

THE OT

CHECKLIST: WHAT YOU NEED

- Rectangular papers and markers and/or pencil crayons (*use last week's flags if you've got them!*)
- Small pieces of paper, glue or tape
- Copies of the downloadable 622 service booklet
- Copies of the lesson handout
- Copy of the leader's notes
- OPTIONAL: Bibles (ESV or similar recommended)
- OPTIONAL: A white board, easel pad, or chalk board with markers/chalk
- OPTIONAL: Have notebooks on hand for teens to take home and use as prayer journals if they wish

ICE BREAKER: FLAG OF YOU

Set up ahead of time: Have a rectangular paper representing each teen and post them on the wall. (If you kept the "flags of me" from lesson #19, flip them over and use the blank side.) Write the name of each teen in the middle of the corresponding "flag". As the teens arrive, provide them with pencils and small pieces of paper (large enough to hold a few handwritten lines). Each teen's task is to write one note for each of the other teens' flags. All of the comments must be positive and they must write something for everyone. It can be something they admire about each person, an encouragement, a scripture verse. (Here are a few examples: "You have a beautiful smile"; "You always listen when other people speak"; "I'm glad you're in this group"; "You're so insightful about the Bible", "Galatians 6:9", etc.) Encourage them to be sincere. The notes should ring true. Your teens may wish to sign their names on the notes that they have written, but it's not necessary. When they've finished writing their notes, provide glue or tape and have them stick their notes to the flags that they go with. Teens can then take down their own flags and read them (and keep them).

FOR LARGER GROUPS, WRITE A LIST OF THE NAMES IN YOUR GROUP SOMEWHERE VISIBLE SO THAT NO ONE IS MISSED. IF AT ALL POSSIBLE, DO TRY TO HAVE EACH PERSON WRITE TO EACH OTHER PERSON EVEN IN LARGER GROUPS. FOR SMALLER GROUPS, ENCOURAGE TEENS TO WRITE MORE OR TO WRITE SEVERAL ENCOURAGEMENTS FOR EACH PERSON. ESPECIALLY FOR SMALL GROUPS, YOU MAY WANT TO MAKE SPECIAL FLAGS FOR A FEW SPECIFIC PEOPLE IN THE PARISH SUCH AS THE PRIEST, THE ADMINISTRATOR, ETC. WHICH CAN BE GIVEN TO THEM LATER.

622: BEGINNING WITH PRAYER

Begin the formal part of the lesson by saying together the first part of the order of service for young people in the booklet, up to the middle of page 4.

AT THIS POINT IN THE LESSON, ASK IF THE TEENS SUCCEEDED IN DOING LAST WEEK'S CHALLENGE, HOW IT WENT, AND WHETHER THEY HAVE ANYTHING TO SHARE.

DISCUSSION: THE BEST AND WORST ABOUT TEAMS

As an introduction to the lesson ask the teens to discuss the following questions.

DEPENDING ON THE COMFORT LEVEL FOR SHARING IN YOUR GROUP, IT MAY BE EASIER TO HAVE THEM VOLUNTEER ANSWERS WITH ALL RESPONSES WRITTEN TOGETHER ON A BOARD.

- Think of a team (or work group) that you've been a part of that has not worked well. What were some of the reasons it didn't work?
- What would the ideal team (or work group) look like?
- What can one person on a bad team do to change their group for the better?

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A few things worth pointing out (if they don't otherwise arise during the discussion):

- *We've all belonged to groups that have flopped. Sometimes the people on the team are not committed to the same goals. Sometimes they can't get along with each other. There are many, many reasons why groups can be miserable to work in. This is an ideal moment for a personal example!*
- *When a group of people are committed to each other and to the same goals, they are able to achieve greater things together than they ever could as individuals. Good groups are characterized by people listening to one another, encouraging each other in their strengths, building upon one another's abilities, etc. Hopefully some of this was happening in today's opening exercise.*
- *Each person present changes the dynamic in a group. That doesn't mean that you can single-handedly make everything perfect, but it does mean that how you choose to contribute (or not contribute) changes the whole. The OT is filled with examples of men and women who belonged to a group of people that was getting it wrong. We can look to them, in particular, for how we can pray as a part of a group that needs God (which includes every group we will ever belong to!).*

THE LESSON: NEHEMIAH 1

The first part of the lesson begins with a few words about praying with the Old Testament saints in general and then provides some specific context for the prayer of Nehemiah. This can be read aloud. Then the teens are asked to read the Bible text (either silently to themselves or aloud together), followed by some additional questions for discussion.

The Old Testament (OT) is filled with inspiring stories of saints and heroes that can serve as role models and examples for us. Embedded like gems throughout the OT are wonderful prayers from people in a wide range of circumstances. We can infuse fresh meaning into the prayers of the OT saints by making them our own.

Today we're going to look at one of the prayers of Nehemiah...

Nehemiah (whose name means "The Lord comforts") lived during a dark time for Israel. The kingdom had been divided into two, the Northern Kingdom and Judea (where the important city of Jerusalem was). Both kingdoms had been conquered by foreign nations. Many Israelites had been taken captive or exiled from their homeland.

Our story opens in Babylon, where Nehemiah is serving as the cupbearer to the Babylonian king. When he hears about the situation in Jerusalem, Nehemiah prays to God, and asks the king to send him to help his people. Nehemiah's prayers are answered. He is made governor of Judea, and God enables him to overcome many difficulties to repair the walls of Jerusalem, to set things in order in the temple, and to reestablish a sense of identity for his people.

Refer to Nehemiah 1:2-11.

(THE TEXT IS PROVIDED ON THE BACK OF THE HANDOUTS AND IN THESE LEADERS' NOTES SO THAT EVERYONE CAN MARK IT UP AND MAKE NOTES ON IT IF DESIRED. ALTERNATIVELY, YOU CAN READ OUT OF A BIBLE).

Read through the text. Then ask the teens to respond to what they've just read. Here are some questions to help guide the discussion.

- What does this passage tell us about Nehemiah's view of God?
- What does it tell us about Nehemiah's view of the people he belongs to?
- What does it tell us about how Nehemiah views himself?

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A few notes and reflections for reference:

- *Nehemiah's prayer opens with adoration. He describes God as great, awesome, loving, covenant-keeping. The remainder of his prayer is solidly rooted in his trust that God cares and that God is able to do what Nehemiah asks. Nehemiah's prayer suggests that we are getting a snapshot – one moment in an ongoing relationship between Nehemiah and the God that he knows well.*
- *Nehemiah recognizes that the people have made a mess of things. They bear responsibility for the situation that they are in. He specifically refers to their sin, corruption and failure to keep God's commandments. In spite of this, Nehemiah recognizes that these people still belong to and are loved by God and that they are not beyond his help.*
- *Although Nehemiah is far away in Babylon, he cares deeply about what is happening with his people in Jerusalem. He is so concerned about them that he weeps, fasts and prays for several days. More than that, Nehemiah is prepared to ask God to send him to do whatever difficult work must be done with these wayward people in order to restore things. It's important to note that throughout Nehemiah's prayer, he identifies himself with the failures of his people. He could have pulled back from them, adopting a them-and-me attitude, but he did not. Notice Nehemiah's words "in the sight of this man" (v11). He is referring here to the Babylonian king, and asking God to intervene on his behalf. Nehemiah recognizes that he is under the human authority of the king, but he also recognizes that all of creation is under God's authority - kings included!*

DURING EACH LESSON, IF THE TEENS RAISE THEOLOGICAL OR BIBLICAL QUESTIONS THAT YOU DON'T FEEL CONFIDENT ABOUT ANSWERING, SAY SO, BUT LET THEM KNOW THAT YOU'LL FIND THE ANSWER AND RESPOND AT THE NEXT MEETING.

PREVIEW: AT-HOME CHALLENGE

Take a brief moment to look at the at-home challenge together.

THE WEEKLY "AT-HOME CHALLENGE" IS TYPICALLY A SIMPLE ASSIGNMENT TO SPEND SOME QUIET TIME IN PRIVATE PRAYER. ENCOURAGE THE TEENS TO GET NOTEBOOKS THAT CAN BE USED AS PRAYER JOURNALS. ASSURE THEM THAT THEY WILL NOT BE REQUIRED TO SHOW THEIR JOURNAL OR THEIR PRIVATE PRAYERS TO ANYONE.

EACH MORNING: Take ten minutes to be quiet with God. Open by slowly praying along with these excerpts from the prayers of Asa and Jehoshaphat (2 Chronicles 14:11, 20:6, 12): *"O Lord, there is none like you to help... we rely on you... You rule over all the kingdoms of the nations. In your hand are power and might, so that none is able to withstand you... We do not know what to do, but our eyes are on you."*

EACH EVENING: Take ten minutes to be quiet with God. Open by slowly praying along with these excerpts from the prayer of Daniel (Daniel 9:4-5,18-19): *"O Lord, the great and awesome God, who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments, we have sinned and done wrong and acted wickedly and rebelled, turning aside from your commandments and rules... O my God, incline your ear and hear... For we do not present our pleas before you because of our righteousness, but because of your great mercy. O Lord, hear; O Lord, forgive. O Lord, pay attention and act."*

- AND/OR -

Take some time to pray through this prayer, pausing to reflect after each phrase.

O Eternal God, mighty in power, of infinite majesty, whom the heaven of heavens cannot contain, much less the walls of temples made with hands; who yet hast promised to be present wherever two or three are gathered together in thy Name: Direct and bless, we pray thee, our efforts to build this house for thy worship

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and service, and grant us such success as may tend to thy glory and the salvation of thy people; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

(PRAYER FROM THE OFFICE FOR THE LAYING OF THE FOUNDATION STONE OF A CHURCH OR CHAPEL, BCP PAGE 679)

622 (AGAIN)

Close with any prayers that might be appropriate in the context of the discussion of the day.

AT THE END OF EACH LESSON, IF YOU FIND THAT YOU STILL HAVE LOTS OF TIME REMAINING, YOU MIGHT CHOOSE TO TAKE SOME TIME TO EXPLORE THE "PRAYERS AND THANKSGIVINGS" SECTION IN THE BCP (PAGES 39-61, OR YOU CAN USE THE DOWNLOADABLE BOOKLET). AS YOUR GROUP MEMBERS COME ACROSS PRAYERS THAT THEY FIND RELEVANT, PAUSE AND PRAY THEM TOGETHER. IF YOU'RE PRESSED FOR TIME, YOU MIGHT CLOSE WITH THE THEMED PRAYER FROM THE AT-HOME CHALLENGE.

Then finish with the "Grace", the final prayer in the booklet.

NEHEMIAH 1: **SERVANT OF THE SERVANTS OF THE LORD**

²...And I asked them concerning the Jews who escaped, who had survived the exile, and concerning Jerusalem.

³And they said to me, "The remnant there in the province who had survived the exile is in great trouble and shame. The wall of Jerusalem is broken down, and its gates are destroyed by fire."

⁴As soon as I heard these words I sat down and wept and mourned for days, and I continued fasting and praying before the God of heaven. ⁵And I said, "O Lord God of heaven, the great and awesome God who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments, ⁶let your ear be attentive and your eyes open, to hear the prayer of your servant that I now pray before you day and night for the people of Israel your servants, confessing the sins of the people of Israel, which we have sinned against you. Even I and my father's house have sinned. ⁷We have acted very corruptly against you and have not kept the commandments, the statutes, and the rules that you commanded your servant Moses. ⁸Remember the word that you commanded your servant Moses, saying, 'If you are unfaithful, I will scatter you among the peoples, ⁹but if you return to me and keep my commandments and do them, though your outcasts are in the uttermost parts of heaven, from there I will gather them and bring them to the place that I have chosen, to make my name dwell there.' ¹⁰They are your servants and your people, whom you have redeemed by your great power and by your strong hand. ¹¹O Lord, let your ear be attentive to the prayer of your servant, and to the prayer of your servants who delight to fear your name, and give success to your servant today, and grant him mercy in the sight of this man."