



THE EXILES RETURN

BIBLE PASSAGE: Ezra 1–3; 7; Nehemiah 1–2

FOCUS VERSES: Colossians 3:23–24; Ephesians 2:10; 4:11–12

Summary: The Israelite people had been in exile for 70 years. King Cyrus was stirred by the Lord to let some of the people return to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple. Ezra later took a second group and encouraged all of the people to turn away from sin and turn to God. Nehemiah heard about how the walls of his home, Jerusalem, were destroyed. He received permission to go back and help rebuild the walls. God used His people to do His work to restore the city.



MONTHLY *Memory Verse*

*Great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised,
and His greatness is unsearchable.*

(PSALM 145:3)



**God works through
His people.**

We will go deeper in God's truth by answering these questions:



DOES GOD NEED PEOPLE?

God doesn't need anyone or anything, but He loves us and chooses to involve us in His work.



HOW CAN GOD WORK THROUGH US?

God calls us to share His love and serve others—in our church, in our community and around the world.



HOW IS GOD INVITING ME TO RESPOND?

Kids will reflect and respond to the truth they learned about God.

Leader TRAINING

LEADER TRAINING TOPIC: PATTERN OF PRAYER

Kids become more comfortable with prayer as they begin to understand the pattern of prayer. Practice stillness. Begin with praise. Confess your sins. Thank God. Pray for yourself and others. Practicing this pattern each week will help kids know what to expect and be prepared to pray.

- **Sitting Still.** Turn off the lights and invite kids to sit still and focus on God.
- **Popcorn Praise.** Call out a letter and invite kids to stand up and praise God for who He is, using a word that starts with that letter (e.g., “God, you are Amazing”).
- **Confession.** Encourage kids to sit quietly and reflect on things they need to confess to God. Ask them to ask His forgiveness for those things silently.
- **Thanksgiving Together.** Set a timer and see how long your group can thank God for specific things.
- **Pray for You/Me.** Encourage kids to pray for themselves, asking God to help them live out the lessons they learn. Next, challenge them to pray for someone else.

NAVIGATING A BROKEN WORLD: EARNING SALVATION

Almost half of U.S. adults believe that salvation is earned by doing good deeds in their lives.* Salvation by grace alone goes against our human instinct of working to get what we want. Kids’ natural, default belief will be that they have to do good things to go to heaven or to earn God’s favor. You may have kids in your group who feel they must do good things to earn God’s love. In today’s lesson kids will learn that God works through us and that we can serve Him by serving others and sharing His love. Listen carefully to kids’ responses, pointing them toward the grace of God. Help them see that our works are a response to God’s love and goodness, not an effort to try to earn His favor.

*For more resources on this topic, check out:

[britecurriculum.com/resources](https://www.britecurriculum.com/resources)

ELEMENTARY GLOSSARY

Omnipotent: having unlimited power; stronger than anything

Temple: the holy place where God’s people went to worship Him

Bible TEACHING

THE EXILES RETURN EZRA 1-3; 7; NEHEMIAH 1-2



PRAY: God, please help us see today that You never abandon Your people. Israel's sin separated them from You, yet You worked through others to bring them back. Thank You for Your love that never quits! Amen.

SUPPLIES:

Bible, teaching slides, printable pages, yarn, scissors, hole punch

PREP:

Print the printable pages. Punch holes in the top corners of each page and tie yarn through the holes so the pages can be worn around volunteers' necks.

LEADER TIP:

For smaller groups, use six volunteers instead of 12.

Ask 12 volunteers to stand in a line at the front of your space facing the group.

Say: These 12 people represent the 12 tribes of Israel. God's people had been in exile for about 70 years. Because of their disobedience, the Lord had let their enemies capture them and take them away from their home.

Ask every other person in the line to take a seat. Six volunteers should now be at the front.

Say: Then God led Cyrus, king of Persia, to send some of the people of Judah back to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple. The temple was the Israelites' place of worship, built by King Solomon. It had been destroyed when they were captured.

Ask two kids who just sat down to return to their places in line. Hang the sign titled "Temple Builders" around their necks.

Say: Cyrus also decreed that the Persian people would give silver and gold to the Israelites to help rebuild the temple. Cyrus even found items that had been stolen from the temple and returned them. The people returned to Jerusalem and worked together to rebuild the temple.

Ask two more kids who previously sat to return to their places in line. Hang the sign titled "More Temple Builders" around their necks.

Say: When the foundation was laid, the priests led a great celebration of praise. The people sang with great joy.

Bible TEACHING CONTINUED

Show teaching illustration: The People Celebrate on the Temple Foundation.

Read Ezra 3:11 directly from the Bible: *And they sang responsively, praising and giving thanks to the LORD, "For He is good, for His steadfast love endures forever toward Israel." And all the people shouted with a great shout when they praised the LORD, because the foundation of the house of the LORD was laid.*

Say: When Artaxerxes became king, he allowed another group of exiles to return to Judah. One of these men was Ezra, a priest who loved studying and teaching God's Word.

Ask one more kid from the line who sat down to return to their place in line. Hang the sign titled "Ezra" around their neck.

Say: Ezra led the people to repent of their sin and live like God wanted them to. But there was another problem in Jerusalem. The surrounding walls that protected the city were destroyed. A man named Nehemiah heard this and was heartbroken for his home city. He asked God for help.

Say: Nehemiah was the cupbearer to King Artaxerxes. The king noticed how sad Nehemiah was and asked what was wrong. Nehemiah shared about the walls. The king asked what Nehemiah wanted.

Read Nehemiah 2:5 directly from the Bible: *And I said to the king, "If it pleases the king, and if your servant has found favor in your sight, that you send me to Judah, to the city of my fathers' graves, that I may rebuild it."*

Say: The king said yes and allowed Nehemiah to return.

Ask one more kid from the line who previously sat to return to their place in line. Hang the sign titled "Nehemiah" around their neck.

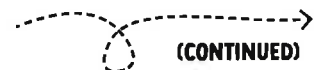
Show teaching illustration: Nehemiah Leads the Rebuilding of the Wall.

Say: Nehemiah rallied the people and began the hard work of rebuilding the walls together.

Ask everyone standing in the line to link arms.

Say: God worked through many people to bring the exiles home and to begin to rebuild Jerusalem.

Show teaching slide: Point to Jesus.



Bible TEACHING CONTINUED



POINT TO JESUS

Say: The Israelites were returning to a broken city. The temple and walls had been destroyed by their enemy as a result of their sin. Our whole world was broken when Adam and Eve sinned. Our world has pain, suffering, broken relationships and many other awful things. Worst of all, our relationship with God is broken. No one can work hard enough or do enough good things to fix our broken world. That is why Jesus came. Jesus paid the price for our sin, fixing the sin problem and making it possible for us to live with God forever. And one day, Jesus will restore this whole broken world and make it new.



TEMPLE BUILDERS



TEMPLE BUILDERS



MORE TEMPLE BUILDERS



MORE TEMPLE BUILDERS



EZRA



NEHEMIAH

Small Group ROADMAP

1

BELONG (10 MINUTES)

Goal: For kids to experience God's love through a welcoming community

COME TOGETHER

SUPPLIES: Bucket, paper (1 per kid)

OR

REMAKE

SUPPLIES: Modeling dough, coloring supplies, paper, several cups

2

BELIEVE (10 MINUTES)

Goal: For kids to discover who God is by engaging with the Bible

PARTNER PASS

SUPPLIES: Bibles, teaching slide, ball (1 per 2 kids)

OR

GOD WORKS THROUGH PEOPLE

SUPPLIES: Bible, printable pages, scissors, painter's tape, coloring supplies

3



DISCIPLESHIP DISCUSSION (10 MINUTES)

Goal: To engage kids in faith conversations that help them navigate a broken world with biblical wisdom

4

BECOME (10 MINUTES)

Goal: For kids to learn to follow Jesus by applying faith to their lives

I CAN DO THAT

SUPPLIES: Bible, Take-Home page, coloring supplies, printable page, glue sticks (1 per kid), kid scissors (1 per kid)

OR

NEHEMIAH'S PRAYER

SUPPLIES: Bible, Take-Home page, coloring supplies, printable pages, whiteboard, dry-erase markers, painter's tape



COME TOGETHER

SUPPLIES:

Bucket, paper (1 per kid)

PREP:

Crumple the paper into balls. Put the paper balls on the floor on one side of your space and the bucket on the other side.

LEADER TIP: Use any easy items you already have for kids to pick up!

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. *Welcome each kid by name and welcome any new kids to the group.*
2. **Discuss:** What was the best and worst part of your week?
3. **Discuss:** This month we are learning that God is greater than anything! How have you seen God's greatness this week?
4. **Discuss:** Do your parents ever ask you to do something that they could easily do themselves? Why do you think they do that?
5. **Say:** I have a pile of paper balls that need to be put in the bucket over there. I could put them in the bucket, but I want you to work together to move them. The only rule is that if you have a ball, you can only take two steps toward the bucket. You will then pass it to your partner, who will take two steps forward. Keep doing this until you can put the ball in the bucket! Then go get another one and repeat the process.
6. *Divide kids into pairs and decide who is picking up the ball first.*
7. *Start the game and cheer on the kids!*
8. **Say:** Great job working together to move all the balls to the bucket!

**ACTIVITY WRAP-UP:**

Today we are learning that God works through His people. God doesn't need people to help Him, but He wants to involve them in what He is doing. God used people like Ezra and Nehemiah in the Bible to lead the people in rebuilding the temple and the city walls.



REMAKE

SUPPLIES:

Modeling dough, coloring supplies, paper, several cups

PREP:

None

LEADER TIP: Substitute any easy items you have on hand that you can create with for the items listed above. Ensure you have enough new supplies if you have multiple services.

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. *Welcome each kid by name and welcome any new kids to the group.*
2. **Discuss:** What was the best and worst part of your week?
3. **Discuss:** This month we are learning that God is greater than anything! How have you seen God's greatness this week?
4. **Discuss:** Have you ever tried to remake something that was broken or damaged? How did it go? Was the new version exactly like the first one?
5. **Discuss:** Did someone help you remake it?
6. **Say:** I have several things here that I'll use to make something. After I make it, I'll break it and ask a volunteer to remake it!
7. *Using the supplies, make various things, such as a tower with cups or a snake with modeling dough, or draw something with the drawing supplies. Dismantle, break or blemish what you made, then ask for a volunteer to remake it.*
8. *Repeat as time allows.*
9. **Discuss:** Was it easy to remake what I made? Why or why not?
10. **Discuss:** Did the remake look like the first one?
11. **Discuss:** If the remade one is not the same as the first one, does that mean we shouldn't remake or rebuild anything? Why?



ACTIVITY WRAP-UP:

Today we're learning about the times when God worked through Ezra to rebuild the temple where the people worshiped God and through Nehemiah to rebuild the walls that protected the city. God worked through them in big ways!



PARTNER PASS

SUPPLIES:

Bibles, teaching slide, ball (1 per 2 kids)

PREP:

Print or show the Memory Verse teaching slide.

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Lead kids to find Psalm 145:3 in their Bibles. Read it aloud together.
2. **Discuss:** How did God show His greatness to Ezra and Nehemiah?
3. **Say:** No one is like God! He is greater than anyone or anything. He brought the Israelites home and worked through them to rebuild the city walls.
4. **Discuss:** Does God need people?
5. **Say:** God doesn't need anyone or anything, but He loves us and chooses to involve us in His work.
6. **Say:** Let's play a partner game and work together to say our verse.
7. Divide kids into pairs. Give each pair a ball and have them stand back to back.
8. The entire group will say the first word of the verse together. Whoever is holding the ball will twist and pass the ball to their partner.
9. The entire group will say the next word together, and the partner will twist and pass the ball back.
10. Pairs will continue until everyone has repeated the verse, including the reference.
11. Have kids begin saying the verse and passing the ball. Assist as needed.
12. Continue reciting the verse, encouraging kids to go faster.
13. **Discuss:** Why do you think God chooses to involve us in His work?

ACTIVITY WRAP-UP:

You could have said the verse on your own, but it was so much more fun with another person! God loves involving us in His work!



GOD WORKS THROUGH PEOPLE

SUPPLIES:

Bible, printable pages, scissors, painter's tape, coloring supplies

PREP:

Print the printable pages and cut out (1 flower per kid). Tape the printable vase to the wall.

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. **Discuss:** In our story today, how was the wall rebuilt?
2. **Discuss:** Could God have rebuilt the wall all by Himself? Why?
3. **Discuss:** Does God need people?
4. **Say:** God doesn't need anyone or anything, but He loves us and chooses to involve us in His work.
5. *Point to the vase on the wall.*
6. **Say:** Look at this vase. Someone took the time to create this beautiful vase.
7. **Discuss:** What is a vase used for?
8. **Discuss:** Imagine if this vase just sat in a closet instead of holding beautiful flowers in a room for everyone to see. Would that be good or bad? Why?
9. **Read:** Ephesians 2:10.
10. **Discuss:** What does this verse tell us about God?
11. **Say:** God created us and loves us! He created us to work with Him on His plan to save the world.
12. *Take out the printable flowers.*
13. **Say:** Each of these flowers describes a time when God worked through people. We will read them and then you will color them and put them in our vase.
14. *Read the words on each flower aloud and then pass out a flower for each kid to color. When kids are finished, have them tape the flowers in the vase.*

**ACTIVITY WRAP-UP:**

God could have accomplished all of these things on His own. He didn't need any of these people because He is all-powerful. But He loves us and chooses to involve us in His work.



Discipleship DISCUSSION

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR FOLLOWERS OF JESUS?

Discuss: How does this true story from the Bible show us that God is good?

Say: God didn't forget His promises to His people. He gave them leaders to bring them back from exile to Jerusalem. He provided what they needed. He never abandoned them, despite the many times they turned away from Him.

Read Deuteronomy 31:6b directly from the Bible: *It is the LORD your God who goes with you. He will not leave you or forsake you.*

BUT WHAT ABOUT ... EARNING SALVATION?

Discuss: Have you ever heard someone say that you have to do good things to get into heaven?

Discuss: Why do you think people might believe that they can earn entrance into heaven by doing good things?

Discuss: What does the Bible have to say about that?

Say: Many people in our world believe that they can go to heaven by doing more good things than bad things. Some of the major world religions believe this. But Ephesians 2:8–9 says: *For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.* In other words, heaven is a gift from God when we have faith in Jesus. There is absolutely nothing we can do on our own to earn it. In fact, the Bible says in Isaiah 64:6 that all of the good things we do are like dirty rags compared to God's holiness. God does want us to do good things, but we do those out of love and obedience toward Him, not to try to earn His love.



I CAN DO THAT

SUPPLIES:

Bible, Take-Home page, coloring supplies, printable page, glue sticks (1 per kid), kid scissors (1 per kid).

PREP:

Print the Take-Home page (1 per kid). Print the printable pages (3 hands per kid).

ADAPTATION FOR DIFFERENT LEARNERS: For kids to reference it throughout the activity, make a list on a whiteboard of general ways that we can serve others.

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. **Discuss:** How did God work through the Ezra, Nehemiah and the Israelites?
2. **Discuss:** How can God work through us?
3. **Say:** God calls us to share His love and serve others—in our church, in our community and around the world.
4. **Discuss:** What does it mean to serve others?
5. **Say:** Ezra and Nehemiah knew that they could best serve God by leading the people to rebuild the temple and the city walls. They knew the work would be hard, but they were willing.
6. **Read:** Colossians 3:23–24.
7. **Discuss:** What are you good at that you could use to serve God and others?
8. **Say:** To help us remember that God calls us to serve others, we will think about how we can serve others in the different places we live, learn and play.
9. *Give each kid three hands and coloring supplies. Encourage kids to draw or write how they can personally serve God in the labeled places and have them cut out the hands. Show them how to create a circle by putting the palms side by side with the fingers pointed out. Have kids glue the edges of the palms together.*
10. **Say:** God does not need us. But He wants to involve us in His work. Take your hands with you to help you remember to serve God by serving others.
11. **Pray:** God, You are worthy of praise. Thank You for loving us and using us to do Your work. Help us to serve You and show Your love to others. Amen.
12. **Say:** God works through His people. Let's take time to respond to Him.

ACTIVITY WRAP-UP:

Lead kids to use the "Me Question" box on their Take-Home pages. Ask fun, relationship-building questions while kids wait to be picked up. As parents arrive, connect with them and point out the Take-Home page.



NEHEMIAH'S PRAYER

SUPPLIES:

Bible, Take-Home page, coloring supplies, printable pages, whiteboard, dry-erase markers, painter's tape

PREP:

Print the Take-Home page (1 per kid). Print the printable pages and cut out. Write the following prayer on the whiteboard, leaving large spaces for the blanks: *Dear God, help me to _____. Give me _____ and _____ to live for You. Amen.*

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. **Say:** God worked through Nehemiah to lead the people to rebuild the city walls. Nehemiah served God, and God can work through you too!
2. **Discuss:** How can God work through us?
3. **Say:** God calls us to share His love and serve others—in our church, in our community and around the world.
4. **Discuss:** How can you serve God in your life? Maybe it is being a kind and loving friend, an obedient son or daughter, a hardworking student or an encouraging teammate.
5. **Say:** Let's complete a prayer to ask God to help you serve Him.
6. *Show kids the cards and review each one. Use the cards to complete the prayer on the board for yourself. Read it aloud, then have a kid volunteer to complete the prayer for themselves. Repeat until everyone has had a turn.*
7. **Say:** When Nehemiah realized that God wanted him to lead the rebuilding of the city walls, the first thing he did was pray! He knew he needed God's strength and direction to do the work. We each need God's strength, too, as we do what God is leading us to do.
8. **Pray:** God, You are worthy of praise. Thank You for loving us and using us to do Your work. Help us to serve You and show Your love to others. Amen.
9. **Say:** God works through His people. Let's take time to respond to Him.

ACTIVITY WRAP-UP:

Lead kids to use the "Me Question" box on their Take-Home pages. Ask fun, relationship-building questions while kids wait to be picked up. As parents arrive, connect with them and point out the Take-Home page.



GOD WORKS THROUGH PEOPLE

YOUNGER ELEMENTARY SMALL GROUP
THE EXILES RETURN

PAGE 1 OF 4

PREP: Print the printable page.



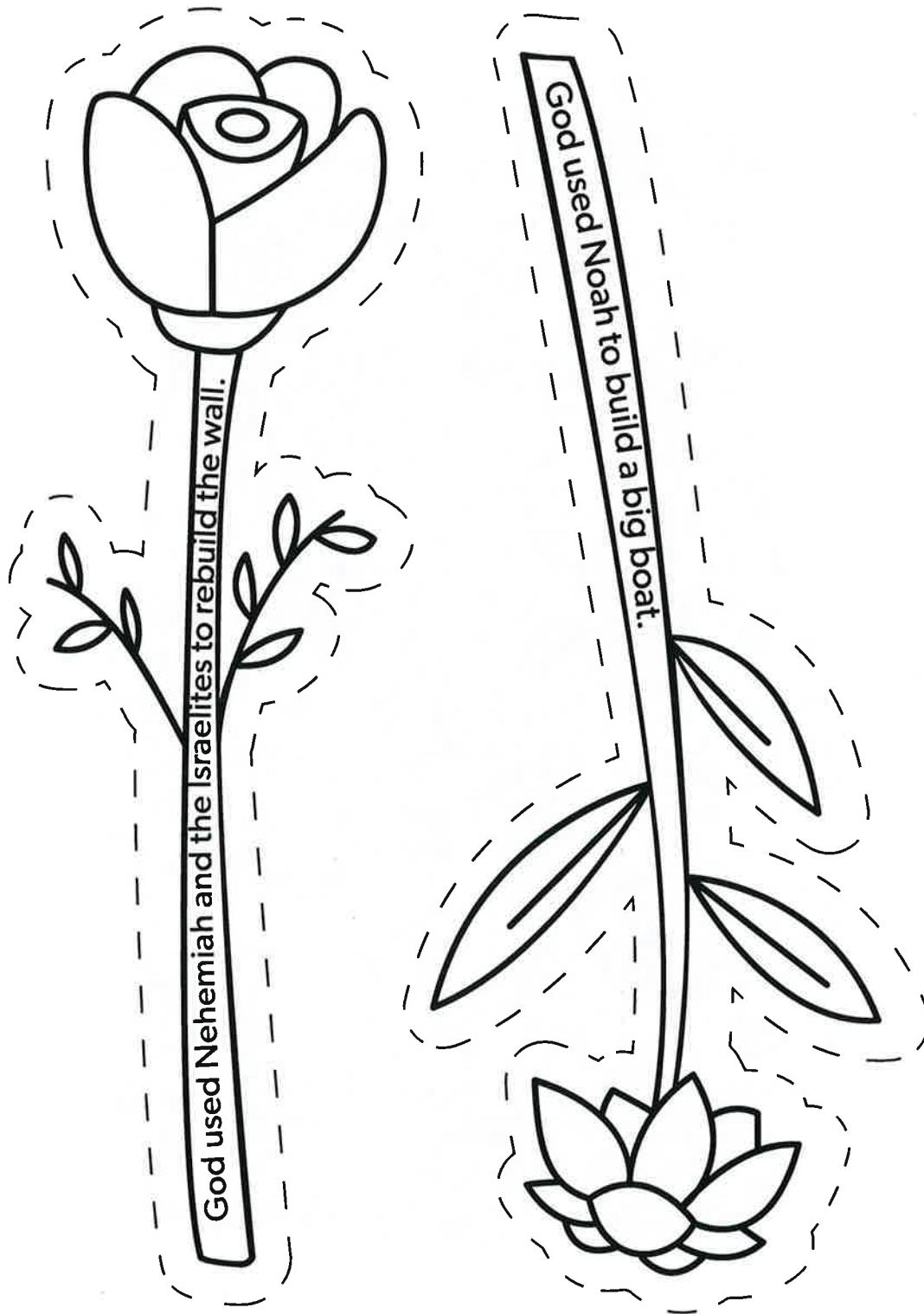


GOD WORKS THROUGH PEOPLE

YOUNGER ELEMENTARY SMALL GROUP
THE EXILES RETURN

PAGE 2 OF 4

PREP: Print the printable pages and cut out (1 flower per kid).



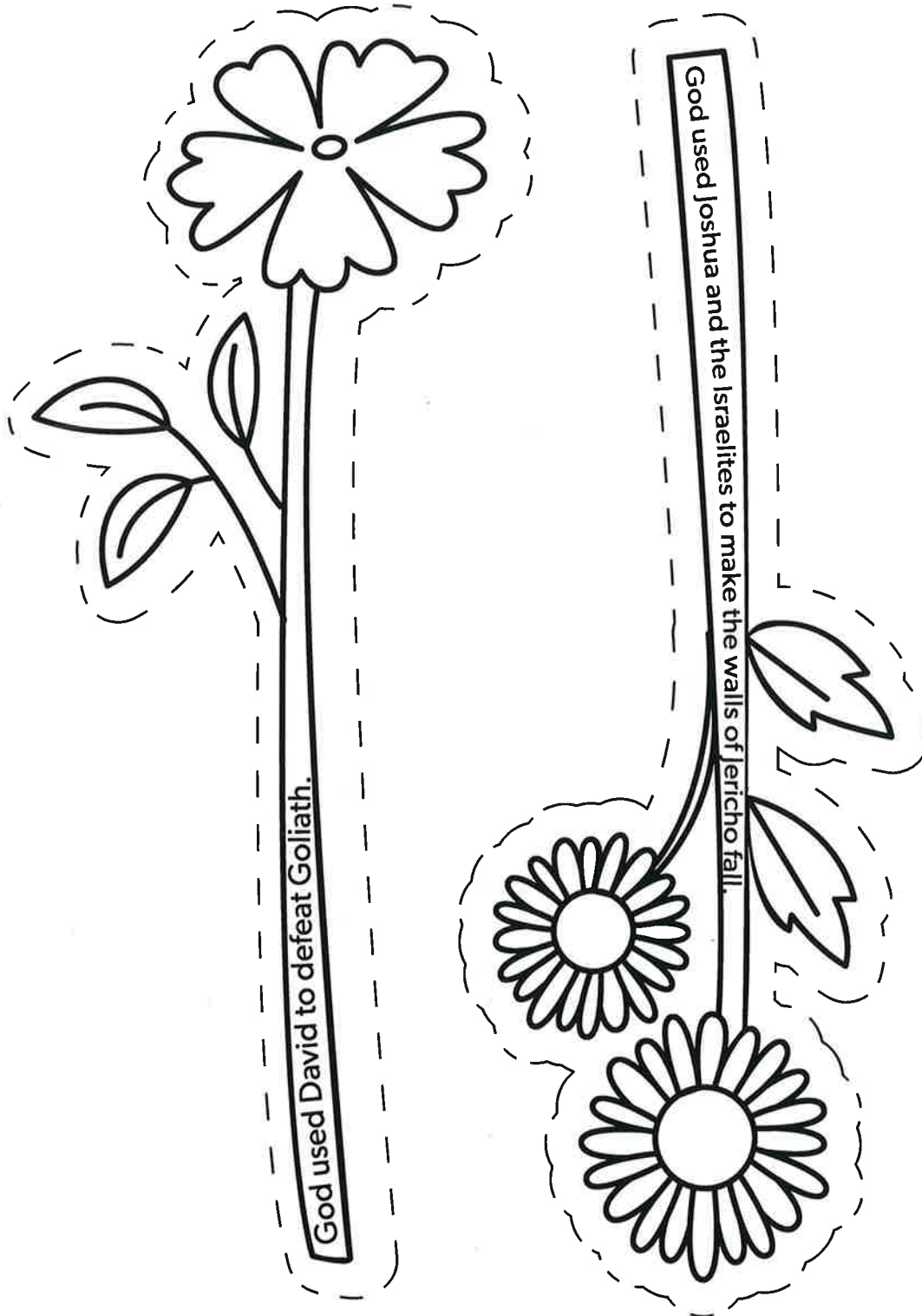


GOD WORKS THROUGH PEOPLE

YOUNGER ELEMENTARY SMALL GROUP
THE EXILES RETURN

PAGE 3 OF 4

PREP: Print the printable pages and cut out (1 flower per kid).



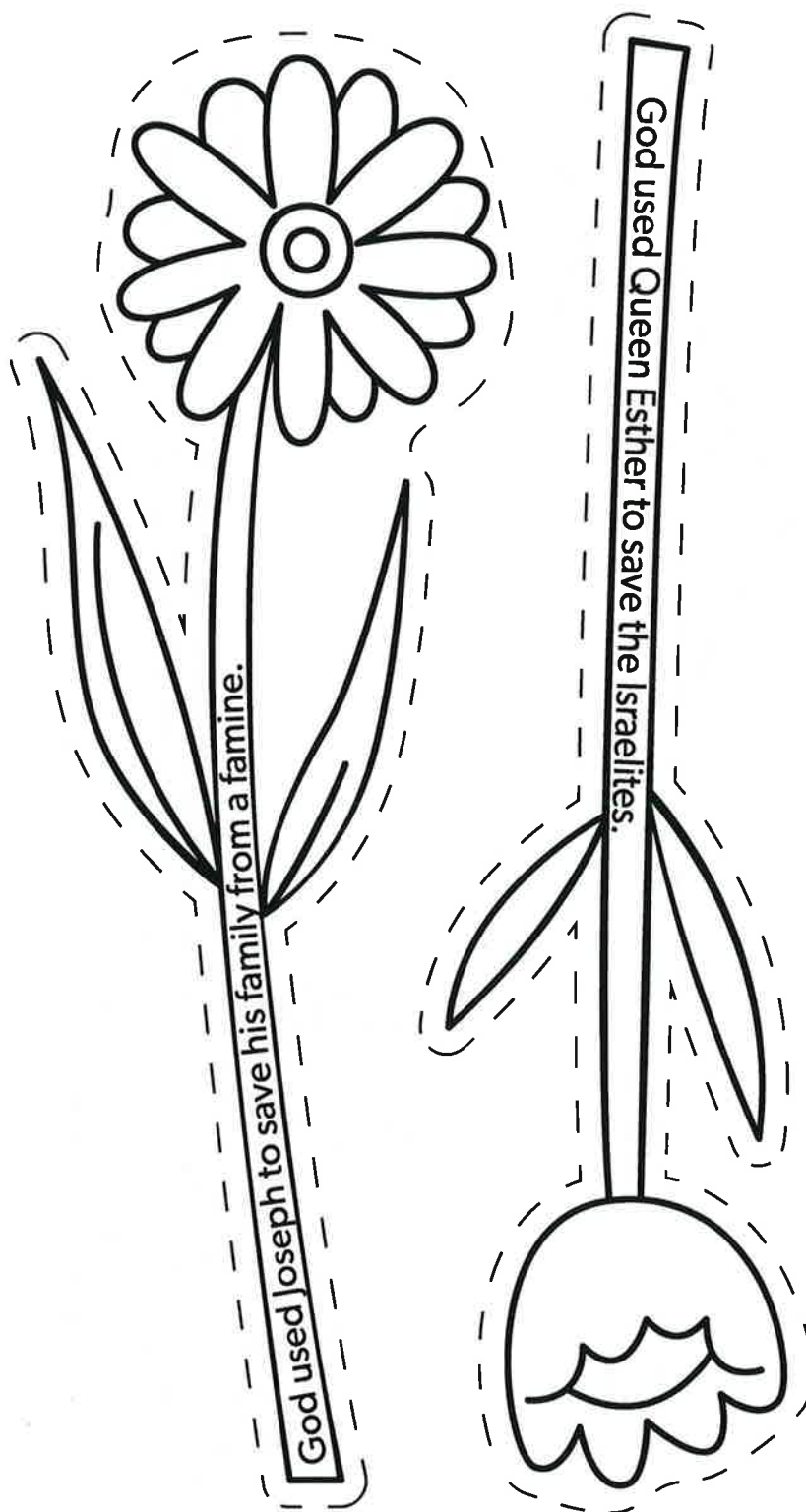


GOD WORKS THROUGH PEOPLE

YOUNGER ELEMENTARY SMALL GROUP
THE EXILES RETURN

PAGE 4 OF 4

PREP: Print the printable pages and cut out (1 flower per kid).





I CAN DO THAT

YOUNGER ELEMENTARY SMALL GROUP
THE EXILES RETURN

PAGE 1 OF 3

PREP: Print the printable pages (3 hands per kid).





I CAN DO THAT

YOUNGER ELEMENTARY SMALL GROUP
THE EXILES RETURN

PAGE 2 OF 3

PREP: Print the printable pages (3 hands per kid).





I CAN DO THAT

YOUNGER ELEMENTARY SMALL GROUP
THE EXILES RETURN

PAGE 3 OF 3

PREP: Print the printable pages (3 hands per kid).





NEHEMIAH'S PRAYER

YOUNGER ELEMENTARY SMALL GROUP
THE EXILES RETURN

PAGE 1 OF 3

PREP: Print the printable pages and cut out.



SAY KIND THINGS



PAY ATTENTION



SHOW KINDNESS



LISTEN



BE LOVING



OBEY



NEHEMIAH'S PRAYER

YOUNGER ELEMENTARY SMALL GROUP
THE EXILES RETURN

PAGE 2 OF 3

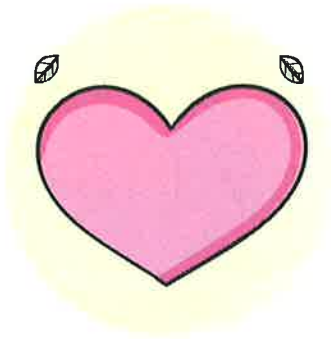
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KIND



HARDWORKING



LOVING



OBEDIENT



ENCOURAGING



SERVE OTHERS



NEHEMIAH'S PRAYER

YOUNGER ELEMENTARY SMALL GROUP
THE EXILES RETURN

PAGE 3 OF 3

PREP: Print the printable pages and cut out.



WISDOM



MAKE GOOD CHOICES



COURAGE



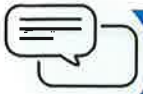
STRENGTH



PRAY



**READ MY BIBLE &
LEARN ABOUT GOD**



TAKE-HOME

BIBLE PASSAGE: EZRA 1-3; 7; NEHEMIAH 1-2 After 70 years in exile, King Cyrus allowed the Israelites to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the temple. Ezra led more people back and called them to turn from sin. Nehemiah returned to lead the rebuilding of the city walls. God used His people to restore the city.

POINT TO JESUS: The Israelites were returning to a broken city. Our whole world was broken when Adam and Eve sinned. Our world has pain, hurt, broken relationships, and so many other awful things. Worst of all, our relationship with God is broken. Jesus paid the price for our sin, fixing the sin problem and making it possible for us to live with God forever. And one day, Jesus will restore this whole broken world and make it new.



God works through His people.



MONTHLY MEMORY VERSE

*Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised,
and His greatness is unsearchable.*

(PSALM 145:3)

FAMILIES, ASK THESE THREE QUESTIONS!

?

**WHAT WAS THE MOST INTERESTING
THING YOU LEARNED ABOUT THE EXILES
RETURNING HOME TODAY?**

HE

DOES GOD NEED PEOPLE?

God doesn't need anyone or anything, but He loves us and chooses to involve us in His work.

WE

HOW CAN GOD WORK THROUGH US?

God calls us to share His love and serve others—in our church, in our community, and around the world.

HOW IS GOD INVITING ME TO RESPOND?

CHOOSE ONE:

- | | |
|--|---------------------------------------|
| ☐ I can talk to God about ... | ☐ I wonder ... |
| ☐ I can remember ... | ☐ I can ... |



DRAW OR WRITE YOUR RESPONSE

YOUR FAMILY'S WIN THIS WEEK ...

Make a list of gifts and talents God has given your family. Beside each gift, write ways you can use that gift to serve God.

NAVIGATING A BROKEN WORLD

Earning salvation can be a tough topic for kids. We can help kids view this topic through the lens of Scripture. Learn more about this and how to have a conversation at home here. [Britecurriculum.com/tough-topics](https://www.britecurriculum.com/tough-topics)

**WANT MORE
AT-HOME
DISCIPLESHIP
DISCUSSION?
SCAN ME!**



GOING DEEPER

Read God's Word this week!

Read each passage with a grown-up and answer the three questions together.

☐ **DAY 1**

Read: Ezra 1:1-3

HE: What do these verses tell us about God?

WE: What do these verses tell us about people?

ME: How is God inviting me to respond?

?

☐ **DAY 2**

Read: Nehemiah 2:4-8

HE: What do these verses tell us about God?

WE: What do these verses tell us about people?

ME: How is God inviting me to respond?

?

☐ **DAY 3**

Read: Philippians 2:12-

HE: What do these verses tell us about God?

WE: What do these verses tell us about people?

ME: How is God inviting me to respond?

?

☐ **DAY 4**

Read: Matthew 5:14-16

HE: What do these verses tell us about God?

WE: What do these verses tell us about people?

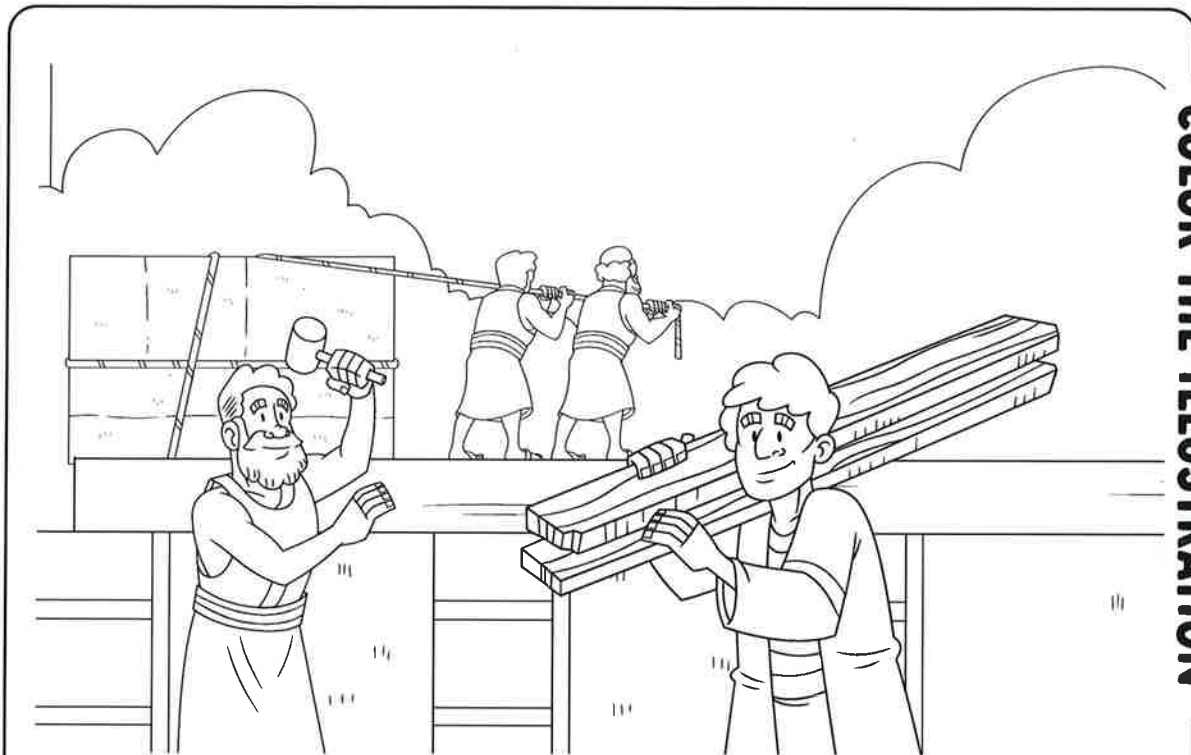
ME: How is God inviting me to respond?

?



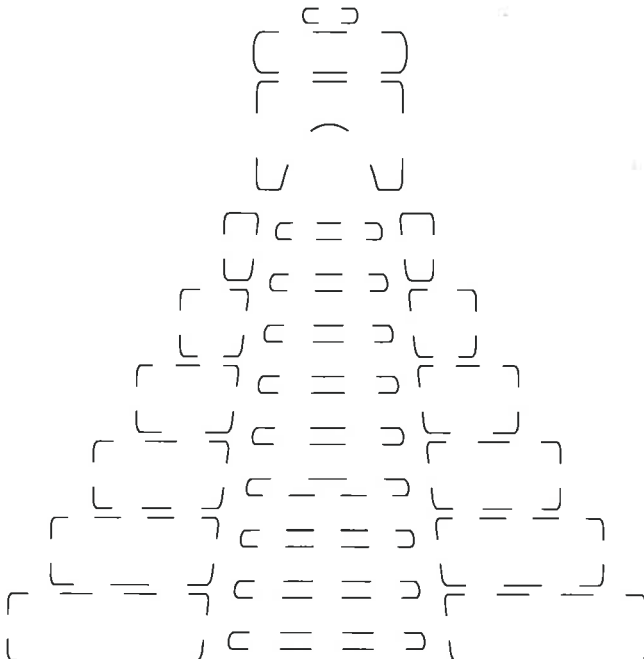
TAKE-HOME ACTIVITIES

THE EXILES RETURN



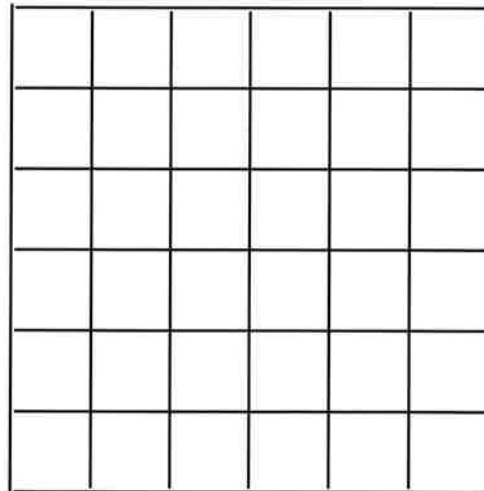
COLOR THE ILLUSTRATION

TRACE THIS!



OBSTRUCTION

- Find a partner. One will be "x" and one will be "o".
- Write your shape in a square. Shade in all the squares around it.
- The next player will write their shape in a square and shade the squares around it.
- The first player who can't make a move loses!



EZRA 1-3; 7; NEHEMIAH 1-2

THE EXILES RETURN



brite*

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Coloring Page