The Rebuilt Life
Studies in Nehemiah

Session 4 – Crisis in the Community | Nehemiah Chapter 5

In our previous session, we saw Nehemiah and his crew working shoulder to shoulder. But what happened to this picture of courage and cooperation? While enemy threats failed to halt work on the wall, inner conflict was putting further progress in jeopardy.

Goals for this Session:

- Discover what Nehemiah can teach us about character, conduct, and compassion.
- Consider what it takes to stand firm and stay true to God's call on your life.
- Pray honest prayers that relinquish our rights and inspire a heart to serve.

Ice Breaker

How do you react when you see someone being taken advantage of? How about when someone takes advantage of you?

A Time to Raise Your Voice

Nehemiah 5:1–13
Nehemiah hears the outcry of the people; he confronts those who exploited the circumstances for profit at the expense of their Hebrew brothers.

1. The protest was widespread and deeply felt, but this crisis didn't happen overnight. Several factors contributed to the hardships that brought this conflict to a breaking point.

    a. Remember that Nehemiah's workforce was voluntary. These were men who sacrificially left their normal trades, professions, and farms for nearly two months in order to work on the wall. Consider the impact this would have had on their families and villages.

    b. For most people living in and around Jerusalem, it was a struggle to make ends meet, even before the rebuilding project. What else made life difficult for them?

2. Nehemiah's initial reaction to this situation was righteous anger. In your observation, what does this say about Nehemiah?

   a. Although Nehemiah had good reason to be angry, he did not immediately take action. What did he do, and what does this say about Nehemiah?

   b. Even when anger is appropriate, why is there wisdom in waiting to speak? Consider what you read in these verses and answer in your own words.

      Proverbs 12:18

      Proverbs 15:18

      Ephesians 4:25–27

      James 1:19–20

3. Nehemiah called all of the people together and confronted those few leaders who were responsible for causing this problem. Briefly summarize what Nehemiah said to them.

   a. Nehemiah and others were doing what they could to redeem fellow Jews who had sold themselves as slaves in order to survive. It was the right thing to do (Leviticus 25:47–49) and it would help in the effort to reestablish Jerusalem. But their efforts were being hampered. In what way?

   b. From what you have read in the text, what exactly was Nehemiah rebuking the nobles and rulers for? How did they respond?

Good to Know

Nehemiah contended with the leaders for their unethical treatment of the people and for ignoring the Mosaic Law.

Jews were not to charge their own people interest (Deuteronomy 23:19-20) on any kind of loan. Interest could be charged on loans made to a foreigner.

God's people could not force an impoverished fellow Jew into slavery in order to pay a debt or have sustainable means to live. They must be allowed to work off their debt, interest-free, as a hired worker (Leviticus 25:35-42).

4. Nehemiah understood that you can't correct what you will not confront. He insisted they own their behavior from a legal and moral standpoint. He also made a strong appeal on the basis of their witness. They were adding fuel to the enemy's fire by bringing reproach to God's name. What message did their wrong behavior send to their unbelieving neighbors?

   a. Nehemiah reminded the leaders of who they were ultimately representing. He called on them to make it right—and to their credit, they did. As believers, our conduct declares what God is like as much as our words do. Use the following verses to explain how our behavior can make the gospel attractive to others.

      John 13:34–35

      Matthew 5:16

      Romans 12:9–13

   b. Nehemiah had a project to complete, but people mattered to him. Think about it. When a conflict threatens to slow or halt your work, what is your usual response? What would you like it to be?

"When we Christians behave badly, or fail to behave well, we are making Christianity unbelievable to the outside world."

C.S. Lewis
Mere Christianity

Memory Verse
As you memorize this verse, make it part of your prayers every day. Ask the Holy Spirit to work it into your heart and mind.

He has shown you, oh man, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you?
To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.
Micah 6:8 NIV

Think About It . . .

We are called to live differently than the world around us. In actual practice, what does this look like in my life and conduct?

Act justly …

Love mercy …

Walk humbly …

Ambition and Lasting Treasure

Nehemiah 5:14–19

Nehemiah's appointment as governor of Judah granted him all the perks and privileges of the job. However, Nehemiah did not exploit his position for personal gain.

1. Nehemiah was entitled to a food allowance for his household and official entertaining. As a Persian official, he had the right to collect taxes for this but he chose not to. What two reasons did he give for not doing so?

   a. If Nehemiah had set this example only during the rebuilding project, it still would have been admirable. But the wall was completed in 52 days. Why do you think Nehemiah made this a policy for the twelve-year duration of his term as governor?

   Good to Know

   The "fear of the Lord" does not mean being afraid of God. It isn't dread of being punished. This fear is a healthy desire to please our loving and gracious God and to avoid anything that would be dishonoring to Him. It is an attitude of heart that finds its way into how we deal with every practical matter of life.

   b. In what ways did Nehemiah and those who worked for him conduct business differently than the previous governors?

   c. For Nehemiah, bending rules to benefit himself was not an option. There is a current trend to "take a knee" in protest, but Nehemiah took that posture for a different reason. Consistently bending the knee *in prayer* instilled Nehemiah with a healthy fear of the Lord that kept his conscience clear and personal ambition in its proper place.

   Christians are called to make the most of their God-given abilities and resources to serve the Lord and bring Him glory (see Luke 19:12–27). What will keep our aim clear and true? Read the following scriptures and answer in your own words.

   Jeremiah 45:5a

   Matthew 6:19, 20, 33

   Mark 10:43–45

   Philippians 2:3–7

2. The Bible tells us that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom (Proverbs 9:10). When our highest ambition is to please God and serve Him effectively in all our endeavors, what can we be certain of? Find the promises in the verses below and answer in your own words.

   Proverbs 2:3–8

   Psalm 25:12

   Psalm 147:11

   Colossians 3:22–24

3. Nehemiah committed to rebuild a wall—not because he had a passion for construction, but because he loved God and His people. Maybe you can relate to Nehemiah.

   a. Have you ever committed to serve others in a way that you wouldn't naturally pursue on your own? What did it require? Briefly share how it stretched you.

   b. What blessings/benefits have you seen for others or experienced personally as a result of your service?

   c. Would you be more likely to step out of your comfort zone to serve others in the future? Why or why not?

Gospel at a Glance: Servanthood | For Nehemiah, being governor was a position of influence that came with great responsibility. It meant honoring God's name, obeying God's Word, and loving God's people. He was entitled, as the king's representative, to benefits and privileges that could be very profitable for him. But Nehemiah devoted himself to work alongside the people. Rather than add to their hardship, he bore the cost that came with his responsibilities and served. Nehemiah's love for God fueled his compassion for people, making him a worthy example of servant leadership. But we have the highest example in Jesus, who said "I am among you as one who serves" (Luke 22:27). As Paul so beautifully stated in Philippians 2:6–8, Jesus set aside His divine privileges, took the humble position of a servant, and bore the cost for all who believe in Him to be freed from the burden of sin.

Adoration **C**onfession **T**hankfulness **S**upplication

"Pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord's people." Ephesians 6:18 NIV

God sparked Nehemiah to pray and take action. Others joined in and the work began. With God's blessing, power, and protection, the wall was rebuilt. In each session, we will take time to pray—for others and for ourselves, for our church, our communities, and our nation.

As a focus for prayer, you can use the memory verse, another scripture, or simply what the Lord has impressed on you from the chapter. No need to be profound or elaborate, just authentic.

Record your simple prayer, including each element here.

A _____

C _____

T _____

S _____

Group Prayer Requests

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