

All-age talk

Aim: to encourage Christians to discover and pursue their vocation – thereby being faithful to God's calling.

Bible passages

This sermon is based on the first six chapters of the book of Nehemiah, but don't worry – you don't have to read them all out in the service. These are the key passages:

- Nehemiah's call: Chapter 1:1-4
- Nehemiah responds: Chapter 2:1-6
- Rebuilding the walls: Chapter 2:11-13. Summarise the rebuilding then read Chapter 6:15-16
- Opposition: Chapter 4:1-3, 7-9; Chapter 6:1-3, 10-12
- Nehemiah's character and behaviour: Chapter 5:1-12, 14-18

Suggestions for reading

- Summarise some of the readings with only key verses being actually read.
- Read with different people taking the different parts.
- Read with props: a cup for Nehemiah, a crown for the King and so on.
- Create your own retelling from the story of Nehemiah, there are plenty of goodies and baddies, joys and sorrows that you can encourage the congregation to respond to with 'ahhh's', 'shame!', 'boo', etc.

Preparation

For an all-age talk, you will want to include activities to engage and include the children. Suggestions are made throughout the text for you to choose from.

You'll need:

- a plastic wine glass
- paper gold crown for the king
- a jug of very dilute fruit squash (blackcurrant, summer fruit)
- a light tray
- small cards/pieces of paper with 'Make a difference' written or printed on them
- pencils or pens
- postcards and stamps

The first clip on the *Transforming Lives* DVD, *Christian Teachers Transform Lives*, can be shown before or after the talk as an illustration of how Christian teachers feel, like Nehemiah, called to their work and how they try to make a difference through what they do in school.



Church services: Sermon outlines

Talk

Sentences in italics are instructions.

Suggestions for participation appear in the right hand column. You probably won't want to include all of these. Choose those that will best suit your congregation.

Nehemiah worked for the King of Persia (modern Iran). He did not originally come from Persia; he came from the city of Jerusalem, which was many miles away. All his family lived in Jerusalem and sometimes they sent news to let him know what was happening at home. *Ask who has had a postcard or letter recently with family news from someone who lives a long way away.*

Nehemiah had a very good job; he was cupbearer to the king. *Ask what that is.*

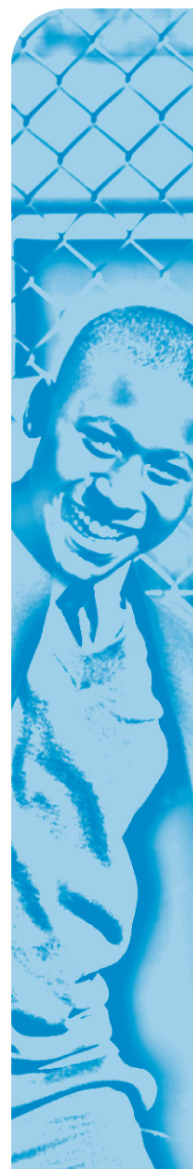
Nehemiah's job was important; he protected and served the king, he made sure the wine was not poisoned. But Nehemiah was more than a waiter, a cupbearer was close to the king and had influence. He was good at his job. He probably thought he would always be a cupbearer, but one day his brother arrived with some news from Jerusalem.

Nehemiah was deeply upset, his people were poor and in trouble, the city gates had been burned and the walls had been broken down. Enemies could get in and attack. Nehemiah prayed. He prayed and then he prayed again. He couldn't get the needs of his people out of his head. He knew that God was calling him to do something about it – he couldn't just ignore it. He prayed for four months but he went to work as normal. In the most difficult of times we often have to carry on our daily work, even if inside we are desperately upset.

Arrange with some people, both adults and children, to share postcards they have received from friends and relatives. Or supply stamps and postcards and ask who wants to send a postcard to a relative living a long way away. The volunteer writes it on the spot and shares what they have written. It can be posted after the service. Provide a scribe for younger children.

Get an adult as Nehemiah to show how a modern waiter/waitress brings the wine glass on a tray. Children can have a go, but only put a little squash in the glasses. Have a child to play the part of the king.

Get a child to act as Nehemiah's brother, walking in from the back of the church as if from a long way away, and ask him to read out these words: 'Nehemiah, things are not good in Jerusalem. The people are poor and in trouble. The wall of the city has been broken down. The gates of the city have been burned.'



Church services: Sermon outlines

One day the king asked Nehemiah why he looked so miserable and Nehemiah explained and asked for permission to go home and help his people. The king agreed and Nehemiah was put in charge of the city of Jerusalem.

There was much work to be done in the city and this was a new job for Nehemiah. He looked at the broken down walls and decided they must be mended straight away or an enemy might get in. Nehemiah found it hard to get the people to build; they started well but soon ran out of energy and enthusiasm. They were discouraged and worn out (Nehemiah 4:10). Maybe they sang a song like this: *Sing this to the tune of 'Three blind mice'.*

Nehemiah needed to inspire and encourage the people and get them moving again. He talked to them about building the wall to protect their families, so Nehemiah arranged that everyone mended the piece of wall near their house or business. People were more willing to work if they knew they were protecting their own family or place of work. Nehemiah made them feel that with God's help they could do it.

Nehemiah and the people finished rebuilding the wall with God's help. He certainly needed God's help because it was a real challenge. There were enemies who wanted to stop him. They laughed at the wall; they tried to get Nehemiah into trouble with the king and even sent death threats! Sometimes we have to cope with people who don't like us for some reason. They might laugh at us, try to get us into trouble or even bully us. This can happen at any age and it is difficult to handle if you are a child at school or an adult at work.

Nehemiah was not going to be stopped by bullies; instead he both prayed and acted. He was faithful to what God had called him to, and he persevered in spite of the difficulties. He armed the people, posted guards, and prayed (Nehemiah 4:9,16 and 6:9). He not only carried on, but he set about changing Jerusalem. First he refused to take the governor's allowance (wages). His people were so poor that he only took what he needed. He used what money he

Show these words on a PowerPoint slide, and get the children to join in the singing:

*We feel weak! We feel weak!
Too many rocks! Too many rocks!
How can we build up the wall again?
There's much too much rubble for us to move.
We're getting weaker day by day.
We're too tired! We're too tired!*

You can get the children and adults to help you build a wall with crisp boxes. Alternatively you can refer to Bob the Builder here or show a clip from a Bob the Builder DVD. Ask the children what Bob always says. ('Can we fix it? Yes we can!')

Ask people to pause and spend a few moments in prayer for those who face opposition or difficult situations at school or work. You might want to provide prayer support for any who would like it afterwards.



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All this was a new job for Nehemiah. He had gone from the king's palace to a building site but in both he showed that he was called by God to do his job. In both jobs he was a cupbearer. In one he carried cups of wine to the king. In his second job he carried invisible cups of God's love and encouragement to the people.



Reflection

Ask people to think of ways in which they could be cupbearers of God's love and encouragement in the home, school or at work. Think about how Nehemiah did it, setting an example, showing compassion, challenging wrongdoing, inspiring and encouraging others, making a difference.

We can all be cupbearers of God's love in whatever we do in life: in the family, in our local community, at school, in our friendships, in whatever job we do. All of us are called to love and serve God. But then each of us is called to do that in different ways – some as teachers, some as engineers, some as doctors, some as writers or musicians, some as parents – the list of the vocations we might have is nearly endless! But whatever we do God gives us the gifts that we need and opportunities to serve him. Sometimes that will be difficult, there will be challenges and we will need to persevere – just as Nehemiah found when he was trying to get people to rebuild the wall. But all of us are called to transform the places where we live and work so that God's love and wisdom can be seen.

Give out (or arrange for everyone to be given at the start of the service) the 'Make a difference' cards and pens. Ask people to prayerfully think of one thing they can do – it can be very small – to make a difference at home, school or work, and write this on the back of the card.

