

# THE TEACHING PLAN

**Purpose:** to help students know that regardless of our culture’s perspective, there is only One who is worthy of worship—our holy God!

**Preparation:** As you begin your study, first praise the Lord for who He is. Second, praise Him for the great things He has done in your life, and thank Him for what He has promised about the future.

It is interesting to note that it was the holiness of God that caused Isaiah to recognize not just his sinful condition but also the precise area of weakness in his life. This is a powerful reminder that our lives are only as pure as the time we spend in God’s presence. Isaiah also reminds us that if we are not concerned about the sinfulness of our culture, that is a reflection of our fleshly lifestyles.

This account of Isaiah’s experience with God is a clear picture of what we are supposed to be doing—making ourselves available to serve the Master. The phrase “Here am I” ought to be on the lips of us all, along with a constant declaration of praise and gratitude for the salvation and bountiful blessings He has bestowed upon us.

Be ready to explain that although God fully understands that we are not capable of living perfect lives, He does expect us to seek this. Just as with Isaiah, God is calling each of us to a life of holiness and service. God used the death of a great leader and close friend to assist Isaiah in seeing his need for radical change.

Prepare to ask your students how they think the Lord may have been seeking their attention prior to this week’s lesson. He is continually calling us and desiring that we be in a dynamic, powerful, and loving relationship with Him.

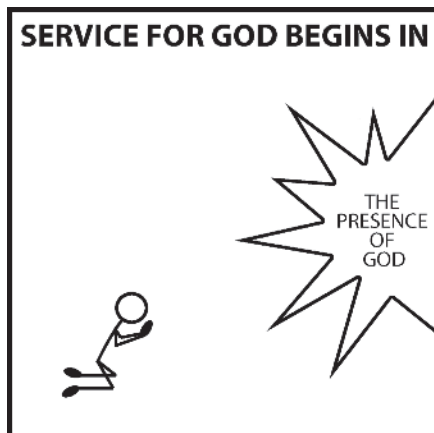
**Presentation:** Challenge your class to consider that the highest form of praise we can give our Lord is lives that

magnify Him wherever we go and whatever we do. Isaiah asked the Lord how long he should proclaim the message. He was told to keep speaking until there was no one left to listen. Remind your students that the service we do for the Lord may vary but that holiness should never be considered optional.

God in His holiness sent one of His seraphim with a coal to purge the sin of Isaiah in a room full of His glory; but, greater than this, God has sent us His perfect Lamb and only begotten Son to provide righteousness through a rugged, cruel, and shameful cross.

Encourage your students to daily bow before the King of kings and Lord of lords; there is nothing He does not own, and there is no reason that He should not be recognized as He is—the King!

## USING THE CHALKBOARD



Being in the presence of God, we have a clearer understanding of who He is and our personal call to holiness and service.

—Keith Phillips.

# THE TEACHING PLAN

**Purpose:** to remind students that God is good and has done great things. We are commanded to publicly proclaim the wonders of His works with enthusiasm and gladness.

**Preparation:** Read the previous chapters to better understand the flow of praise preceding this passage. Be ready to explain from Isaiah 12:1 that the phrase “that day” refers to the time of the future reign of Jesus on earth. Israel will be glad and rejoicing that God never gave up on them. Prepare to discuss how God is long-suffering and worthy of our praise; there is no match for His love.

God is quick to forget our sins and failures and quick to restore us to Himself. We all have reasons as to why we are thankful for His grace toward us. Plan to ask students whether they believe we praise Him as we should for all the grace He has shown. Salvation is more than an occasion or event; salvation is the Person of Jesus Christ, our Deliverer and our Redeemer.

We praise Him for the day that our salvation will be complete. We can only imagine how we are yet to benefit as a result of God’s goodness to us. We would do well to spend more time anticipating what God has prepared for those who love Him.

**Presentation:** Begin the class by asking a volunteer to read the assigned Scripture aloud. Then lead your class in prayer, asking the Holy Spirit to magnify the deep truths of His Word during the class time. Challenge students to always be grateful for the forgiveness we have received from God, as He no longer associates us with our past sin. We should also praise Him for His faithfulness, as He is our strength. We no longer have to face the daily difficulties of our lives in fear.

Isaiah continued by reminding his

readers that God is the well that never runs dry, our future joy, hope, and peace. Our praise should be both private and public. We are to declare His praise to others and make mention of His name, for He is worthy!

Help the students to understand that we do not sing *for* the Lord; we sing *to* Him. We offer our song to the Lord as a sacrifice of praise and adoration; we enter into His presence with humble hearts, honoring the King of kings and Lord of lords.

Ask your students whether they have anything that was not given to them. Sometimes we get complacent and live as though we take our blessings for granted. Use this time to call your class to a time of thankfulness and praise, for there is none like our Lord!

## USING THE CHALKBOARD



We all choose to whom or what we sing our praises. Sound reasoning will confirm that there is only one who is worthy and capable of putting a new song in our hearts: our Lord Jesus.

—Keith Phillips.

# THE TEACHING PLAN

**Purpose:** to remind students about the importance of an honest relationship with God. He knows when our actions do not come from humble hearts.

**Preparation:** It is very important to gain a good understanding of these Scriptures by reading them several times and using trusted study helps. Ask the Lord for help in comprehending the seriousness of the matter. Not only had the people betrayed God; they had also attempted to deceive Him, as if He were not capable of knowing their hearts, thus mocking Him.

Consider the consequences of others who have attempted to deceive God with unrepentant hearts. Think of King Saul and his seeking advice from the underworld, which led to his self-inflicted death, or Judas's betrayal of Jesus, which led to the horrible destruction of his life. God is forgiving and long-suffering, but we must not mock Him with unrepentant hearts and the expectation of no consequences.

Tell your students that formality of worship is not what God desires. He is interested in an intimate relationship that continues to grow and produce fruit in the life of the believer for the glory of God.

**Presentation:** Give the students a brief account of the history that led up to these assigned Scriptures. It is very important that the forbearance and long-suffering of God is emphasized. It is not God's desire to punish His children. However, as a loving Father, He can only tolerate disobedience for so long.

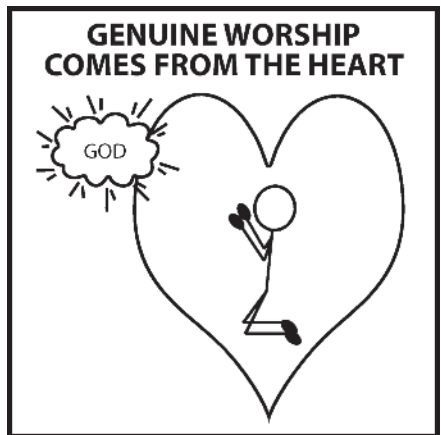
Tell the class that God had given the nation of Israel much truth. They had no excuse for walking in darkness, other than their willful choice. They had become blinded to His light because of their own unbelief and could no longer see God's truth. It was as if the Scrip-

tures were sealed and they had no access. Help the students understand that we can become so familiar with and accustomed to the truth of God that we become dull of hearing and just go through the motions of service and worship.

Ask the students whether they are sure their speech matches their actions, for this is pleasing to the Lord and strengthens our testimony. We, the created, often lose our perspective as to who actually owns all that we see and do not see. This is God's universe, and the created are to worship the Creator.

Encourage class members to stay focused and not allow anyone or anything to become a stumbling block that hinders their walk with and worship of God. Students should keep short accounts with God; in other words, they should acknowledge their sin and seek forgiveness immediately.

## USING THE CHALKBOARD



When we are humbled in heart, we will not need to be convinced or persuaded to bow before the Lord.

—Keith Phillips.

# THE TEACHING PLAN

**Purpose:** to teach students that God has great plans for the future. God always has a promise that instills hope.

**Preparation:** Prepare by reading the assigned lesson Scriptures several times. Review Isaiah 2:3-4 and 11:6-9 and various verses in Revelation 17, 19, 20, and 21. This will enhance your study preparation and broaden your understanding.

Isaiah 65:17 makes reference to the time beyond the millennial reign of Christ, when a new heaven and new earth will be created. Verses 18-25 refer to the preceding time, when Jesus will rule the earth for a thousand years.

Consider that we live in a fast-paced and pressure-filled culture that demands our attention every moment. We have access to every possible means of entertainment and technology one could possibly imagine. However, the truth of the matter is that even though these things are at times beneficial to our lives, they are not capable of giving us hope.

Be ready to explain to your students that they need to maintain a healthy balance in their lives. It is important they do not get so caught up in that which is current that they cannot rejoice over God's plan for the future.

**Presentation:** Begin the class with prayer; then ask for volunteers to read the assigned Scriptures aloud. Give students a brief background of events that had taken place during Isaiah's ministry. Help them see that it was a dark time. Much uncertainty was sure-ly in the hearts of many.

Remind students that even when we fail Him, God never leaves us hopeless; He gives us a better day to look forward to. Ask students to voice any questions they have about these Scrip-

tures and also to comment on what aspect of this upcoming glorious future appeals to them most. Do what you can to help students take ownership of this prophecy. Help them identify with it and claim it, seeing what God has promised them.

This lesson is an opportunity to remind your students that God is always in control. There may be times when it appears the devil and his wickedness are unhindered and unstoppable, but our Lord has promised He will have the last word.

Encourage the students not to be taken in by the times and godless society we live in but to stay true to the One who has the master plan and the power to complete it. What we see is *not* what we get; the best is yet to come!

## USING THE CHALKBOARD



This illustration gives us a "new view." God has promised a day when where we live, the bodies we have, and all that we love will be newly created.

—Keith Phillips.

# THE TEACHING PLAN

**Purpose:** to help students see the importance of continual meaningful worship in their lives.

**Preparation:** As you read the lesson text, imagine yourself in the place of these believers. God had given them a new opportunity to reestablish their worship. Consider the blessing we have in the freedom to worship the Lord, and remember that it was when these individuals no longer considered worship a privilege and a responsibility that they lost this freedom.

Consider also that worship is not just a feeling or an emotion; we must *choose* to worship God. The believers of Ezra's day made a priority of orienting themselves to worship, and it was a unanimous decision. It is regrettable that we, as the body of Christ, have allowed formality and ritual to fill the time in our services that was meant for worship.

Be reminded that the time allotted for this class belongs to God; the agenda is His to decide. There should always be an open opportunity for a student to give a testimony of praise and thankfulness. As you prepare, pray that the Spirit of God will quicken the hearts of class members and fill the room with His presence.

**Presentation:** Ask for several volunteers to read the text. After a brief background on the lesson setting, pose several thought-provoking questions to the class. For example, you might want to ask students how they think Ezra felt: he was a priest but resided in captivity in a land where there was no opportunity for temple worship. How would class members feel if they no longer had access to places of worship?

Point out that the people understood the importance of the altar. Everyone needs a place he has purposely set aside to meet with God on a regular basis. A person's altar is the place of re-

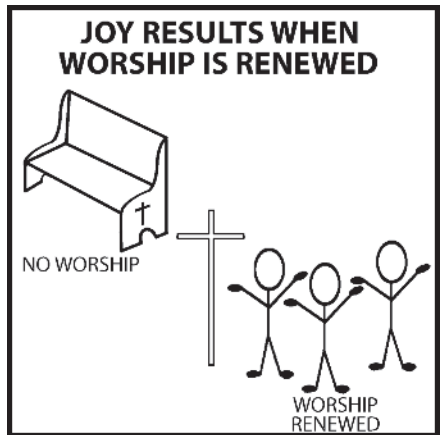
pentance, sacrifice, praise, and communion with God. Ask your students whether they meet with God daily. Do they bow before the King of kings and the Lord of lords at least once a day, even if they do not say a word?

It also should be noted that worship influences our giving. The people gave freely to the rebuilding of the temple.

Some think that worship is limited to the lifting up of hands in praise and being in the middle of a very exciting congregational meeting. This is good, but worship occurs anytime our actions are Spirit-led with the intent to magnify our Saviour.

When we give from our heart in true worship, it will influence all aspects of life. Challenge students to evaluate their worship.

## USING THE CHALKBOARD



When we decide to joyfully worship the Lord, our joy will increase, and others will eventually decide to celebrate as well. Intensify the praise where you are.

—Keith Phillips.

# THE TEACHING PLAN

**Purpose:** to remind students that it is important to work along with others to make an impact for Christ.

**Preparation:** Read the text several times. Also read Haggai 1:12 through 2:9 for further insight. Think about young adults who are anticipating making their mark on life. There are many factors that go into who they will become in Christ. A foundation speaks of a new beginning, surety and steadfastness, and anticipation of future growth.

Consider what sacrifices are needed to lay a foundation. Foundations are not built overnight, and it had taken the returning exiles a long time to arrive where they were now. We must continue in the task the Lord has for us.

**Presentation:** Read the text aloud, and then ask a volunteer to pray for the class and you as you begin to lead. Remind the students where the lesson from last week ended, and connect this lesson with it. It is important for them to see the determination of these believers. Ask students why it is necessary to have a foundation and why it is so essential to have a *strong* foundation. Point out that these verses indicate clearly that many young people were involved in this project. Ask them why they think the Scriptures revealed this fact.

The completion of the foundation was a significant event in the lives of these believers. Ask students to share some important events in their lives that were clear indications that God was at work. You can assist them by giving some personal examples to get them started.

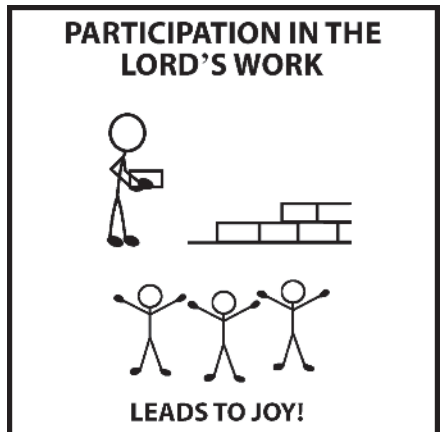
Many of the people who had seen the original temple in all its glory were not impressed with what they were seeing now; there was much sorrow in their hearts. Emphasize that content-

ment is often all about perspective. God does not want us to live in the past. Always looking back neglects the future, and the future is what God has planned for us.

Tell the students that the glory of God had already left the old temple, so the structure was actually serving no useful purpose when it was destroyed. A good lesson to learn is that sometimes God decides to tear down so that He can start over. This is also true in our lives, since we are the temple of God.

It was regrettable that a clear sound of praise was not heard that day, but this is a good illustration of what happens when there is division in God's church. Challenge students to think in the upcoming week about the foundation God wants for their lives and the example they can set for others.

## USING THE CHALKBOARD



Use this illustration as a reminder that the beauty of the building is not as important to God as the attitude of the workers called to His service.

—Keith Phillips.

# THE TEACHING PLAN

**Purpose:** to remind your students that they can celebrate with joy because of God's faithfulness.

**Preparation:** Begin your study early in the week, and ask the Lord to give you the insight needed to teach the lesson. Read the text and supporting passages to ensure a clear understanding of the subject matter. Be sure to jot down truths as they come to you throughout the week. This lessens the possibility of forgetting them.

Consider an interesting introductory question, such as "If you knew what you were doing was pleasing to God but legally you were told to stop until further notice, what would you do?" Obviously, this question is an opening for all sorts of conversations, providing a great opportunity for you to speak directly to students' hearts.

Be prepared to explain to students that the joy of success does not always come easily. Often there are obstacles, hindrances, and setbacks before we see the fruits of our labor. Students should know that God has not changed; He loves and cares for them just as He did the temple builders.

**Presentation:** Open the class with prayer; then ask for volunteers to read the text aloud. Explain to students that it is God's desire for His children to experience joy in their walk with Him. However, there are criteria that must be met to know the joy that comes from God.

A person must first have a growing, intimate relationship with Christ. Second, just as with the temple builders, stress to the class the importance of steadfast faith and the setting of goals. Remind students that if they aim at nothing, they will hit it every time.

Third, it is interesting to note the unity of purpose in the building of the temple. Attitudes of selfishness, unhealthy inde-

pendence, and arrogance will prove to be detrimental to a believer's spiritual maturity and emotional health. God wants us to build relationships and work together with others. We are to follow the Lord's lead in all relational issues.

The temple builders faced some difficult times as they worked to obey the Lord. Sometimes our feelings and emotions are like a roller coaster, going up and down. Point out that it was encouragement from the Word of God that kept the builders going. The temple builders were wise to seek counsel from those God had sent to lead and encourage them.

Finally, we see that these believers separated themselves from the wickedness of the surrounding culture. Ask class members to evaluate their joy. Do they need to make changes?

## USING THE CHALKBOARD



It is God's faithfulness that sustains our joy when we work and wait. Celebrate with those who have helped you along the way.

—Keith Phillips.

# THE TEACHING PLAN

**Purpose:** to teach students that it is God who protects and provides.

**Preparation:** Conduct an honest evaluation of your prayer life. Settle any issues God may bring to your attention. Read the text several times until you feel you fully grasp it; then review Christ's teachings on prayer.

As much as possible, put yourself in Ezra's shoes. He had a great responsibility, and it seems that for the first time he was fully aware of it. Notice Ezra's humanity and honesty, which brought him to humility. It is when we see the truth of our helplessness that we seek God with the right heart.

Our prayer life is not all about us. Ezra saw the challenges that lay ahead, and he was mindful of the families and the children who would travel to Jerusalem. We need a clean relationship before the Lord, for many are depending on us. We never know when the sudden changes of life will require that we call out to our Lord.

**Presentation:** Ask for volunteers to read the text aloud, and then lead the class in prayer before teaching. Point out that just as Ezra was conscious of needing God's help, so we sometimes realize that we have underestimated our need for the Lord. This is not a time to push through and just hope for the best as we depend on the abilities of others and ourselves. God understands we are human, and He is not eagerly waiting to punish us. As a loving Father who wants to help us, He desires that we come to Him.

You may want to refer to Jesus' time of fasting in Matthew 4:1-11 and His teaching on fasting in 6:16-18. These insights will be of great benefit to students in the future. Stress that the decision to fast is Spirit-led and reflects our sincerity in seeking the help of God.

This text in Ezra is a reminder that we should ask God's blessing on the work

we do, on our travel, on our times of uncertainty, and as a testimony of our faith in God. Most children are taught that they can accomplish anything in life and become whatever they want to be. The problem with this equation is that God's will is not part of the solution.

As believers, we must realize that God has the greatest plans for our lives. We are to seek Him for direction, wisdom, and courage to be successful in life. In Ezra 8:31 we see that God delivered the returning exiles from the hand of the enemy. Remind your students that the devil, the world, and our flesh will constantly be aggressive against our desire to grow in Christ. Like Ezra, we must seek God's will concerning the journey that He has entrusted to us.

## USING THE CHALKBOARD



Use this illustration as a reminder that we should seek God for all that we need, along with the courage to accept responsibility for what He has already given.

—Keith Phillips.



# THE TEACHING PLAN

**Purpose:** to teach students that God has entrusted us with His many blessings.

**Preparation:** Read these Scriptures slowly, and give them much thought. Ask the Lord for sensitivity to His Spirit so that you will have much insight as you prepare and think along the lines of stewardship, accountability, and honor.

Keep in mind that just as the gifts described were precious because they were holy, so too are the gifts that God has given each of us. Consider that we are the temple of God and carry special gifts to glorify and magnify the One who sits on the throne of our heart.

Think about the hostile territory these exiles would be passing through with the gifts and treasures. This is a reminder that what God has given us is not just for the safe confines of our Sunday services. We are to walk the backstreets and dark places of the world so that others can see His glory.

Prepare to ask your students to name some of the gifts God has placed in their temples and how they are using them through the week to praise the King of kings. Suggest some of the people and places that could benefit from the gifts they have.

**Presentation:** After the reading of the text, call on a student to pray for this week's lesson. Ask students how much thought they have given to their purpose in life. Then ask them whether they have considered the significance of God's blessing upon them. Point out that just as Ezra chose certain individuals for the journey, God has separated us for His purposes.

And just as these priests would be accountable for the care of the gifts until they reached their final destination, so too are we. You may want to refer to II Timothy 1:6, where Paul admonished

young Timothy to stir up his gifts. Remind students that we are to steward our gifts by strengthening and enhancing them through prayer and practice.

The purpose of the treasures and gifts taken to Jerusalem was to distinguish the temple as the dwelling place of the true and living God. Ask students how God is using the gifts in His temple, their bodies, to proclaim that He is the only true and living God.

Point out that Ezra 8:30 indicates that the priests accepted the gifts and the stewardship of them. There may be students in your class that have not stepped up to the plate in this regard. Remind them that truly content people are obedient to God and desire to please Him above all. The gifts from God are what sweeten the journey of life. Also remind them that Satan is a liar and desires to keep us from utilizing God's gifts to bless others.

## USING THE CHALKBOARD



Take care of what God has entrusted to you, knowing that it is meant for His glory.

—Keith Phillips.

# THE TEACHING PLAN

**Purpose:** to teach students the importance of continually celebrating past blessings and deliverances of the Lord.

**Preparation:** Be sure to read historically related Scriptures to help you gain a better understanding as you prepare. Be ready to speak on the knowledge we receive when we become students of God's Word. Worship requires not only obedience but preparation as well.

Think about how we sometimes just want an emotional, feel-good experience in worship without a hunger for Him. We have pep rallies and tailgating to prepare us for the big game, and these sometimes require a lot of work and commitment. However, we so often go to church without any forethought or anticipation of the manifestation of our Lord. Challenge yourself this week to pray and to take steps of preparation for worship.

Ezra reminds us that the people experienced great gladness as they went through this process. This would be a thought-provoking opportunity to ask your students about their joy level and how this affects worship. Some may need to evaluate, survey, and make adjustments in their lives. True worship will not allow for distractions. We should ask ourselves whether God has our complete attention. True worship also does not allow for desertion. Does God have our total commitment?

**Presentation:** Read the text, and open the class in prayer. Clarify to students that—just like the people of Nehemiah's day—when we read the Scriptures, we are to act upon the truth we have learned. The people lived temporarily in booths as a reminder of the journey of their forefathers from Egypt. They celebrated the protection that God had given them.

Encourage students to reflect on the goodness of God in their lives. We

should never forget where we have come from and that God blesses obedience. Remind students that God is still protecting and providing for them. When a nation forgets its history, it is destined to repeat it. Ask students what important lessons America has forgotten and why the country needs to return to its biblical foundation. Point out that the believers in Nehemiah's day took steps to remain appreciative of God's past blessings.

Ask the class to discuss how members are showing their appreciation for all that God has done in their lives. Point out that Ezra indicates that all the people had their individual times of worship but that they also came together on the eighth day of the feast. Share with students that we are to meet together to worship, to encourage one another, and to be strengthened by God's Word.

## USING THE CHALKBOARD

### READ, REFLECT, RESPOND



### TO GOD'S WORD

A careful reading of the Scriptures should always cause us to ask ourselves what our response should be and to seek how God wants to change our lives.

—Keith Phillips.

# THE TEACHING PLAN

**Purpose:** to help students understand how dreadful sin is but that God hears our prayers of repentance.

**Preparation:** This lesson deals with very important subject matter. Consider spending extra time in prayer as you prepare, and be sure to include the names of your students. It would be wise to read all of Nehemiah 9 at least twice in order to get familiar with the subject matter.

Be prepared to refer to the wisdom and insight of Nehemiah and Ezra. Both of these men knew that God would be doing more than rebuilding a wall and a temple; He would also be rebuilding a people. Make mention of the people's acknowledgment of their sins and the sins of their fathers. It was important for the exiles to know that they had sinned and fallen short of the glory of God (Rom. 3:23) and that they were not to follow in their fathers' pattern of disobedience.

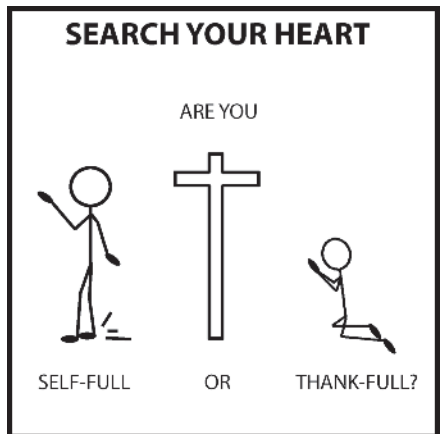
All this took place a very short time after the praise and celebration of Nehemiah 8. Be mindful that once we begin to deepen our relationship with God, we will see more of our sinful selves. Confession is not a once-in-a-lifetime, or at least very infrequent, event. God is continually conforming us to His image as He purges the impurities from our lives. The key is our willingness to allow the Holy Spirit to work in us. Ask the Lord to search the depths of your heart. Be still before Him and wait.

**Presentation:** Ask for volunteers to read the text and additional verses that you sense are needful. Then lead the class in prayer. Students need to understand that although times seem to change, God does not. Sin is still sin, and it has devastating effects on our lives. It is no respecter of persons, regardless of age or gender, and no one is exempt from its grip and destruction.

Point out that the exiles' prayer was also focused on the spiritual condition of their land and their leaders. If there was ever a time our nation and our world needed prayer, it is now. We are living in a very sad and frightful time. The hand of God's judgment is becoming more visible as we see a struggling global economy, terrorism, an increase in natural disasters, and weather patterns that often perplex meteorologists.

Challenge your students to see the world beyond their normal perspective, as there are many reasons to pray. Nehemiah 9:36 summarizes what happens when God's people are not sensitive to spiritual issues. These people had become the servants of others in a land that God had originally given to them. It is wise for us to ask God to search our hearts daily.

## USING THE CHALKBOARD



The people of Nehemiah's day did not hesitate to confess their sins. We should ask God to search our hearts. He will let us know whether we are "thank-full" or "self-full."

—Keith Phillips.

# THE TEACHING PLAN

**Purpose:** to teach students to always be thankful to God and to publicly declare His goodness.

**Preparation:** As you prepare, think about one of the most anticipated and exciting days of your life. Think about a time when you had worked very hard for something and now looked forward to reaching your goal. You may recall that others suggested you were wasting your time or even discouraged you from continuing.

There also may have been a situation when you knew that, if it had not been for the grace of God, there was no way you could succeed. Keep these thoughts in mind as you read the lesson text. Nehemiah and the people were planning a celebration that the locals and those from afar, including their enemies, would not be able to ignore.

Go back to Nehemiah 1 and 2 to reread about the prophet's brokenness, his building strategy, and his courage. Be ready to remind students that celebrations happen when we seek God with humble hearts, a willingness to work, and a determination not to quit.

**Presentation:** Read the text, and open the class with prayer. Begin by asking the students to recall a time in their lives when they were glad everything had returned to normal. Then say that that is somewhat how the people of Nehemiah's day were feeling. Ask students whether they thanked the Lord when their lives returned to a better day.

Point out that this celebration of the exiles represented a time of rebuilding not only a wall but also their lives. They were safe now and had protection from their enemies. This event also transitioned them into being available for new service to the Lord. Students need to know that there are many seasons of life and that we need to be willing to transi-

tion as God changes our circumstances and needs. We should be thankful that God is always at work in our lives.

Ask students how they express their gratefulness to the Lord. Do they sing, or do they sacrifice? Nehemiah and the people did both. Worship is giving back to God what He has already given us: our talents, time, and treasures.

Notice that Nehemiah 12:43 refers to great sacrifice and great joy. These people did not go into this halfheartedly; they celebrated, praised, and worshipped as loudly, as long, and as passionately as they could.

Stress to the students that they can dedicate themselves to the Lord today and rejoice as they do so. Broken walls and devastation in their lives are no match for His grace. Lead your class in a celebration of who God is and the great things He has done.

## USING THE CHALKBOARD



Use this illustration as a reminder that God desires and deserves the praise of His people.

—Keith Phillips.

# THE TEACHING PLAN

**Purpose:** to remind students of the importance of observing the Lord's Day.

**Preparation:** Read God's command concerning the Sabbath in Exodus 20:8-11 and Deuteronomy 5:12-15. Also refer to Nehemiah 10:31, which reflected the covenant the Jews had made not to become involved in the very issues that were now taking place. Consider reevaluating your perspective on and observance of the Lord's Day, as it is easy to gradually waver. There are numerous distractions and temptations to regard Sunday as any other day.

Think about Nehemiah's determination not to allow a compromise. Many in our day would tell Nehemiah he needed to lighten up. However, he knew that these types of practices would lead to terrible consequences. Undoubtedly some were watching to see how Nehemiah would respond. As teachers and leaders, we must seek the Lord for wisdom, courage, and compassion as we come in contact with individuals who are looking for and in need of truth, even when the truth is unpopular and not easily discussed.

**Presentation:** Open the class in prayer. Ask for volunteers to read the text aloud. Before you begin with comments, ask the class their perspective on what Nehemiah reported. This will give you a feel for where the students are and where you need to go with your leading. The issue is not just a particular day or even the actions the exiles were involved in; it is that a direct command from God had been broken.

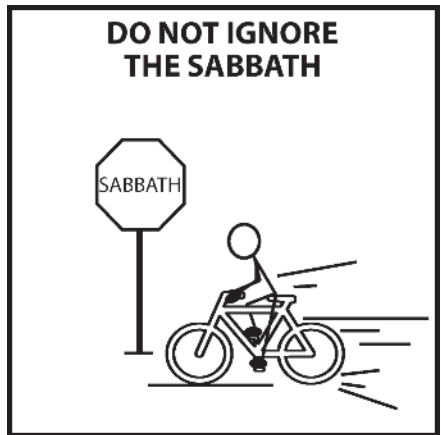
Help students see that we should not play God; we cannot rationalize our thoughts and actions in such a way as to make disobedience justifiable. Our perspective should not be that we *must* go to church on Sunday but that we are privileged to attend church on Sunday. Point

out to students that if we do not want to fellowship with other believers and experience worshipping our Lord, something is missing in our relationship with Him.

It should be noted that the enemy is not easily deterred. Just as Nehemiah had to stay committed to the task of righting this wrong, so we should stay committed. Stress to students that the issue of faithfulness to the Lord's house needs to be settled. Challenge them to remove hindrances that compete for their time at the Lord's house.

Remind students that the Master Potter is always glad to see the work of His hands enter into the Potter's house for a time of reunion, reforming, and reaffirming. We do ourselves an injustice by thinking we have ownership of our lives and can improve what the Potter has begun.

## USING THE CHALKBOARD



Setting aside a day of worship should be at the top of our priorities. Friends, family, and visitors should know that if they visit on the weekend, they are welcome to attend services with us.

—Keith Phillips.