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1. LEADER PREPARATION

LESSON OVERVIEW
Nehemiah got other people involved in rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem; he didn’t try doing it alone. Nehemiah also had to learn how to keep working in spite of his enemies. In this lesson, we’ll learn that when God calls us to do something significant, we will need other people and we will need to endure criticism and opposition. Your students have the opportunity to lead the way and make a difference in their schools, in your community, and in our world.

LESSON OBJECTIVES
1. WHAT: Take a step of faith and lead the way in confronting a problem or meeting a need in this world.
2. WHY: God will move through anyone who is willing, available, and obedient.
3. HOW: Encourage your teenagers to lead the way by doing their part in God’s process of restoring, renewing, and rebuilding broken lives.

PRIMARY SCRIPTURE
Nehemiah 3 and 4

SECONDARY SCRIPTURE
Philippians 3:12-14

TEACHING PREP
The short overview below is designed to help you prepare for your lesson. While you may not want to convey this information word-for-word with your teenagers, you’ll definitely want to refer to it as you lead your small group lesson.

Read Nehemiah 3 and 4; for further preparation, finish off the rest of the book.

Chapter 3 gives a detailed account of the division of labor; it took a lot of people working together to repair the walls around Jerusalem.

In chapter 4, we read about the challenges Nehemiah and the citizens of Jerusalem faced, particularly from Sanballat and Tobiah. These two men taunted the workers, and when that wasn’t enough, they made plans to attack Jerusalem. But Nehemiah and the other leaders coordinated the workers and citizens, and God “frustrated” their enemies’ plans (v. 15).

Before this week’s lesson, we’d encourage you to take time and read through the rest of Nehemiah to see how God continued to protect and provide, and how the citizens of Jerusalem rediscovered what it meant to honor God and live for God. The process of restoration didn’t stop with the city walls; God worked in the lives of the people, too. As your young people address the problems and needs of their world, remind them that ultimately God is the one who restores and renews and rebuilds broken lives.
THE BEFORE & AFTER [optional]

Text Message Questions
We’ve provided a couple of different text message questions to send out to your students prior to your meeting. Feel free to use one or both of the questions below. As with the rest of the curriculum, edit these questions to fit the needs of your ministry.

- What does it take to lead the way for God? Be at small group tonight to talk about it.
- How is God rebuilding people’s lives in your world? Dig deeper tonight at small group.

Parent Email
We’ve provided you with an email below that you can send to your parents following the lesson. Our hope is to encourage parents to continue the conversation at home. Feel free to edit and customize the email to fit your ministry needs.

Dear parents,

We’ve wrapped up our three-week small group series focused on Nehemiah. I want our teenagers to be familiar with great heroes from the Bible, like we see in Nehemiah, in order to discover the truths and lessons within these stories that we can live out today. That’s been our focus throughout this series: obeying God and doing our part to tackle the problems of our world and meet people’s needs.

This week, we challenged our teenagers to lead the way by being prepared, dividing duties, and overcoming obstacles. In the middle of the rebuilding project, the citizens of Jerusalem rediscovered what it meant to honor God and live for God. The process of restoration didn’t stop with the city walls; God worked in the lives of the people, too. As our young people address the problems and needs of their world, we want them to remember that ultimately God is the one who restores and renews and rebuilds broken lives.

I’d encourage you to talk with your teenager this week about this final lesson and the entire series. Find out how your student is putting these truths and teachings into practice. Here are some questions you could include in your conversation:

- Sometimes we do things “by the seat of our pants” instead of planning a strategy—what are the pros and cons of doing that?
- When have mockery or criticism distracted you spiritually? How did you overcome those obstacles, or how did those challenges knock you off track?
- Through this entire process of leading the way, what are practical ways God offers his help?

I’m praying for God to continue working in the lives of our teenagers to make a difference in this world. Have an awesome day!
NEHEMIAH
Week 3: Leading the Way

2. LESSON GUIDE

GETTING THINGS STARTED [optional]
As you begin your small group, welcome your students and invite them into your meeting area. Open in prayer, and then jump into the activity below.

Activity [optional]
Before your small group meets, buy or bring enough bricks for each person in the group. Grab some Sharpie pens, too.

**SAY SOMETHING LIKE:** As we wrap up this series, I want you to walk away with a solid reminder of God’s ability to rebuild and restore lives. God is the one who does this work, yet he chooses to ask you and me to be involved in the experience. It’s an incredible part of being a follower of Jesus. Right now, I want you to take your brick and the Sharpie and write a single word that summarizes what you sense God is doing in your life through the story of Nehemiah. So, if you’ve found yourself becoming more compassionate about people who don’t know God, you could write the word “compassion.” Or if you feel a need for restoration in your life between you and God or with someone else, you could write the word “restoration.” Maybe you want to write the word “action” because you sense God telling you it’s time to act on the problems you’ve observed.

Give your teenagers about five minutes for this activity. Ask them to explain why they wrote their particular words.

If you came up with an opening activity, movie clip, or game that worked well with your group, and you’d like to share it with other youth workers, please email us at ideas@simplyyouthministry.com.

TEACHING POINTS
The goal of the Teaching Points is to help students capture the essence of each lesson with more discussion and less lecture-style teaching. The main points we have chosen here are (1) Be prepared, (2) Divide duties, and (3) Overcome opposition.

Remember: All throughout these lessons, it’s up to you to choose (1) how many questions you use, and (2) the wording of the main points—keep ours, or change the wording to make it clearer for your audience.

Read Nehemiah 3 and 4 together as a group. It’s a lot of reading, but it’s worth it! Consider allowing one or more of the teenagers to read the text.

**SAY SOMETHING LIKE:** One of the greatest things about being a follower of Jesus is experiencing God’s love, forgiveness, and restoration. This series has focused on Nehemiah’s role in rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem, and we’ve been taking the truths from his experience and looking for ways to apply those ideas to the problems in our world today. We’ve already talked about identifying problems, and in our previous lesson, we focused on responding with action. Today we finish this series by discovering what it means to lead the way as we meet the needs of people in our world.
1. Be prepared

**SAY SOMETHING LIKE** Nehemiah and the citizens of Jerusalem didn’t approach the rebuilding effort randomly or haphazardly. They had a plan with a focused approach. They got the necessary supplies to the right locations, and they got to work.

**ASK:**
- Sometimes we do things “by the seat of our pants” instead of planning a strategy—what are the pro’s and con’s of planning ahead?
- If God is in control of everything, and he works through us, then why do we need to plan?

2. Divide duties

**SAY SOMETHING LIKE** The team needed people working within their strengths. Once we identify problems and respond with action, it’s vital that we lead the way by directing people toward tasks that are the right fit with the way God made them. That’s how Nehemiah led the way in Jerusalem.

**ASK:**
- Why was it important to the writer of Nehemiah that, in chapter 3, he list all these different workers and the portions of Jerusalem that they helped rebuild?
- When were you involved in a team project that had people working in areas where they weren’t skilled or gifted? What happened?
- What truth about successfully pulling off a big project is embedded in Nehemiah 3:12? [NOTE: Everyone played a part—including women, and that wouldn’t have been expected in those days.]

3. Overcome opposition

**SAY SOMETHING LIKE** It’s no surprise that Nehemiah and the citizens of Jerusalem encountered resistance as they began to rebuild the city walls. Following God’s plans and purposes is an incredibly blessed experience, but it’s often accompanied by obstacles and opposition. In those moments, we can choose to focus on the fear and the chances of failure, or we can choose to focus on God and how he will continue to protect and guide us.

**ASK:**
- Look at verses 1-3. Why did Sanballat and Tobiah start by mocking the Jews and their efforts at rebuilding Jerusalem’s walls, before making plans to attack the city?
- If you were one of the citizens of Jerusalem, what would you be feeling and doing after you heard about the plans to attack the city?

**ADDITIONAL DISCUSSION** [optional]
- Sanballat and Tobiah mocked the workers but people stayed focused on the project. When have mockery or criticism distracted you spiritually? How did you overcome those obstacles, or how did those challenges knock you off track?
- Read Philippians 3:12-14. How can these words encourage and inspire you as you prepare to lead the way?
APPLICATION
Pair up with another person in the group—ideally, the same partner from the previous week’s discussion—for these questions.

ASK:
- How can you create the most effective plans in leading the way with the problem you believe God wants you to address (or problems, if each person is focused on a different issue)? What organization and planning will be required?
- What tasks or responsibilities will need to be completed as you lead the way in confronting this problem (or problems)? What specific individuals could you approach to get involved?
- As you begin confronting this problem (or problems), where might you encounter obstacles or opposition? How might you respond?
- Through this entire process of leading the way, what are practical ways God offers his help?

Bring everyone back together to discuss these questions, especially if the entire group is going to address one single problem.

SAY SOMETHING LIKE: The challenge now is to put these plans into action. In the weeks ahead, I’ll be calling and texting you to see how things are going. Remember, the ultimate success comes from God, but we had the privilege of being part of his plan in confronting problems in our world. [NOTE: We encourage you to follow up and see if your students are putting their plans into action. Some will, and some won’t, but regardless of their response, remain supportive as you talk with them.]

SUMMARY
End your small group lesson here. Provide your teenagers with a quick summary or take-home challenge based on (1) the content of this lesson, (2) the dialogue that took place during the lesson, (3) your understanding of the issues and struggles your teenagers are facing, and (4) the big picture of your youth ministry and what your leadership team wants accomplished with the teaching and discussion time.

FOR KEEPS [MEMORY VERSE]
Encourage and/or challenge your teenagers to memorize the verse below.

At last the wall was completed to half its height around the entire city, for the people had worked with enthusiasm (Nehemiah 4:6).