame.
- Confess it to God together.
- Work to align the area to the Bible

Pray. God, give us courage to let your Word search our marriage. Where we are exposed, meet us with mercy. Heal what we cannot fix ourselves. Amen.

Thursday. Shared Joy Rooted in Covenant Grace. (*Nehemiah 8:10*)

Think. Nehemiah calls the people to joy because God is renewing covenant relationship. Joy is not denial of our sin, but confidence in his grace. In marriage, joy grows when both spouses remember that God's faithfulness, not their performance, sustains the marriage covenant.

Reflect. Many marriages carry unspoken shame. Scripture restores joy by reminding God's people that renewal belongs to him. When couples receive grace together, joy becomes shared strength rather than private emotion.

Apply. Practice joy intentionally:

- Each spouse names one evidence of God's grace in your marriage.
- Thank God aloud together.
- Choose one act of generosity or hospitality to perform together this week.

Pray. God, restore our joy in you. Let grace, not guilt, be the strength of our marriage. Amen.

Friday. Obedience Becomes a Shared Direction. (*Nehemiah 8:12*)

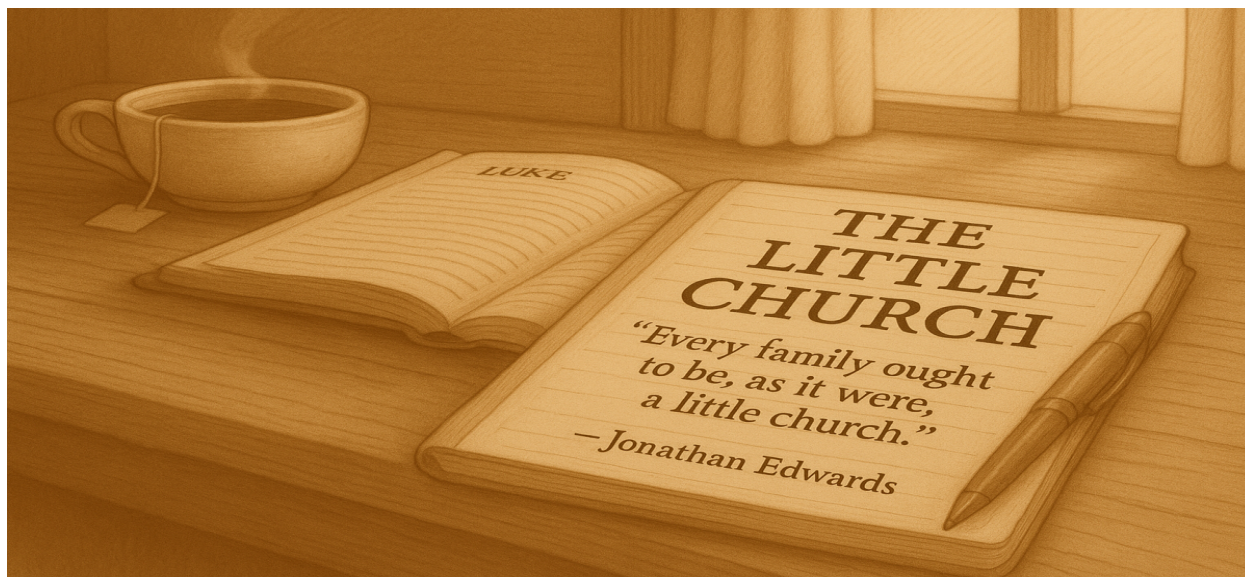
Think. The people leave the gathering and live differently. Scripture forms obedience that shapes daily life. In marriage, obedience becomes direction, habits, and priorities aligned under God's Word.

Reflect. A marriage formed by Scripture does not ask, "What feels right?" but, "What has God made clear?" Obedience is not punishment, it is participation in God's renewing work.

Apply. Choose one concrete practice to continue together:

- Commit to regular Community Group participation.
- Establish a weekly shared Scripture rhythm.
- Practice planned generosity shaped by God's Word.

Pray. God, help us live what we have heard. Shape our marriage through obedience born of grace. Amen.



Monday. God Gathers Families Under His Word. (*Nehemiah 8:1–3*)

Think. God gathers his people to hear his Word together. Families are not separate from God's people; they are part of them. God forms families by teaching them to listen together, not just individually.

Reflect. When families hear Scripture together, children learn that God's Word shapes daily life, not just church time. Listening together teaches belonging.

Apply. As a family:

- Read Nehemiah 8:1–3 aloud.
- Let one child or the children say what they heard.
- Keep it simple and encourage sharing.

Pray. God, thank you for bringing our family under your Word. Teach us to listen together. Amen.

Tuesday. God Helps Us Understand. (*Nehemiah 8:7–8*)

Think. God sent teachers to help his people understand. Families are God’s primary place of teaching God’s word.

Reflect. Parents do not need all the answers. God works through explanation, questions, and patience.

Apply. Ask one question together:

- “What does this tell us about God?”
- Let children answer freely.
- Like a teaching priest in Neh 8, offer direction to their understanding.

Pray. God, help our family learn together. Give us patience and clarity as we grow together. Amen.

Wednesday. God’s Word Shows Us Our Heart. (*Nehemiah 8:9*)

Think. The people felt sadness when they understood God’s Word. Scripture shows us where we need help.

Reflect. God’s correction is loving, not harsh.

Apply. Each person shares one way they want or need God’s help this week.

Pray. God, thank you for loving us enough to show us the truth. Help us grow. Amen.

Thursday. God Gives Joy to His People. (*Nehemiah 8:10*)

Think. God turns Israel’s sadness into joy because he is faithful and loves his people.

Reflect. Joy grows when families remember what God has done.

Apply As a family:

- Name three good gifts from God.
- Thank God aloud.
- Share something, a word, or deed, with someone else outside of your family this week.

Pray. God, thank you for your goodness to our family. Amen.

Friday. Living God's Word Together. (*Nehemiah 8:12*)

Think. The people lived differently because they understood God's Word.

Reflect. God wants our family to follow him together.

Apply. Commit to these family practices each week:

- Scripture reading,
- prayer together,
- generosity or hospitality.

Pray. God, help our family live what we have learned. Form us by your Word. Amen.