

AGES 11 – 16 YEARS OLD

Nehemiah

Lesson #1: Sadness is a Powerful Motivation

LESSON OBJECTIVES

Goals

1. Introduce students to the Old Testament book of Nehemiah
2. Help students recognize what injustices for which God has given them a burden
3. Equip students to devote their lives to something worthwhile

Topics

Burdens, Serving

Scripture Memorization

Nehemiah 2:3

OPENING PRAYER (5 to 10 minutes)

GROUP BUILDING (10 minutes)

Nehemiah is about building. Give students a pack of toothpicks and a pack of marshmallows. Separate them in groups or have them work as individuals. Give them five minutes to build something out of their construction materials. Declare one of their structures the winner, and then invite them to eat their creations.

GETTING STARTED (5 minutes)

We are going to talk about friendship today.

General Discussion:

- What, if anything, do you know about Nehemiah? (*He lived in Old Testament days, wrote a book of the Bible, rebuilt a wall, etc.*)
- Have you ever thought about what his motivation was? (*Allow for discussion.*)
- What motivates you to do things? (*Money, fame, etc.*)
- When you think about sadness, do you consider it a motivation? (*Sadness is not often considered a motivation.*)
- What might sadness prompt you to do? (*Isolate yourself, cry, be quiet or still, seek God, etc.*)

In Nehemiah, we read about sadness motivating someone to act. My prayer for you today is that you will identify what makes you sad, and it will in turn motivate you to action. Let's get started.

DIGGING IN (20 minutes)

CHRISTIAN ACADEMY OF EDUCATION AND FORMATION JCL

40 DAYS OF FAST AND PRAYER



Read Nehemiah 1

Nehemiah lives in a land far from the land he is from. God's people, the Jewish nation, has been taken captive and is now ruled by Persia. Some Jews had survived in Jerusalem and reported to Nehemiah the rough shape the city was in.

Discussion Questions:

1. What is Nehemiah's response regarding those who survived the exile? (*He weeps for days, fasts and prays.*)
2. What does he pray about? (*He repents and asks God to forgive his people.*)
3. What does he ask specifically for in verse 11? (That God would grant him favor in the "presence of this man.")
4. Who was "this man" he prays about? (*It is the King of Persia, for whom Nehemiah is the cupbearer.*)

The cupbearer was an important job. They were responsible for tasting the wine the King would drink before he did to ensure it wasn't poisoned. In addition, this was a position that required a certain attitude. It was not permitted for people to be sad in the King's presence. But Nehemiah is definitely sad. And what we're about to discover is that it drove him to action.

General Discussion:

- Why do you think that Nehemiah is struck with such sadness? (*These are his people, his hometown, etc.*)
- What do you think it was that bothered Nehemiah the most about what he'd heard? (*The people are vulnerable, the city in ruins, etc.*)
- What is something you see in the world that makes you sad? (*Poverty, hunger, lack of clean drinking water, human trafficking, etc.*)
- So far, what has been your response to that sadness? (*Students will likely struggle with this answer, but most of us do nothing beyond being sad.*)

As we start this study of Nehemiah, one of the things we need to understand is that God gave Nehemiah a specific burden, and that burden moved him to action. The first question you need to answer is what burden God has given you. The next question you must ask is how you fix, or help fix, that which is wrong.

In Nehemiah 1 we learn that Nehemiah is saddened. In chapters 2 and 3, we learn his plan for fixing what he sees that is broken.

MAKING IT REAL (25 minutes)

Think Courageous Thoughts

Read Nehemiah 2:1-10

Discussion Questions:

1. After Nehemiah confesses what is bothering him to the King (a great act of courage), the King asks a very interesting question in verse 4. What is it? (*"What is it you want?"*)
2. What is Nehemiah's answer? (*He requests to go back to Jerusalem to rebuild the wall.*)
3. Why is this a big request? (*He'd abandon his post, it's a big job, there are dangers involved, etc.*)
4. What else does Nehemiah ask for? (*He asks for letters to be sent ahead of him, he asks for safe*

CHRISTIAN ACADEMY OF EDUCATION AND FORMATION JCL

40 DAYS OF FAST AND PRAYER



passage, he asks for money, protection, etc.)

5. Do you think these requests are strange for a cupbearer? *(It is certainly courageous.)*

6. What is it you want? What do you wish you could do? *(Allow students to answer.)*

7. What did Nehemiah do before he answered? *(Verse 4 says that he prayed to God.)*

If you don't know what it is God wants you to do, or if you don't feel very courageous, prayer is an excellent place to start. Let's take some time right now and ask God to show you what it is He wants you to devote your life to, and to give you courage to do it.

But Nehemiah doesn't stop there.

Work Really Hard

Read Nehemiah 2:11-18

Discussion Questions:

1. As we read this passage, how big of a job do you sense Nehemiah is up against? *(It's a big job...the wall is in ruins.)*

2. What are some of the words that help us understand how big this challenge is? *("ruins," "trouble," "disgrace," "destroyed," "broken," etc.)*

3. What are some challenges you feel when you think about the burden you have? *(There are global challenges, expensive solutions, things you cannot do alone.)*

It has been said that anything worth doing is not easy. God will give you a burden for injustice and fixing problems you see in the world. But be sure of this...investing in fixing those problems will take time and effort.

It will also take help.

Cling to Community

Read Nehemiah 3:1-16, 3:17-32

As we read, we noticed a lot of different names. Let's go back through and write some down.

Discussion Questions:

1. Does that number of names surprise you? Why or why not? *(It was a big job, involving hundreds of people.)*

2. Who is on your list? Who can help you do what God has called you to do? *(Invite students to name names.)*

Perhaps one of the most helpful things you can do as you pursue what God calls you toward is gather around yourself some people who will encourage you, assist you, and those who are also willing to work hard.

And then, pray some more. That's a good place to end today.

CLOSING PRAYER (3 minutes)

Pray that your students will discover what breaks their heart, turn it over to God, and devote their entire lives to i

Nehemiah

Lesson #2: Fearless Focus

LESSON OBJECTIVES

Goals

1. To introduce students to the Old Testament book of Nehemiah
2. To inspire students to live lives of fearless focus
3. To help students commit to living for a purpose worthy of their undivided attention

Topics

Commitment, Perseverance, Zealousness

Scripture Memorization

Nehemiah 6:3

OPENING PRAYER (5 to 10 minutes)

GROUP BUILDING (10 minutes)

Play a game requiring concentration and focus:

- The first person in your circle declares a category (countries in the world, colors, professional baseball teams, etc.)
- Go around the circle...each person gets three seconds to name a relevant answer to that category (Florida, red, the Baltimore Orioles)
- Keep time by establishing a rhythm with students snapping their fingers in a 1-2-3 pattern
- If a student doesn't answer correctly or in the time allowed, they are eliminated and the category changes with the person who is next in the circle choosing the new category
- Continue until only one student remains — they are the concentration master!

GETTING STARTED (5 minutes)

General Discussion:

- What was difficult about that game? (Allow students to share.)
- Did the time limit make it easier or more difficult to concentrate? (Most would agree it makes it more difficult.)
- Are you someone who struggles to focus? (Allow students to share.)
- What are some activities that require a lot of concentration? (Homework, building stuff, drawing, etc.)

DIGGING IN (20 minutes)

Invite groups or individuals to read either Nehemiah 4, 5 or 6. Instruct them to read them two to three times each so they have a solid grasp on the content. Give groups about 5-10 minutes to do this. Then ask the questions that follow, which apply to each chapter but will have different answers based on the group.

CHRISTIAN ACADEMY OF EDUCATION AND FORMATION JCL

40 DAYS OF FAST AND PRAYER



Nehemiah 4

Discussion Questions:

1. What kind of challenge did Nehemiah face in Nehemiah 4? (*Opposition, oppression, injustice, threats, etc.*)
2. Who was it that was causing trouble? (*Sanballat, Tobiah, the Arabs, the ammonites, his own people, etc.*)
3. What do you sense is Nehemiah's attitude during this chapter? (*Persistent, faithful, wise, etc.*)
4. Why do you think he faced opposition when he was doing a good thing? (*There were those who were jealous, didn't share his values, were ignorant, etc.*)
5. Did Nehemiah's difficulty come from a single source or many? (*It came from many, from those inside and outside his community.*)
6. What were some of Nehemiah's responses in light of these difficulties? (*He prayed a lot, worked hard, inspired others, etc.*)
7. What impact did these trials have on Nehemiah and those around him? (*They were discouraged, afraid, resolved, etc.*)

Nehemiah 5

Discussion Questions:

1. What kind of challenge did Nehemiah face in Nehemiah 5? (*Opposition, oppression, injustice, threats, etc.*)
2. Who was it that was causing trouble? (*The nobles and officials.*)
3. What do you sense is Nehemiah's attitude during this chapter? (*Angry, faithful, wise, etc.*)
4. Why do you think he faced opposition when he was doing a good thing? (*There were those who were jealous, didn't share his values, were ignorant, etc.*)
5. Did Nehemiah's difficulty come from a single source or many? (*It came from many, from those inside and outside his community.*)
6. What were some of Nehemiah's responses in light of these difficulties? (*He became angry. He spoke out against the injustice he saw.*)
7. What impact did these trials have on Nehemiah and those around him? (*The officials and nobles listened to Nehemiah and quit charging the people interest.*)

Nehemiah 6

Discussion Questions:

1. What kind of challenge did Nehemiah face in Nehemiah 6? (*Opposition, oppression, injustice, threats, etc.*)
2. Who was it that was causing trouble? (*Sanballat, Tobiah, Geshem, etc.*)
3. What do you sense is Nehemiah's attitude during this chapter? (*Persistent, faithful, wise, etc.*)
4. Why do you think he faced opposition when he was doing a good thing? (*There were those who were jealous, didn't share his values, were ignorant, etc.*)
5. Did Nehemiah's difficulty come from a single source or many? (*It came from many, from those inside and outside his community.*)
6. What were some of Nehemiah's responses in light of these difficulties? (*He prayed a lot, worked hard, inspired others, etc.*)
7. What impact did these trials have on Nehemiah and those around him? (*They were discouraged, afraid, resolved, etc.*)

CHRISTIAN ACADEMY OF EDUCATION AND FORMATION JCL

40 DAYS OF FAST AND PRAYER



MAKING IT REAL (15 minutes)

I would like to suggest to you that the only way the wall got completed — the only way Nehemiah was able to fulfill God's will for his life — was because he remained focused on the mission God had given him.

Read Nehemiah 6:1-4

Discussion Questions:

1. What reason does Nehemiah give for not going to meet the three men? *(He was doing good work and couldn't stop to leave it.)*
2. How many times did they attempt to lure him away? *(Four times.)*
3. How many times did he give the same response? *(All four times.)*
4. Why was the wall so important to Nehemiah? *(The safety and security and stability of his community was on the line.)*

Focus is something that we think about when we're studying, when we're working on a project, or when we're trying to solve a puzzle. We sometimes don't think about it in terms of a long-term mission or calling God has given us.

General Discussion:

- What do you think might be a "wall" that God has given you to complete? *(Allow students to share.)*
- As a teenager, what are some difficulties you could have that would throw off your focus on this mission? *(Ridicule, lack of resources, being misunderstood, etc.)*
- Is there anything you are doing in your life right now that you might consider such a great work that it requires your entire focus? *(Allow students to share.)*
- How do you plan to stay dedicated to the task? *(Nehemiah gave us some clues — prayer, etc.)*
- To whom do you think you can look for support, encouragement, and accountability? *(This group, your parents, a best friend, the Holy Spirit, etc.)*

CLOSING PRAYER (3 minutes)

Pray that your students would be able to focus on the mission God has given them and not be distracted or detoured from its completion.

Nehemiah

Lesson #3: More Than a Wall

LESSON OBJECTIVES

Goals

1. To introduce students to the Old Testament book of Nehemiah
2. To create space for students to struggle with why they do what they do
3. To inspire students to discover the motivation behind their life's mission

Topics

Discernment, Holy Spirit, Individuality

Scripture Memorization

Nehemiah 8:17

OPENING PRAYER (5 to 10 minutes)

GROUP BUILDING (10 minutes)

Knee tag is a fun game that doesn't involve any preparation or materials. Set a timer for one minute. The goal of the game is for each player to tag the knees of as many other players as possible in one minute. You can't cover your knees. Call out each tag with a number as you get more "1...2...3." The person with the most knees tagged wins!

GETTING STARTED (5 minutes)

(Use this time to review and reflect upon the lessons learned from Nehemiah so far.)

General Discussion:

- Who wrote the Book of Nehemiah? *(Probably Nehemiah.)*
- Where is Nehemiah at the beginning of the story? *(He's in the capital city of Persia, the most powerful country in the land.)*
- What is his job? *(He's the cupbearer to the King.)*
- What does he ask the king to allow him to do? *(Return to Jerusalem.)*
- What is Nehemiah's mission? *(To rebuild the walls of Jerusalem.)*

We're all on the same page. But today we'll discover a twist. It seems like Nehemiah's mission is not to simply rebuild the walls of Jerusalem — that task is complete by chapter six and the story doesn't end there. So today we'll discover what Nehemiah is really up to — and we might discover that our lives may have a deeper purpose as well.

DIGGING IN (20 minutes)

CHRISTIAN ACADEMY OF EDUCATION AND FORMATION JCL

40 DAYS OF FAST AND PRAYER



Read Nehemiah 7:1-4

Discussion Questions:

1. What stage of the rebuild has the wall reached at this point? *(It is finished.)*
2. How does Nehemiah describe Jerusalem in verse 4? *(It is "large and spacious.")*
3. Who is living there? Why? *(Very few people, houses hadn't been rebuilt.)*
4. Have you ever wondered why the Book of Nehemiah doesn't end when the wall is completed in chapter 6? Why or why not? *(There may be lots of suggestions, but the real reason is that the work of Nehemiah wasn't finished, so his book isn't finished.)*
5. What does Nehemiah have left to do? *(Settle the people, reorganize the community again and get their focus back on God.)*

The work of Nehemiah is often considered to be rebuilding the wall — but it was much more than that. He's rebuilding a people.

Read Nehemiah 8:1-3, 5-6

Discussion Questions:

1. Where did the people come together, according to verse 1? *(The Water Gate.)*
2. More importantly, how did they come together? *("as one")*
3. What did Ezra do in front of the gathered people? *(He read from the Book of the Law of Moses.)*
4. How did the people respond? *(They listened attentively.)*
5. Why did they listen in this manner? *(They have not had a relationship with the Book of Law or God for decades.)*
6. What was the people's response to hearing the Word of God? *(They shouted "Amen!" And bowed down and worshiped the Lord with their faces on the ground.)*
7. Was this their response when the wall was finished? Why not? *(No...because the point of all this is not the wall, it's about restoring the people's relationship to God.)*

Read Nehemiah 8:17

It is a beautiful thing when a people celebrate. But it's worth mentioning again — their joy does not come from a completed wall, but a re-gathered community. They are living in temporary shelters at this point, but they are together, and they have the Word of the Lord in their midst once again.

MAKING IT REAL (25 minutes)

We get caught up in what we do a lot. Think about the questions high school students often get asked:

- Do you make good grades?
- What sports do you play?
- When are you going to get a job?
- Where do you want to go to college?

Did you notice that none of these are "why" questions?

CHRISTIAN ACADEMY OF EDUCATION AND FORMATION JCL

40 DAYS OF FAST AND PRAYER



What if Nehemiah were just about the wall — the “what”? It would end midway through Nehemiah 6. But it doesn’t, because there’s a “why” behind it all. And there needs to be a “why” behind what we do, too.

It doesn’t matter how long it takes you to “build your wall.” It will only fall into disrepair again if there isn’t a “why” behind your efforts. The point of Nehemiah was not the construction of brick and mortar — it was the redemption of a people.

General Discussion:

- Do you ever think about why you spend the time on the things you spend time on? *(Most teenagers probably do not.)*
- What is the motivation behind your life’s efforts? *(Allow students to answer.)*

If you had a hard time answering those questions, there are some questions we can ask ourselves to see what motivates what we do, and what might motivate a more noble effort.

General Discussion:

- From the things you spend most of your time doing, who benefits most? *(Often, the answer to this question is ourselves.)*
- From the things Nehemiah spent the most time doing, who benefited most? *(Others.)*
- Our motivation is often revealed by our habits and priorities — what are some of yours? *(Allow students to consider this and answer as it will likely reveal some of their motivations.)*
- What did Nehemiah prioritize in his life? *(He gave up a comfortable job to go and do dangerous, arduous work.)*
- Do you want to continue down the path on your own? Where do you think it will lead? *(Allow students to answer.)*
- If you were to state it simply — what is the “why” behind your life? Why do you do what you do? *(Allow students to struggle with this, if necessary.)*

For us, the question is not what our lives are going to be about — it’s why your life has that focus. If Nehemiah were rebuilding the wall for the wall’s sake, he would’ve quit. He was rebuilding it for the people. And because of this, his book continues and there is much celebration. His mission was accomplished because his “why” kept him engaged and striving.

Don’t stop short of finding out your motivations. Your story doesn’t end with a what, but with a why. And indeed, your motivation is really what empowers your story to be redemptive, God honoring, and beautiful.

CLOSING PRAYER (3 minutes)

Pray that your students would not only discover what they’re supposed to do with their lives, but that they would discover why that will be their life’s work.

Nehemiah

Lesson #4: Small Goals

LESSON OBJECTIVES

Goals

1. To introduce students to the Old Testament book of Nehemiah
2. To inspire students to greater mission in their life
3. To assist students in setting small goals to complete their God-given mission

Topics

Burdens, Caring, Commitment, Community

Scripture Memorization

Nehemiah 6:15

OPENING PRAYER (5 to 10 minutes)

GROUP BUILDING (10 minutes)

Pass out post-it notes and instruct everyone to write a well-known person's name on it (without letting anyone else see the name). Find someone and put your post-it note on someone else's forehead.

At this point, everyone should have a post-it note on their forehead. It is the job of each person to guess what person is written on their forehead. They do so by asking yes or no questions: "Am I female?" "Am I a singer?" "Am I from America?" "Am I tall?" etc.

As players figure out who they are they remove their post-it note. The last person to guess loses and must clean up all the post-it notes!

GETTING STARTED (5 minutes)

General Discussion:

(Use this time to review and reflect upon the lessons learned from Nehemiah so far.)

General Discussion:

- How did you figure out who was who? *(You had to ask certain questions.)*
- How do you figure out who you are? What are some words that describe you? *(You can ask people who know you, listen to what God says about you, etc.)*
- How do you figure out what you're meant to do in life? *(Allow students to share.)*

Today, as we continue our study of Nehemiah, we're going to explore what it means to reach a big goal or succeed at a big vision. Let's dig in to see what Nehemiah is really up to — and we might discover that our lives may have a deeper purpose as well.

DIGGING IN (20 minutes)

CHRISTIAN ACADEMY OF EDUCATION AND FORMATION JCL

40 DAYS OF FAST AND PRAYER



We're going to read several passages in a row, then go back and discuss our way through them:

Read Nehemiah 1:2-4, 4:19-21, 5:14-19, 6:4-11, 15, 12:43-44

Discussion Questions:

1. What prompted Nehemiah to accept the mission of rebuilding Jerusalem's walls? *(His brothers came and told him of the status of the city and it saddened him.)*
2. Was this a challenging or easy work? What evidence do we see of this? *(Very difficult, Nehemiah's crew had to defend themselves, faced opposition, the work was vast, etc.)*
3. What did Nehemiah have to sacrifice? *(His own comfort, financial gain, he did not tax the people, so he could be more comfortable, he personally fed hundreds of people at his own expense, etc.)*
4. In Nehemiah 6, we read of the ongoing opposition to the work. What was Nehemiah's attitude during this time? *(He was resolute, undistracted, focused, etc.)*
5. How long did it take to rebuild of the wall? Does this seem fast or slow to you? *(52 days...it seems quick for the job at hand and the challenges they faced.)*
6. How does the book of Nehemiah conclude? *(Sacrifices, feasting, plenty, and sharing.)*
7. When you think about Nehemiah — the man, the book, the project — what words come to mind? *(Impossible, persistence, hard work, mission, community, etc.)*

It's helpful to take a wide view at books of the Bible. When we do this with Nehemiah, we see a massive movement in a relatively short time. We also know that this big step forward is possible because of several smaller steps

MAKING IT REAL (25 minutes)

If you have a big dream or feel called to a big mission, like Nehemiah you need to spend time on that. We see three steps in Nehemiah's story that we can model our lives after.

Step One: Motivation

It all starts with your motivation.

General Discussion:

- What motivates Nehemiah? *(Heartbreak, sadness, loyalty, etc.)*
- We talked in our first week about how what breaks our heart says a lot about what God might be calling us to — What breaks your heart? *(Injustice, poverty, people far from Jesus, lack of clean drinking water, etc.)*
- When you think about your life, what is it that you would like to accomplish for the Kingdom? *(Really encourage your students when they respond — "I could see you doing that," "you'd be great at that," "that's totally you!")*

Step Two: Persistence

Nehemiah just didn't give up. Even though he faced opposition, he persisted. Day by day, he continued to strive toward a completed mission. We can do the same.

General Discussion:

- What are the small goals you need to set to reach your larger goal? *(Allow students to attempt to break that down, but they may need some help.)*
- How can you prepare to accomplish what you feel called to? How did Nehemiah? *(Building a team, thinking through the steps he needed to order, learning more about what he needed to do, gathering*

CHRISTIAN ACADEMY OF EDUCATION AND FORMATION JCL

40 DAYS OF FAST AND PRAYER



resources, prayer, etc.)

- As you face opposition, you're going to need to make sure you're not facing this alone. Who are some people who will help you? Encourage you? *(Parents, church family, peers, teachers, trainers, etc.)*
- Given the mission you feel called to, what opposition do you expect? *(It's just going to be hard, people won't understand, you will face discouragement, etc.)*
- What is a first step to complete this mission? What is your next step? *(Let students respond.)*

The good news is, as you persist and see progress, you'll look forward to the moment when the mission is accomplished. That leads to the last step — celebration.

Step Three: Celebration

Read Nehemiah 12:27, 31, and 43

When it was all said and done, Nehemiah and the community celebrated.

General Discussion:

- When you think about the mission God has called you to, what do you envision at the end when your job is complete? *(Allow students to dream about the result.)*
- Nehemiah had a band and choir to celebrate with...who do you envision celebrating with you? *(Allow students to share.)*
- What do you think it is that makes shared mission something that bonds us together as people? *(Shared sacrifice and shared experience helps us unify, serving one another gives us perspective, etc.)*

I want you to know that I'm proud of you in advance. Whatever God puts on your heart to do — whatever grieves you or motivates you — if you will persist, celebration awaits. Let's pray for that day to come as we seek to sacrifice and serve the King and the Kingdom. And remember, it starts with a single step.

CLOSING PRAYER (3 minutes)

Pray for your students to sense and fully give themselves to a calling from God.