

Faithful



for
Families

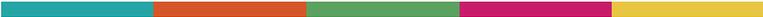


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Dear families,

I'm delighted that you have chosen to dig deeper with your children this month. You're about to embark on a journey to understanding people in God's story who really loved Him and wanted to serve Him. It's refreshing to see the good guys win!

Don't let the fact that this study is in the Old Testament make you think that it has no application for our lives today. The opposite is actually true. Ezra, Nehemiah and Esther each have a unique story. I don't want you to miss the connection to Jesus in each of these Old Testament accounts. Ezra wrote a prayer of confession that shows us how important it is that we're honest with God when we sin. When we show God a heart of repentance, it strengthens our relationship with Him and He offers us redemption. Ezra was honest with his sin and, in turn, was a great example to us.

Nehemiah was very aware of how God kept His promise to bring His people back to the Promised Land. God's character is so full of patience and forgiveness as He loved the Jewish people over and over again. They keep sliding into sin and He keeps making a way for them to know of His compassion. The connection to Jesus is what? Exactly! It feels like this book was written just for us, doesn't it? That's because it was. We mess up and God continues to love us and redeem us.

In the book of Esther, we see a part of history that could have been catastrophic! The line of the promised Savior was almost destroyed when the end of the Jewish people seemed inevitable. But, God. God can do anything can't He? We've seen Him move again and again. The same God who provided a way for the Jewish people to overcome does that very same thing for you and me.

So, dig into the adventure this month! God's book of history, the Bible, is anything but boring! Enjoy every moment!

With Joy,
Lisa Davis

01

God is Faithful to Deliver His People



Ezra, Chapter 1

Bottom Line

God is faithful to deliver you!

Points for Parents

The book of Ezra is found in the Old Testament, which historically means before the birth of Christ. The book of Ezra and Nehemiah are actually partners in the story of rebuilding. The book of Ezra discusses the rebuilding of the temple, and then the book of Nehemiah discusses the rebuilding of the city's walls that, in effect, protected the temple.

In this book, we see that Israel was going through a lot of hurt. They were barely holding on to their sense of identity! They'd forgotten what God had called them to do and began living outside of his direction for their lives. Does this sound familiar to you? We, like the Israelites, lose sight of what God has for us, don't we? But just as they were led to turn away from sin and to repent, he does the same for us. He is faithful to love and forgive!

Introduce the Story

Ezra is found in the Old Testament and is one of the history books. These 12 books in the Old Testament cover a span of 1000 years. That's a long time, isn't it? In the book of Ezra, God used empires as part of his rescue plan. Empires are multiple countries and people who are ruled by one king. The exile the Israelites experienced in Babylon was finally over, and they got another chance to prove their love and obedience to God. The book of Ezra has 10 chapters; the first 6 talk about their trip back to Jerusalem and their work to rebuild the temple while their evil neighbors tried to stop them.

Tell the Story

The book of Ezra was named after a real man. Ezra was a priest who helped the Israelites learn God's law. However, the book of Ezra begins with another Bible character. His name was King Cyrus of Persia (Ezra 1:1). King Cyrus was the one who declared that God had given him the job of helping the Israelites rebuild the temple in Jerusalem. He said to the people that anyone who felt led by God to go and rebuild the temple should go! And then he asked the rest of the people to support them with money, supplies, livestock, and offerings for the temple of God.

They received many things to go and complete the work that God had called them to. King Cyrus was even able to bring out things from the previous temple that had been destroyed under King Nebuchadnezzar years earlier. There were so many cool things! Listen to these: (vs. 9-10) 30 gold basins, 1,000 silver basins, 29 incense burners, 30 gold bowls, 410 silver bowls and many other expensive items.

The Bible tells us that King Nebuchadnezzar had taken those things from God's temple and put them in his temple to worship false gods! That's not good, is it?

Learning Activity

Create a blanket temple! Use a large blanket to cover your kitchen table and have each member of the family bring something special to the "temple" from their room. Talk about why that item is special! Have your "Let's Talk" and "Pray Together" sections of the lesson in your blanket temple.

Let's Talk

1. Is the book of Ezra named after a real man? *Yes, he was a priest who helped the Israelites learn God's laws.*
2. Which king do we hear about in the first part of the book? *King Cyrus*
3. Imagine how happy King Cyrus was to be able to get the cool things that were taken by King Nebuchadnezzar and get those things back to being back in God's temple.
4. God has always had a plan to restore his people into a right relationship with him. It happens over and over again in the Bible. What is God's ultimate rescue plan for our lives? *Jesus is the ultimate rescue plan!*

Pray Together

Dear God, Thank you for always making a way for us to return to you! Thank you for sending Jesus to us so that we don't have to stay burdened with the sin in our life. We are so thankful for the freedom from sin that you give us. Help us each day to remember you are always with us, no matter what. Help us to love others and serve you while we do. In Jesus' name, Amen.

02

God Will Come Through for the Faithful in the Midst of the Trial



Zechariah 13:1; John 4:7-26

Bottom Line

God provides the fountain, and Jesus is the living water!

Points for Parents

Throughout much of the Old Testament, we see the Israelites come close to God and then fall away. The Israelites struggled to worship God and God alone. It wasn't that they completely strayed away from God or forgot about him. Rather, they would bring false gods and idols to worship alongside the one true God. Obviously, this angered God. Throughout history, he gave prophets to his people, calling them to remain faithful to him and to him alone.

Introduce the Story

Zechariah is a book in the Old Testament. In fact, Zechariah was a prophet to the people of Israel, even while many were living in Babylon. A prophet is someone God used to deliver messages to his people. The book of Zechariah contains visions or dreams that point to a future where Jerusalem would be restored. It calls us (Christians) to have hope and remain faithful to God even while we wait for the eventual return of Jesus.

Tell the Story

Zechariah 13:1 says, *"On that day a fountain will be opened to the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, to cleanse them from sin and impurity."* This is one of the main themes in the book of Zechariah. Each of us, every human living in this world, has sin in our lives. That means that we sometimes do things and say things that go against the rules that God set out for us. God put rules (commandments) in place to help us, guide us, and lead us into a good relationship with him. Sometimes, we break those rules (sin), which makes God sad and angry. So, what happens next? Well, God loves us so much that, even though we each have sin in our lives, he has created a way for us to become clean. That's exactly what the prophet Zechariah was reminding the people of Israel. You might mess up, you might sin, but you can wash it all off. But how? As a family read John 4:4-26. *Hint: Jesus is living water. Through Jesus, and because of our faith in him, our sin can be washed away.*

Learning Activity

As a family, pick an activity to do together. For example, you could do chores together, play a game of wiffleball in the backyard, go on a walk or hike together, go to the local apple orchard or pumpkin patch, or something else. *Hint: Try not to drink anything during the activity. When you come back, grab a refreshing drink together (ice cold water, lemonade, apple cider, etc.).* Discuss how that drink makes your body feel. The living water that Jesus offers is even more refreshing and good for our soul!

Let's Talk

1. Who was Zechariah and what did prophets do?
2. Zechariah was reminding the people of Israel that God would provide a fountain to cleanse them from their sin. How can we wash our sins away?
3. How is Jesus "living water"?

Pray Together

Dear Lord, we're thankful that you love us so much that you provide a way for us to be close to you and forgiven of our sins. Lord, we pray that we will always look to you as our living water. Amen.

03 Rebuilding the Temple



Ezra 2-6

Bottom Line

The journey of faith is made up of single steps of obedience to God.

Points for Parents

After the kings of Assyria and Babylon sacked the kingdoms of Israel and Judah, God's people were taken into exile. For several decades, they lived under the rule of the Assyrians, then the Babylonians, and then the Persians. During this time of exile, the Israelites could not worship God as he had commanded because they did not have access to the destroyed temple in Jerusalem. When King Cyrus granted the remaining Israelites funding and leeway to rebuild the temple, the offer was more than an opportunity to restore civic pride: the returning Israelites faced the serious task of helping their people return to the faith. Like mission work today, this work required the steady contributions of a wide variety of secular and religious leaders with various skills and gifts. Miraculously, God provided the Israelites with a diverse cast of talented administrators, craftsmen, and prophets, as well as convenient political opportunities, to make rebuilding the temple a success.

Introduce the Story

A long time before Jesus, God's special people, the Israelites, had to live far away from home in a land full of strangers. For a long time, they wished they could go back home! They missed their cities and houses, and they especially missed getting to worship God together. One day, the king in the land where the Israelites lived said that they could go back home. They were so excited! But they knew that they would have a lot of work to do. Nobody had taken care of their things while they were gone, and strangers had torn down the temple where they worshiped God together. In today's story, we'll see how four brave guys who loved God led teams to build a new temple so they could worship together again.

Tell the Story

After a long journey home, the Israelites finally made it back to Jerusalem. Two friends named Joshua and Zerubbabel (Josh and Zeru for short) came back with the Israelites too. They had a special job. They were priests, which meant they were in charge of helping everybody worship God. A long time ago, priests like them had worshiped God in a special building called a temple. But the temple had been torn down! Josh and Zeru knew what they had to do: they needed to build a new temple. So, they gathered their friends the Israelites and started building... [Encourage kids to pantomime laying bricks].

But then... "STOP!" Some of the Israelites' neighbors didn't like them, and they didn't want them to finish the temple. So, the king from far, far away said that they had to stop building. Josh and Zeru were so sad, they didn't think they would ever get to worship God in the temple again. God knew they needed someone to help them be brave and keep building. So, he sent two more friends: Haggai and Zechariah. They had a special job too. They were prophets, which meant that they told people what God wanted them to do. Haggai and Zechariah met Josh and Zeru and said: "Finish the temple!" So, the Israelites started building again... [Encourage kids to start "building" again].

But then... "STOP!" Some of the king's men from the land far away got angry at Josh, Zeru, Haggai, and Zechariah. "Who said you could keep building?" they asked. The king's men sent a letter to the king to see what to do. The Israelites waited—would they be allowed to finish the temple? Finally, a letter came back. It was a letter from the king! The Israelites were so nervous to see what it said. When they read it, it said: "Make sure the Israelites have everything they need to keep building. Finish the temple!" So, the Israelites started building again... [Encourage kids to "build" one last time].

And then... "HOORAY! THE TEMPLE IS DONE!" The Israelites finally finished the temple. They were so happy! They worshiped God together and thanked him for helping them finish the temple. Little by little, God had helped them do it!

Learning Activity

Materials: Any building toys (Blocks, Lincoln Logs, Tinker Toys, etc.)

In this game, kids play as “Israelites” and a grown-up plays the “king” (or “queen”). To finish the game, the Israelites need to build the biggest “temple” building they can out of the toys. However, whenever the king shouts “Who said you could keep building?” the Israelites have to freeze. To unfreeze themselves, the Israelites have to say: “God says, ‘Finish the Temple!’” The game ends once the kids’ temple is complete.

In consecutive rounds, kids might take turns playing the king, with a grown-up playing an Israelite.

Let’s Talk

1. Was it easy or hard for the Israelites to build the new temple? Why?
2. How did God help the Israelites build the temple?
3. How do you think God can help us today?

Pray Together

Invite kids to share something they would like to do someday. Pray together and thank God for all of the ways that he has helped you and your family. Then, ask him to help when things are tough and when you are trying something new. Invite kids to ask God for help doing the thing they would like to do someday.

04

Be Faithful Where God Puts You



Esther 4:12-4:14

Bottom Line

God works through events and speaks through people.

Points for Parents

God is the main character of Esther even though he is not mentioned by name. What we learn from the book of Esther is that God works all around us, in us, and through fellow believers.

Queen Esther had a choice to make: Would she risk her life by speaking to the king even though she was not invited to, which could mean death? If she managed to speak to him, she could persuade him not to kill the Jewish people. Mordecai tells Esther, *“And who knows but that you have come to your royal position for such a time as this?”* (Esther 4:14) He tells her that, if she does not speak up, God will use someone else to intercede for his people.

Introduce the Story

The book of Esther is from the Old Testament. It could be considered something like a Cinderella story. A queen was needed for the king, so all the young maidens were brought before the king. He wanted to choose a new queen from them. Esther was beautiful, and, just like Cinderella, she did not have any family. The only exception was her uncle, a man named Mordecai who loved God. Instead of the evil stepmother in Cinderella, the book of Esther has an evil man named Haman, who hated all the Jewish people and had a plan to kill all of them. BUT, despite the similarities, Esther is NOT a Cinderella story. It's a real story of bravery, listening to God, and saving the people. Are you ready to hear the rest of this great story?

Tell the Story

“For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place, but you and your father’s family will perish. And who knows but that you have come to your royal position for such a time as this?”

Has there ever been a time when you saved the day? Maybe you were the person at school who offered some of your food to a friend who forgot their lunch. At recess, maybe your friends wanted you to play with them, but they

didn't want to include your other friend. You decided to play with your friend who was left out because you didn't want them to be lonely. You were made for a time such as this, to help another.

You could have easily eaten all your lunch and said, “I'm hungry too,” and not share your food with your friend. Playing with your friends would have been easy to do, but you chose to stay and be with the friend who was not asked to play. You were made for a time such as this, to lift someone up.

By helping others and lifting them up, we honor God, just like Queen Esther did. It was a sacrifice for her because she could have been put to death for speaking to the King Xerxes. She did the right thing and helped to save her people.

Our story begins with Queen Vashti, who did not honor King Xerxes' request to come to visit him. So, she was kicked off the throne, and a new queen was to be chosen. Esther would become the new queen for King Xerxes. Esther was a beautiful Jewish woman. Her cousin was Mordecai, who looked after Esther since he was her only family. King Xerxes liked Mordecai because he saved the king's life earlier, when two men had plotted to kill the king. Mordecai wasn't the only servant the king liked, though. Later, a man named Haman was promoted above all other princes. Haman thought he was so awesome that everybody should bow down to him when he passed by. Mordecai refused. This made Haman VERY angry—so angry that he devised a plan to kill all people who were Jewish like Mordecai. He told King Xerxes there was a certain group of people spread throughout the land that did not keep the king's law—a mean-spirited lie! The king had a letter written to all his cities ordering that, the next year, all the Jewish people should be killed. The letter was sealed with the king's signet ring. When Mordecai heard this evil plan, he mourned and cried out. Esther was told of the plan and that she must tell King Xerxes what Haman planned to do.

Should she risk her life by speaking to the king so that she could help her people? Esther chose to fast for three days and pray, and she asked all the Jewish people to do the same. Queen Esther held a banquet for Haman, and she told the king about Haman's plot to kill all the Jewish people. The king was furious and had Haman executed for his crime. Mordecai was promoted to the king's house, and the Jewish people were saved. Queen Esther was one who came to her royal position for a time such as this.

Did Queen Esther make the right choice? If you are faced with a situation where you need to make a difficult choice, what is something you could do that would help you?

Learning Activity

Can you design your own signet ring? Here is an example of a signet ring. You can draw a ring with your family initial, a picture, or whatever you want for your family signet ring.



For more step by step drawing tutorials visit us at www.drawingtutorials101.com

Let's Talk

1. In this story, God worked by moving people and events in just the right way to accomplish his plan. There were many ways God worked in this story. Can you name one of them?
2. Why was Haman so angry against Mordecai?
3. How many days did Queen Esther fast and pray? Why did she do this?

Pray Together

Think of ways to praise God while you pray. Thank him for all the blessings he gives in your life. Praise him for everything because he is in control of your life.

06 Faithfulness to God is Built on Courage



Nehemiah 2:1-9

Bottom Line

God gives us the courage to be true to him.

Points for Parents

The book of Nehemiah takes place in a dark time for God's people. They were thrown into exile and losing their faith. Jerusalem had been left in ruins. However, through Nehemiah's faithfulness to the Lord, he takes on the courageous task of rebuilding Jerusalem's wall to keep the people safe.

Parenting is also a courageous task, especially when you are leading your children to know and love Jesus. It's vital for parents to be an example of a faithful follower to their children. We can look to Nehemiah as an example of a strong, faithful follower, not because he is a perfect person, but because he strives to honor and glorify God in all situations. He prays for discernment from the Lord and has the courage to go where he calls him. I encourage you to do the same on your parenting journey.

Introduce the Story

Nehemiah follows the book of Ezra in the Old Testament. These books are set after the Babylonians destroyed Jerusalem and placed the people in exile. In the book of Ezra, first, we follow Zerubbabel who led a large group of Israelites back to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple. Then, we follow Ezra as he taught the Torah and rebuilt the community. Finally, we reach the book of Nehemiah, where a man named Nehemiah took on the courageous task of rebuilding Jerusalem's wall.

Tell the Story

We begin the book with a man named Nehemiah, an Israelite official serving in the Persian government. He was very upset by the state of Jerusalem. Jerusalem's walls had fallen, and the Israelites were in great trouble. The first thing Nehemiah did was pray to God (ask the kids to make prayer hands). He knew that only God could provide him the courage to help the Israelites.

Later, Nehemiah looked sad in front of the Persian king (have the kids make a sad face). The king asked him, "Why does your face look so sad when you are not ill? This can be nothing but sadness of heart."

Although Nehemiah was very afraid (ask the kids to make a scared face), he told the king how worried he was for Jerusalem and his people. The king asked, "What do you want?"

Before Nehemiah answered the king, he prayed to God (ask the kids to make prayer hands). He then asked the king to send him to Jerusalem so he could rebuild the walls. The king was pleased with Nehemiah's request and let him go. He even sent army officers and cavalry to assist him on his journey (ask the kids to cheer for Nehemiah).

Nehemiah went on to guide the people in rebuilding Jerusalem's walls. They managed to do it in only 52 days! He accomplished this courageous task, faced great odds, and helped restore people's faith in God. Jerusalem and the people had renewed hope! Nehemiah is known as one of Israel's great leaders, not because of his own strength, but because he had strength through God. He was a man in constant prayer and trusted God's ways above his own.

Learning Activity

Jerusalem Walls craft

Supplies: Jerusalem in the days of Nehemiah printable (preferably on cardstock), mini marshmallows, and frosting

Link to printable:

https://www.canva.com/design/DAFFASFiAKM/dB6rySbAKnmo5hnMSaBnw0/view?utm_content=DAFFASFiAKM&utm_campaign=designshare&utm_medium=link&utm_source=publishsharelink

Say: Jerusalem's walls had been destroyed and needed to be repaired. If the walls were not rebuilt, enemies could invade the people and their city. Nehemiah led the people to complete the courageous task. Let's rebuild our own Jerusalem walls with marshmallows and icing.

Let's Talk

1. Why was Nehemiah upset in the beginning of the story? *Jerusalem was in ruin and his people were in trouble. He wanted to help rebuild the walls.*
2. How did Nehemiah show courage? *Even though Nehemiah's situation was scary, he always ran to the Lord in prayer first. Then, he made the courageous decision to trust the Lord and ask the king to send him to Jerusalem.*
3. What are the qualities of Nehemiah that make him a strong, faithful follower of God? *He was in constant prayer with the Lord, and he had the courage to go where God called in.*

Pray Together

Dear Lord, thank you for the example of Nehemiah in our story today. You are a God who cares for your people, just like you cared for the Israelites. Please help us have the courage to be strong, faithful followers and trust you in all situations. Amen.

Faithful for Families



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