



ELEMENTARY FAMILY DEVOTIONAL

March 22 - God's People Repented

Bible Passage:	Nehemiah 8-13
Main Point:	God's people repented and promised to be faithful.
Key Passage:	1 Peter 5:10
Big Picture Question:	Who is in control of everything? God is in control of everything in heaven and on earth.

PARENT'S BIBLE STUDY

(For you to read for your own studying to lead you into preparation for teaching)

Ezra was a priest in Babylon at the end of the exile. More than 50 years after the first group of exiles returned to Jerusalem and completed and dedicated the temple, Ezra led a second group back to Jerusalem.

Just as God had been with Nehemiah, He was with Ezra—granting him favor with the Persian king. The king gave Ezra permission to go to Jerusalem. He provided Ezra with a letter and access to resources to ensure safe travel. (See Ezra 7:11-26.)

Ezra traveled to Jerusalem with a purpose. God's people had spent 70 years in exile, and they needed to be reminded how to live. As a scribe, Ezra was an expert on the law of Moses, and he had "determined in his heart to study the law of the Lord, obey it, and teach its statutes and ordinances in Israel" (Ezra 7:10).

Under Nehemiah's leadership, the people had rebuilt Jerusalem's walls. They gathered together at the Water Gate to hear the law of Moses. Men, women, and children—anyone who could understand—came to listen to the reading of God's Word.

From early morning until midday, Ezra read from the book of the law of Moses. He stood on a high wooden platform where everyone could see and hear him. Ezra opened the book of the law, and everyone stood up. The Levites helped the listeners understand the words of the law. The people reacted strongly to hearing and understanding the law of Moses. Verse 9 says the people wept. The law revealed their sin, and they repented.

God's Word is powerful. The law reveals our sin and how short we fall of meeting God's standard. As you teach kids, help them recognize that we cannot meet God's requirements. We need a Savior. God sent Jesus to obey the law perfectly and die for our sins. We can trust in Him for salvation.

OPENING CROWD BREAKER QUESTION:

Ask your kids to share some things that bring them joy.

Share • A lot of things make us happy. Spending time with friends, playing a fun game, or getting to go somewhere special are all things that bring happiness to our lives. God is the ultimate source of our joy, and the Bible says that the joy of the Lord is our strength. We'll hear more about that in our story.

OPENING ACTIVITY "HOW WOULD YOU RESPOND?"

Read different scenarios from below to your kids. Kids will make a facial expression to represent how they would feel. Invite kids to explain why they picked that emotion.

Suggested scenarios: getting a cool gift for your birthday; getting sick during a day off from school, finding out your pet is sick; your best friend coming over to spend the night; finding a five dollar bill in your pocket; waking up from a nightmare; and so forth.

Share • In our story, the Israelites heard the Word of God read. It made them cry because they realized that they had sinned against God. God's people repented and promised to be faithful, and Ezra told them that it was a happy day. They could celebrate because of how faithful God had been to them.

BIBLE LESSON:

Share • When Ezra read the Word of God to the people it was as if he was holding up a mirror for all the people. As they listened to the laws that God had given to His people, they realized they had disobeyed God. Their sin made them very sad. How do you feel when you know you have done something wrong? God's people repented and promised to be faithful. They wanted to obey God because they loved Him.

One part of the story that might have been surprising was Ezra's response to the people's sadness. Ezra told the people not to be sad, but to celebrate instead. You see, feeling sad about sin is normal, and often that is the right way to feel. But when we know we have sinned, and we repent, we can also feel joy knowing that God has forgiven us and loves us. When we repent, God is ready to make us new and give us clean hearts. That is wonderful news!

When we repent and trust in Jesus, we're adopted into God's family! We don't need to feel guilty or ashamed of our sin, because God takes our sin away. We will still feel sad sometimes, but we can also take comfort in God's goodness to us. Now, we obey God out of our deep love for Him. We know that we are imperfect and we will still choose sin sometimes, but because of Jesus we are forgiven and set free from sin.

Connecting It To Christ

Share • God's Word is powerful. When Ezra read God's Word, the people loved God more and changed their ways. The Bible says that Jesus is "the Word." Jesus is God who came to live with people on earth. Jesus has the power to change our hearts.

BIBLE STORY DISCUSSION

Have your children open up their bibles to Nehemiah 8–13. Remind the kids that the Book of Nehemiah is in the historical division of the Old Testament. Remind them that Nehemiah had led the people to rebuild the walls around Jerusalem. Ezra was a scribe who had devoted himself to studying and teaching God's Word.

Ask the following questions & discuss them as a family:

- Who read God's Word to all of the people? (*Ezra, Neh. 8:2*)
- How did the people respond when they heard God's words? (*They cried, Neh. 8:9*)
- What did Ezra tell the people to do when they got home? (*prepare a feast and share with their neighbors, Neh. 8:10*)
- Why do you think the people responded to the Word of God by crying? *Guide your kids to see that the people realized that they had sinned against God. They had fallen short of what God had called them to, and they knew that they deserved to be punished. Their sin separated them from God and that made them very sad. (Isa. 59:2)*
- Why did God want the people to celebrate instead? *God had been incredibly kind to His people. He restored them to their land and revealed their sin so they could repent and obey Him. His faithfulness was greater than their sin, and He wanted them to be happy about His goodness. Their celebration honored God's work.*
- What can you do when you realize that you have sinned? *Help your kids understand that when we sin we must confess our sin and repent. Repent means to turn away from sin and turn to Jesus. God has shown us grace and has promised to forgive our sin when we come to Him with a repentant heart. (Acts 3:19)*

Share • God's people repented and promised to be faithful. When we sin, we can repent and confess our sin to God. And just like the Israelites celebrated God's faithfulness, we can celebrate because God has shown us mercy and grace!