

Nehemiah's Perseverance

(Nehemiah 2:9—4:23)

Introduction

Have you ever been afraid? If you were in danger, you would be. Can you think of some things that cause you to be afraid? [Teacher, let the children respond.] Perhaps you might hear your parents arguing, or maybe you've been laughed at, or you have a big test coming up at school. Sometimes we can be afraid of the dark, thunder and lightning storms, big scary dogs or bullies at school.

Nehemiah was about to leave the safety of the king of Persia's palace and travel many miles to Jerusalem. Was he afraid? What would happen when he arrived? Would God protect him from the enemies?

Opening Prayer

Father, thank You that You are always with us. Teach us this morning that we never need to be afraid. Help us to always trust in Your love and care for us. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Memory Verse

*Let the peace that comes from Christ rule in your hearts.
(Colossians 3:15a NLT)*

Lesson

Last week we learned that after getting the news that the people of Jerusalem were in trouble and that the city was still laying in ruins, Nehemiah was broken hearted. He wanted to help God's people.

Nehemiah was the king's most trusted servant. He was the king's cupbearer. His job was to taste test the king's food and drink to make sure it didn't have any poison in it. It seemed impossible that Nehemiah could leave the king's service. He was a slave and didn't have the right to just walk out on his job. So, he prayed and asked God to give the king a heart of compassion towards him.

Last week we learned that prayer is powerful and has wonderful results: the king not only gave him permission to return to Jerusalem, but he gave Nehemiah letters of introduction and a royal escort so that they could travel in safety. It would take nearly three months to make the journey; they would have to walk over 900 miles to get to Israel.

Finally, Nehemiah arrived in Jerusalem. And, he was immediately met with opposition. There were two men, Sanballat and Tobiah, who were angry that *anyone* would want to rebuild Jerusalem.

Nehemiah 2:10

But when Sanballat the Horonite and Tobiah the Ammonite official heard of my arrival, they were very displeased that someone had come to help the people of Israel.

Ever since the beginning, people have hated the Jews and have come against them all through the ages.

Nehemiah didn't seem to be upset or frightened by these enemies. He had a job to do, and he would not let this problem stop him.

If you have trusted Jesus to be your Savior, **God gives you peace in your heart even when you have problems.** [Teacher, recap some of the things the children talked about during the Pre-Session Warm Up.] Peace is the quietness that Jesus gives you deep in your heart. God loves you, and He would not allow these problems to come unless He wanted you to learn an important lesson. God wants you to learn more about Him, His love for you, and His power to help you. When you put your trust in God to help you with a problem, you will have peace in your heart. Nehemiah trusted in God; therefore, he was not frightened or upset by the enemies.

Three days after Nehemiah got to Jerusalem, he went out secretly at night to inspect the walls and gates of the city.

Nehemiah 2:13-15

After dark I went out through the Valley Gate, past the Jackal's Well, and over to the Dung Gate to inspect the broken walls and burned gates. (14) Then I went to the Fountain Gate and to the King's Pool, but my donkey couldn't get through the rubble. (15) So, though it was still

dark, I went up the Kidron Valley instead, inspecting the wall before I turned back and entered again at the Valley Gate.

Nehemiah was shocked by what he saw. Such utter ruin! Such awful desolation! It seemed hard to believe that almost ninety years after the first captives had returned to rebuild the temple that there should still be all this mess and so little done to rebuild the walls of the city. The next day he went to see the city officials.

Nehemiah 2:16-17

The city officials did not know I had been out there or what I was doing, for I had not yet said anything to anyone about my plans. I had not yet spoken to the Jewish leaders—the priests, the nobles, the officials, or anyone else in the administration. (17) But now I said to them, “You know very well what trouble we are in. Jerusalem lies in ruins, and its gates have been destroyed by fire. Let us rebuild the wall of Jerusalem and end this disgrace!”

Then Nehemiah encouraged the people to rebuild the walls. He assured them that God would be with them.

Nehemiah 2:18

Then I told them about how the gracious hand of God had been on me, and about my conversation with the king. They replied at once, “Yes, let’s rebuild the wall!” So they began the good work.

As word spread that the walls of Jerusalem were going to be rebuilt, new hope filled every one's heart. But the enemies of the Jews made fun of their decision.

Nehemiah 2:19

But when Sanballat, Tobiah, and Geshem the Arab heard of our plan, they scoffed contemptuously. “What are you doing? Are you rebelling against the king?” they asked

But Nehemiah kept encouraging the people, telling them that God would make sure they succeeded.

Nehemiah 2:20

I replied, “The God of heaven will help us succeed. We, his servants, will start rebuilding this wall. But you have no share, legal right, or historic claim in Jerusalem.”

So, they began the huge job of rebuilding the walls.

Nehemiah had a great plan. He split the people into groups and divided up the wall into sections. He gave each group one section of the wall to work on. This way everybody had something to do and was responsible for a part of the work. And so it was, all around the city. Priests, rulers, doctors, shopkeepers, carpenters—everybody was busy, doing his best. Old men, young men, mothers and daughters, all did their part. Boys and girls were fetching and carrying and doing all they could to do help, too.

With so many people working together it wasn't long before the wall began to take shape. Some mixed mortar, others lifted stones, and still others set the stones in place and others went to get the building materials.

I bet some of the families were keeping an eye on their neighbors to see how fast they were building their section. I wouldn't be surprised if some groups were having some friendly competition with each other to see who could build the most wall in a day. And, I'm sure they helped each other when things got difficult. Some of those stones were very big and heavy.

Now, it's a strange thing, but whenever anybody tries to do some great work for God, somebody else tries to stop it. So it was with the building of the walls of Jerusalem.

No sooner had Nehemiah gotten all the people working on the job that the enemies of God's people started to fuss about it.

Nehemiah 4:1-3

Sanballat was very angry when he learned that we were rebuilding the wall. He flew into a rage and mocked the Jews, (2) saying in front of his friends and the Samaritan army officers, “What does this bunch of poor, feeble Jews think they're doing? Do they think they can build the wall in a

single day by just offering a few sacrifices? Do they actually think they can make something of stones from a rubbish heap—and charred ones at that?"

(3) Tobiah the Ammonite, who was standing beside him, remarked, "That stone wall would collapse if even a fox walked along the top of it!"

Nehemiah asked God for help and then he kept on building.

Nehemiah 4:6

At last the wall was completed to half its height around the entire city, for the people had worked with enthusiasm.

Then Sanballat, Tobiah and Geshem were gathering an army to attack the city and knock the wall down again.

Friendly Jews out in the country sent word that these enemies planned to creep up through the piles of rubble that were not yet cleared away and pounce on the builders to kill them and stop the work.

Nehemiah 4:12

The Jews who lived near the enemy came and told us again and again, "They will come from all directions and attack us!"

Nehemiah acted at once. He ordered everybody to drop their building tools and stand out on the wall with swords, spears, and bows ready to meet the attackers.

Nehemiah 4:13

So I placed armed guards behind the lowest parts of the wall in the exposed areas. I stationed the people to stand guard by families, armed with swords, spears, and bows.

Then Nehemiah told the people to have courage and not be afraid:

Nehemiah 4:14

Then as I looked over the situation, I called together the nobles and the rest of the people and said to them, "Don't be afraid of the enemy! Remember the Lord, who is great and glorious, and fight for your brothers, your sons, your daughters, your wives, and your homes!"

Nehemiah was not afraid because he knew that God had the power to take care of this problem situation. God wants you to know **God will give you peace in your heart even when you have problems.** You must be careful not to allow circumstances or problems that come into your life to take away the quietness (peace) Jesus wants you to have in your heart.

The Bible says, *Let the peace that comes from Christ rule in your hearts* (Colossians 3:15). Instead of thinking about the things that make you afraid, such as big dogs, a dark room, or kids who make fun of you, remember to think about God—who He is and what He has done—in your heart. Nehemiah had peace because he knew God had the power to take care of this situation.

And God answered their prayer and protected them. When Sanballat and his men, crept up to attack the city, they saw the half-built wall lined with armed men, and they turned around and ran away!

But, from then on, Nehemiah never felt quite safe. He knew that those ruffians might return. So, he gave orders that half the people should go on with the building while the other half stood guard. As an extra safeguard every builder carried his sword by his side as he worked.

Nehemiah 4:16-17

But from then on, only half my men worked while the other half stood guard with spears, shields, bows, and coats of mail. The leaders stationed themselves behind the people of Judah (17) who were building the wall. The laborers carried on their work with one hand supporting their load and one hand holding a weapon.

The work continued from sun up to sun down, and no one left at night; they stayed to defend the city together. It only took fifty-two days to build that great wall, because all the people worked together and God was with them.

God was right there to help them. He is with us to help us with our problems, too. **God will give you peace in your heart even when you have problems.** [Teacher, review the Memory Verse.]

When you are afraid, instead of thinking about your problems, keep your mind on God—His love, His power, and the fact that He is always with you. If you do, you will have God's peace in your heart.

Closing Prayer

Father, thank You that as we put our trust in You to help us with a problem, You give us peace in our heart. Help me to remember the verse for today so that I won't be afraid. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Learning Activities

Craft Corner

Have the children make a large heart and print the Memory Verse on it. Encourage the children to take this home and put it where they can see it every day to remind them they can have God's peace in their heart at all times.

Game Center

Against a Wall

1. Have each child find a partner.
2. Give each child a stack of paper cups.
3. One child will be the "*wall-builder*" and attempt to build a wall.
4. The other partner will stand about 7 feet away and will be the "*cup-thrower*". Every 10 seconds the *cup-thrower* will attempt to knock the wall down by throwing a paper cup at the wall.
5. Talk it over. *Ask*:
 - a. How did the *cup-thrower* affect the progress of the *wall-builder*?
 - b. How do you think the Israelites felt as Sanballat and Tobiah kept making problems for them?
 - c. Why do you think the Israelites kept building anyway?
6. Switch roles and play again.
7. Finish by working on the wall together!

Or, use the following questions in a game of your choice:

1. What was it that Sanballat and Tobiah did when they heard that Nehemiah had come to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem? (They became angry that a man had come to seek the well-being of the children of Israel.)
2. What does God give you in your heart even when you are in danger? (Peace on the inside.)
3. What is Peace? (It is a quietness that Jesus gives you deep in your heart.)
4. How did Nehemiah encourage the people to work on the wall? (He reminded them that God was with them.)
5. What was Nehemiah's plan for building the walls around Jerusalem? (He split the people into groups and divided up the wall into sections. He gave each group one section of the wall to work on.)
6. What did Nehemiah do when Sanballat, Tobiah and Geshem gathered an army to attack the city and knock the wall down again? (He had everybody stand out on the wall with swords, spears, and bows ready to meet the attackers.)
7. After Sanballat, Tobiah, and Geshem and their army turned around and ran away, what did Nehemiah order the workers to do? (He gave orders that half the people should go on with the building while the other half stood guard. As an extra safeguard every builder carried his sword by his side as he worked.)
8. How long did it take for them to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem? (52 days.)
9. What can you do when problems bring fear to your heart? (Decide to think about God—His love, His power, His presence—and the peace of God will fill your heart.)

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