

Nehemiah's Burden

(Nehemiah 1:1—2:8)

Introduction

Suppose you heard on TV about people who lost everything in a hurricane. What could you do to help them? [Teacher, let the children respond.] How about if you hear that someone was very sick or in the hospital? Maybe you know of someone that has been in a bad car accident. What could you do? The very best thing you could do is pray! What are some other things we could pray for others about? (Death in a family, financial needs, need to know Jesus.)

God is very pleased when you and I pray for others in need.

Today our lesson is about Nehemiah who knew the power of prayer. He wanted to go and help his people who were in great need. So he asked God to grant him favor with the king. And God made a way for him to go help the children of Israel.

Opening Prayer

Father, when we look around us we see people in need all over the world. Give us hearts of compassion for others who so desperately need Your love and care and wisdom and patience. I pray that You would make us instruments of Your love. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Memory Verse

The earnest prayer of a righteous man has great power and wonderful results. (James 5:16b NLT)

Lesson

Our last lesson was about the book of Ezra. It tells the story of how the children of Israel finally returned to the Promised Land after 70 years of captivity in Babylon.

We learned that because the children of Israel were unfaithful to God, He punished the people by allowing the Babylonians to come against

them. The Babylonians came into Israel, destroyed Jerusalem and marched the children of Israel 900 miles over to what is present day Iraq where they became servants to King Nebuchadnezzar.

Eventually, the Babylonians were taken over by the Persians. Then, after 70 years of captivity, the children of Israel were finally allowed to return to their home land in Israel. Not all of the Israelites returned to Israel all at once. The first thing those who returned wanted to do was rebuild the Temple of God because they were so thankful to God.

But the children of Israel did not have a strong leader, they were disorganized, and the city of Jerusalem continued to lay in ruins.

Today's lesson is about Nehemiah. He was the cupbearer to the king of Persia and he lived in the royal palace. The cupbearer was a very important person in the courts of the kings. He was responsible for taste testing the king's food and drinks to make sure they were not poisoned by his enemies. Nehemiah was the king's *most* trusted servant. Since Nehemiah saw the king at every meal, he was often in the king's presence.

One day Nehemiah's brother came to visit him. He had just come from Israel and Nehemiah asked him how the people in Jerusalem were getting along and if they had rebuilt the city yet.

His report was not a cheerful one. He said, "The people are greatly troubled and the wall of Jerusalem is still torn down, and the gates are burned."

Nehemiah 1:3

They said to me, "Things are not going well for those who returned to the province of Judah. They are in great trouble and disgrace. The wall of Jerusalem has been torn down, and the gates have been destroyed by fire."

When Nehemiah heard this, he was very sad. He prayed to God that he might be able to help his people. Nehemiah knew the power of prayer.

Why had God allowed such terrible things to happen to His people and their city? God had told them, "You shall have no other gods before Me." But the people disobeyed God's commands and worshiped false gods.

Disobeying God is sin, and sin is very serious to God. The Jewish people had chosen to disobey God. They refused to do what was right, so God had allowed them to be taken captive, and the city of Jerusalem to be destroyed. God expects us to obey Him.

Hearing that the city was still in ruins, broke Nehemiah's heart. One day Nehemiah was in a big slump and the king asked, "*What's the matter, you look very unhappy.*"

Nehemiah 2:2

So the king asked me, "Why are you looking so sad? You don't look sick to me. You must be deeply troubled." Then I was terrified,

Nehemiah was frightened because no one was to show sadness in front of the king. In fact, he could have lost his job in the king's court or even been killed for being sad in the king's presence. (Esther 4:2). But he told the king why he was so downcast.

Nehemiah 2:3

but I replied, "Long live the king! How can I not be sad? For the city where my ancestors are buried is in ruins, and the gates have been destroyed by fire."

So, the king asked Nehemiah what he could do to help. You see, he loved Nehemiah.

Nehemiah 2:4-5

The king asked, "Well, how can I help you?" With a prayer to the God of heaven, (5) I replied, "If it please the king, and if you are pleased with me, your servant, send me to Judah to rebuild the city where my ancestors are buried."

Nehemiah knew the power of prayer. Before he answered the king, he prayed to God. What do you think Nehemiah asked God? [Teacher, let the children respond.] He probably asked God for just the right words to say. He might have asked God to give the king favor towards him.

Nehemiah knew it was wise to pray to God *before* he said anything to the king. It's not good to speak out too quickly. Before you say anything to anyone you should ask God to give you just the right

words to say. Too often we speak out before we think what we're going to say. The Bible tells us that God will give us just the right words to say to people as well as the right heart-attitude. Don't be too hasty to speak out.

You can ask God to give you wisdom to know *what* to say and *how* to say it. You want to be sure that your attitude and actions are being led by His love. You also want to ask God to help you to be a patient listener, too.

Nehemiah wanted to help his people, so he prayed, trusting God to give him the words to say to the king. Then he asked the king to send him back to Jerusalem to help rebuild the city.

The king not only agreed to let him go, he gave him letters of introduction to all the rulers along the way, so that he would have a safe journey. You see, it took about three months to walk all the way back to Israel. And the king even offered to provide lumber to rebuild the walls and gates of the city. God moved the heart of the king to have mercy upon Nehemiah and the children of Israel.

Prayer is powerful. You can pray for your friends or for people you have never met. When you hear about others with needs, will you remember to pray for them? Our prayers have great power and wonderful results. Tell God exactly what the needs are and ask Him to take care of them. God is especially pleased when you ask Him to use you to help. Think right now of someone with a special need and ask God to help you pray for that person. Remember, the greatest need of any person is to know Jesus as Savior.

Closing Prayer

[Teacher, spend time in prayer with the children.]

Learning Activities

Activity Corner

To give the children experience in praying for others they don't know, bring a newspaper to class and look through articles together, and

discuss how you could pray for the people involved (victims of crime, natural disasters, accidents, wars; world, national, local leaders.) Have them choose one item to pray about through the week. Encourage them to look for God's answers.

Game Center

The following are two variations on the same game:

“Categories” Game Plan #1 – Review Questions

Divide the class into 2 teams. When it's a team's turn, 2 people come up. One is the “Questioner” and the other is the “Answerer”. They choose a category (Game Questions or Key Words) and a card from that category. Each card has a point value (such as: 1,000, 500, 400, 300, 200, 100, 50)

The “Questioner” asks the question; if the “Answerer” doesn't know the answer he can ask for clues. For every clue that he is given, 10 points gets knocked off the total.

For example, a couple from the same team picks a category card for 300 points. The Questioner asks, "How large was Gideon's army?" If the Answerer doesn't know, he can ask for a clue. The Questioner might say, "It was less than 1,000." And if the Answerer gets the right answer at that point their team gets 290 points.

Only provide one question per point value. Once it has been taken, the next contestant who picks that category has to take one of the other valued questions.

Question suggestions: See below

“Categories” Game Plan #2 – Key Words

Divide the class into 2 teams. When it's a team's turn, 2 people come up. One is the “Questioner” and the other is the “Answerer”. They choose a category and a card from that category. Each card has a point value (such as: 1,000, 500, 400, 300, 200, 100, 50)

Each card has a word on it. The “Questioner” gets 30 seconds to get the “Answerer” to say that word.

For example, a couple from the same team picks a category card for 300 points. The “Questioner” picks a card that says, “Esther” on it. He begins to give the “Answerer” clues, such as, “This woman became the Queen of Persia; she was raised by Mordecai” and so on.

The “Questioner” cannot say any of the words on the card. If time is up before the right word is given, they get no points.

Only provide one question per point value. Once it has been taken, the next contestant who picks that category has to take one of the other valued questions.

Key Word suggestions: “Letters and Lumber”, “Ruins”, “Cupbearer”, “Temple”, “Jerusalem”, “Babylon”, “Pray”, and “Sin”.

Or use the following review questions in another game of your choice:

1. Why did the children of Israel end up over in Babylon? (They had not followed the ways of the Lord; they had been unfaithful.)
2. What did the Babylonians do to the temple of God in Jerusalem? (They burned it and broke down the walls.)
3. Nehemiah was the king's “cupbearer.” What was a cupbearer? (The one responsible for taste testing the king's food and drink to be sure it wasn't poisoned.)
4. What bad news did Nehemiah's brother bring from Jerusalem? (That the people were greatly troubled and the wall of the city was still torn down and the gates burned.)
5. What did Nehemiah do before he spoke to the king? (He prayed.)
6. What do we call it when we disobey God? (Sin)
7. What was it that broke Nehemiah's heart? (Hearing that the city of Jerusalem still lay in ruins.)

8. What should you ask God for before you speak out to people?
(Wisdom; for the right words to speak, the right heart-attitude.)
9. What did the king of Persia give Nehemiah to help make his long journey to Jerusalem a safe one? (Letters of introduction to all the rulers along the way.)
10. What did the king of Persia give Nehemiah to help with the building project? (Lumber)
11. According to our Memory verse today, what do our prayers have?
(Great power and wonderful results.)

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