



WEEK 1 HYBRID TEACHING GUIDE

GOALS

THE BIG IDEA

Big difficulties can inspire
God-sized goals.

THE BIBLE

Nehemiah 1:1-2:5; Mark 16:15

WHAT? *What are we talking about today?*

QUESTION | What's your New Year's resolution?

- Let's go! The new year is here! **What's your New Year's resolution?**
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** Give a few students a chance to share with the group, and share your resolution too.

VIDEO | Screaming Goats

- Last year, people accomplished pretty amazing things. They won championships, set world records, released hit movies, wrote best-selling books, and topped the charts with number one singles. That made me wonder, "How many of these incredible achievements started out as a New Year's resolution?" Take this song, for example.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** There are plenty of video clips of popular songs being interrupted by screaming goats. Whether it's [Taylor Swift](#), [Whitney Houston](#), [Bon Jovi](#), or [Elsa](#), choose a clip you love and play it — or make your own with a song your students would recognize!
- I don't know what goals this person had when writing this song, but I'm guessing "get turned into a goat meme" wasn't one of them.
- Has this ever happened to one of your goals? I don't mean the screaming goat thing — I mean, have you ever set a goal but had your plan interrupted or side-tracked? It happens! Maybe it's because you got a little lazy, or you lost focus, or other responsibilities took priority, or you got stuck and weren't sure how to make it happen.

STORY | Talk about a goal you never completed.

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** Tell a brief story about a goal you once had that you never completed, and why your goal got side-tracked. You might talk about wanting to win the heart of your crush, or become a professional baseball player, or get really good at juggling. Then share some of the



reasons you never achieved your goal. For bonus points, try working in the phrase, "I wanted to be the GOAT," as in, "greatest of all time."

DISCUSSION

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Break for discussion. If you have more than ten students, split into groups so everyone can share. The starred questions are designed for high schoolers, so you may want to skip them if you're working only with middle schoolers.*
 - **What's your New Year's resolution?**
 - *** What's one goal you set but never accomplished? Why did your goal get side-tracked?**
 - *** Which is most difficult for you: setting goals or achieving your goals? What's difficult about it?**

POLL | What are your goals?

- In case you couldn't tell, we're talking about goals — how to set and achieve big goals. Maybe your goal is to . . .
 - Raise your grades.
 - Learn a new skill.
 - Get accepted to college.
 - Get a job.
 - Get healthier.
 - Get TikTok famous.
- If I were to ask about your goals, I'm guessing some of you would be able to share your goals immediately, some would have to think about it for a while, and some would say you don't really have any goals just yet — and that's okay!
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Have students respond to each of the following questions by raising their hands for the option (Yes, No, or Not Sure).*
 - **Do you have any goals right now?**
 - **Do you have any goals for your future?**
 - **If you could change the world for the better, would you want to?**
 - **Do you ever feel like you need help achieving your goals?**
 - **Do you need help setting goals in the first place?**
 - **Would you be content with having no goals for your life?**
- At your age, it's normal to feel like you're struggling to set or achieve goals. When you're a teenager . . .
 - You're still figuring out who you are and who you want to be.
 - It's hard to think far into the future.
 - It's hard to get (or stay) disciplined.
 - You don't have total independence or control over your life or time.
- But even though setting and achieving goals can be difficult at your age, I am convinced you can change the world — not someday, but today. And it all starts with the goals you set.



SO WHAT? *Why does it matter to God and to us?*

ACTIVITY | GOAT Goals (Part 1)

- Underneath your seat is a sheet of paper. And yes, it's shaped like a goat. Why? Because I want you to write down a goal, but not just any goal — a GOAT goal. A big, bold, greatest-of-all-time kind of goal. Maybe your GOAT goal is about . . .
 - What you want to accomplish.
 - What you want to become.
 - What you want to contribute to the world.
- At the end of our time together, I'm going to ask you to reflect on that goal and either change it, add to it, or make it more specific. For now, just right down whatever you're thinking.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Before your program, print and cut the handouts provided in your Week 1 folder, and place one under each seat with a pen. Give students one minute to write down a goal.*
- Over the next few weeks, we're going to address questions like . . .
 - "What goals should I have for my life?"
 - "What do my goals have to do with God's goals?"
 - "How can I achieve my goals?"
- To do that, I'm going to introduce you to someone from Scripture who had a big goal of his own. Let's see what we can learn from him.

SCRIPTURE | Nehemiah 1:1-2:5

- First, a little background.
 - We're going to be looking at a book from the Old Testament of the Bible — that's the part that was written before Jesus and is the story of the Jewish people.
 - The book we're reading is called Nehemiah, written by a guy named (you guessed it) Nehemiah.
 - About 140 years before this book begins, the Jewish people were conquered by an enemy army that took control of Jerusalem, they destroyed the city, burned the temple where the Jewish people worshiped God, and sent many of God's people into exile.
 - Through the prophets God promised to restore and rebuild Jerusalem and that God's people would return, but this was a devastating loss for the Jewish people.
- Can you imagine what it would be like to be invaded by an enemy army and then kicked out of your own home, city, or country?
 - You'd likely lose friends and family members in the process.
 - If you survived, you'd be forced to adopt a new language, laws, and customs.
 - For generations, the Jewish people were heartbroken about their lost city, temple, culture, and community.
- After Jerusalem was destroyed and a new king took control, some of God's people began to return to Jerusalem, looking for ways to rebuild what they had lost — but it was a long process.
 - About 140 years after Jerusalem was destroyed, the story of Nehemiah begins.
 - Nehemiah had only ever known a Jerusalem occupied by enemy armies.
 - Nehemiah was passionate about seeing Jerusalem restored, but he wasn't just anyone — he was serving in the government, working for the king of Persia.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Read, summarize, or act out Nehemiah 1:1-2:5.*



- Nehemiah had a big goal, inspired by a big problem. Nehemiah already knew Jerusalem had been destroyed — that was old news! But when Hananai told him the Jewish people were returning to Jerusalem and the walls were still in shambles, Nehemiah saw the problem.
 - There was a practical problem. Without walls, God's people would be vulnerable to another attack.
 - But there was also a spiritual problem. The city of Jerusalem was deeply connected with the Jewish people's relationship with God. Rebuilding the walls would be a way for them to honor God, but leaving them in shambles would be a sin against God.
- Nehemiah wanted to see the whole nation of Israel turn back to God, so he set a God-sized goal: find a way to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem so God's people would be protected and God would be honored.

NEHEMIAH'S GOD-SIZED GOALS

- Jerusalem's troubles birthed in Nehemiah a goal that wouldn't just benefit himself but would serve his people and his God too.
- **HIS GOAL BEGAN WITH DIFFICULTY.**
 - Nehemiah didn't set this goal because he needed a cool New Year's resolution. He set it because he saw a problem that needed to be solved and believed he could help solve it.
 - When Nehemiah identified the problem that needed to be solved, he grieved and wept. Solving this problem wasn't just a fun hobby. It mattered deeply to him.
- **HIS GOAL BEGAN WITH PRAYER.**
 - As Nehemiah wept, he also fasted and prayed. He knew his goal was so big that he couldn't do it by himself.
 - Before he made a single move, he asked God for wisdom, guidance, and help. Then he kept praying for months!
- **HIS GOAL BEGAN WITH GOD'S HELP.**
 - Nehemiah stood up from his prayer and fasting determined to attempt a series of impossible tasks. He knew his own wisdom and experience weren't enough to guarantee success, so he asked God for help.
 - The size of this goal forced Nehemiah to put all of his faith in a God who could do what Nehemiah couldn't.
- The book of Nehemiah begins with destruction, loss, grief, and tears — but that's not where this story is going to end. When Nehemiah heard the news about Jerusalem's crumbling walls, he discovered an important truth: **big difficulties can inspire God-sized goals.**

NOW WHAT? *What does God want us to do about it?*

DISCUSSION

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Break for discussion. If you have more than ten students, split into groups so everyone can share. The starred questions are designed for high schoolers, so you may want to skip them if you're working only with middle schoolers.*
 - **What was Nehemiah's goal and why was it so important to him?**
 - * **How do you think prayer could help you set or achieve your goals?**
 - * **What are some examples of goals that benefit people other than ourselves?**



REFLECTION | GOAT Goals (Part 2)

- So why are we talking about this guy from 2500 years ago? What do he and his walls have to do with us today?
 - There is so much to say about the story of Nehemiah. Countless books have been written about what his story can teach us about wisdom, leadership, and having a vision.
 - Over the next few weeks, we're going to see what we can learn from him about setting and achieving goals — but not just any goals. God-sized goals.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Encourage students to look again at the goals they've written down.*
- Remember that goal you wrote down a few minutes ago? Take a look at it again. How does your goal compare to Nehemiah's goal?
 - **Is your goal inspired by a big difficulty?** Does it solve a problem? Does it solve a problem that impacts anyone other than you, or is your goal mostly about what you can gain?
 - **Is your goal inspired by prayer?** Is it a goal you want for yourself or is it a goal God wants for you too? Have you ever talked to God about it?
 - **Do you need God's help to accomplish your goal?** That's usually a good indication of whether or not your goal is big enough. If you're pretty sure you can accomplish the goal, it's a you-sized goal. A God-sized goal is a goal that likely seems impossible.

VIDEO | Treadmills

- It's not hard to set a goal that benefits you. Most of us do that every New Year's Day. But those kinds of goals are like running on a treadmill.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *As you teach, play a video (silently) of someone on a treadmill. You might show [this music video](#) from OK Go, or [this guy](#) who treadmills really fast.*
- On a treadmill, some people can run for hours, logging tons of miles, and burning lots of calories. But they really aren't going anywhere. No matter how many moves they make, they'll never leave the place where they started.
- When we set us-sized goals, it's kind of like running on a treadmill. We don't really go anywhere, and we're the only ones who benefit.

RESPONSE | God-Sized Goals

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *As you teach, encourage students to update the goal they wrote down earlier or create a new one altogether.*
- So what's the alternative? How can we learn from Nehemiah and set God-sized goals that can change the world?
- **BEGIN WITH DIFFICULTY:** I don't mean you need to cause difficulty for yourself, and I don't mean you need to wait until something difficult happens to you. There is difficulty happening all around us — we just have to open our eyes and notice.
 - Maybe you've experienced difficulty (like loss, bullying, discrimination, or difficulties with your family or health). Chances are, someone has experienced the same difficulties you have experienced. So how can you help? Maybe that's where your God-sized goal can begin.
 - Maybe you haven't experienced very much difficulty, but you can see plenty of problems in the world around you. People are hurting, struggling, and in pain. Maybe that's where your God-sized goal can begin — by focusing on the needs of others.



- We will often find our God-sized goals hidden within something we're passionate about. Like Nehemiah, our passions can often be inspired by the difficulties we see or experience.
- **BEGIN WITH PRAYER:** If you're not sure what your God-sized goals could be, start by asking God to open your eyes to the people and needs around you. If you feel like God might be leading you toward a need or a goal, share it with people you trust and see what they think. Wise people can help us set God-sized goals.
- **BEGIN WITH GOD'S HELP:** We'll need God's help if our goals really are God-sized.
 - Just like Nehemiah was desperate for God to do something impossible, let's believe God can do impossible things through us too.
 - Then ask God, "Give me the strength to do something about the pain, hurt, and difficulties I see around me."
- Have you chosen a goal yet? Have you dreamed big enough? If you're not sure, that's okay. For the next few weeks, we're going on a journey to discover what kinds of goals God might be calling us to pursue. Today is just the beginning.
- This week, I hope you'll think about this question: "What breaks my heart?" Or maybe, "What *should* break my heart?" How can difficulty in your life or in the world inspire you to dream about what God can do — and how you can help God do it?
- I know the question, "What are my goals for my life?" could be scary. But instead of waiting around for inspiration or cues, what if you (like Nehemiah) looked around for problems that need to be solved? Whether those problems impact you, others, or the whole world, **big difficulties can inspire God-sized goals**. I can't wait to see what kinds of God-sized goals you begin to pursue.

DISCUSSION

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Break for discussion. If you have more than ten students, split into groups so everyone can share.*
 - **Read Mark 16:15.** What "God-sized goal" does Jesus give us? What problems or difficulties are fixed when this goal is achieved?
 - What's one "you-sized" goal you want to accomplish? What difficulties have inspired that goal?
 - Do you have a "God-sized" goal you want to accomplish? What is it and what difficulties have inspired that goal?
 - How can our group help you set or achieve a goal this week?