

BACK TO SCHOOL WITH GOD
NEHEMIAH 2:1-6 - TEST YOUR REFLEXES

We engaged in two activities to test our reflexes; some people agreed to help. First of all there was a small ball to catch and to do it quicker and quicker; then secondly there were four arrows to appear on a slide on the screen: the first person to see the arrow is to call out "arrow"!

Reflexes are what we do by instinct. Someone throws a ball at you, there are two possible reflexes: you either catch it or duck! It does depend on how hard the ball is thrown, or what kind of ball; you will catch it if the ball is like this, soft and not coming too fast; you are more likely to duck if it is a hard cricket ball! Reflexes work in other ways too: if someone hits you, you either hit them back or run away; if someone calls you names, you either call them names back or keep quiet; if someone cares for you and helps you, you either care for them back and help them or you don't. We have all sorts of reflexes and we don't always think about them.

Nehemiah had a reflex action - to pray. Gavin told us earlier about what troubled Nehemiah: the city he loved was in ruins and his people were sad and so he was sad. Then he looked up and prayed; he prayed long and hard. Prayer became his reflex action, his instinct. He had a great job, the King's cupbearer: he gave the king his wine, and tasted it first. So he spent a lot of time in the king's palace. The King noticed one day that Nehemiah was sad and asked him what was bothering him; "Why are you sad?" Nehemiah told him about Jerusalem and how it was in ruins; how could he not be sad when that was bothering him? Amazingly, the King said "What is it that you want?" Wow! Now was his chance! What did he do first? *"Then I..." (Nehemiah 2:4f)* There was no time to make a long prayer; there was only time to send an arrow-kind of prayer to ask God for help. Then he answered the king and king gave him what he wanted. God answered his prayer.

You're going to school tomorrow and it is a difficult day, or you're about to meet someone you don't get on with very well – an arrow prayer, "help me, Lord". You're about to sit a test or an exam – you send an arrow prayer as you turn over the paper, "help me, Lord". You're a parent about to take your child to school and something comes up to bother your child about the day ahead – you send an arrow prayer, "help me, Lord". You're a teacher about to walk into the classroom with a class that you find challenging – you send an arrow prayer as you walk through the door, "help me, Lord". You're the head teacher about to have a conversation with a parent; or a parent about to have a conversation with the head teacher – you send an arrow prayer as you walk into the room, "help me, Lord". You're about to go to school to take an assembly and something is not going well – you send an arrow prayer, "help me, Lord". These are all school examples, but in every other place and in every other situation, the same applies – you can send an arrow prayer, "help me, Lord".

Prayer can be our instinct, our reflex action in every situation. That's what Nehemiah learned and it is a huge challenge for us. There are other reflexes: to panic, to run away, to worry, and still others. Try praying. Jesus promises to listen to our prayers and answer us: *"Ask and..." (Luke 11:9)* This is not an empty promise, but a very real promise; Jesus will listen to us and answer our prayers, both the long and hard prayers and the arrow prayers. You can train your reflexes to be quicker; you can train to catch the ball more easily; there is a wall of lights in the National Museum that you can play to make your reflexes faster. Do we train our reflexes to pray? Here's something for us to learn, to pray and pray. Nehemiah trained his reflexes and when the king asked him the most important question of his life, Nehemiah's first reflex is to pray and then answer King. God was there, listening to his prayer and helping Nehemiah. God listens to our prayers and is there to help us; it is true of school, it is true of life wherever we are tomorrow.