

dwell[®]



Dear Family,

During the six weeks of this unit, we'll discover again how our amazing and powerful God keeps his promises. God has a plan for the lives of his people. Even when we face hard times, God is there. Through the stories of Daniel, Esther, Ezra, and Nehemiah, we'll see God working in amazing ways.

I hope you have time to explore and talk about these stories at home too. This schedule will help you keep track of where we are in God's big story, the Bible:



Date: _____ Daniel and the Last Party (Daniel 5)

If God were to write a warning on the wall of your school or church or home, what might it say?



Date: _____ Daniel and the Lions' Den (Daniel 6)

Do you think King Darius really expected Daniel to answer when he called into the lions' den? Why or why not?



Date: _____ Esther, Part 1 (Esther 1-5:2)

How do you see God working in this story?



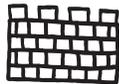
Date: _____ Esther, Part 2 (Esther 5:3-Esther 10)

God used Esther for special work at a difficult time. How might God be using you?



Date: _____ Home Again! (Ezra 1, 3)

How has God been faithful to you?



Date _____ New Walls, New People (Nehemiah 1-10)

How has God been faithful to the people of your church, your city, or your nation?

Our Memory Challenge for the next six weeks is 1 Corinthians 13:4-7. To listen to or purchase a great musical version or rap of these verses (and of 1 Corinthians 13:1-3, the Memory Challenge from Unit 5), visit *DwellCurriculum.org* and look for "Love Is" and/or "Without Love." Or consider purchasing a copy of the *DwellSongs 2* CD at *www.faithaliveresources.org*.

Sincerely,

Memory Challenge

⁴ Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. ⁵ It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs.

⁶ Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. ⁷ It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.

—1 Corinthians 13:4-7 (NIV)

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Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

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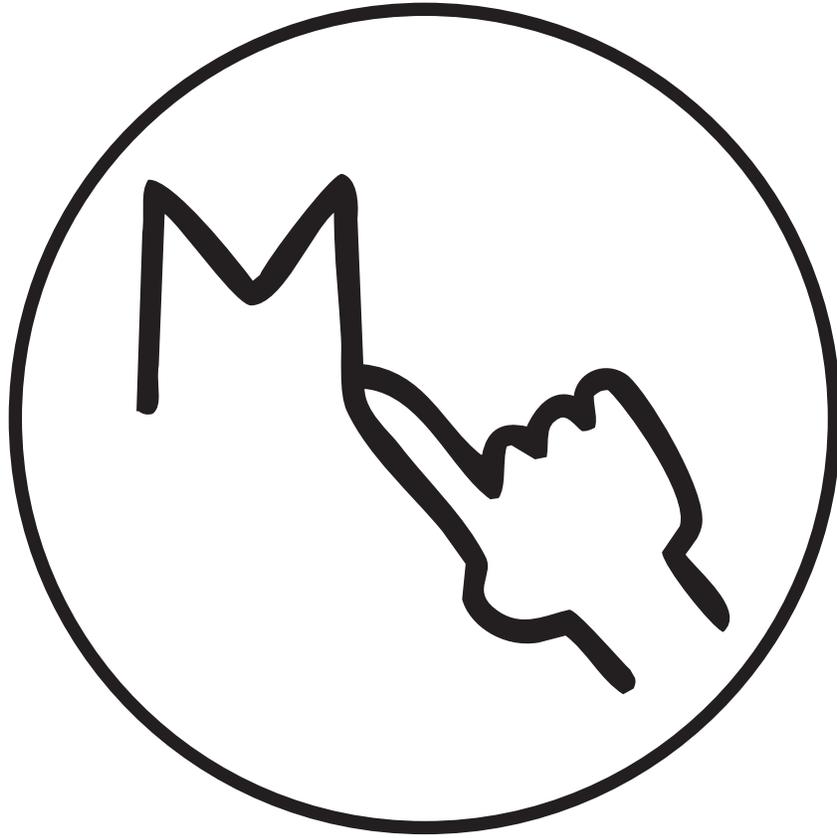
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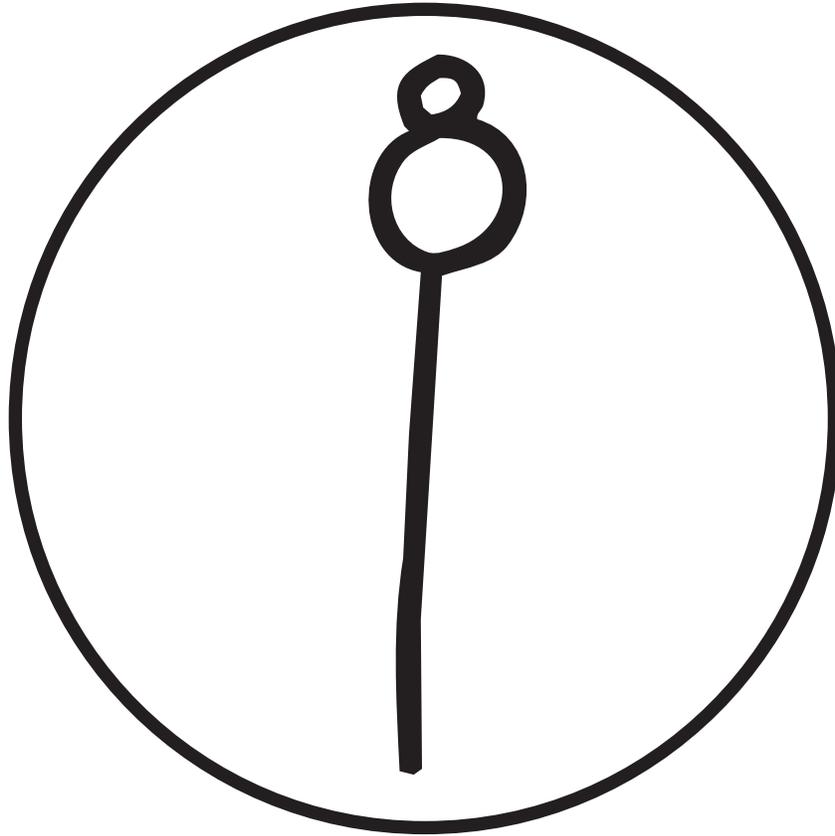
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Marvel Year 2, Unit 6, Session 1



Marvel Year 2, Unit 6, Session 2



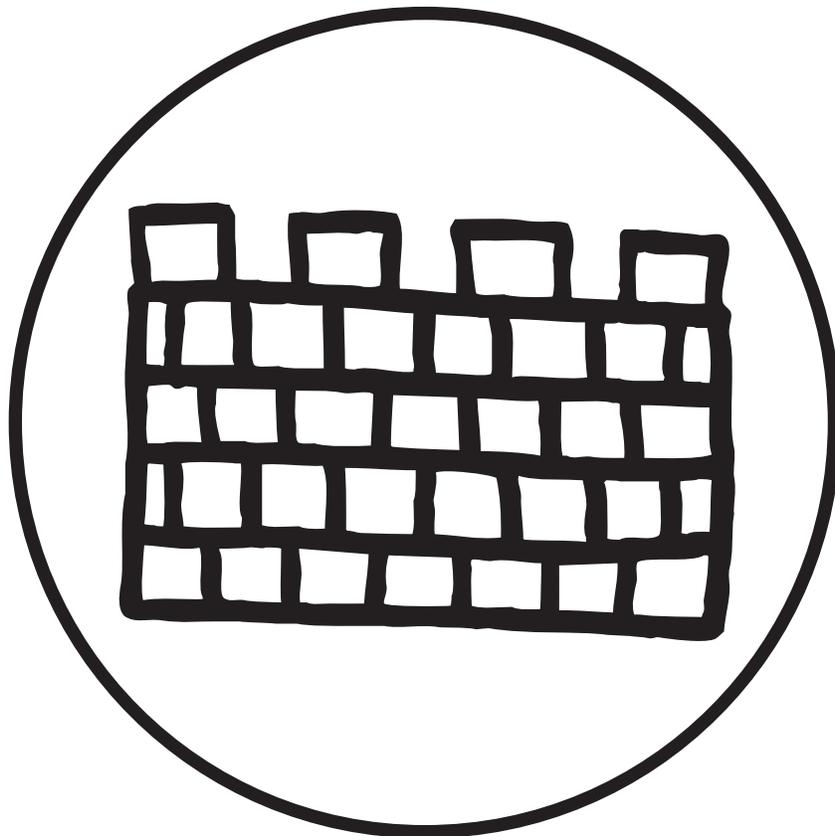
Marvel Year 2, Unit 6, Session 3



Marvel Year 2, Unit 6, Session 4



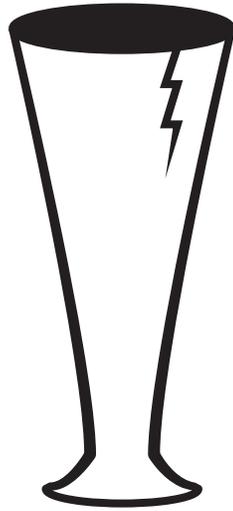
Marvel Year 2, Unit 6, Session 5



Marvel Year 2, Unit 6, Session 6

Goblets of God's Gifts

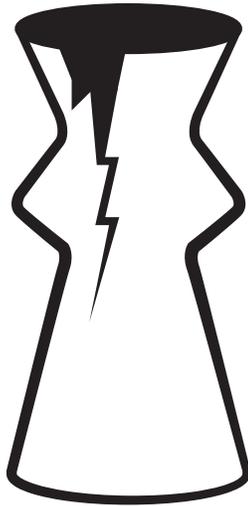
LOOK
DOWN
ON
OTHERS



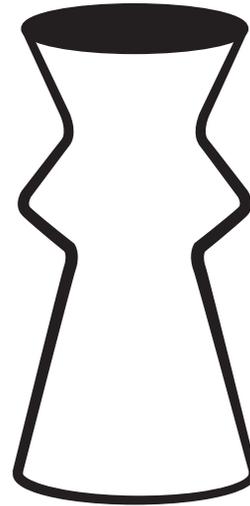
LOOK UP
TO GOD



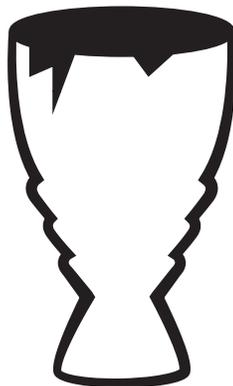
HATE



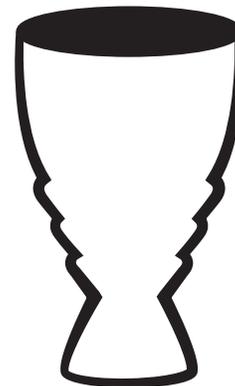
LOVE



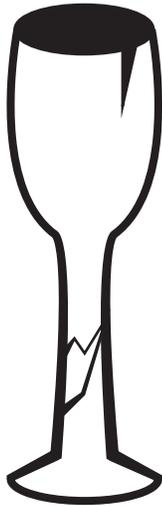
DON'T
GIVE
ANYONE
A CHANCE



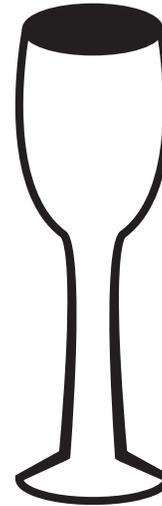
SHOW
MERCY



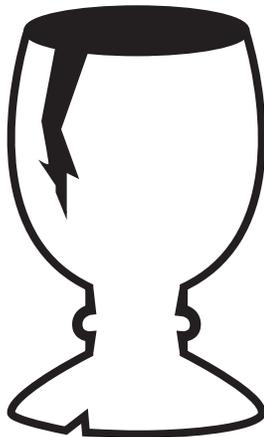
RESENTFUL,
UNFORGIVING



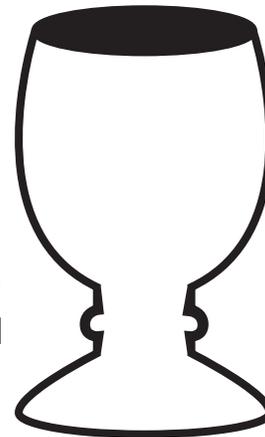
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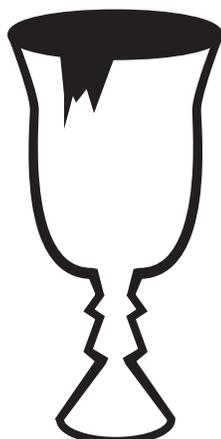
DISHONEST,
DECEITFUL



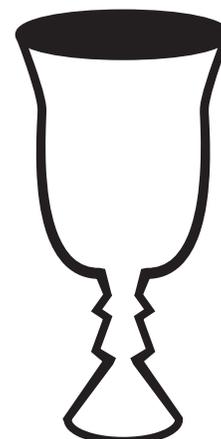
GOODNESS
AND TRUTH



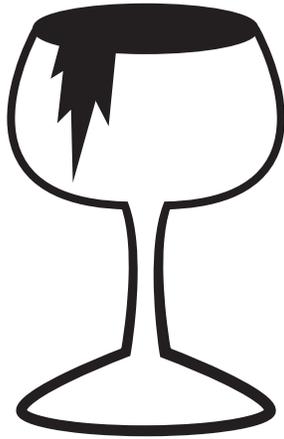
DISLOYAL



FAITHFUL



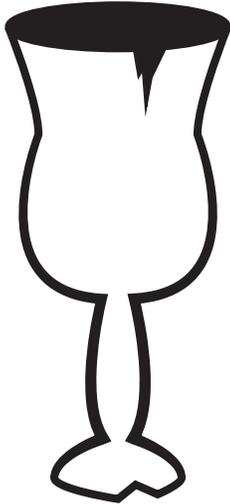
UNCARING



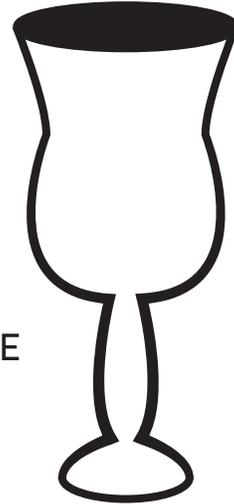
COMPASSIONATE



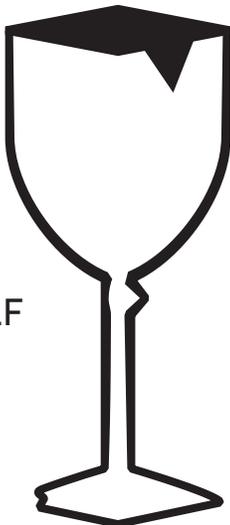
PROUD



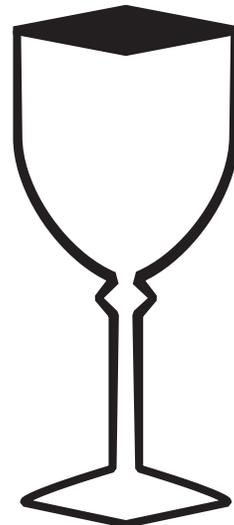
HUMBLE
DEPENDENCE
UPON GOD



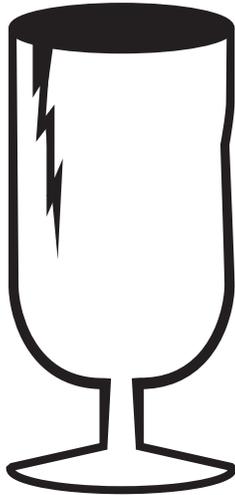
RELY ONLY
ON YOURSELF



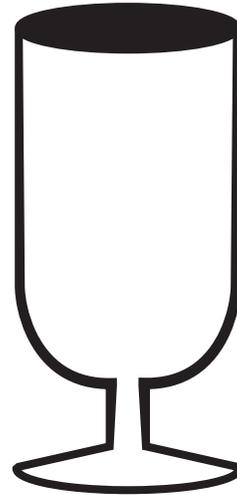
TRUST
IN GOD



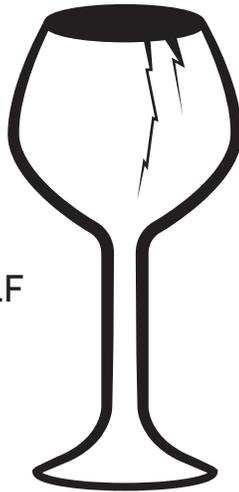
REJECT
GOD'S
GOODNESS



GRATITUDE



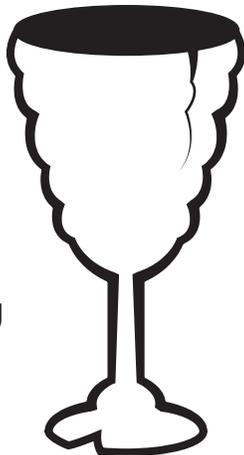
PUT YOURSELF
ABOVE GOD



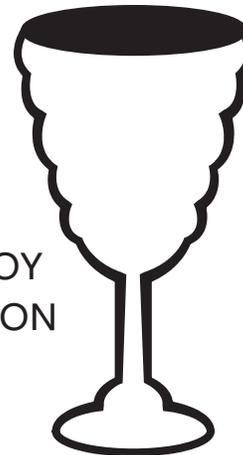
HONOR GOD
AND HIS WAYS



DO WHAT
PLEASES YOU



FIND YOUR JOY
AND SALVATION
IN GOD



It's a Party . . . But Not for Long

CHARACTERS

Narrator

**Belshazzar, king
of Babylon**

Guest 1

Guest 2

Guest 3

Servant

Wise men

Queen

Daniel

Scene 1

Narrator: The great kingdom of Babylon began to crack at its foundation. At the palace, King Belshazzar was more interested in throwing parties than defending his kingdom. He didn't pay any attention to God.

Belshazzar: I want a party with a thousand guests. Order enough wine and food to last all night long.

Servant: Yes, my king. We'll make your party the best ever.

Narrator: The gardens were harvested, the animals were slaughtered, and the cooks cooked, while the servants ran around getting the palace party-ready. Finally, the doors were thrown open to the guests.

Belshazzar: *(to his guests)* Welcome, everyone, to the greatest celebration in Babylon! Eat! Drink! Make yourselves merry with wine and food. Enjoy the music and dancing—there'll never be a party to compare to this one.

Narrator: Belshazzar drank and toasted himself for all his greatness. Filled with wine, he had another idea. This celebration was worthy of the gold and silver cups taken from the temple in Jerusalem. What use were they to the people of Israel? Their God's temple had been burned to the ground.

Belshazzar: Servants! Go and get all of the gold and silver cups that King Nebuchadnezzar took from Israel. We'll show the God of Israel that the gods of Babylon are the greatest!

Servant: Are you sure, my king? You've heard the stories about the power of this God. Mocking him by using his holy cups for a party is not smart.

Belshazzar: Stories! An invisible God doesn't scare me. In my kingdom we worship the gods of gold, silver, bronze, iron, wood, and stone. We deserve the gold and silver goblets. Don't waste another minute.

Narrator: So the servants brought out the sacred cups made of silver and gold. God had told the people of Israel that the cups should remain holy and were to be used only by the priests of God's temple. But Belshazzar gave the cups to his guests, their wives, and nobles. They filled the cups with wine and lifted them in praise to their gods.

Guest 1: Praise be to the gods of gold and silver!

Guest 2: Praise be to the gods of bronze and iron!

Guest 3: Praise be to the gods of wood and stone!

All Guests: Praise be to our gods. Yahoo!

Narrator: The cheers couldn't have been louder and wilder. But suddenly the fingers of a human hand appeared on the wall, writing words! The king's eyes fixed on the hand without a body. His knees knocked against each other. His legs wobbled like rubber.

Belshazzar: Whhaat are those words?! *Mene, Mene, Tekel, Parsin.* What does that mean?! *(falls to the ground in terror)* Servants, go and get my wise men at once!

Scene 2

Wise Men: At your service, your majesty. How may we help you?

Belshazzar: Whoever reads this writing and tells me what it means will be clothed in purple and have a gold chain placed around his neck. I will also make him third highest in the kingdom!

Wise Men: Sorry, O King, but we cannot read this mysterious writing. Its meaning is a complete mystery. We are baffled down to our wise toes.

Belshazzar: Whatever will I do?

Queen: O King Belshazzar! Don't be alarmed! There is a man who used to work for King Nebuchadnezzar who has the spirit of the holy gods in him. His name is Daniel. He was able to solve many problems for the king in the past. He can solve riddles and mysteries. Call for Daniel, and he will help you.

Belshazzar: Servants! Get Daniel at once!

Daniel: King Belshazzar, I see that you are in great distress.

Belshazzar: Yes! Please! I have heard that you are able to give interpretations and can solve difficult problems. Tell me what this strange writing means, and I will clothe you in purple, give you a gold chain, and make you third highest in my kingdom!

Daniel: You may keep your gifts for yourself. Give your rewards to someone else. But I will read the writing and tell you what it means. You remember, O King, that Nebuchadnezzar had great power. But he thought all of his greatness came from himself and not from the God of Israel. Then the Lord God gave Nebuchadnezzar the mind of an animal and sent him to sleep with the beasts of the field—until he admitted that God is truly ruler of the earth.

You knew all of this, O King. Yet you still mocked God by using his holy cups for your wicked party, praising the gods of gold and silver!

Here is what the writing means: *Mene, Mene, Tekel, Parsin: Numbered, Numbered, Weighed, and Divided.*

Mene: God has numbered your days as king and they have come to an end.

Tekel: You have been weighed on God's scales and you have not measured up.

Parsin: Your kingdom will be divided between the Medes and the Persians.

Belshazzar: Quick! Servants! Clothe this man in purple. Give him a gold chain.

(to Daniel) I pronounce you third ruler in my kingdom!

Narrator: That very night Belshazzar, king of the Babylonians, was killed, and Darius the Mede took over the kingdom. Everything happened as Daniel had said it would.

Conspiracy, Capture, and Deliverance

Who could have guessed that a young slave from Israel, captured by the Babylonians, could rise up to become an important official in the greatest kingdom of its time—the kingdom of Babylon? Of course, you know all about it. You know how Daniel never let go of his trust in God. And God blessed Daniel under the rule of all the kings who had power in this prosperous kingdom: King Nebuchadnezzar, King Belshazzar, and now King Darius.

Part 1: Conspiracy

Of course that didn't please other hoping-to-be-favorites in the kingdom. The day King Darius ordered all lesser rulers to report directly to Daniel, they began their scheming. **Pointer Finger for hissing.**

The not-so-favorites spied on Daniel, looking for one slip-up, one mistake he might make so that they could report it to the king. **Pointer Finger for Hissing.**

It became a ridiculous task. Daniel never cheated, never lied, and fulfilled all his duties. The not-so-favorites would have given up, but then they had an idea. **Pointer Finger for Hissing.**

The one way they could get Daniel to disobey would be to give him an order that went against the law of his God. **Pointer Finger for Hissing.**

So the not-so-favorites went to King Darius and convinced him that a decree, or ruling, should be made that would force all people to stop praying to any gods and pray only to the king for the next thirty days. **Pointer Finger for Hissing.**

King Darius could imagine the glory. He agreed without another thought.

“And,” said the not-so-favorites, “anyone who does pray to another god will be thrown into the lions’ den.” **Pointer Finger for Hissing.**

King Darius, visualizing all the people bowing down to him, agreed that the decree should be put into writing so it could not be changed.

Part 2: Capture

When Daniel heard about the decree, he went home and climbed to his upstairs room, where the windows opened toward Jerusalem. Just as he did everyday—morning, noon and evening—he got down on his knees and gave thanks to God.

The not-so-favorites witnessed it. Aha! They caught him! **Clenched Fist.**

So they went to King Darius and said, “Did you not publish a decree saying that during the next thirty days anyone who prays to any god or man except you, O King, would be thrown into the lions’ den? **Clenched Fist.**

The king answered, “The order is firm. It cannot be canceled.”

Then they said to the king, “Daniel pays no attention to you, O King, or to the decree you put in writing. He still prays three times a day to his God.” **Clenched Fist.**

When the king heard this, he was very upset. He dismissed the men, and he looked for a loophole, a way to get around the decree he had written.

The men returned to the king and said to him, “Remember, O King, that according to our law no decree that the king issues can be changed.” **Clenched Fist.**

So the king gave the order, and they went to get Daniel. **Clenched Fist.**

The king watched as the men threw Daniel into the lions' den. **Clenched Fist.**

After the men did their rejoicing, the king called down to Daniel, "May your God, whom you serve continually, rescue you!"

A stone was brought and placed over the mouth of the den, and the king sealed it with his own ring and with the rings of all the not-so-favorites. Daniel's situation could not be changed. **Clenched Fist.**

Part 3: Deliverance (God Delivers)

The king returned to his palace and spent the night without eating and without any entertainment. He could not sleep, either.

At the first light of dawn, the king got up and hurried to the lions' den. When he came near the den, he called to Daniel in an anguished voice, "Daniel, servant of the living God, has your God, whom you serve continually, been able to rescue you?"

Daniel answered, "O king, live forever! My God sent his angel, and he shut the mouths of the lions." **Raised Arm—God Delivers.**

"The lions have not hurt me!" **Raised Arm—God Delivers.**

"God found me innocent in his sight." **Raised Arm—God Delivers.**

"Neither have I ever done any wrong before you, O king."

The king was overjoyed. He gave orders to lift Daniel out of the den. And when Daniel was raised up, no wound was found on him because he had trusted in God. **Raised Arm—God Delivers.**

At the king's command, the not-so-favorites who had falsely accused Daniel were brought in and thrown into the lions' den. Unfortunately for them, they did not survive.

Then King Darius wrote another decree. This time he pronounced that in every part of his kingdom people must fear and honor the God of Daniel.

Here is what he wrote:

For he is the living God
and he endures forever;
his kingdom will not be destroyed,
his reign will never end.
He rescues and he saves;
he performs signs and wonders
in the heavens and on the earth.
He has rescued Daniel
from the power of the lions.

Raised Arm—God Delivers.

You're a Winner!

This certificate is awarded to:

(Child's name)

for

Presented by:

(Leader's name)

on

(Date)

Emoticons

(*==*)	wonder	@}--	as lovely as a rose
:)	smile	*-:)	idea
:[sad	:-L	frustrated
:-O	surprised	[-O<	praying
:?(cry	:-“	whistling
(**)	pleased	b-(feeling beat up
>:)	mad	:>-	peace
>:O	very angry	[-X	shame on you
:/	thinking	:))	hee-hee
o.O	confused	^:)	not worthy
<3	heart	(*	star
^^		(< -<)	shifty, suspicious
<>	very happy	(o_O)	shocked
---		:(frown
—	secretly	:	speechless
:-??	I don't know	:D	laugh
%-(not listening	:@	angry
>:)	evil/wicked	:S	confused
;)	wink	(??)	puzzled/what will happen?
>:O	upset		

The Story of Esther (Part 1)

The news spread throughout palace halls and city streets. “He has chosen!” “The king has chosen!” Ever since Xerxes, the king of Persia, sent his first queen, Vashti, away from the palace, his servants had been helping him find a new queen. They brought all of the most beautiful women in the kingdom to live in the palace to prepare to meet the king. After a year of beauty treatments, each woman was presented to the king.

King Xerxes delighted in Esther, a young and beautiful Jewish girl, above all the other women. So Xerxes placed a royal crown on her head and declared her the new queen of Persia. Esther had been raised by her cousin Mordecai after her mother and father died. Mordecai loved Esther very much and tried to meet with her at the palace gates as much as he could. “Don’t tell anyone that you are a Jew,” he said to Esther. So she kept her identity a secret.

One day when Esther met Mordecai by the gates, her cousin’s face was creased with worry. “Yesterday, while I was sitting at the king’s gates, I overheard two soldiers talking,” Mordecai said. “They were making plans to kill King Xerxes!”

“Oh no!” Esther said. “I must tell the king at once!”

That evening, when the king called her to see him, Esther told her husband what Mordecai had overheard. The king was furious and immediately called his advisors and chief soldiers. When the report was investigated and found to be true, the two men who plotted to kill the king were put to death. King Xerxes was very grateful to Queen Esther, and Mordecai’s bravery was recorded in the royal books.

A few weeks later, however, King Xerxes had forgotten all about Mordecai. The king was spending much of his time with one of his nobles, a wicked man named Haman. Xerxes was so impressed with Haman’s confidence and hard work that he gave him a position of honor higher than that of all the other nobles in the palace. The king even ordered all the people to bow before Haman and pay him respect whenever he passed by. Everyone obeyed the king and bowed to Haman—everyone but Mordecai.

When the royal officials informed Haman that Mordecai refused to bow to him, Haman was filled with rage. When he learned that Mordecai was a Jew, this filled Haman with even more hatred and anger. “How dare that man—one of those rotten Jews—disobey me, the honorable Haman! He’ll be sorry . . . deathly sorry!” Haman hissed. He then devised a plan not only to kill Mordecai, but to destroy all of the Jews in the kingdom.

Haman went to the king and told him about the Jewish people in the land and how it was best to get rid of them all. He asked Xerxes to issue a new law that on a certain day of the year all the Jews in the kingdom would be killed. Haman’s proposal was convincing to King Xerxes, but he was unaware of Haman’s secret plan to seek revenge against Mordecai. And he was unaware that his lovely queen, Esther, was also a Jew.

“On the thirteenth day of the twelfth month,” the king’s messengers wrote, “all the Jews in the land will be killed and their homes and businesses destroyed.” The king’s messengers sent word of the new law to all the provinces in Persia, and the Jewish people were devastated.

When Mordecai told Esther about the terrible new law, her heart was gripped with pain. “How can this happen?!” she said. “What are we going to do?”

“Esther,” Mordecai urged, “You must do something to help us—you have to talk to the king yourself!”

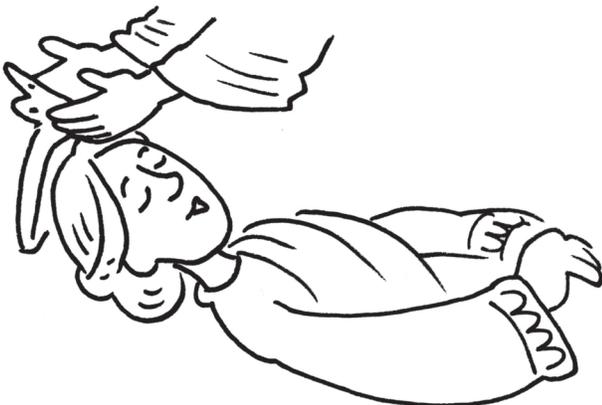
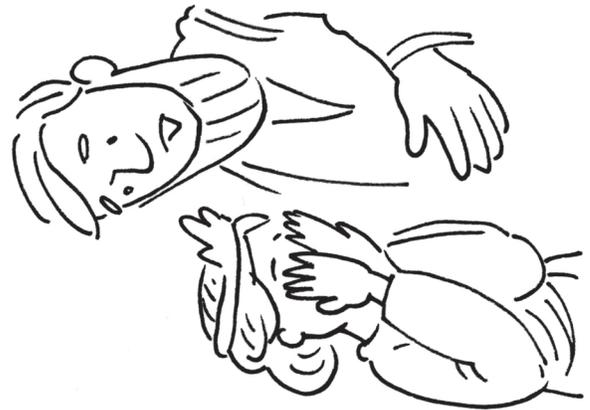
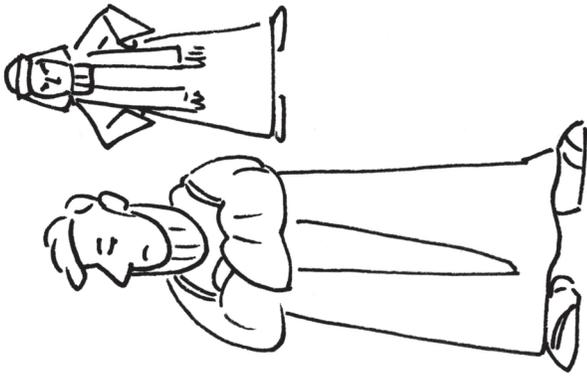
“But the king has not asked to see me in a month,” she replied sadly. “If anyone goes to the king without being summoned, he or she could be put to death!” Everything seemed so hopeless.

“This may be why you have become queen, Esther—to save your people,” Mordecai said.

Esther took a deep breath and then replied, “Go, and gather all the Jews in the land and fast for me. Do not eat or drink for three days, and I and my maids will do the same. Then I will go to the king, even though it is against the law. And if I die, I die.”

To be continued . . .

The Story of Esther (Part 1) Story Cards



The Story of Esther (Part 2)

After three days, Esther was weak from hunger. But she knew that she had to approach the king—no matter what. Her maids helped her put on her finest robes, and she headed slowly toward the throne room. As Queen Esther opened the door and saw her husband, she tried to look brave—even though she was so terrified she could hardly breathe.

As King Xerxes saw Esther approaching, he was amazed at her dazzling beauty. She knelt before him, and he held out his scepter toward her. He did not send her away! “What is it, Esther?” King Xerxes smiled. “Ask for whatever you like, and it will be yours—even up to half of my kingdom!”

“O King,” Esther replied with a trembling smile. “I would like to invite you and Haman to come to a banquet I have prepared for you today.”

“Of course!” the king replied. “Bring Haman at once so that we can attend Esther’s special banquet!” he told his servants.

When the banquet was ready, King Xerxes, Haman, and Esther ate together. The two men ate and drank merrily, but Esther remained quiet and picked at her food. Every time she looked at Haman, her heart filled with fear and anger. This was the man who was planning to destroy her people!

“What is it you would like, Esther?” The king went on. “Ask whatever you wish and it will be granted—even up to half of my kingdom!” Esther took a deep breath and finally managed to say, “If the king is pleased with me, I would like to invite your majesty and Haman to come to another banquet tomorrow. Then I will tell the king my request.”

As Haman left the palace, he was puffed up with pride. “The queen has invited me to another banquet. What an important man I am!” But as he passed by the city gate, he noticed that Mordecai still would not bow to him. This made him furious. He went home and told his wife and friends about the queen’s invitation, and about his hatred for Mordecai.

“Have a gallows built seventy-five feet (22.5 meters) high. In the morning, have Mordecai hanged on it, then go to Queen Esther’s banquet happy,” said his wife and friends.

“What a brilliant idea!” Haman smiled to himself. He had the gallows built at once. He thought he would finally get rid of Mordecai once and for all.

That night, as the gallows was being built at Haman’s house, the king could not sleep. So he passed the time by having his record book read to him. It told all about the important things that took place during his reign as king. As a servant read the book, the king heard how Mordecai had saved his life.

“What was done to honor Mordecai for his brave service to the king?” he asked.

“Nothing has been done.” the servant replied. Just then, Haman arrived at the king’s court. Haman had come to ask permission to hang Mordecai that very day. But King Xerxes wanted to ask Haman a question.

“What should be done for the man the king wants to honor?” he asked Haman.

Haman swelled with pride and thought to himself, “Who else in the kingdom would the king want to honor but me?” So Haman told the king, “Allow the honored man to wear one of the king’s robes, and have him ride on the king’s horse throughout the city, and have someone loudly proclaim, ‘This is what is done for the man the king wishes to honor!’”

“What a great idea!” the king exclaimed. “Go immediately and do everything you have said for Mordecai, who has never been rewarded for saving my life.” Haman’s jaw dropped. He was humiliated! He had to honor the very man he was planning to kill!

Later that day, after Haman had honored Mordecai, he and the king went to Esther's second banquet. After much eating and drinking the king asked Esther again, "What is it you would like, my queen? I will give it to you—even up to half of my kingdom!"

Esther took a deep breath and answered, "If I have found favor with you, O King, and if it pleases your majesty, please grant me my life—that is my request. Please spare my people. Someone in your kingdom plans to have me and my people killed!"

The king's eyes flashed with fury. "Who has dared to do such a thing?" he demanded.

She pointed at Haman. "This wicked man Haman is the one!" she cried. Haman's smile vanished. He watched in terror as the king got up in rage and went out to the palace garden. Haman saw this as his chance to beg Esther for his life.

"Please, please, Queen Esther, have mercy and save my life!" he pleaded. Just then the king came back into the room. He saw Haman clinging to Esther's robe and grew even angrier. "Now he's attacking my queen! Take him out of here!" Xerxes roared. Then one of the servants told the king, "There's a gallows at Haman's house that he had made for Mordecai."

"Hang him on it!" the king ordered. So Haman was hanged on the very gallows that he intended for Mordecai. Esther sighed with relief. Haman was gone for good!

A few days later the king passed a new law to guard the Jewish people from Haman's wicked plan. Queen Esther and her people were saved! Haman was dead, and the king appointed Mordecai to take Haman's place as his trusted official.

All over the kingdom God's people celebrated with feasts and dancing and praised God for saving them from destruction.

Praise Prayer

All:

We praise you, God.

You cared for Daniel and Esther and your people in captivity.

And you care for us, too, O God.

We thank and praise you for being our God.

We thank and praise you for caring for us and for the people in our families.

We thank and praise you for caring for the people in our church.

We thank and praise you for your saving power through your Son, Jesus.

Individuals:

I thank and praise you for . . .

All:

How majestic is your name in all the earth. Amen.

The Long Trip Home Story Segments

King Cyrus's Announcement

One day the new and popular King Cyrus, who now ruled all of Persia, including Babylon, had an idea. He may have thought it was a great idea, but guess what! Before God's people were taken into captivity, God's prophet Jeremiah had already talked about this idea. Jeremiah spoke these words from God: "After seventy years are completed in Babylon, I will cause you to return to this place." That place was Jerusalem, the place of God's temple, built long ago by King Solomon.

Cyrus may have been trying to prove that he was a good king, giving the people a chance to return to their homeland and rebuild their temple. But it sure looked like God was behind it!

Take a sip from your goatskin water bottle in thanksgiving to God for always providing.

Who Is Going?

The families of Judah and Benjamin responded with a yes. (Remember that God's people were divided into tribes or groups according to their ancestors in Jacob's family of long ago.) You are part of that group. The priests and Levites also were ready. A rebuilding of the temple needed these religious leaders.

If you want to use one of their names, go to Ezra 2 and pick a name you can pronounce. Otherwise just stay with the good name you have.

Packing Up

When it was time to go, the people who were not going were eager to help out with gifts. You and the other travelers received silver and gold, pots and pans, goats and cows.

Feel the added weight in your pack, and make room beside you for the goats.

More Treasures

Then King Cyrus brought out all the things King Nebuchadnezzar had taken from the temple. There were thirty gold platters, one thousand silver platters, twenty-nine knives, thirty gold basins, four hundred and ten silver basins, one thousand other articles, and more. All together there were five thousand, four hundred pieces of gold and silver.

Take a deep breath. It is the first time you've seen all these pieces that King Nebuchadnezzar had hidden away. What clues does this give you about the grandeur of God's temple before its destruction? Do you wish you could have seen it?

The Journey

Traveling with five thousand or so people was not the fastest way to go. The day was never over when you stopped. The horses, mules, camels, and donkeys needed to be fed.

But tomorrow it is your turn to ride a camel. What is it like to be up there riding high while swaying with the camel's movements?



Arrival

Your first stop in the homeland is at the place where the house, or temple, of the Lord once stood in Jerusalem. You dig deep into your pockets and moneybags. A lot of work needs to be done, but it will be worth it.

After that you move into your homes. They need lots of repairs after sitting empty, but they are *your* homes in *your* land.

Take a deep breath of the good air as you look at the welcome mat symbol.



God's Altar

After seven months of fixing up your homes, it is time to build the altar for worshiping God. You and the others follow the instructions God gave to Moses long ago. Now you can make sacrifices to God and celebrate all the festivals that honor God.

Pause a moment to thank God for freedom to worship.



God's Temple

Next came the biggest project of all: the rebuilding of God's temple. The builders traded food and drink with the people in the north who had cedar logs.

You are too young to lift those heavy logs, but the smell of the cedar wood is wonderful. Next, you watch as huge stones are fitted against each other perfectly. Talk with your friends about how they could do that.



The Celebration

When the foundation was completed you celebrated. The priests and Levites gathered with trumpets and cymbals, and you sang praises to the Lord, saying,

“He is good;
his love to Israel endures forever!”

Then you gave a loud shout of praise to the Lord.

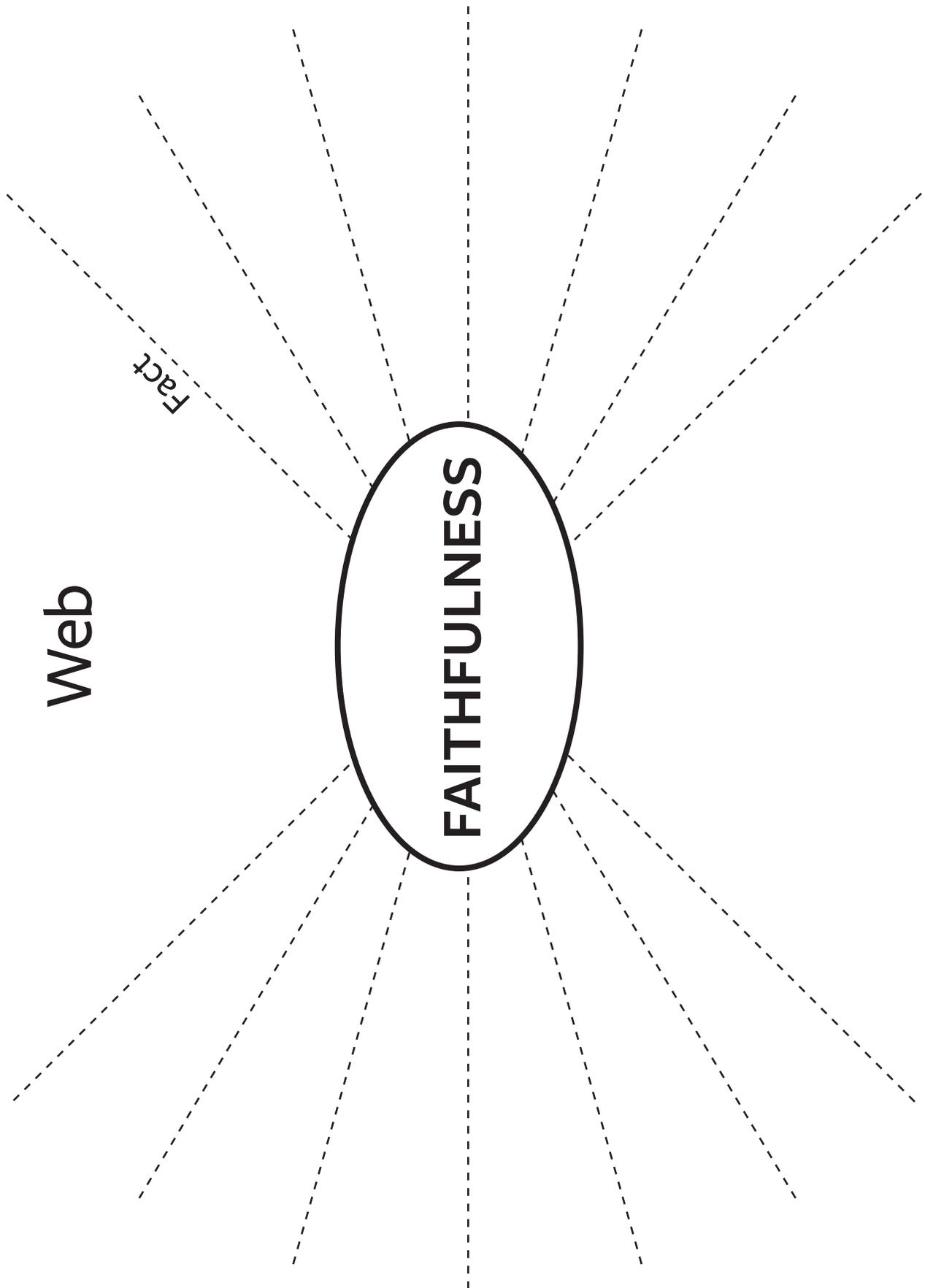
Go ahead and shout.

Everyone was so excited! God was gracious enough to bring you back to your home. The foundation of the temple was laid—soon, the whole temple would be rebuilt! But as you shouted praises to God, your grandfather and many of the other older people who remembered the old temple wept loudly. They remembered how grand and beautiful the first temple was and thought the new temple could never replace the former one.

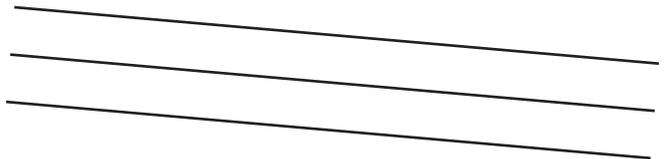
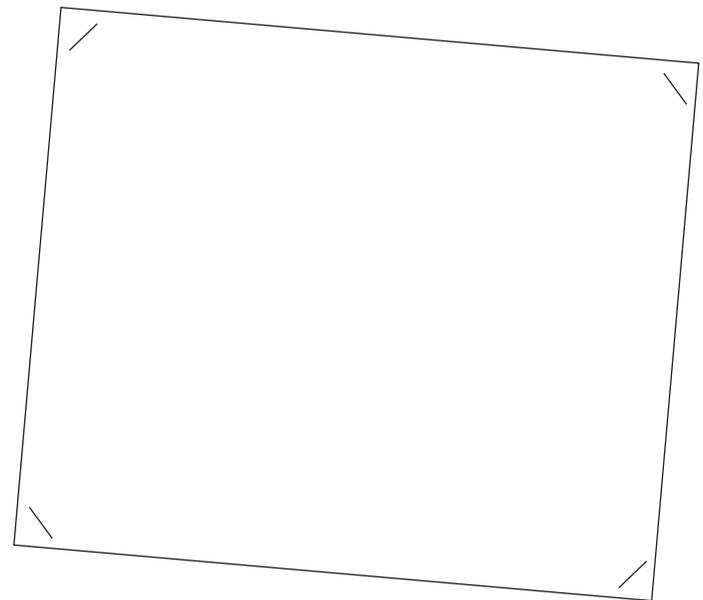
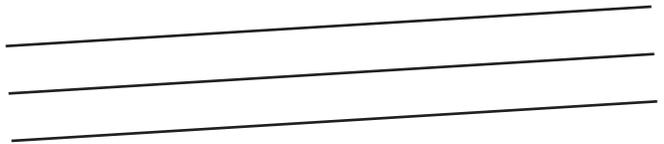
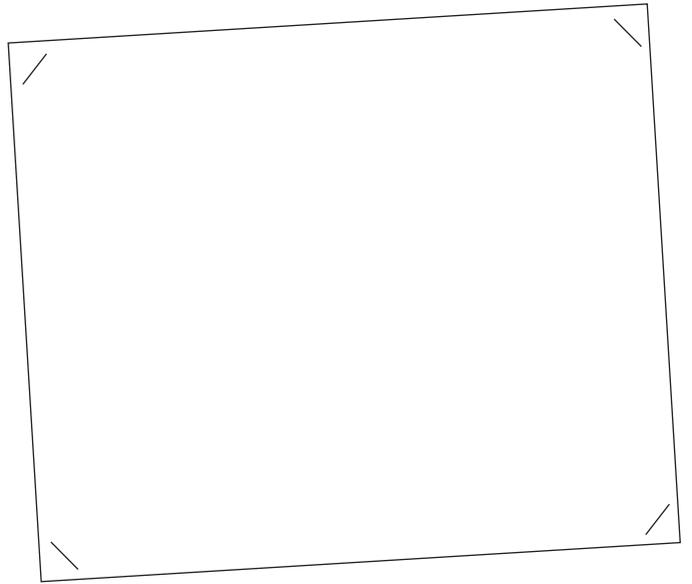
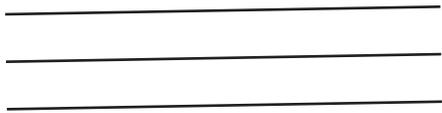
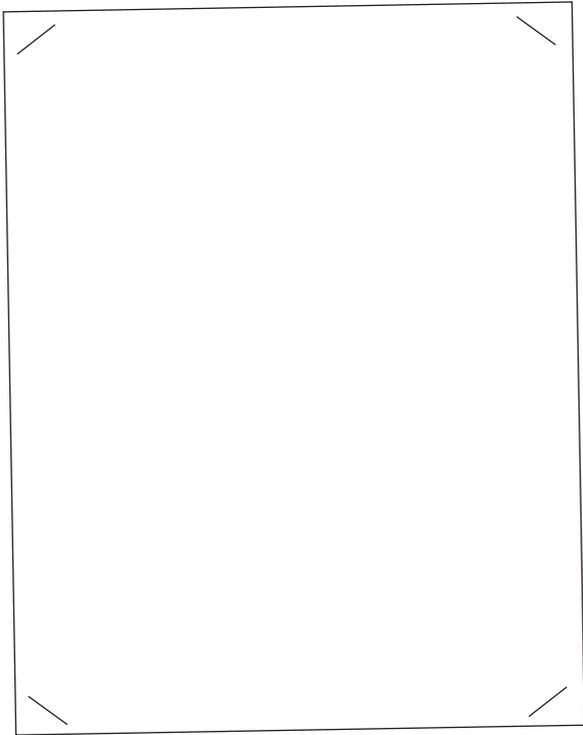
All of you made such a loud noise that many of the people living nearby heard your shouts of joy. It was a very sad and happy moment—but you are hopeful that your city and the temple of the Lord will be great once more.



Web



Snapshots



Prayer and Action, Prayer and Action, Again and Again

Ready, Set, Pray

Nehemiah: One day as I was working in the king’s palace as usual, one of my brothers suddenly appeared. This was a surprise because he had gone off to Judah with Ezra and the others. He returned with bad news. Things were not going well in the homeland. The wall of Jerusalem was broken. The gates into the city had been burned. The people who had returned had encountered trouble. They were bullied and shamed by their neighbors.

ALL: Sighs and groans.

Nehemiah: When I heard about the troubles, I sat down and wept for my brothers and sisters. Then I prayed. O Lord, God of the heavens who never stopped loving us, hear my prayer.

ALL: We were taken from our land because we stopped loving you and your ways. We want to delight in you again. But we have troubles and need help.

Nehemiah: When I go in to serve the king, may he favor me so that I can go to my people.

The King and I

Nehemiah: My duties for the king included choosing and bringing him only the best wine. Immediately he noticed my sad face and asked about it. I was afraid, but I told him about the troubles back in Jerusalem. Then he asked me what I wanted to do.

ALL: *(Quickly and silently send up a prayer for me.)*

Nehemiah: Immediately and bravely, I answered, “If it pleases the king, send me to Jerusalem so that I can help rebuild the city.

ALL: *(Cheers)* Yes, yes! The king said yes!

The No-Good, Broken-Down Walls

Nehemiah: Because God was with me, I was able to get supplies from other kings and sources. I rode around the city at night to inspect the situation. In the morning I told the people how God was with me and because of that we could rebuild.

ALL: Yes, yes! Rebuild, rebuild!

Great Gates

Nehemiah: We made a good start. One gate after another received new doors. Then we put the bolts and bars into place.

ALL: Sheep Gate, Fish Gate, Valley Gate, Dung Gate, Fountain Gate, Horse Gate, Inspection Gate, and more, and walls, and more walls. G-o-o-o-d work!

The No-Good, Discouraging Enemies

Nehemiah: A couple of troublemakers, one named Sanballat and another named Tobiah, came and tormented us.

They called us weaklings, saying that we can’t do anything right. Tobiah said that if a fox climbed up on our wall, it would break down.

ALL: Hear us, O God. Our enemies insult us. Turn them away from us.

Nehemiah: After praying we went back to work. That really surprised our enemies. They thought they had beaten us with their words. So they tried again to come and fight against us. What did we do?

ALL: We prayed.

Nehemiah: Then we posted guards around the clock.

ALL: Sanballat and Tobiah kept up the tormenting. This time we heard they planned to kill us.

Nehemiah: I told the people not to be afraid. I told them to stand together and fight for each other. For God is with us.

ALL: The Lord our God is great and awesome.

Nehemiah: It surprised our enemies that we knew about their plot—and that we still had the courage to go on with our rebuilding.

Trouble Within

Nehemiah: The workers are crying out. Many don't have food for their families. Some had to take out loans to buy food. Others are paying such high taxes to the leaders that they can't afford food. Those who are rich aren't doing anything to help.

ALL: It is not right.

Nehemiah: I called a meeting of all the people and asked for a change. They promised to help each other.

ALL: Amen. God is praised when people help one another.

Nehemiah: I tried to do my part by working hard on the wall and by not taking my full payments.

ALL: O God, favor all those who help others.

[CELEBRATION 1]

Snares, Plots, Threats, and Intimidation

Nehemiah: Sanballat, Tobiah, and the rest of our enemies invited me to meet with them.

ALL: Hiss-hiss-hiss.

Nehemiah: I figured it was a scheme to trap me.

ALL: Hiss-hiss-hiss.

Nehemiah: Five times they tried to get me to come. They tried to wear all of us down, hoping we'd grow weak. But I prayed.

ALL: Strengthen my hands.

Nehemiah: Our enemies finally gave up.

A New Wall

Nehemiah: The wall is up. The doors are in place. The gatekeepers are chosen. The singers are ready. The Levites are appointed. The city is spacious.

ALL: Come. Come all you families. Come all of you who came out of the exile.

Nehemiah: All the people came, and Ezra read out loud to them from God's Word. Ezra praised the Lord.

ALL: Amen! Amen!

Nehemiah: This is a day to remember that the joy of the Lord is your strength. Celebrate with great joy. Enjoy good food and sweet drinks.

[CELEBRATION 2]

Confession and Praise

Nehemiah: On another day, the people came together again. They confessed that forgetting God had caused God to send their fathers and mothers away from their land and into exile. They did not want that to happen again. They wanted to become a people who praised God forever.

ALL: Praise God forever!

Blessed be God's glorious name.

God made a covenant with Abraham.

God delivered us from Egypt.

God gave us water in the desert.

But our people failed to remember.

We became slaves in a strange land.

God, however, is a forgiving and gracious God.

Now we promise to follow God again.

Our God is a gracious and merciful God.

Crack the Code

Nehemiah was able to encourage the people because of his prayers. Next to each letter of the alphabet, put in a code number or symbol. Choose a prayer from one of these verses and write the code number for each letter in the word under the line. Be sure to skip a line between words.

Prayer Verses: Nehemiah 1:6a; Nehemiah 5:10; Nehemiah 6:9b; Nehemiah 9:5b

A									
B									
C									
D									
E									
F									
G									
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New Walls, New People

Shalom. My name is Nehemiah. I'm a Jew, though for much of my life I lived in the city of Susa, far away from my homeland, Jerusalem. I worked for King Artaxerxes, the ruler who came after Queen Esther and her husband, King Xerxes. I was his cupbearer. That means it was my duty to taste each glass of wine before I handed it to the king. That way, if anyone poisoned the king's drink, I would die, and the king's life would be saved. This was a very important job, and the king trusted me very much.

I was happy in Susa. I enjoyed my job because I developed a close relationship with the king and had the opportunity to meet important people in his palace. But part of me also longed for the promised land of my people, Jerusalem. I hoped things were going well with the people there.

Everything changed when my brother returned from a trip to our sacred land. He was deeply discouraged by what he saw. "Nehemiah," he said to me, "it is horrible there. Many of the houses still lie in heaps of rubble. They have rebuilt God's temple, but the walls of the city are still broken down. Other nations can come and attack us at any time. Our people have no protection if the walls continue to lie in piles of broken stones. Everyone around us will mock us and our God!"

When I heard this, I wept with sadness. How long before another nation would come into our city and destroy us again? For days I fasted and prayed before God to help my people.

Later on, when I presented the king with his wine, he noticed that I looked troubled and sad. "Nehemiah, why do you look so sad? Something must be bothering you," he said. I trembled with fear. "O King, may you live forever!" I said. "Why shouldn't my face look sad when the city where my ancestors are buried is in ruins?"

The king looked at me with great concern in his eyes. "What is it you want, Nehemiah?"

I silently asked God for strength. Then I asked the king if he might allow me to go back to Jerusalem to rebuild the city. He wondered how long it would take and when I would be back. I quickly set a timeline, promising to come back soon to be his cupbearer again. And he agreed! Because the hand of God was upon me, King Artaxerxes said yes! He even wrote letters to the surrounding governors to let them know what I was planning to do, and he sent some of his army to accompany me and to keep me and my people safe!

When I arrived in Jerusalem, I spent a few days visiting the people there. I didn't tell them right away why I had come. One night, though, I sneaked out to take a closer look at what repairs needed to be done to the wall. The next day I called a meeting of some of the priests, nobles, officials, and workers in the city. "Come, let us rebuild the walls of Jerusalem!" I said. I told them how I had asked King Artaxerxes to help. "God will give us success!" I said.

I saw many people nodding their heads in agreement. "Yes, let's start rebuilding!" they replied.

The local governors Sanballat and Tobiah heard about what we were doing, and they didn't like it. They mocked us and tried to discourage us.

"What do you think you're doing?" they taunted. "The minute the king hears about this, he will think you are rebelling against him!"

But I was not afraid of them. "We will rebuild this wall," I told them. "And you will have no share in Jerusalem, nor will you have any right to it. It is *you* who lead this city in shame and disgrace!"

Sanballat and Tobiah grew angrier each day we continued to work on the wall. Other people in the area were threatening us too. They even plotted together to come and fight against us to stop what we were doing. But we prayed to God to protect us, and we posted guards to keep watch for our enemies, day and night. Even as we worked on rebuilding the temple, we kept our weapons close at hand in case we needed to stop working to fight.

Each time our enemies tried to stop us, I prayed to God, and God protected us and gave us the strength to keep working. We never gave up! And we finished rebuilding the wall in fifty-two days. When our enemies heard about the work we had completed, they *finally* realized that our God was on our side!

As I looked at the walls we had built, my heart swelled with joy and pride. And the people joined me in giving thanksgiving to our almighty God!



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