

Nehemiah Seeks God's Forgiveness for Israel

Nehemiah 1:1-2:9



Worship Theme:



God restores us.

Weaving Faith Into Life:



Children will ask God for restoration in their lives and worship God for his forgiveness.

Session Sequence	What Children Will Do	Supplies
1 Let's Praise God! <i>(up to 25 minutes)</i>	Sing • "His Great Love" (Romans 5:8) • "Create in Me a Pure Heart" (Psalm 51:10) • "You, You, You" • "Nothing Could Keep Me From You" • "My Hope Is in the Lord" • "Love the Lord" (Deuteronomy 6:4-9)	KidsOwn Worship Kit: <i>KidsOwn Worship DVD</i> Classroom Supplies: Video equipment, jigsaw puzzle

Preschool

Session Sequence	What Children Will Do	Supplies
2 Let's Learn the Point! <i>(up to 25 minutes)</i>	Mud-Pie Messes Make mock-mud messes.	Classroom Supplies: Unsweetened cocoa powder; vegetable oil; water; measuring spoons; 1 craft stick, 1 paper cup, and 1 cupcake liner per child; baby wipes
	God Restores Us Build a "city" and talk about the story.	Classroom Supplies: Bible, mud pies from "Mud-Pie Messes," drinking straws, blocks
	* Making Us Better Use comforting items to restore a sad friend.	Classroom Supplies: Stuffed animal, tissues, banana, adhesive bandage, baby wipes, tape, glass of water, torn paper

Session Sequence	What Children Will Do	Supplies
2 Let's Learn the Point! <i>(up to 25 minutes)</i>	* God Restores Us Find answers to game questions in Scripture passages.	Classroom Supplies: Bibles
	* New Again Restore a damaged whiteboard.	Classroom Supplies: whiteboard, permanent markers, dry-erase markers, paper towels
	Heads Above Make an artistic representation of restoration.	Classroom Supplies: Poster board, markers, scissors, glue, ground coffee, construction paper

Session Sequence	What Children Will Do	Supplies
3 Let's Pray! <i>(up to 10 minutes)</i>	The Offering Give mistakes and disappointments to God, and get a clean paper.	Classroom Supplies: Offering bowls, paper, pencils
	Time to Pray Find a quiet space to confess their sins to God.	
	"Guide Me, O Thou Great Jehovah" Talk about being cleaned, and sing a song.	KidsOwn Worship Kit: <i>KidsOwn Worship DVD</i> Classroom Supplies: Video equipment

* Starred activities can be used successfully with preschool and elementary children together. Customize your session to fit your needs. You can separate preschoolers and elementary children for Section 2. Or, if you keep the children all together for the entire worship session, we suggest you choose from the starred activities.

Nehemiah Seeks God's Forgiveness for Israel

Nehemiah 1:1–2:9

The events described in this passage occurred 90 years after the first large group of Hebrews had returned to the land of Judah. And 70 years had passed since the Temple in Jerusalem had been rebuilt. In addition, about 12 years had passed since Ezra had been authorized by Artaxerxes to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem and had returned to Jerusalem with a large contingent of men, women, and children, as well as excellent funding from the king. It appeared that God was working to restore his people, just as he had promised through Jeremiah and other prophets. Thus, Nehemiah was surprised to hear from his brother, Hanani, that Jerusalem still lay in ruins. That news grieved Nehemiah greatly.

Nehemiah's initial response wasn't to run to the king for help; rather, he turned to God in prayer. Nehemiah's mourning and fasting demonstrated to God and to those around him how sincerely he cared about the situation in Jerusalem. Perhaps part of his grieving centered around his concern that walls would help to protect Jerusalem from the influences of the people living in the surrounding area. Nehemiah wanted the people of Jerusalem to follow God, and he may have felt that their commitment might be endangered without the walls.

Nehemiah went to God in prayer, confessing the sins that he and his ancestors had committed against God. Nehemiah knew the words of Moses and was clinging to the promise that, if the people returned to God and obeyed him, God would restore them from exile. And then Nehemiah asked God to grant him success in executing the plan he had formed during his days of fasting and prayer.

As cupbearer to King Artaxerxes, Nehemiah held a position of great responsibility and respect. His job was to sample all the food and drink that came to the king, to guard against the possibility of assassination by poisoning. Nehemiah must have done a good job as cupbearer: Artaxerxes was king for 40 years before dying of natural causes. In such a position of trust, Nehemiah was probably also an adviser to the king and was no doubt a close confidant.

Even for someone in Nehemiah's trusted position, coming before the king was a scary proposition. And Nehemiah was boldly asking for two enormous favors: permission to make the trip and the king's assistance in making it. Even after having prayed for days, Nehemiah silently said a quick prayer to God before making his request.

Nehemiah's prayer was answered abundantly. Artaxerxes gave him the time off he needed, letters assuring safe passage through lands along the way, and a guarantee of building materials. In addition, the king gave him and his entourage an escort of officers and soldiers on horses! When Nehemiah prayed and humbled himself before God, God answered. And Nehemiah set out to help accomplish the return to God's favor and to prosperity that Jeremiah had prophesied more than 100 years earlier.

Devotion for Leaders

Sin damages our lives and pulls us from God. When we allow Jesus to be the leader of our lives, we grow closer to him and stronger in our faith.

Weaving Faith Into Your Life: Do you need God to restore an area of your life? Nehemiah envisioned the restoration of a damaged city, and he asked the king for permission to begin the work. Find a quiet place and pray this prayer: "God, I want to begin the work of rebuilding [describe the area that needs restoration]. Thank you for hearing my prayer and helping to restore what is broken between us."

Why We Worship for Leaders

We worship God because he restores us. Think of the computer's Undo feature or the Ctrl-Z keystroke combination that allows us to undo a change. Sin and circumstances sometimes change us, and we would like to have the opportunity to go back to the starting point, to clean up the rubble, and to try again. Today's story shows that God is ready to restore those who come to him in repentance. Today we can enjoy the ultimate restoration that comes when we make Christ our Lord and Savior. As you lead this session, praise God for his restoration work in your own life.

Easy Prep for Leaders

Let's Praise God!

- Make sure your video equipment is ready.
- Set out the pieces of a jigsaw puzzle near the entrance.

Preschool Activities—Refer to the preschool pages for preparations.

1 Let's Praise God!

Play KidsOwn Worship music videos as children arrive. Greet everyone by name and invite kids to work on the jigsaw puzzle. Say, "Would you please help put the puzzle back together?"

When everyone has arrived, begin worship.

Say Hello, everyone! Welcome to children's church. As you came in today, I asked you to work together to restore a puzzle that was once complete but is now broken apart.

Ask • What happened as you worked together on the puzzle? (It got finished; it looked better.)

Say Today we're going to talk about restoring things that are broken. God is at work to restore broken people to wholeness, and that's why we worship him today! We'll talk later about what we mean when we say that people are broken. Right now, let's begin our praise with a song that reminds us just how much God loves us. Sing this song with enthusiasm!

 Sing "His Great Love" (Romans 5:8).

Say If you really put a lot of energy into that song, it might take a few minutes for your heart to be restored to its regular rate! In God's great design, our bodies come through with the energy we need to do great things—like sing with all our hearts or play a sport to win. Our hearts pump faster to get extra oxygen into our blood and to our muscles.

Ask • What would it be like if your heart continued to pound hard after you stopped needing the extra oxygen? (It would hurt; we'd get tired.)

Say ▶ You'd soon feel exhausted all the time! As soon as we stop exercising, our bodies begin to be restored to their regular working condition. God put this plan in place to restore our bodies. God made our bodies in a wonderful way. He also designed a plan for our bodies to rest when we're sick so that we can fight the sickness off and be restored to health. God designed the way our bodies heal when we get a cut or a scrape, too, so that our normal skin is restored underneath.

God has a plan for restoring our hearts, too. When people rebel against God, they go their own way. They decide they know better than God. That's when their lives get all messed up. But God wants to restore people by forgiving them. Forgiven people want to serve God with their whole hearts. Let's sing and ask God to restore our hearts.

▶ Sing "Create in Me a Pure Heart" (Psalm 51:10).

Say ▶ Let's sing a fun song to remind us where our hearts belong.

▶ Sing "You, You, You."

Say ▶ Find a partner and stand face to face with your partner. I'm going to call out a direction, and I want you to do whatever I say. Pause between each direction while kids complete your instructions.

Step to the left.

Step to the right.

Touch elbows.

Stand toe to toe.

Stand back to back.

Take three steps forward.

Wait! You and your partner are going in two different directions.

- Ask** ▶
- If we continue in the way we're going, what will happen? (We'll get separated; we'll go different ways; we'll crash into each other.)
 - How is this like what happens when we get separated from God? (When we don't follow God, we go the wrong way; when we do our own thing, we get separated from God.)

Say ▶ This is not how God wants us to be with him. God doesn't want us walking away from him and going our own way.

Now turn around and face your partner. Take three steps. You are restored to your partner, face to face, the way you were in the beginning.

- Ask** ▶
- How is this like the way God wants us to be with him? (He wants us to be close to him; he wants us to face him.)

Say ▶ Let's sing "Nothing Could Keep Me From You."

▶ Sing "Nothing Could Keep Me From You."

Say Sometimes doing what God tells us to takes strength and courage.

Ask • What are some things in nature that make you think of strength and power? (Mountains; trees; lightning; the ocean.)

Say The Bible tells us God is a rock (Deuteronomy 32:4), a consuming fire (Deuteronomy 4:24), and the one who “churns up the sea so that its waves roar” (Isaiah 51:15). God created some powerful creatures that can conquer the churning waves and soar on the wild winds. One is the eagle. And though the eagle has a powerful beak and talons, and although its enormous wingspan makes it amazingly strong, none of those features gives it the ability to soar through the air. The air currents under its wings hold the eagle up, so the eagle doesn’t have to do much at all. He only has to wait on the wind and capture the current. The Bible tells us that when we wait on God, he will renew our strength and we will be like eagles.

God wants us to wait on him, just as the eagle waits on the wind currents. God wants to restore us to complete dependence on and trust in him—so we can hold out our wings and let him support us. Hope in him helps us soar!

 Sing “My Hope Is in the Lord.”

Say That promise makes me want to love God with my whole being. Sing “Love the Lord” with me now.

 Sing “Love the Lord” (Deuteronomy 6:4-9).

Pray Dear God, we adore you. We give you our lives because we love you. We thank you for restoring us when we rebel against you. In Jesus’ name, amen.

2

Let's Learn the Point!

Preschool Activities, pages 129-130

At this time, have the preschool leader invite the preschoolers to go to their own room for this section of activities. Tear out the Preschool Activities page, and give it to the preschool leader. Have the preschool leader bring the preschoolers back to participate in Let's Pray! with the older children. If you prefer to keep all the children together, do the starred (*) activities. They will work well with both elementary and preschool children.

Elementary Activities

* *God Restores Us*

Open your Bible to Nehemiah 1:1. Have the children sit in a circle.

Say Nehemiah was a cupbearer. Being a cupbearer meant not only that he carried the king's cup, but that he was also supposed to taste drinks prepared for the king. That way, if the drink was poisoned, Nehemiah would get sick or die, but the king would be protected.

Usually, Nehemiah was a happy cupbearer. But one day, Nehemiah came to work looking sad. He was not his happy self at all! Now, being sad in front of a king in those days could cost you your life. Let's find out what caused Nehemiah to be willing to put his life at even more risk than it was when he drank from the king's cup.

Have kids form three teams. Give each team a Bible. Let each team choose a team name.

Say Open your Bibles to the book of Nehemiah. This game is called Two Truths and a Lie. All the information your team needs will be found in these passages. I'll read three facts and give you a Scripture reference (remember they're all in the book of Nehemiah). Two facts will be true according to the Scripture passage, and one fact will be made up. The team that's up first may work together to choose any of the three events as a truth. The second team up may either choose the truth from the remaining two events, or pass. If the team passes, then team 3 must try to choose the remaining truth. We'll trade off on which team goes first each time. After all three teams have selected or gotten stuck with an answer, I'll reveal the truths.

Read all three statements before asking teams for their decisions. Remind the kids to read the passage before choosing their answers. Truths are marked with a T. The false statements are marked with an L.

(continued on page 131)

Nehemiah Seeks God's Forgiveness for Israel

Nehemiah 1:1–2:9

Worship Theme:



God restores us.

Easy Prep for Leaders

Making Us Better—Choose a stuffed animal or doll to be Messed-Up Mickey. Place the tissues, banana, adhesive bandage, baby wipes, tape, and glass of water on the table randomly. Have a torn piece of paper available.

Using Theo

Consider using Theophilus the FaithRetriever puppet today in these ways:

- Have Theo lead the preschoolers from the main worship area to the preschool room.
- Have Theo replace the stuffed animal in “Making Us Better.”
- See the KidsOwn Worship Kit for a puppet skit written for today’s worship session.



Mud-Pie Messes

Give each child a craft stick and a cup with 1 tablespoon of cocoa powder in the bottom.

Ask • What do you think is in this cup?

Say We are going to make some mud with the powder in this cup.

Pour 1 teaspoon of vegetable oil in each cup, and instruct the children to stir it carefully. Have them keep stirring as you add a teaspoon of water. If the mixture is too crumbly, add a few more drops of water. Invite the children to take the “mud” from the cup and squeeze it in their hands. The oil in the mud dough will keep it from sticking to their hands. After the children have

played with the dough a little, have them make mud pies by squishing the dough into the cupcake liners. Have children wipe their hands with baby wipes.

- Ask**
- What was it like to make this mud-pie mix?
 - What’s it like to make a real mess?
 - What’s it like to have to clean the mess up all by yourself?
 - Have you ever had to clean up someone else’s mess? What was that like?

Say Sometimes we get stuck with a mess. Today we’re going to learn about some people who really made a mess of things, and we’re going to learn about Nehemiah, who helped them clean up.

God Restores Us

Open your Bible to Nehemiah 1:1, and show it to the children.

Have the children sit around a table, and put drinking straws, blocks, and the mud pies from the “Mud-Pie Messes” activity in the center of the table.

Say The Bible tells us about the beautiful city of Jerusalem built by God’s people. Let’s use our mud pies and these drinking straws to quickly build a city. Give the children time to work together to poke straws into the mud pies to make the “buildings” in a city.

The people protected their city with a wall. Let’s use these blocks to build a wall around the city. As the children build, continue the story.

For a while the people loved nothing better than to serve God and worship him. They were known as God’s people. But then they started to forget to serve God. They decided to do things their own way instead. God had to punish them to help them learn how important it is to serve

ALLERGY ALERT



Be aware that some children have food allergies that can be dangerous. Know your children, and consult with parents about allergies their children may have. Also be sure to read food labels carefully as hidden ingredients can cause allergy-related problems.

God Restores Us (continued)

him. So God allowed someone to come and take their city away from them. The enemies knocked down the wall around the city. Can you knock over one block at a time? Allow the children to tear down the wall. Then have them knock over the buildings as well.

Nehemiah was one of God's people. When Nehemiah heard what had happened to the wall, he was very sad. He prayed that God would forgive his people for forgetting to serve God. Nehemiah came up with a plan to restore the wall around the city of Jerusalem. But he knew he would need the help of the king.

Ask • What would you do if you needed a king's help?

Say Well, Nehemiah couldn't just go ask the king. In fact, he couldn't speak to the king unless the king spoke to him first. So Nehemiah prayed and asked God to help the king be kind to him:

**"I ask you, God, if you please,
Make this king be kind to me."**

Nehemiah had always been happy in front of the king, but this time Nehemiah was sad.

Ask • What do you do when you're sad?

When the children mention a sad action, demonstrate the action, and say, for example, "Nehemiah might have [name the sad action]."

Say The king finally asked, "Nehemiah, what's wrong with you?" Before he answered the king, Nehemiah prayed quietly:

**"I ask you, God, if you please,
Make this king be kind to me."**

Nehemiah answered, "I'm sad because the city of my people is ruined. It's a mess. The wall and the gates are gone." Remember Nehemiah's prayer? Encourage the children to repeat the prayer with you.

Ask • What do you think the king said?

Say The king said, "How can I help you, Nehemiah?" Nehemiah began to tell the king about his plan to visit Jerusalem and rebuild the city.

Ask • How do you think Nehemiah felt then?

Say Nehemiah must have thanked God over and over again. He was restored to his happy self.

**"Praise you, God, for you were pleased
To help the king be kind to me."**

Nehemiah had a change from sadness to gladness because God answered his prayer. And in his gladness, Nehemiah got busy making plans to restore the wall of the city—to build it up so it was just like it had once been. Nehemiah knew he could depend on God because God restores us.

* Making Us Better

Say Nehemiah knew his people had a terrible problem. They had disobeyed God. To fix their problem, they would need to ask for God's help. God could make them like new.

This is my friend Mickey. Hold up the stuffed animal.

Once he was Marvelous Mickey. Now he's got many problems. He's feeling like Messed-Up Mickey. Let's see if we can help change him back into Marvelous Mickey.

Read the following sets of circumstances, and allow the children to choose something that will help restore Mickey. The child who chooses something may also choose one or two children to help Mickey use it so that each child has an opportunity to participate.

- Mickey is sad. He's been crying, and his nose is runny.
- Mickey is hungry. He hasn't eaten anything since breakfast.

• Mickey got a cut on his ear.

• Mickey's hands and face are dirty.

• Mickey tore his favorite art project. (Put the torn paper in Mickey's hand.)

• Mickey is thirsty.

Say Sometimes we feel like Messed-Up Mickey when we disobey. Disobeying God makes people very sad. And disobeying God often gets people into lots of trouble.

Ask • How did it feel to help Mickey?

Say God is the one who helps us when we're in trouble. God is glad to help us, just as we were glad to help Mickey. God is the one who restores us, but sometimes God uses kind helpers, like the king in our Bible story, who helped Nehemiah and his people. We praise God for always being willing to fix things that go wrong.

1

- a. Nehemiah was visited by his mother, Hanani. (L)
- b. Nehemiah's brother came from Judah and told how things were going in Jerusalem. (T)
- c. Things were not going well in Jerusalem. (T)

Chapter 1:1-3

2

- a. The wall of Jerusalem had been torn down. (T)
- b. The gates of Jerusalem had been burned. (T)
- c. People in Jerusalem felt proud of their city. (L)

Chapter 1:3

3

- a. Nehemiah was so sad to hear the news from his brother that he cried. (T)
- b. Nehemiah offered his countrymen a hearty meal after he heard their news. (L)
- c. Nehemiah prayed night and day for Israel. (T)

Chapter 1:4

4

- a. Nehemiah confessed that every Israelite except him and his family had sinned. (L)
- b. Their sins were not obeying the commandments given by Moses. (T)
- c. Nehemiah reminded God of his promises to Moses. (T)

Chapter 1:5-9

5

- a. Nehemiah planned to ask the king for a favor. (T)
- b. Nehemiah asked God to make the king respond kindly to him. (T)
- c. Nehemiah went that same day to ask the king for a favor. (L)

Chapter 1:11-2:1

6

- a. The king noticed Nehemiah was sad. (T)
- b. Nehemiah tried to hide his feelings from the king. (L)
- c. Nehemiah asked the king to send him to rebuild the city. (T)

Chapter 2:1-5

Have kids be seated in their teams. Ask them to read Nehemiah 2:6-9 and find as many "pieces" of Nehemiah's restoration as they can. Have each group share its thoughts with the other groups.

Ask • **Why do you think the king was so helpful to Nehemiah?**

(Nehemiah was a good servant; he loved Nehemiah.)

• **Why do you think God was willing to restore Jerusalem?**

(Nehemiah asked for forgiveness; God loved the people.)

• **When is God willing to restore us?** (When we ask for his forgiveness; when we turn to him; when we show we love him.)

Say ➤ God wants to clean up the messes that happen when people don't remember to put him first. When we confess our sins and turn away from them, God gives us a second chance, like the second chance he gave Nehemiah's people. That's why we say, "God restores us." Let's learn a little more about restoration.

* *New Again*

Have kids think of things they've done wrong or things they wish they could get a do-over on. As kids think, make several scribbles on a whiteboard using a permanent marker.

Say ➤ When we do wrong things, we want a do-over. But that's not something we can get for ourselves.

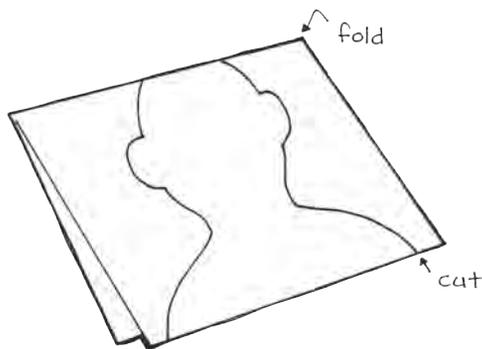
Have a few kids try to erase the marks using paper towels.

Say ➤ Hmm...it seems like the marks I made destroyed our whiteboard. It won't come clean! Maybe the things you thought about while I made the marks feel like that, too. But God restores us. He can take the things we've damaged and make them new again.

Color completely over your scribbles with a dry-erase marker. Then have a few new kids come up and erase the marks. The permanent marker will erase along with the dry-erase.

- Ask** ➤
- What did the whiteboard look like when we first tried to erase it? (Messy; ugly.)
 - What does the whiteboard look like now? (Clean; beautiful.)
 - What are we like before God restores us? (Broken; ugly with sin.)
 - What are we like after God restores us? (New; clean.)
 - What do we mean when we say that God restores us? What does God do to us? (He helps us clean up our lives; God takes the old sin away, and we're made new.)

Say ➤ The sin and rebellion in our lives makes us as messy and damaged as a whiteboard with permanent marker scribbles. But God promises to restore us when we confess our sin and turn away from it. That means that God makes us clean and perfect and new—just like our whiteboard now. Let's learn more about God's restoration.



Heads Above

Have kids get into groups of four or five. Distribute poster board, a marker, and scissors to each group. The poster board should be the same color on both sides.

Instruct each group to fold the poster board in half with the fold at the top. Have one member of each group lie on the poster board with the top of his or her head at the fold. Have another group member trace the outline of the

person's head and shoulders onto the poster board. Each group should cut through both layers of poster board along the traced lines, leaving the fold line intact at the top of the head.

Say ▶ **Think of some ways people might mess up their lives. Then take turns telling your group what you thought of. As each person mentions a way people mess up, think of a simple word or picture to represent that poor choice. Then use glue to write your word or draw your picture on the shape of the person.**

Give the kids about five minutes to complete your instructions. When the figures are covered with glue, walk around tossing ground coffee on the glue indiscriminately. As you do so, continue talking.

Say ▶ **The kinds of things you mentioned really mess people up, and these things can also mess up everything around the people. In Nehemiah's story, individuals made wrong choices and eventually the whole nation got messed up and torn apart. But we know that God restores us.**

Ask ▶ • **How can these figures be restored?** (We can flip it over; we can try to scrape the coffee grounds off.)

Have kids flip the clean figure in back to the front to cover the messy figure. Have them press hard so that the glue will hold the two layers together.

Encourage kids to cut facial features from construction paper to show the faces of restoration. Give the kids several minutes to finish their figures. When the groups have finished, gather everyone together and let groups show their restored figures.

Ask ▶ • **Once your figures were restored, what did you have to do?** (Put smiles on their faces; make them look happy.)

- **How is that like what Nehemiah had to do?** (He had to help people rebuild; he had to help the Israelites follow God again.)
- **How is that like what we have to do when we are given a second chance?** (We have to change our behavior; we have to follow God.)

Say ▶ **It is always God who restores us. Sometimes we still have some rebuilding left to do, but we know that's under God's direction. God will be with us each step of the way, because he loves us and wants to see us become like him. Fortunately, we're not on our own. We have friends to help us as we become all God wants us to be.**

3 Let's Pray!

The Offering

Give each child a pencil and a small piece of paper. Place a stack of clean paper in each offering bowl.

Say ▶ **Isn't it great to know that God restores us! On the piece of paper I gave you, write or draw something you feel sorry about or are disappointed about. When the offering bowls come around this morning, you can give that old situation to God, if you want. Just put your paper in the offering bowl, and take out a fresh, new, restored piece.**

Give the children a minute to work and then take the offering.

Time to Pray

Encourage the children to find a place in the room to sit where they won't be distracted. Give them two minutes to pray silently and confess any sins they'd like to confess.

"Guide Me, O Thou Great Jehovah"

Ask ▶ • **What have you done that's made you feel like you need a good long bath or shower?** (I played a long baseball game; I fell while I was riding my bike.)
• **How do you feel after you're clean?** (I feel much better; I'm happier.)

Say ▶ **That feeling is similar to how being restored feels. We get rid of the grime and somehow it just makes us feel more like ourselves, more like we think we're supposed to feel, even if we don't ordinarily enjoy baths! It's because of that feeling afterward that we're willing to be soaked down. Let's sing "Guide Me, O Thou Great Jehovah" to tell God that we're willing to let him restore us and guide us.**

 Sing "Guide Me, O Thou Great Jehovah."

Pray ▶ **Dear God, thank you for loving us so much that you will forgive us when we mess up. We know we can call on you anytime, and we know you can restore us. In Jesus' name, amen.**



Encouragement for Leaders

Dear God, help me to remember that as I serve these children I am serving you. Please give me strength each day to be kind and patient with these precious little ones. In Jesus' name, amen.