



A series of Bible experiences for busy households on life's journey

Nehemiah – reading the journal of a man whose heart was focused on God

Background

Artaxerxes – (say, ART-ah-ZERK-zees) – was the king, the emperor of the Persian Empire. Anything he said he wanted he got. If he wanted someone to make him a special gift – they had to stop and make his gift. If he wanted to take over a country, he would send a messenger (instead of his army) and say, “Give up!” Because he was so strong, a lot of countries just gave up... they knew he’d send the army next!

Nehemiah was the cupbearer of the king, tasting the food of the king before him to make sure it wasn’t poisoned. He lived with the bad news about Jerusalem for 6 months, praying to God, before the king noticed how sad he was. When the king asked him what was wrong, Nehemiah said a quick prayer to God and then told the king plainly what broke his heart. The king told him he was allowed to go and to rebuild Jerusalem and he gave him letters of permission to get all the materials he needed to do the work, and he gave him a little army to go with him to help him. Both the king and Nehemiah knew that people could try to hurt him while he did this work.



Words and Ideas to Know

Nisan – a month that would be somewhere around April to May

Praying under my breath – to say a very quick prayer so quietly that no one but God can hear it

Ancestors – the people of my family who lived long before me

Horonite – a person from the town of Horonaim

Ammonite – a person who came from the place called Amman

Scripture

Nehemiah 2:1-10 (The Message)

It was the month of Nisan in the twentieth year of Artaxerxes the king. At the hour for serving wine I brought it in and gave it to the king. I had never been hangdog in his presence before, so he asked me, “Why the long face? You’re not sick are you? Or are you depressed?”

That made me all the more agitated. I said, “Long live the king! And why shouldn’t I be depressed when the city, the city where all my family is buried, is in ruins and the city gates have been reduced to cinders?”

The king then asked me, “So what do you want?”

Praying under my breath to the God-of-Heaven, I said, “If it please the king, and if the king thinks well of me, send me to Judah, to the city where my family is buried, so that I can rebuild it.”

The king, with the queen sitting alongside him, said, “How long will your work take and when would you expect to return?” I gave him a time, and the king gave his approval to send me. Then I said, “If it please the

king, provide me with letters to the governors across the Euphrates that authorize my travel through to Judah; and also an order to Asaph, keeper of the king's forest, to supply me with timber for the beams of The Temple fortress, the wall of the city, and the house where I'll be living."

The generous hand of my God was with me in this and the king gave them to me. When I met the governors across The River (the Euphrates) I showed them the king's letters. The king even sent along a cavalry escort.

When Sanballat the Horonite and Tobiah the Ammonite official heard about this, they were very upset, angry that anyone would come to look after the interests of the People of Israel.

Imagine



I wonder what it would be like to live long ago when people walked or rode on an animal, like a camel or a horse or a donkey.

I wonder what we look like when we're nervous or a little bit scared.

I wonder what it would be like to have to get permission to do something important.

I wonder what it would be like to make a plan to build a wall or to make a gate when I never did that before.

I wonder what it would be like to own a whole forest.



Play

Places – Find maps and see if you can locate the Euphrates river. How about the Tigris? Can you find Israel? How far away is the Euphrates from Israel? Pretend you had to walk that far... what would you make sure to take with you?

Try camping overnight somewhere other than your bedroom. Would you go somewhere with your family? Would you set it up in the living room? In the backyard?

Permission – create a game by writing on pieces of paper, permission to do things, and then play the card game "Go Fish," but instead of just getting a new card, get a new card and a "Permission Slip" from the pile you and your friends make up. Then, do the thing you were given "permission" to do – like drink a whole glass of water without stopping, or hold your breath until you can't or whatever you think would be fun. (But, be careful because you might get one you made up.)

Pray

Lord, remind us of how you love us when we have to do something that seems hard. When we're a little scared, remind us to pray to you for help. When we have a big job to do, remind us that we can ask other people to help us. Remind us that you love us, Lord. Amen.