

Group discussion *Each number below includes questions that relate to the scripture. I offer a few answers, but your perspective may be better. The point is to discuss, not to get 100% agreement. Rule of thumb: the fewer questions you ask, the better. Save time for “the big question.”*

Read Zephaniah 3:9-20 aloud.

1. What is the mood of these verses?

What does God promise to do in this reading? What are the verbs?

What are the word pictures of God?

What does this say about God’s resolve to find and raise up worshippers, and how might this give us confidence?

Cush is the upper Nile region of Egypt. When we worship today, how do we fulfill God’s desire from Zeph. 3:10?

2. When God destroys sinners, what kind of people does he spare (12-13)? Who makes up the remnant?

When you hear people express concern about our nation’s moral decay, how could verse 12 give you hope?

3. What are some of the promises of verses 14-17?

How is God described in verse 17? Who does this sound like?
Sound like a parenting calming an infant with a lullaby?

How well does that image fit with your picture of God in the Old Testament?

4. When you think of God watching you, how does it make you feel?

Where do we get the negative view of God watching us with a scowl?

Not from the Bible!

The Bible teaches that God knows all about us and will judge us, but that is only one aspect of God. What are some other ways he watches over us?

Parenting images like Zeph. 3 might help – parents discipline children, but that’s a small fraction of what good parents do.

5. Until Zeph. 3:9, the entire book has described God destroying people who hurt others and worship idols. Why is there so much destruction in the prophetic writings?

Nearly every prophetic book ends with a comfort section like Zeph. 3:9-20. What does that say about God’s character and nature?

6. How much does this passage foretell events related to Jesus?
Like most prophets, Zephaniah is focused on addressing the spiritual needs of his peers, so messianic prophecies are hard to find.

How does the life of Jesus add new meaning to this passage that Zephaniah’s peers could have never imagined?

† **The million-dollar question** *If you ask only one question, let this be it. Allow at least 20 minutes. Go around the circle and give each person an opportunity to answer. It’s okay if they pass, but at least they get a chance to respond.*

When the word “God” is said, what is the first picture that comes to mind? How might your image be incomplete or even inaccurate?
All our pictures are incomplete, so don’t feel bad. How could we possibly imagine someone as amazing as God?

Resources

Bible notes

See the front cover for info about Zephaniah and his audience.

Prayer ideas

Thank God for watching over us like a loving parent.

Lay situations before God where you need protection or wisdom.

Pray for someone who needs to come to know Jesus.

Kid-friendly activity. *An activity designed to help kids and adults grow in faith together. Do this first, then dismiss the kids so the adults can talk.*

Play the quiet game – one of the grown-ups is “it.” Everyone else has to be totally quiet. One peep or snicker and you are out!

Last one in the game is the winner.

You might give a prize for the kid who can be quiet the longest.

Ask one of the kids to read Zephaniah 3:14-17 aloud.

What does this passage say about being loud or quiet?

14 – shout out praises to God

17 – God quiets us with his love

When has your mom or dad quieted you with love? When have you seen that happen with a baby?

Let them tell stories about when they were sick or sad and a parent's love helped.

How can God calm us when we are upset? How can you feel God's love if you can't see him face to face?

Offer a prayer of quiet – thank God for moments he calms us.

Offer a shouting prayer – Shout out great things God has done.

These would work well as chain prayers, with an adult starting & ending the prayer and members offering their items. Do the quiet prayer first.

Play the LOUD game – send the kids outside and see who can be the loudest!



May 16, 2010

LIFE Group Guide

Zephaniah 3 – God watches

By John Grant (jgrant@collegehills.org)

The theme: **God watches over his people.**

Even though Zephaniah is obscure, it is still the word of God and it holds value today. This week's passage contains beautiful thoughts about how God watches over his people like a loving parent.

Zephaniah lived in Judah in the 600's BC, when Josiah was king (1:1). He was probably an old man when Jeremiah was born. He wrote before Josiah's religious reforms began in 621 BC (II Kings 22). At the time, Assyria had destroyed Israel and dominated the Mediterranean region.

Judah was caught in idolatry (as usual), so Zephaniah's message (like most prophetic writings) was one of destruction. Zephaniah foresees a day of justice when God punishes idol worshippers and evil doers, starting with his people in Judah and then their neighbors.

Fortunately, the book of Zephaniah closes with a word of hope. That's where this discussion will focus.

Leadership tip: Make contact with group members between meetings. Spend time together socially, help one another with projects at home and work, serve together in the church and in the community.

Relate *Use a few to introduce the theme, check everyone's spiritual pulse, and "break the ice." No right or wrong answers – maybe goofy but not wrong! Look for opportunities to affirm and encourage through these questions.*

- ❖ Gimme five...places you never thought you would see flooded (but they were this month)?
- ❖ What was your most recent interaction with a police officer?
- ❖ What do you know about Zephaniah?