BELONG

Starter Questions: If 2026 had a title like a movie, what would yours be? Ask your students if they would like to share their highs and lows from the week.

Become Challenge Check-In: Last week, you were challenged to have a faith conversation with someone in your circle of impact. Did you pray for an opportunity to do that? How did it go?

BELIEVE

Scripture: **Ezra 1:1–5**

Main Idea: **God is working out His plans.**

Focus Question: **How can I recognize God's work in my life?**

Context: (Share with students before reading Scripture.)

God's people had spent decades in exile after the Babylonians conquered Jerusalem and destroyed the temple. Through the prophet Jeremiah, God had promised that their exile would not last forever. Now Persia had conquered Babylon, and a new king, Cyrus, was in power. As you read, pay attention to how God works through Cyrus and His people to accomplish His plan.

Summary: (For leader reference only. Do not read aloud. Let students discover the meaning of the passage as they read.)

God began fulfilling His promise to bring His people home by moving King Cyrus to allow their return and the rebuilding of the temple. God also stirred the hearts of His people to respond. What looked like a decision made by a powerful king was part of God's greater plan. God was accomplishing His purposes, even after years when His people could not see how their story would unfold.

Read Ezra 1:1–5.

- What does this passage show us about how God was working? How was He working through different people? *(God stirred King Cyrus to issue the decree and stirred the hearts of His people to return to Jerusalem. Verse 1 also tells us that God was fulfilling what He had spoken through Jeremiah. God was working through both a powerful ruler and ordinary people to accomplish His purposes.)*
- Why do you think it might have been difficult for God's people to recognize His plan while they were living in exile? *(They had experienced defeat, loss, and years away from home. They couldn't see the future or know how God would fulfill His promises. Their circumstances may have made it difficult to recognize that God had not abandoned them.)*
- What does the way God worked in this passage teach us about Him? *(God is faithful to His Word and works through people and circumstances to accomplish His purposes. His people couldn't see how everything would unfold during their exile, but God had not forgotten His promises. We may not always understand what God is doing, but we can trust what He has revealed about Himself in Scripture.)*

Read Proverbs 16:9.

- How does this proverb connect to what happened in Ezra 1? What might it mean for the plans we make for our own lives? *(King Cyrus and the Israelites made real decisions, but God was working through those decisions to accomplish His purposes. We can make plans and take wise steps, while recognizing that God is ultimately in control. We don't have to know exactly how everything will unfold to trust Him.)*

Reflect

- Looking back over this year, what are some ways you've seen God at work? What about times when it was harder to recognize His work? *(Students might share answered prayers, ways they've grown in their faith or obedience, relationships that have shaped them, or opportunities to serve others. Others may have experienced disappointment or uncertainty. Remind students that Scripture reveals God's character and faithfulness, even when we can't understand what He's doing in our circumstances. We don't have to see or understand everything God is doing to trust Him.)*
- What's one way you want to respond to God as you head into a new year? *(Encourage students to consider a specific response, such as trusting God with an uncertainty, obeying something He's shown them in Scripture, praying more consistently, or taking a step of faith.)*

BECOME

Circle of Impact Challenge: As you make plans for Christmas break, ask God to help you recognize opportunities to be part of what He's doing. Look for one opportunity to intentionally show someone the love of Jesus, whether that's serving someone, including someone who feels left out, or having a conversation about your faith. Be willing to adjust your plans when an opportunity comes along.