

## ICEBREAKER

- What is something that you are really passionate about?
- What is something that others might describe you as overzealous about?

## IDEA 1 - GOOD INTENTIONS + OVERZEALOUS = HARM

Through the life and leadership of Ezra, Rob highlighted that good intentions mixed with overzealousness can actually cause harm

- Where have you seen this play out in your own life or in leadership situations you've witnessed?
- How can we recognize when our pursuit of excellence or purity is crossing the line into harmful zealousness?
- What guardrails can we put in place to ensure our application of biblical principles doesn't cause unintended harm to others?

## IDEA 2- EZRA'S FEAR, LEGALISM & PRIDE

As Rob further analyzed Ezra's leadership he pointed out that he struggled with fear, legalism and pride.

Out of fear, Ezra put up boundaries with others so that the Israelites wouldn't be influenced by others at the expense of Israel being an influencer.

- How do we walk the tension between not wanting to be influenced by others in a negative way and also being an influential presence in others lives who think and act differently from us?

- **What is your reaction to this quote by Ray Lubek?**
  - *“As a sobering reminder....We should note that the Pharisees, whom we know so well from our New Testament, consider Ezra to be the founding father of their movement. Did they pray? Read Scripture? Fast? Take their faith seriously? Expect others to conform to their standards? Passionately work at keeping every command? Exclude all outsiders? Deem themselves as better than others? Add their own rules to God’s commands? Were they sincere? The answer to all these questions is, of course, yes, just like we find in Ezra-Nehemiah. And rather than seeking to replicate this kind of “godly leadership,” we should seek our positive role models for spiritual leadership elsewhere.”*
- One of the things pride does to Godly leaders is makes them stand in their positional authority and neglect their spiritual intimacy. **How do we maintain spiritual intimacy with God when making important decisions in positions of authority?**
- We all struggle with fear, legalism, or pride at times. **Which of these three do you find most challenging to overcome in your own life?**

## EXPERIENCING GOD TOGETHER: EXAMINING OUR INTENTIONS

Take time to examine areas where our good intentions and passions might be blinding us to potential harm. Like Ezra, we can sometimes become so focused on what we believe is right that we miss the impact our actions have on others and ourselves.

Give your Life Group 3-5 minutes to personally reflect on and process the following questions:

- **What areas of my life am I most passionate about? Where do I feel strongest conviction?**
- **In these areas, how might my passion sometimes affect others around me?**
- **When have I noticed myself becoming rigid or inflexible because of my convictions?**
- **Is there an area where I might be imposing my standards on others in ways that cause harm rather than healing?**
- **What would it look like to hold my convictions with both truth AND grace?**

Then encourage people to identify one concrete action you can take this week to address what you've discovered. This might be:

- A conversation you need to have
- An apology you need to offer
- A boundary you need to soften
- A perspective you need to reconsider

Invite people to share one insight they gained from this time of examination, and/or one step they plan to take in response.

Optional Closing Prayer:

*“Lord, it's difficult to see how our good intentions can sometimes cause harm. Give us hearts that are passionate for truth but equally committed to grace. Help us to hold our convictions in ways that bring life, not burdens. May we be known not just for what we stand for, but for how we love. In Jesus' name, Amen.”*

## **PRACTICE FOR THIS WEEK - UPWARD, OUTWARD, FORWARD**

Follow through this week with whatever action you felt like God was inviting you to take above.