

# FROM THE MOUNDS OF RUBBLE

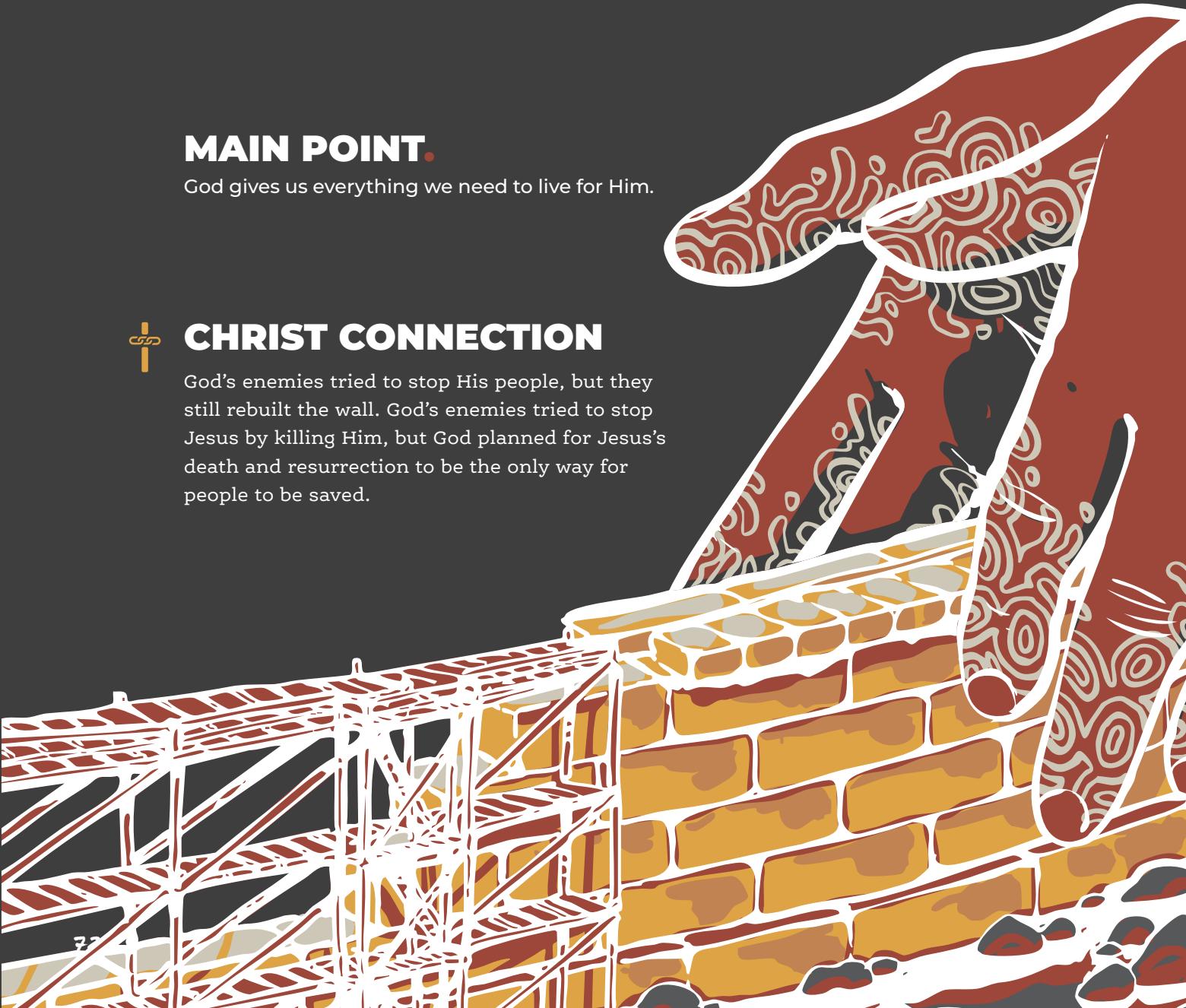
## MAIN POINT.

God gives us everything we need to live for Him.



## CHRIST CONNECTION

God's enemies tried to stop His people, but they still rebuilt the wall. God's enemies tried to stop Jesus by killing Him, but God planned for Jesus's death and resurrection to be the only way for people to be saved.



# POWER TO PERSEVERE

This week, we're covering the passages and main points below. But we encourage you to read all of the content on the timeline as you prepare to teach.

## Nehemiah 1-6

### GOD EXCHANGES OUR DISCOURAGEMENT FOR PERSEVERANCE

#### NEHEMIAH 4:1-14

1 When Sanballat heard that we were rebuilding the wall, he became furious. He mocked the Jews 2 before his colleagues and the powerful men of Samaria and said, “What are these pathetic Jews doing? Can they restore it by themselves? Will they offer sacrifices? Will they ever finish it? Can they bring these burnt stones back to life from the mounds of rubble?” 3 Then Tobiah the Ammonite, who was beside him, said, “Indeed, even if a fox climbed up what they are building, he would break down their stone wall!” 4 Listen, our God, for we are despised. Make their insults return on their own heads and let them be taken as plunder to a land of captivity. 5 Do not cover their guilt or let their sin be erased from your sight, because they have angered the builders. 6 So we rebuilt the wall until the entire wall was joined together up to half its height, for the people had the will to keep working. 7 When Sanballat, Tobiah, and the Arabs, Ammonites, and Ashdodites heard that the repair to the walls of Jerusalem was progressing and that the gaps were being closed, they became furious. 8 They all plotted together to come and fight against Jerusalem and throw it into confusion. 9 So we prayed to our God and stationed a guard because of them day and night. 10 In Judah, it was said: The strength of the laborer fails, since there is so much rubble. We will never be able to rebuild the wall. 11 And our enemies said, “They won’t realize it until we’re among them and can kill them and stop the work.” 12 When the Jews who lived nearby arrived, they said to us time and again, “Everywhere you turn, they attack us.” 13 So I stationed people behind the lowest sections of the wall, at the vulnerable areas. I stationed them by families with their swords, spears, and bows. 14 After I made an inspection, I stood up and said to the nobles, the officials, and the rest of the people, “Don’t be afraid of them. Remember the great and awe-inspiring Lord, and fight for your countrymen, your sons and daughters, your wives and homes.”

### GOD'S POWER DOES THE WORK IN US

#### NEHEMIAH 6:15-16

15 The wall was completed in fifty-two days, on the twenty-fifth day of the month Elul. 16 When all our enemies heard this, all the surrounding nations were intimidated and lost their confidence, for they realized that this task had been accomplished by our God.

# BEFORE YOU TEACH

## MAIN POINT.

God gives us everything we need to live for Him.

Leaders: When you face discouragement or opposition as a leader, imitate Nehemiah—pray to God for help and continue the good work He has given you to do, knowing it isn’t in vain (1 Cor. 15:58).

## BIBLICAL COMMENTARY

### GOD EXCHANGES OUR DISCOURAGEMENT FOR PERSEVERANCE

#### NEHEMIAH 4:1-3

“The people seem too weak, the task seems too big, and the people recognize that they cannot do this by themselves. They are right, but what those who speak this way fail to remember is that they are not doing this by themselves. God has promised to enable the effort, and the good hand of God is upon Nehemiah.”<sup>1</sup>

#### NEHEMIAH 4:1-5

“Sanballat knew that a restored Jerusalem would lessen his influence in the area. Thus he was greatly angered and intent on discouraging Nehemiah’s project, even though he knew that it had the approval of the Persian court. Anger will often be the world’s response to God’s work because it challenges worldviews and values. Much of the opposition to the project consisted of psychological warfare. The first opposition came in the form of ridicule, often sufficient to stifle the spirit and work of anyone. . . . The first thing Nehemiah did was to turn to God in prayer. God’s people should always regard prayer not as a last resort but as our primary weapon against opposition. . . . A number of points in response to this issue should be made: (1) Nehemiah’s request. . . was for divine judgment against sin, a clear teaching in Scripture. The prayer in verse 5 for God not to cover their enemies’ guilt was not a prayer against their salvation but for divine justice. (2) It was a prayer for God to act, not for permission to take personal vengeance (Rom. 12:19-21). (3) It expressed zeal for God’s work and God’s honor. Nehemiah had no doubts that the building of the wall was God’s doing, so opposition to it was opposition to God.”<sup>2</sup>

### GOD’S POWER DOES THE WORK IN US

#### NEHEMIAH 6:16

“The sense in which the surrounding people were afraid would be that they were awed, rather than apprehensive. Their respect for the Jews and their God was increased, and their self-esteem diminished. So the very size of the circle which Sanballat had managed to draw round Jerusalem brought all the wider recognition of God’s power. Paul’s experience of the fruits of persecution in Philippians 1:12.”<sup>3</sup>



## CONTEXT

**Background:** The author of Nehemiah is anonymous, but Jewish sources usually credit Ezra. Many scholars believe 1 and 2 Chronicles, Ezra, and Nehemiah may have been written by a person (or persons), the “Chronicler.” Nehemiah lived in Persia’s winter capital and served as King Artaxerxes’s personal attendant and cupbearer, which gained him special favor. A group of Jewish men, along with Nehemiah’s brother, Hanani, traveled the one thousand miles to Jerusalem and reported that the situation there was despairing. God’s people had been back from exile for about ninety years; though they rebuilt the temple, the city was a pile of rubble with no protective wall. Nehemiah wept for days and prayed a beautiful prayer of confession and petition, a prayer worth reading (Neh. 1:4-11). Nehemiah couldn’t hide his sadness, which according to ancient Persian etiquette, could’ve communicated displeasure with the king and led to his execution. When the king inquired about his demeanor, Nehemiah prayerfully and fearfully responded with the truth and a request to return to Jerusalem; the king agreed, even supplying Nehemiah with letters that granted him safe passage through the region and the necessary supplies to build! Nehemiah recognized God’s hand was on his journey (Neh. 2:8), but rebuilding and strengthening Jerusalem gained the attention and disapproval of other tribes, who worked relentlessly to interrupt the work.

## THEOLOGY CONNECTION

### God Is Immanent

When we say that God is immanent, we mean that God is personable and relatable to those made in His image, while remaining completely distinct and unique from all of His creation. It means that God is not a distant deity, who only sits on His heavenly throne with no interaction, but instead, He is a personal God who created people in His image to be in personal relationship with Him.

## LEADERS' PRAYER

GOD, SOMETIMES WE FEEL LIKE NEHEMIAH AND THE PEOPLE REBUILDING THE WALL. THE TASK OF LEADING AND DISCIPLING OUR STUDENTS SEEKS HUGE, SOMETIMES IMPOSSIBLE. WE BECOME DISCOURAGED BY SETBACKS AND OPPOSITION. HELP US TO LEAN ON YOUR ABILITY AND YOUR POWER INSTEAD OF OUR OWN. DO AMAZING WORK IN THEIR LIVES THAT CAN BE EXPLAINED ONLY AS “ACCOMPLISHED BY OUR GOD.”



## KICK STARTER

### ♡ HEART CHECK

Last week, we saw how God positioned Esther to save the Jews, even when it didn't look like He was working. How did you see God moving last week? Did you make an effort to look for His work, even if it was hard to see? What can you do to be more aware of how God wants to use this season of your life?

These optional activities are designed to help your students interact. You'll find a Discussion Activity and a Cultural Connection, which touches on a relevant topic in today's teen culture. Each group is different, so adapt these activities to fit your group's needs. The goal is for students to connect more to the lesson as they connect to the topic and to one another.

## 1

## ATTENTION AND ACCOLADES

### SUPPLIES LIST: NONE

Ask the following questions, allowing time for students to share responses:

- **DO YOU WANT OTHERS TO KNOW ABOUT THE GOOD THINGS YOU DO OR DO YOU WANT TO KEEP IT PRIVATE?**
- **HAVE YOU EVER BEEN RECOGNIZED FOR SOMETHING GOOD THAT YOU REALLY DIDN'T EARN? HOW DID YOU HANDLE IT?**
- **HAVE YOU EVER DONE SOMETHING GREAT BUT SOMEONE ELSE GOT CREDIT FOR IT? HOW DID YOU FEEL OR REACT?**

Here's the deal: We need encouragement and affirmation. But we often allow that desire to take over, making the need for attention or praise our motive for doing what's right or good. In reality, anything good in us comes from the only One who is good: God.

## 2

## CULTURAL CONNECTION

Sometimes, life feels like it's crumbling all around us, like a war zone. Circumstances we couldn't control smashed everything to pieces. When we look around, all we see are ruins and rubble where strong towers and bridges once stood. And in these times, we may feel like we'll never be able to rebuild. The destruction feels too deep, too permanent. Maybe life crumbled when you heard the word "cancer" spoken over someone you loved. Maybe your parents divorced. Maybe your sibling or friend died in a car crash. Maybe you tried alcohol or drugs for the first time and can't walk away. Maybe you compromised godly standards for purity. The truth is that life does crumble sometimes. It breaks and crashes down. And the other truth is that even in your best efforts, you can't rebuild what broke—not on your own. But God can. God responds when you turn to Him, when you hand Him the pieces of what's left, when you repent. He rebuilds you and restores you (1 Pet. 5:10). He makes you new.

# DISCUSSION

## MAIN POINT.

God gives us everything we need to live for Him.

### GOD EXCHANGES OUR DISCOURAGEMENT FOR PERSEVERANCE

READ NEHEMIAH 4:1-14



#### WHEN YOU'RE STRUGGLING, WHO'S THE FIRST PERSON YOU TURN TO? WHY DO WE STRUGGLE TO GO TO GOD FIRST?

When you feel stressed or get bad news, you may instinctively turn to a parent or a friend. You need advice or comfort, so you go to someone you can see and hear. In this passage, Nehemiah immediately turned to God in prayer, likely because he had cultivated a habit of doing so.

People who love us can support us and give us godly advice, but only God gives us perfect wisdom to guide our steps. **God is immanent, meaning He isn't distant; He is so very near and desires a relationship with us.** Talk to Him throughout the day, even about "small" things, because He cares about every part of your life.



#### HOW DOES CULTURE MOCK BELIEVERS? HOW SHOULD WE REACT?

You made a big stand for your faith, and people called you names, made fun of you, deserted you, or accused you of being judgmental. Teammates treated you like an outcast. You were penalized for missing a practice to attend church. Being misunderstood or mocked is discouraging and sometimes hurtful. The Jews had every worldly reason to stop—safety, fatigue, fear—but they looked to God. **Respond by admitting your discouragement and hurt to God; take your doubts and fears to Him instead of retaliating. Then, like the Jews rebuilding, lean in and faithfully do the next thing God has laid before you to do.**



#### READ NEHEMIAH 1:5. WHAT DID NEHEMIAH BELIEVE ABOUT GOD? HOW DID THOSE BELIEFS HELP HIM PERSEVERE? AS BELIEVERS TODAY, WHY DO WE STRUGGLE TO PERSEVERE?

When Nehemiah heard about the awful situation in Jerusalem, he called out to the "God of the heavens" and declared that He was the "great and awe-inspiring God who keeps his gracious covenant." Nehemiah's prayer shows his beliefs about God: He was capable, worthy of awe and worship, and faithful, despite how the situation looked. God wouldn't break His promise.

**Nehemiah's firm beliefs kept him moving, when the situation screamed for him to stop—when many of us would've given up.** The truth is that a lot of us don't know how to persevere; our faith doesn't have the stamina of these men and women, of others who've suffered greatly or given their lives for Christ. **We give up the moment we feel uncomfortable, at the first sign of ridicule or loneliness, or when our popularity is on the line.** Maybe our ideas about God are weak compared to who God is; maybe our beliefs have made Him small, incapable; maybe we doubt that He will keep His promises. And we couldn't be more wrong. We must look back at God's faithfulness and look to God's Word; if we do, and if we believe what we find, we'll choose faithfulness to Jesus and never dream of stopping.

## GOD'S POWER DOES THE WORK IN US

READ NEHEMIAH 6:15-16

### WHY DO WE WANT RECOGNITION AND PRAISE SO BADLY? HOW DOES OUR CULTURE MAKE THIS TOUGHER?

Most of us crave recognition; sometimes, the chance of getting attention is our only motive for doing good acts. We struggle with others not knowing when we do something great or honorable. Social media has fueled this struggle. If we don't share it, then it didn't happen, right? Others' highlights are visible at all times, to which we compare our own accomplishments; inevitably, theirs look better, more impressive. Nehemiah left a significant position in the king's court—the king of the largest empire at that time—to go rebuild the walls of a small city by comparison. **Nehemiah's name wasn't praised for the work, but God's was.** Hearing that we've done something good is nice, and receiving recognition can encourage us. But what if we followed Nehemiah's lead? **What if our good acts didn't hinge on applause? What if we were willing to walk away from what the world says is more important and instead invest in what seems smaller, insignificant, or even unseen? And what if we gave all the glory to God instead of seeking some for ourselves?**



### PEOPLE KNEW GOD ACCOMPLISHED THE REBUILDING OF THE WALL. IS THE WAY YOU LIVE AN UNDENIABLE EXAMPLE OF GOD'S WORK? WHY SHOULD IT BE?

Fifty-two days. Incredible. But not because of Nehemiah or the people. **The work was incredible because God alone made it possible.** Even outsiders and unbelievers saw God's hand at work in the rebuilding and transforming—stone by stone. The same should be true of our lives. **Unbelievers, really everyone, should see such a transformation in us that they know we couldn't have done it on our own—a change explained only by God's hand doing the work to rebuild us. God takes the rubble and ruins of who we were—how we talked, what we thought, how we treated people, how we handled stress, drama, and even grief—and He lovingly, patiently rebuilds us, stone by stone.** He promised to make us a new creation (2 Cor. 5:17); if nothing at all about our lives has changed, then we must examine whether or not we know Jesus. To know Him is to love Him; and to love Him means we follow His commands (John 14:15). And this transforms everything.

## WRAP-UP

**HOW ARE YOU LETTING FEAR OF BEING LEFT OUT OR REJECTED DISCOURSE YOU FROM LIVING BOLDLY FOR JESUS? WHAT WOULD HELP YOU PERSEVERE?**

When we give our lives to Jesus, most of us don't suddenly stop caring about what others think. Many of us struggle for a long time. You want to know the truth? A lot of us never fully stop caring what others think. We let it hinder us for so long that we look back with regret over all the time we wasted—time we can't get back, time we could've used for the Lord. Here's the honest truth: Right now, your social life may feel like the most important thing in the world. **The people you're working so hard to impress—even compromising your convictions for—will one day move on. The attention you're striving for—even poisoning your heart and mind for—will fade.** What doesn't end or fade is God's kingdom. Instead of waiting, live boldly as a citizen of heaven now. Link arms with others who love Jesus. And if you're the only one, look for ways to love others like Jesus loves them. Look for people who are hurting or who need a friend. Persevering happens one small decision at a time. So, live boldly today, and then do it again tomorrow.