

Introduction to Ezra Week 1

Point to Emphasize: We should learn from our failures; there are always consequences for our actions.

Memory Verse: ...be on your guard lest being carried away by the error of the lawless, you fall from your own steadfastness. (2 Peter 3:17b)

Story Sample

How many of you have ever failed to do what you should? Not only once but again and again. Maybe you were told you have to finish your homework before playing. But you find a way to start playing before you were done with homework. Not only do you not follow the rules, you are also showing disrespect to your parents. It will take you much longer to finish your homework. And it usually ends up with you in trouble!

The children of Israel were like us. They failed many times. There are two really good examples of this in the Bible. One example is when the children of Israel had to wander in the wilderness for 40 years after they left Egypt. They had to do this because they did not listen to God and would not trust in God! Since they did not trust in God, they failed to be obedient to God. There were consequences for their failure. If they had obeyed, they would have entered Canaan, the land that was to be their own. But they didn't. So God had them wait 40 years before they entered into the good land. After those 40 years, all who left Egypt died, except for two. God caused them to have to wait and only two of them were allowed to enter into the good land. This was the consequence for their being unbelieving and disobedient.

When I was in fourth grade, I was being silly with the girl who sat at the desk next to me. We were warned to stop fooling around, but we continued. The teacher got upset, and so the whole class had to stay in during recess that day. They all had to pay the consequence for our failure to obey. But I learned from this and never fooled around like that in class again. *[Give your personal example.]*

But the children of Israel did not learn so quickly. The second example comes much later. After many years they had become disobedient once again and had no love for God. And again, there were consequences. This time they were taken from their home in Canaan and taken to Babylon. They were forced to leave behind the good land that God had given to them! On top of that, the temple where they worshipped God in Jerusalem was burned, the wall of the city was torn down, and they were taken captive to a foreign land, to Babylon. Once again they had to pay the consequences for their actions. Again they had to wait to be given another chance. But this time, they were made to wait 70 years. It would have been so much smarter if they had learned to obey the first time! Next week we will begin the story of Ezra that took place after they have been in captivity for those 70 years in Babylon.

I hope one or two of us can share something that recently happened where we learned from our mistake the first time.

Cyrus Gave God the Proper Acknowledgement Week 2

Point to Emphasize: We should be those who give others the proper credit.

Reference Reading: Ezra 1:2

Memory Verse: Jehovah has done great things for us; we are joyful. (Psalm 126:3)

Story Sample

During this period of history in the Old Testament there was a huge empire. It was the Persian Empire, and it covered lots of land. Today we have different countries on the earth —like the U.S, Canada, and Mexico. There are almost 200 countries on the earth today. But at this time in the Old Testament there were not countries but kings with their kingdoms. A king became more powerful by conquering others' lands and peoples. The king of Persia at this time was Cyrus. Jehovah had given all the kingdoms of the earth to him so he was a very powerful king. This included the children of Israel who were captive to Cyrus.

When Cyrus became the king of Persia he ruled over this entire kingdom. One day Cyrus made a proclamation throughout his entire kingdom. He even put this proclamation into writing. What is a proclamation? *[Help children to discuss what a proclamation is -- an official public announcement.]*

Cyrus made an official public announcement that everyone in his entire kingdom would hear. WOW! It must have been a really important matter. So let's read the first part of his proclamation. The Bible tells us it said, "Thus says Cyrus the king of Persia, All the kingdoms of the earth has Jehovah the God of heaven given to me..." (Ezra 1:2a).

So, was Cyrus claiming that he had worked so hard to get such a huge kingdom? *[Let the children discuss this proclamation.]* That's right - Cyrus gave all the credit to God. Many kings would never make this kind of proclamation. Most kings would have said, "I, the greatest king, have conquered so many peoples so that now I have such a great kingdom." They would have taken the credit for themselves. I do not know how many of us are like Cyrus or are we more like the other kings?

One time there was a science project due in a 5th grade class. One student came with a really wonderfully made project. It looked really professional. The name on the project was the student's name. But actually, it should have been his dad's name. The 5th grader had gotten LOTS of help from his dad yet the project did not give his dad the credit. *[Storyteller - include your own example of giving or not giving the proper credit for an accomplishment.]*

[Wrap up the time with seeing if any of the children have had this experience.]

This week I hope we would think about what Cyrus did. Wow! What an incredible king. He gave Jehovah God all the credit! It is so good that we know that Jehovah God is the source of all our achievements.

Cyrus Put God's Interests First Week 3

Point to Emphasize: We should be willing to pay the price to put others first.

Reference Reading: Ezra 1:2 & 3

Memory Verse: Blessed is he who considers the poor... (Psalm 41:1a)

Story Sample

Who can tell us the first part of the proclamation that king Cyrus made? *[Ask if any children have examples from their week to go along with this point.]* It says "Thus says Cyrus the king of Persia, All the kingdoms of the earth has Jehovah the God of heaven given to me" (Ezra 1:2a).

Now let's see what the rest of this proclamation says. "...and He has charged me to build Him a house in Jerusalem, which is in Judah." (Ezra 1:2b) The second part of this proclamation was that God had charged Cyrus to let all the Jews who were in his kingdom go back to Jerusalem to build God's house. Cyrus was not a Jew; most of the peoples in his kingdom were not Jews. An earlier king had conquered the people of God and taken them to Babylon. These Jews were taken captive and were taken out of their land of Judah.

By this proclamation Cyrus was saying that he would willingly release any Israelite captive to go back to their own land so that they could build up God's house. Any Israelite who went back to Jerusalem would no longer be captive, no longer be in Cyrus' kingdom. When these Israelites left Persia, Cyrus would lose workers that gave his kingdom wealth. It would cost Cyrus to let the Israelites go. Eventually over 42,000 Jews left Persia to return to Jerusalem. That's a lot of workers!

If I give you something that will cost or have an effect on me, it is different than giving you something that I will never miss. If I have three cookies and there are three of us together, then to share cookies is easy for me. But what if I only have two cookies but there are three of us together - what will I do? *[Storyteller - insert your own experience of putting others first.]*

Did any of you put someone else first this week? *[Examples can be giving the younger sibling something instead of you keeping it.]* So you see, what Cyrus did was not so easy. It seems hard for us to put someone else first. How good it was that such a world leader would obey God's word!

Cyrus Planned Ahead Week 4

Point to Emphasize: We need to plan in order to carry something out; we need to think ahead.

Reference Reading: Ezra 1:4-6, 2:64

Memory Verse: ...Take forethought for things honorable in the sight of all men.
(Romans 12:17b)

Story Sample

Cyrus made a grand proclamation! Eventually over 42,000 captive Israelites left his kingdom and went back to Jerusalem. But if he had just made the proclamation, their move might have been a big mess. Forty-two thousand people were going back to Jerusalem, but do you think that there were jobs, homes, and food in Jerusalem for them? No! Jerusalem had been destroyed seventy years before, so there was not much left there. If all these people just showed up in Jerusalem, what would they eat and how would they live?

Cyrus was really wise. Not only did he release the captives who wanted to return, but he made a plan so that they could return in a good way. He gave the matter **forethought**. That means he thought ahead. We have to learn to think ahead, too.

We need to think ahead and make a plan to get all kinds of things done—like homework, cleaning up our room, or having friends over. Let's say that you and your friend want to have a sleepover. Is that all there is to it? No. You have to plan when it will be and make sure your parents agree. Then you have to plan where it will be, how you will get there, and what you will need. If you don't make this kind of plan, your sleepover won't really happen. You will just keep talking about it, but you will not actually spend the night.

It is the same thing with homework. What about when you have to do a book report? You have to read the book and decide what kind of report to do, but you also have to ask your mom to help you get the supplies. Let's say you don't plan ahead; then it's the night before the book report is due, and you realize you don't have the poster board. You have to ask your mom to take you to the store to get it that night! A project goes much smoother when we think ahead so we can get the supplies beforehand. Having a plan saves time and energy. *[Give your own example of needing to plan ahead, according to the class's age group.]*

Cyrus understood this principle. He knew that a plan was needed. Some of God's people had chosen to remain in Cyrus's kingdom, and some had chosen to go to Jerusalem. So Cyrus told those who would remain that they should give silver, gold, goods, and cattle to those who would return to Jerusalem. And this is what they did. Those who stayed behind supplied the others for their journey to Jerusalem, as well as for their living once they got there. Cyrus's plan helped the Israelites return to Jerusalem in a good way.

[Close the time by asking the children about plans they can make for the coming week.]

Cyrus Righted a Wrong Week 5

Point to Emphasize: When someone is wronged, we should make it right regardless of who did the wrong.

Reference Reading: Ezra 1:7

Memory Verse: And you shall not wrong one another, but you shall fear your God...
(Leviticus 25:17a)

Story Sample

What Cyrus did next was incredible!

70 years before Cyrus, a Babylonian king named Nebuchadnezzar had destroyed the city of Jerusalem. That king also destroyed the temple, God's house, and took all the vessels from God's house back to his kingdom and put them into the temple of an idol. It was really wrong for all those vessels to be taken and put into an idol's temple.

Sometimes it is fairly easy to right a wrong. When two kids are quarreling because one took the skateboard away from the other, you can easily set things straight. The first kid gets to use the skateboard for five minutes, and then the other one gets a turn of five minutes. But other things are harder. What if you looked at someone else's paper on a test and put down the answer you saw? Are you going to right that wrong or just let it go? *[Have a discussion with the children on this point from their own experience.]*

Cyrus was not the one who took all of those vessels out of God's house. Nor was he the one who put them into an idol's temple. But now he had the opportunity to right a wrong. He had all the silver and gold vessels brought and counted. There were 5,400 vessels. That is a HUGE amount of silver and gold. Rich people today may have the money to buy very expensive cars, houses, or clothes, BUT not even the wealthiest person today makes this many things out of pure gold. Having 5,400 silver and gold vessels in his kingdom made Cyrus' kingdom richer.

What if you saw someone coloring with someone else's crayon? What if they broke the crayon while they were coloring? What if they then hid the broken crayon because they didn't want that person to know? You saw everything that happened. What will you do? Will you replace that broken crayon with your own? Will you right the wrong that happened even if it wasn't you? Or will you do nothing? *[Storyteller think of your own example to share with the children.]*

Well, Cyrus knew what he wanted to do. He gave the vessels from the temple back to God's people, and those vessels would again be put into the house of God where they belonged.

What Cyrus did was amazing! He did a very honorable thing by returning these treasures.

[Storyteller, insert your own story of righting a wrong. Wrap it up with the children talking about their experiences in righting a wrong. Ask the children if they have ever righted a wrong that was not their own.]

The Plan to Rebuild Was Carried Out Willingly Week 6

Point to Emphasize: We should be those who do things willingly.

Reference Reading: Ezra 1:6b, 2:68-70, 3:5, 7

Memory Verse: Your people will offer themselves willingly... (Psalm 110:3a)

Story Sample

Many of the Jews were excited when they heard Cyrus's proclamation. Now they would be free to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the house of God. Could you imagine the excitement?

One time our teacher announced that there was going to be a contest in the school. Whichever class won would go on a field trip! We were all excited! No one was forced to participate. Everyone in our class volunteered. It meant that each one had to give up some free time each week to participate. We were excited so we willingly gave our time to this project. *[Storyteller – insert an example of how you or someone willingly gave.]*

I think that is how these Jews felt. They were probably excited to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the house of God. To work on such a project – rebuilding the house of God, they would need many people and also _____. *[Let the children say what they would need – stones, wood, food, money, etc.]* They needed lots of food, builders, and materials. How were they going to get it all? Were they going to borrow what they needed from King Cyrus? NO! The Bible says that the Jews willingly gave!

When I do something willingly will I be dragging my feet or sad? *[Let the children come up with adjectives – eager, happy]* Now think back on your week. Is there a time when you willingly did something when asked?

We all must admit that there are many times when we are asked to do something and we do it.... but not willingly. I am afraid that we have too many examples of this. Are we willing when our moms ask us to set the table? *[Have the children share what they are asked to do at home. Do they do it willingly? This could be wrapped up with a discussion about why some things are done willingly but others are not.]*

Maybe this week we will have many more examples of doing things willingly!

The Plan Was Carried Out According to Instructions Week 7

Point to Emphasize: We should learn to follow instructions.

Reference Reading: Ezra 3:1-6

Memory Verse: Whatever is commanded by the God of heaven, let it be done exactly for the house of the God of heaven... (Ezra 7:23a)

Story Sample

[Start with examples the children might have from their past week of doing things willingly.]
Did you willingly set the table for your mom?

It was wonderful that those who returned to Jerusalem had such a good attitude and helped willingly! But sometimes, just being willing isn't enough. Sometimes we need instructions so that we can be of some help.

For example, maybe you were willing to help mom set the table, but did you know how to do it? My mom is the one who taught me how to set the table. Let me tell you how...*[Draw on the whiteboard a diagram with the plate in the center, knife and spoon on the right, glass above the knife, and napkin folded with the fork on top of it to the left of the plate.]* My mom taught me how she wanted the table set! I needed to follow her instructions.

But where did the Jews get their instructions on how to rebuild the temple in Jerusalem? That's right – the Bible! They were able to go back and look in the law of Moses to find exactly how the first temple had been built.

They began by building the altar so that they could worship God. Then they held the Feast of Tabernacles, to present their offerings up to God. This was also "as it is written." This instruction was in the Scriptures (the Word of God). For 70 years they had not worshipped God according to the instructions. So how did they know how to do it? There were instructions.

Many times we don't pay attention to instructions. So often a teacher gives an assignment but then when you turn the assignment in, it turns out that you did it wrong because you did not take care of the instructions. *[Storyteller, give your own example of this.]*

It is too easy for us to think that we "know how" to do something so we do not pay any attention to instructions. But the Jews who returned to build the house of God went back to the instructions.

Let's see if you all have some examples of following instructions to tell next week!

The Need for Some to Direct and Supervise Week 8

Point to Emphasize: We need someone over us to supervise and direct us.

Reference Reading: Ezra 3:8, 9

Memory Verse: But all things must be done becomingly and in order. (1 Corinthians 14:40)

Story Sample

Can someone tell me what they did last week to follow instructions?

After the proclamation was made, many Jews went back to rebuild God's house. This was not a building project that could be done in a week or a month. This was going to take them at least a few years. There would be so many different materials to get and so many different people working.

When I was a child, a group of us decided to build a clubhouse in the desert close to our homes. We would go out to the place we had chosen and discuss what we needed to do and what we wanted it to look like, etc. But soon we needed someone to direct the work. Otherwise, one would start here and one would start there and another would be over there. All of us would be working, but it would turn out to be a mess and not a clubhouse. So we asked my dad if he would oversee the project.

It was the same among those who returned to Jerusalem. The work could only go well if there were ones to direct and supervise. During the first year of work Jeshua and Zerubbabel took the lead to meet this need. As the building was going to continue onto the second year they needed to appoint others to supervise. Moving forward, everyone from the tribe of Levi over 20 years old was to help with the oversight of the work on the house of God.

When we built our clubhouse having a leader meant that we could not just go and do it our way. We had to check with my dad and go along with how he directed. It was the same for the Jews helping to rebuild the house. They couldn't show up and do whatever they wanted. They were under someone's directions and supervision. *[Storyteller – give your own example of being under someone's leadership in doing a project or activity. Bring out the point that sometimes we don't like doing what others direct us to do.]*

Sometimes it is not so easy to be under someone's direction. But we need to learn that even as we grow up we will most likely be in situations where we are under someone's supervision. Have you ever wondered why we have lunch or recess monitors at school? Why do we have cross-walk guards? *[Bring in a discussion showing that without supervision we will not always conduct ourselves as we should.]*

[Wrap up this time with an example of how being under someone's supervision helped you in your conduct.] Hopefully this week we will be more respectful to those who direct us.

Praising and Thanking Week 9

Point to Emphasize: It is good to sing our praise and give thanks to God.

Reference Reading: Ezra 3:10-13

Memory Verse: And they sang to one another in praising and giving thanks to Jehovah...
(Ezra 3:11a)

Story Sample

[Spend a little extra time singing today. Some suggestions: "God, our God is G-O-O-D"; "I love God"; "I wanna thank God for making me"; "Our God is so big"; "Praise Him, Praise Him"; "Would you like to thank the Lord"; "Singing, praising, praying, thanking."]

It took a lot of work to build the temple, didn't it? It required money, supplies, workers, and supervisors over the work. Eventually, the foundation of the temple was laid. You might think that at this time, the Israelites would have continued working on the rest of the building. But it's very interesting, the Bible tells us that at this point, they stopped their work and took time to praise Jehovah; it even says that they did this according to the directions of David the king of Israel.

I really enjoyed our singing time today. *[Ask one or two of the children which song they enjoyed the most.]* I love to hear all of you singing songs to the Lord. This is a way that, as young ones, we can praise and thank God. And it's in the Bible—there are many stories that speak of the people singing their praise to God. I'm sure many of you hear your parents singing with their heart to the Lord, and it makes you happy inside. That is because it is good to sing to the Lord.

So, the Jews got out their trumpets and cymbals, and they sang praises to Jehovah. They were so happy to be back in Jerusalem, where they belonged. And they were full of joy that the building of the temple had begun! Some were so happy that they shouted, and some were so happy that they cried. It was a great time of praising and thanking. The Bible says that it was so loud that the sound was heard from far away.

[Insert your own story about singing to the Lord at home or in the car.]

When we sing like this, we are praising and thanking God. It would be so good if all our homes would be filled with singing this week! Wouldn't it be wonderful if we each taught our parents a new song this week at the dinner table? Then, explain to them that this is a way to praise and thank the Lord for what He does for us. Let's all try this and come back next week and tell about it.

A Frustration Came In Week 10

Point to Emphasize: Don't let your attitude, speaking, or behavior be a frustration to others.

Reference Reading: Ezra 3:8, 10-14; 4:1-5, 24

Memory Verse: Guard your tongue from evil, and your lips from speaking deceit. (Psalm 34:13)

Story Sample

So, did any of you teach your parents a song this week? Which one? Did you praise and thank God?

The work of rebuilding the house had gone so well for about two years. Stone hewers had prepared the large stones and carpenters had labored on the cedar trees so that the building materials were ready when needed. All those who had returned were so glad to labor together. This project was really going well! They had laid the foundation of the building of God's house. But then a frustration came. A problem came in that slowed down the building. This frustrated the building perhaps for as much as 16 years.

Recently a group of children were having a good time singing a song - "Did the mountains and the trees just happen?" They had been singing a number of songs together for 15 minutes, having a great time. Then a certain child came in late. Instead of joining right in with the others he made the "I'm bored" faces and ridiculous motions to the song. This became a frustration to the whole group, and the singing time was ruined.

When this kind of thing happens it makes me so sad inside. What could we have done to keep the singing time from being spoiled? *[See if the children can identify with the ones enjoying the singing. How could they have responded to keep it from going down?]*

This is similar to what happened in the rebuilding of God's house. Everything was proceeding really well until a frustration came in. Some people came in pretending to want to help, but they really ended up causing trouble to the building work. The Bible says that this frustration "weakened the hands of the people and troubled them in building." Does that mean that their physical arms and hands got weak? What really happened? *[Let the children explain that the people became so discouraged by this frustration that it affected them. Children should have their own examples of this.]*

One time I was put on a group to do a science fair project with three others. We were all working so well together, and our project was turning out really well. There was a boy who had wanted to be on our group but had been assigned by the teacher to another group, and he wasn't happy about it. So he would walk by us when we were working, and say things like "You're doing it all wrong", or "What a dumb project". It made us start doubting what we were doing, and worrying that we were not doing the best project.

This really shows how much our attitude, our speaking, and our behavior can be a frustration to others. Your attitude, speaking and actions can either be a help or a frustration to others. How

can you tell when your attitude, speaking, or behavior has become a help or a frustration to others? *[Depending on how you are able to discuss this with your children will be how you wrap this up. If you are developing a rapport with them then you may have the way to bring this point into their experience and they would be convicted.]*

It would be really good this week if we remember this story and instead of being the cause for frustration we could be a help to what is being built up in a positive way.

Accusations Week 11

Point to Emphasize: Do not be quick to accuse others.

Reference Reading: Ezra 4:6-16

Memory Verse: Beloved, if our heart does not blame us, we have boldness toward God.
(1 John 3:21)

Story Sample

The people who were frustrating the rebuilding work of the house of God were really against God's people. They wanted to stop God's people entirely from what they were doing.

Then, much later in time more was done to frustrate the Jews, God's people. In addition to frustrating the workers who were trying to rebuild the temple, another group of people wrote a letter full of accusations against them to king Artaxerxes, who was now ruling over that land. This letter was written to stop the rebuilding of the walls and city of Jerusalem. What is an accusation? An accusation is to charge another of wrongdoing or of having a bad intention.

It is often so easy to find examples of accusations when a group of children get together. When I was young we went through times when we played marbles every day. Some would get so angry when their marble got hit and they were out of the game. In their anger they would say, "You're cheating." That is an accusation.

[Story-teller: bring in your own story with this point.]

Both the example of the letter to king Artaxerxes and the example of playing marbles show how quick we are to accuse someone else of wrongdoing or of having bad intentions. Probably one of us just this week was in a situation like this where there was an accusation. *[At this point you can have one of the children share a recent experience of this.]*

Maybe you did not think that it was such a big deal to say, "You're cheating", or "You're lying", or "That's not fair." But it is not a small thing to accuse others. We should not be quick to accuse.

The letter that went to the king was full of accusations against those rebuilding the city of Jerusalem. The letter said that the Jews were rebellious and would cause the king damage. It also said that they would not pay taxes or tolls to the king. King Artaxerxes believed those accusations and acted on them. With the king's authority these people came and stopped the Jews of the rebuilding work by force and power. Accusations can have negative results. This letter of accusations caused the rebuilding work to stop. *[Children should be able to discuss a range of emotions and results from this kind of common accusing. Your wrap up depends on what kind of an open discussion you were able to have with the children.]*

From this story we see what a bad effect accusations can have. What might we do next week so that we are not the ones making accusations?

Too Hasty of a Response Week 12

Point to Emphasize: Take time to find out the facts.

Reference Reading: Ezra 4:17-24, 6:7-12

Memory Verse: The plans of the diligent lead only to plentifulness, But everyone who is hasty comes only to want. (Proverbs 21:5)

Story Sample

When King Artaxerxes received the letter of accusations against those rebuilding the city of Jerusalem he gave a rather quick response. And that quick response meant the workers were forced to stop their work of rebuilding the city.

Much earlier another king (Darius) had come to reign. When he got more information concerning the rebuilding of the house of God, which had stopped, he went back and did a thorough search of the facts. He took the time to get all the details. So King Darius had made a decree that the rebuilding of the house should have continued as King Cyrus had decreed. And that no one should interfere with the house of God being completed. King Darius had been thorough and knew that the accusations should not have been acted upon. At this time a Jew named Ezra used this example to show that the later king (Artaxerxes) had made a serious mistake to stop the work of rebuilding the city. Artaxerxes had accepted what he had been told without making sure it was correct, and had been too hasty to act upon those accusations.

My mom was very wise, like King Darius. I remember one time I saw a neighbor girl leaving our house with our bike. I thought she was stealing it, so I ran in the house to accuse her before my mom. My mom didn't say anything right away; she just seemed to be thinking. I, of course, got frustrated because I thought she should have run out and stopped the girl immediately and punished her for stealing. But my mom just said, "Let me check on this." She went to each of my other sisters to ask them if they knew anything about the bike. The first two said no, they didn't know anything about it, and they also thought mom should hurry and do something about it. But then my mom went to my youngest sister and asked her. She told my mom that the neighbor girl needed to go to softball practice and she was late, so she let her borrow the bike so she would get there in time. So my mom was right to make sure of the facts before she ran out and told this girl she was stealing. *[Storyteller: share your own example of an adult waiting to gather all the facts before acting on an accusation.]*

This is why moms often take their time to react when one of their children comes running to them accusing their brother or sister of hitting or taking something from them. Wise adults often know that the accusations don't quite match the facts.

It is always better to take some time. Reacting in a hasty way can cause us to make the wrong decisions.

A Request for Prayer Week 13

Point to Emphasize: We can pray to God for others.

Reference Reading: Ezra 6:1-10

Memory Verse: You will pray to Him, and He will hear you... (Job 22:27a)

Story Sample

Once King Darius discovered all the facts of what King Cyrus had decreed concerning the Jews building the house of God in Jerusalem, he issued his own decree. He would not oppose this project but rather would do as Cyrus had decreed. He decreed that everyone should leave the work on the house of God alone, allowing the Jews to continue working.

Darius would also make sure that the Jews who were rebuilding God's house got all the supplies they needed to finish the building work. He would take care of any expenses it took for this work. He even supplied what they would need for their offerings, as well as whatever food they needed that the priests requested. And once God's house was finished, he wanted those Jews to pray for him and for his sons.

Remember, Cyrus had been a good king. He had given God the credit for his having such a big empire, and he had let any Jew who wanted return to their homeland to rebuild God's house.

Now, much later, here is a second good king who follows through on what Cyrus proclaimed. But besides just building God's house, Darius wanted those Jews to pray for him and his sons in God's house when it was finished. Even though Darius was not one of God's people, the king knew that it was God who could care for them, and that praying to God mattered.

Have you ever prayed for a friend? When I was about your age I would often talk to God as I rode my bike. He was just like a friend to me. As I rode I would talk to Him about all the things I thought were so great. And I would pray to Him about some of my friends. And sometimes I would even ask my friends to pray for me if I was worried or afraid of something.

[Serving one insert your own example.]

[Wrap up this time with a discussion with the children about praying to God, thanking Him, and asking Him to take care of others. If possible, you can bring in that Darius was not one of God's people, yet he realized that praying to God mattered.]

Working with Diligence Week 14

Point to Emphasize: It is good to apply ourselves to tasks.

Reference Reading: Ezra 6:12-15

Memory Verse: Be diligent to present yourself approved to God... (2 Tim. 2:15a)

Story Sample

King Darius finished his decree by saying that the rebuilding of the house of God should be carried out with all diligence. The building work had been frustrated and had even stopped for about sixteen years—until the second year of his reign as king. Now he wanted to make sure that the building work would be carried out with all diligence. This project needed to be completed!

Diligence is a hard word to describe. Can we talk about what it means?

[Have the children give their thoughts on diligence. Then take the words they give and use them in sentences like:

*"So the Jews who were building... (worked for hours without taking a break)
(worked hard to finish)
(worked with all their energy)
(did not give up. They kept working.)"*]

Now, what about us? Is there anything that we do in this kind of way? We should do our homework without taking a break—but somehow it is so easy to get something to drink or start doodling on a piece of paper instead of finishing homework. And we should do our chores with all of our energy—but somehow when it is time to clean our room, we are so tired. Putting all our things away seems to take forever!

[Start a discussion about how easy it is to NOT be diligent. It sounds good to say that the Jews worked with all diligence, but often we are really lazy in carrying things out.]

Darius decreed that they work with all diligence—and they did! They finally completed the building of God's house! They were filled with joy, and so they had a big celebration when they finished. Don't you feel this way when you have finished your homework or chores? It feels good to accomplish something when we apply ourselves. Let's all try to be diligent this week, OK? I can guarantee we'll feel good!

Ezra's Goal Week 15

Point to Emphasize: We should have goals.

Reference Reading: Ezra chapter 7

Memory Verse: For Ezra had set his heart to seek the law of Jehovah and to do it and to teach His statutes and ordinances in Israel. (Ezra 7:10)

Story Sample

A good number of years (about 58 years) after the house of God was rebuilt, God put it into the heart of Ezra, a Jewish scribe or teacher of God's law, to go up to Jerusalem. Ezra went to the king who was then reigning and told him his plan to return to Jerusalem. The temple had been rebuilt, but now the people needed to learn God's way of doing things. Up to this point they had been under the influence of the Babylonian ways, so they needed to be taught God's ways. Ezra saw that there was a need for someone to go teach God's law to the people, so he set his heart to go.

We don't use this expression much anymore – "set his heart". What do you think that means? *[Let children try to answer.]* Well, it means to be determined or to decide to do something. It is to REALLY want something and then to choose to do it. It's kind of like setting a goal.

Now we all know what that is. We've all decided to do something at one time or another, haven't we? When I was six years old I set my heart, or decided, or determined, or had a goal – however you want to say it – to learn how to ride a bike. I wanted to be able to ride the two-wheeler my cousin had handed down to us. It was a good goal. But I found out it wasn't as easy as I thought. There was a small hill right behind our house and I thought if I went to the top of the hill and started rolling down, I would be able to ride by myself. But I fell – again and again and again. I had set my heart to learn, but I just wasn't qualified to teach myself to ride a bike. But I was still determined to learn how to ride a bike! I thought about it and realized I knew someone who was qualified – my older sister. She knew how to ride a bike, so I asked her to help me and she came with me to the top of the hill again, this time, she held on to the bike at the back, so that as I went down, I could feel how it was to balance the bike. It took several trips to the top of the hill but eventually I made it down all by myself. I had been determined, and so I finally learned to ride a bike! *[Storyteller, add your own story from your experience about being determined to do something.]*

Ezra was determined to go to Jerusalem and help the people there. He would go to Jerusalem and teach the people all about God's Word! But he needed some help. So he went to the king, Artaxerxes. He volunteered to go to Jerusalem and asked the king for help. And the king granted Ezra his request. Though the king did not worship God, he respected Ezra's God, and believed Ezra was going on behalf of God. The king granted him to go and gave him a letter, allowing him to go to teach the Israelites. He knew that Ezra was going with the wisdom of God.

[End the time with some of the children sharing about a time they determined to do something positive, like helping another person.]

Being Trustworthy and Trusting God Week 16

Point to Emphasize: Others should be able to trust us.

Reference Reading: Ezra 7:10, 14-20; 8:4, 21-23, 24-35

Memory Verse: Love Jehovah, all you who are His faithful ones; Jehovah guards the trustworthy... (Psalm 31:23a)

Story Sample

When Ezra went to King Artaxerxes about going to Jerusalem, the king offered silver and gold to Ezra so that the Jews in Jerusalem would have the money to buy everything needed in their worship to God. Though the king did not worship God, he respected Ezra's God, and believed Ezra was going on behalf of God. The king trusted Ezra to be one to act according to God.

At this time many other Jews decided to go back to Jerusalem with Ezra. They would be taking a lot of gold, silver and valuables on this trip. So Ezra set apart twelve of the leading men among the priests. He weighed out into their hands all the silver and gold from the children of Israel and from the king. In today's money it would be worth over 200 million dollars.

These trusted men were to carry all this wealth with them to Jerusalem to the house of God. What a responsibility!

Recently I went on a trip with a group of students. One 16-year-old boy went along. His dad entrusted me \$100.00 for his son's spending money. The father knew that his son could not be given that much money because his son was constantly losing his belongings. His son would set down his wallet and then go off and leave it. At 16 the boy could not yet be trusted with anything valuable! Are you going to be like that when you are 16? How can we practice taking care of little things today so that we can be trusted to take care of big things later? *[Give an example of your own.]*

[This should lead to putting shoes away so that you can find them, putting homework back into backpacks so that you take it to school the next day, etc. There are many examples in the children's daily life.]

But not only did Ezra trust these men to get all the money and valuables to Jerusalem safely, he trusted in God! So before they all left on this trip to Jerusalem they fasted and prayed for their God to keep them and all their belongings safe. *[Storyteller, you can also insert your own story about praying to God.]*

As they arrived in Jerusalem all the gold and silver was weighed again. All had made it safely to the house of God.

[With older ones you could have discussions about how to develop habits like this.]

Being Careful in Copying Important Things Week 17

Point to Emphasize: Learn to be accurate in copying things down.

Reference Reading: Ezra 7:6; 4:7

Memory Verse: Do you see a man skilled in his work? He will stand before kings...
(Proverbs 22:29a)

Story Sample

Ezra was really needed in Jerusalem. He was a scribe and a teacher. And the Jews who had returned to rebuild the house of God needed his help. They needed him to instruct them in God's Word.

A scribe [*write the word on the board*] is one who writes. We don't use the word, scribe, any more but we do use words taken from it [*See if anyone can get those words – inscribe, scribble*]. A scribe's job was to read and write and to make copies of official documents. Many people couldn't read or write in those days. Ezra could read and write in Hebrew and he could also translate from Persian to Aramaic. Today if you want to send an important paper (birth or marriage certificate, a business contract), you can take the original and make a copy on a machine. But in the Old Testament times there were no machines like that. People would make a hand-written copy of the original important paper. This was a scribe's job. Since a scribe made copies of important papers, he had to be very careful in his work. If he skipped a line while copying, it would change what the paper said. He had to copy EXACTLY. He could not miss a thing.

Today we don't have scribes but we often have to copy something down. I remember that our 4th grade teacher would put up extra credit homework on the board. Sometimes it was complicated math problems. Sometimes it was a word puzzle. Sometimes it was extra spelling words with their definitions. If you wanted the extra credit you had to copy it off the board. I can't tell you how many times I had trouble at home trying to do the extra credit work. I would work at it and then think, "There is no way to figure this out! I must have copied it down wrong!" Then I would call a friend and have them read to me what they had copied off the board. Sure enough! I had been careless in my copying. I had left a part out. It is too easy to be careless like this. [*Storyteller: insert your own example of being careless in copying something.*]

Well, the Bible says that Ezra was a scribe skilled in the law of Moses, which Jehovah the God of Israel had given. Ezra was skilled in copying important papers. He did not make the kind of careless errors I did. How do you think that he got to be skilled as a scribe? (*practice, practice, practice*)

When you grow up, you will have jobs that require being exact, just like Ezra needed to be. Can you think of some examples for me? [*Write some jobs on the board and have them decide how that job requires being exact – for example, accountant – numbers need to be exact, cooks – recipes need to be exact, doctors – diagnosis needs to be exact, etc.*]

Being Attentive Week 18

Point to Emphasize: Learn to pay attention when someone speaks.

Reference Reading: Nehemiah 8:1-9, 18

Memory Verse: Hear instruction, and be wise; and do not neglect it. (Proverbs 8:33)

Story Sample

Ezra was well known for his knowledge of God's Word. The Jews who had returned to their homeland loved God but did not know His Word very well. This is why Ezra was such a big help to them.

All the people were gathered together into an open area. Ezra read the Word of God to them and the ears of all the people were attentive to the book of the law. Probably many who were there that day had never heard God's Word. And of those who had heard or read God's Word, not many understood it. So as Ezra read, he and others would help the people understand God's Word.

For seven days (during the Feast of Tabernacles) Ezra stood before the people and read God's Word to them, helping them to understand it. And the people paid attention and listened to him. Isn't that amazing! The people were in a huge crowd yet still they listened. That means that they gave their FULL attention. It would be wonderful if we all were that attentive.

Two times a year I go to a training (a study) about the Bible – I think a lot of your parents go as well. It's a huge crowd, sometimes as many as 5,000 people! When I'm listening, I have to pay my FULL attention. I really have to concentrate. Sometimes that's not easy, because I start looking around for my friends and forget to pay attention. Once I went to a meeting and my husband wasn't able to go. I didn't pay very good attention to what was said and when I got home, he asked me to tell him what the meeting was about. I did a terrible job, all because I hadn't paid very good attention. I really wished I had listened better! *[Storyteller – This example is not to stress that they have to pay attention in the meetings. The point is that they have to pay attention all the time.]*

Often we have to make a conscious decision to listen. For instance, your teacher is explaining a math problem (social studies, any subject) on the board, and some kids behind you are whispering. You are distracted and tuned out, so you don't really understand what the teacher is saying. Right then you can choose to be attentive. What could you do to help you to pay attention right then? *[Let them try to answer, then insert your own story of what you did to stay attentive.]*

If you tune out, you miss what the teacher is trying to teach you. Some day you might regret that you did not listen and learn when you had the chance.

[Hopefully you could end this time with a good discussion about attentiveness.]

Needing God's Word Week 19

Point to Emphasize: We all need God's Word.

Reference Reading: Nehemiah 8:1-9, 18

Memory Verse: ...Give me understanding according to Your word. (Psalm 119:169b)

Story Sample

Today we are going to see that Ezra was someone who read God's Word and helped the people of God to understand it. This was really important!

When the Jews returned to their land, many of them did not know God's Word, so they lived their lives and worshipped God according to what they thought was proper. But they did not know what God had said concerning how they should live! And they did not know how God wanted them to worship Him! They did not know a lot of things because they did not know God's Word.

Many people today are like this. They may know that God exists, but they do not know His Word. So they never check God's Word to see if God likes the way they are living or how God wants to be worshipped. God says a lot in His Word. You can find out all about God and what He likes and dislikes by reading His Word. Ultimately, if we want to know God Himself, we need to learn about Him in His Word.

One time I stayed with a family who had four children. Every evening the family would sit on the couch for a few minutes and read the Bible. The oldest girls were eight-year-old twins, their younger brother was five, and the baby was about two. The children sat on their parents' lap as their parents read a short portion of the Bible to them. That is such a good family practice. *[Insert your own story about reading the Word with your family.]*

Do any of you read the Bible with your family at home? *[Encourage them to share what they do as a family.]*

Ezra read and explained God's Word, and that really helped these Jews. By hearing God's Word, they realized that God was not happy about some things they did. They became very sad and were sorry. Then they made some changes. They were God's people, and they wanted to please God according to His Word. They changed some things in their living to please Him, and they began to worship God according to His Word.

We are from families who care for God, so it is the same with us! It is important that we read and understand God's Word. God's Word is not like any other book. It is not common or ordinary. It is a holy book because God is holy and the Bible is God's speaking. So this week, let's all encourage our families to take some time each day to read God's Word together. Then God can be pleased with us as His people.