



SERIES: LESSONS ON THE POWER OF COMBINED EFFORT

Lesson #5: “Joining in Harmony to Persevere”

Nehemiah 5:1-13

Announcements and opening prayer.



Connect: an opportunity for people to immediately interact and connect with each other; icebreaker/attention getters. **Icebreaker:** What are some of the worst examples you have seen of the exploitation of people during serious times? (*Price inflation during hurricane. People bought up farms in the depression. Loan sharks stealing people's homes. Credit card companies exploiting interest rates and creating deeper levels of poverty.*)

Question - How can socio-economic differences cause problems in a church or between believers?

The Bottom Line: Today Nehemiah is going to teach us that no goal is reached without harmony.

LESSON PLAN



Denotes “Apply”

Background: MacArthur points out that the first four chapters of Nehemiah remind us that any significant work for God can expect opposition. The devil will not sit idly by and watch God's people do great works to the glory of God. But attacks do not only come from without. Sometimes the enemy also seeks to work mischief from within. This was the situation in Nehemiah 5. Enemy opposition and difficult times in general had precipitated poor economic conditions. Specifically, the people were fatigued with hard labor, drained by the relentless harassment of enemies, poor and lacking the necessities of life, lacking tax money and borrowing for it, and working on the wall in the city rather than getting food from the country.

On top of these hardships came the complaint that certain wealthy Jews were exploiting their unfortunate countrymen. Rather than show compassion, these opportunists forced people to sell their homes and children, while giving them no opportunity to redeem them back. Under normal conditions, the Mosaic law offered the hope of releasing these young people through the remission of debts every seven years (Exodus 21) or in the fiftieth year of Jubilee (Lev. 25). This custom of redemption made it possible to “buy back” the enslaved individual at almost any time, but the desperate financial situation of Nehemiah’s times made that appear impossible. The effect of this extortion on the morale of the returnees was worse than the enemy opposition. Nehemiah 5 demonstrates the dangers of greed and selfishness. It also shows how godly leaders guide their people through explosive situations and potentially divisive times.

Read Nehemiah 5:1-5

1. To whom was this outcry of the Jewish workers and their families directed?
2. What was taking place?

⌚ What are some times in history when the church has exploited the people?

Read Nehemiah 5:6-8

3. How does Nehemiah respond to their outcry of injustice?

⌚ How is Nehemiah's anger like the anger Jesus showed in the Scripture?

- ⌚ When do we have a right to be "righteous" and yet angry?
4. In his anger, who did he call together to discuss this issue with? (

⌚ In New York City we have the "UNITED NATIONS." Are the nations joined together there united? Why not?

⌚ How can the church become like the United Nations?

Read Nehemiah 5:9-11

5. How was the behavior of the rich Jewish noblemen creating reproach from their Gentile enemies?
6. How would standing in awe of God correct their hypocritical witness?
7. What was Nehemiah's command to those he confronted for their error?

I had a man once tell me that his religion was his religion and his business was his business and he didn't mix the two. What do you think Nehemiah would have said about that?

- ⦿ How would you compare the story of these men's errors with that of Zacchaeus?

Read Nehemiah 5:12-13

8. Do those men rise up in anger at the audacity of Nehemiah to confront them? What do they do?

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- ⦿ Would you say they took on the heart of Zacchaeus?

Thomas Merton has written, “To consider persons and events and situations only in the light of their effect upon myself is to live on the doorstep of hell.” Consider your own track record of dealing with people. Are you (like the rich Jews of Nehemiah’s day) an opportunist who mainly thinks about material things—how you can get ahead, get more stuff, and prosper? Or (like Nehemiah) are you a servant who uses your gifts, resources, time, and treasure to bless others and build them up? How can you be more like Nehemiah?



Interactive Teaching Ideas: ideas for learner-focused teaching. Ask the class to discuss at each table the following assignment and then share their practical ideas taken from John MacArthur’s study on Nehemiah:

- ⦿ What needs to change in your life in the area of money, specifically giving? What financial need (of an individual or in your church) can you meet today?
- ⦿ Nehemiah saw a social problem, an injustice, and he became agitated enough to do something about it. What social concerns do you have today? What is something you will commit to do this week in an attempt to effect change to the glory of God?



CARING TIME: SHARE AND PRAY

Close with a Prayer Time: *Pray that God give us the harmony to work side by side for His glory and to do whatever it takes to arrive at that goal.*



Going Deeper/Homework:

Memory Verse: “Finally, all of you, live in harmony with one another; be sympathetic, loves as brothers, be compassionate and humble” (1 Peter 3:8).

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