

Engaging the Hearers

NEHEMIAH 8:1-12

All the people gathered together into the square before the Water Gate. They told the scribe Ezra to bring the book of the law of Moses, which the LORD had given to Israel. **2**Accordingly, the priest Ezra brought the law before the assembly, both men and women and all who could hear with understanding. This was on the first day of the seventh month. **3**He read from it facing the square before the Water Gate from early morning until midday, in the presence of the men and the women and those who could understand; and the ears of all the people were attentive to the book of the law. **4**The scribe Ezra stood on a wooden platform that had been made for the purpose; and beside him stood Mattithiah, Shema, Anaiah, Uriah, Hilkiah, and Maaseiah on his right hand; and Pedaiah, Mishael, Malchijah, Hashum, Hash-baddanah, Zechariah, and Meshullam on his left hand. **5**And Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people, for he was standing above all the people; and when he opened it, all the people stood up. **6**Then Ezra blessed the LORD, the great God, and all the people answered, "Amen, Amen," lifting up their hands. Then they bowed their heads and worshiped the LORD with their faces to the ground. **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. **8**So they read from the book, from the law of God, with interpretation. They gave the sense, so that the people understood the reading. **9** 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 when 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 of them to those for whom nothing is prepared, 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 stilled 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.



What is striking to you about this scene?

The goal of the first stage of Bible study is to help people engage with the scripture, both intellectually and emotionally, to “stand up in their hearts” as they open to Scripture.

HOW DO YOU HELP PEOPLE “STAND UP IN THEIR HEARTS” AS THEY BEGIN THE BIBLE STUDY?

1. Make _____.
2. _____ their blocks to hearing.
3. _____ them into an appropriate entry posture to the text.

A leader’s role is to _____ expectation levels and _____ them.

THE ENCOUNTER PHASE MUST ADDRESS THE FOLLOWING NEEDS WITHIN THE FIRST 10 MINUTES OF THE STUDY:

1. _____ needs: Answer the question “Will this be worthwhile?”
2. _____ needs: Answer the questions “Will I understand this?” “Will it be interesting?” “Will I learn something?”
3. _____ needs: Answer the question “Is this a safe place?” “Can I be myself here?” “Is my contribution valued?”

SOME IDEAS FOR CREATIVE ENCOUNTER EXERCISES:

- **Reporter.** Write a brief summary as if you are a reporter writing a story on an event/character
- **Journal entry.** Write a brief journal entry as though you are one of the characters in the narrative
- **Eye Witness Account.** Write or share in pairs as if speaking from the perspective of an eye witness to the event (as though you are on trial and need to give details)
- **Role play.** In pairs, “be” one of the characters in the passage and discuss responses to what’s going on
- **Dramatic reading.** Ask several people in the group to participate and read the passage dramatically (this works really well with passages in which there’s a dialogue).
- **Director.** Ask them to imagine they are directing the passage as a scene in a movie; plan out camera angles, lighting, background music, casting, etc.
- **5 Senses.** Read the passage from the perspective of the 5 senses: ask them to pick a sense (touch, smell, sight, hearing, emotional feeling), have someone read the passage aloud, and then discuss what each “sense” perceived in the passage.
- **Drawing.** Give each group member a sheet of paper with a few square blank “cartoon” blocks. Have them fill in the blocks with drawings of the scenes from the passage.

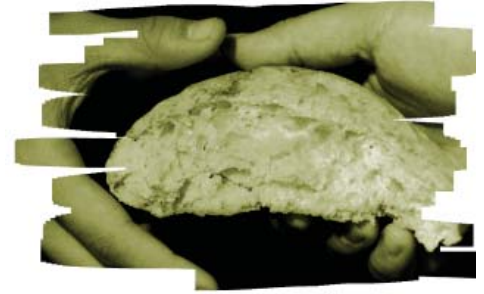
GOOD “ENCOUNTER” QUESTIONS WILL:

- Bridge the gap to our modern experience
- Elicit intrigue; studiers will want to go further
- Reveal the tension of the passage; the drama of the narrative comes to life.
- Begin to move to the heart of the passage.
- Provoke other questions

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What is striking to you about this scene?

- "The ears of all the people were attentive"—they were prepared for the reading of the scripture: a platform had been made for the purpose of reading the scripture. Ezra had been told to bring the Law of Moses. They had thought ahead and had prepared for this day. They gathered all the people.
- When the scripture was read, the people stood up, out of respect and real interest. They had heightened expectation: they expected that it would be worth it. Like standing on tip-toes when a parade is passing by—they expected to receive something great.
- The people were physically involved in the worship of God: they raised their hands, they responded "Amen, Amen", they bowed their heads, they worshipped with their faces to the ground.
- As the reading went on, the Levites went through the crowd, helping people to understand, giving the meaning, answering questions.
- They were not to mourn or weep (out of repentance) but rather they were told to rejoice and eat and celebrate, because they understood the word of the law. Rather than the law being bad news and full of condemnation, hearing it was a privilege and a joy.

The goals of the Encounter stage in a Bible study encourage more than a cognitive response to the text. In this stage, participants also interact with the text emotionally. So, the group discovers both

1. What the text is actually saying (cognitive), and
2. How they feel about what the text is saying (emotive).

Both head and heart should be engaged in the Encounter stage.

The goal of the first stage of Bible study is to help people engage with the scripture, both intellectually and emotionally, to “stand up in their hearts” as they open to Scripture.

HOW DO YOU HELP PEOPLE “STAND UP IN THEIR HEARTS” AS THEY BEGIN THE BIBLE STUDY?

1. Make **space** .
2. **Overcome** their blocks to hearing.
3. **Guide** them into an appropriate entry posture to the text.

A leader’s role is to **raise** expectation levels and **meet** them.

THE ENCOUNTER PHASE MUST ADDRESS THE FOLLOWING NEEDS WITHIN THE FIRST 10 MINUTES OF THE STUDY:

1. **Emotional** needs: Answer the question “Will this be worthwhile?”
2. **Intellectual** needs: Answer the questions “Will I understand this?” “Will it be interesting?” “Will I learn something?”
3. **Social** needs: Answer the question “Is this a safe place?” “Can I be myself here?” “Is my contribution valued?”

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