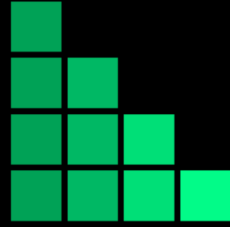


NEW LIFE ONE STUDIES



Series: “Nehemiah: Rise & Build”

Week 5 Study Guide

Message: “When ME hurts WE.”

SCRIPTURE

Main Text:	Cross References:
<i>Nehemiah 5</i> <i>Philippians 2:1-16</i>	<i>Exodus 22:25</i> <i>Leviticus 25:35-43</i> <i>Deuteronomy 15:7-11</i> <i>Galatians 6:2</i>

UNDERSTANDING THE STORY

*(This section focuses on understanding what the text means —
before jumping to what it means for us.)*

Read Nehemiah 5:1-5

Main Idea: The greatest threat to the rebuilding effort suddenly comes from inside the community instead of outside it.

Commentary:

Chapter 4 ended with God’s people standing together against outside opposition. Chapter 5 reveals a different kind of danger: God’s people

are hurting one another. The opening words are striking—*the people raise a cry “against their fellow Jews.”*

There are several layers to this crisis in the midst of a famine. Some families simply do not have enough food. Others have mortgaged their fields, vineyards, and homes in order to survive a famine. Others have borrowed money to pay Persian taxes. Eventually, some families become so deeply indebted that their children enter debt servitude.

This was not simply poverty caused by unfortunate circumstances. The people repeatedly emphasize that those taking advantage of them are their own people. Israel was meant to be a covenant community where those with resources protected the vulnerable rather than profited from their desperation.

That is why their words in verse 5 carry so much weight: “We belong to the same family.” The community may still be rebuilding the wall together, but something much deeper has broken down between them.

The community could not be truly restored while the people rebuilding it were destroying one another.

Think About It:

1. What different pressures are creating the crisis described in verses 1–5?
2. Why is the phrase “their fellow Jews” so important to understanding the seriousness of the problem?
3. What does the progression from hunger, to mortgaging property, to borrowing money, to debt servitude reveal about how poverty can become increasingly difficult to escape?

4. What does this passage reveal about the difference between accomplishing a shared project and actually living as a healthy community?

Takeaway:

God's work cannot be separated from the way God's people treat one another.

Read Nehemiah 5:6–9

Main Idea: Reverence for God should shape the way His people treat one another.

Commentary:

Nehemiah hears the people's complaints and becomes angry—but notice what happens next: *“After thinking it over...”* His anger does not immediately explode into reaction. He considers what is happening and then confronts the nobles and officials directly.

Their behavior violated the heart of God's instructions for Israel in caring for the poor. *See: Exodus 22:25, Leviticus 25:35–43, Deuteronomy 15:7–11.*

Nehemiah therefore takes the issue deeper than finances. In verse 9 he asks, “Should you not walk in the fear of our God?” Biblically, the fear of God is not merely terror. It is a reverence that recognizes who God is and allows that reality to shape how we live. Someone cannot claim to honor God while deliberately mistreating people God has commanded them to love.

Nehemiah points toward Israel's witness among the surrounding nations. Their behavior toward one another said something about the God whose name they carried.

The rebuilding mission was not only about what outsiders could see happening to Jerusalem's walls. The character of the people behind those walls mattered too.

Think About It:

1. Why do you think Nehemiah takes time to think before confronting the nobles and officials?
2. How do the Old Testament commands about caring for the poor help explain why Nehemiah considers their behavior so serious?
3. Why is mistreating another person ultimately more than a relational issue according to this passage?
4. Why would the behavior of God's people affect the way the surrounding nations viewed Israel's God?
5. What does this teach us about the connection between the character of God's people and the mission of God's people?

Takeaway:

You can't honor God while dishonoring people He calls you to love.

Read Nehemiah 5:10–13

Main Idea: Biblical repentance does more than admit something is wrong—it turns around and seeks to repair what has been damaged.

Commentary:

Nehemiah does not leave the people with a vague command to “do better.” His response is extremely concrete: *Stop charging interest. Return what has been taken.*

The problem requires more than feeling guilty because real people have experienced real harm. The nobles and officials must change their behavior and, where possible, restore what their actions have cost others. That gives us an important picture of repentance. Repentance includes recognizing sin and turning away from it, but when our actions have harmed someone else, a genuine heart of repentance also asks: *“What can I do to make this right?”*

The leaders agree. They make a public oath before the priests, emphasizing the seriousness of their promise before God. The symbolic shaking of Nehemiah’s robe pictures the consequences of breaking that commitment.

Verse 13 gives the crucial ending: *“The people did as they had promised.”* Their repentance becomes visible through changed behavior.

Think About It:

1. What specific actions does Nehemiah require from the nobles and officials?
2. Why isn't simply admitting that they were wrong enough in this situation?
3. Why does Nehemiah require a public promise instead of simply accepting their private agreement?
4. What does the statement “the people did as they had promised” tell us about the heart of repentance?

Takeaway:

Repentance isn’t simply admitting your wrongdoing, it’s turning from it. STOP and MAKE IT RIGHT.

Read Nehemiah 5:14–19

Main Idea: Nehemiah refuses to demand from others a standard he is unwilling to live himself.

Commentary:

The second half of the chapter shifts from Nehemiah confronting the leaders to Nehemiah describing his own leadership. As governor, Nehemiah had rights and privileges available to him. Previous governors had placed significant financial burdens on the people. Nehemiah chooses not to do the same. *Why?*

Verse 15 gives the reason: *“But out of reverence for God I did not act like that.”*

That connects directly back to his confrontation in verse 9. Nehemiah told the leaders that the fear of God should change how they treated people—and then shows what that looks like in his own life. Rather than asking, *“What am I entitled to?”* Nehemiah considers the burden already being carried by the people. He continues working on the wall, uses his resources generously, and refuses to use leadership primarily for personal gain. His authority becomes an opportunity to serve rather than an opportunity to take.

The chapter contrasts two ways of living: using what you have primarily for yourself or using what God has given you for the good of others.

Think About It:

1. What contrast does Nehemiah intentionally draw between his leadership and the governors who came before him?

2. Why is verse 15 such an important connection to Nehemiah's confrontation earlier in the chapter?
3. How does Nehemiah's behavior give credibility to what he has asked the nobles and officials to do?

Takeaway:

Godly leadership doesn't ask, "What can I get?" It asks, "How can I serve?"

Read Philippians 2:1–5

Main Idea: The answer to ME-centered living is learning to live with the mindset of Jesus.

Commentary:

The Apostle Paul describes the Church with deeply relational language: united with Christ, sharing in the Spirit, having the same love, being one in spirit and mind. The Church is not simply a collection of individuals who happen to believe the same things. In Christ, we belong to one another.

Paul then identifies what threatens that unity: *selfish ambition* and *vain conceit*.

Selfish ambition asks, "How does this benefit me?" Vain conceit places exaggerated importance on ourselves—our preferences, opinions, comfort, recognition, desires, or way of doing things.

Paul gives the alternative: humility. Humility does not mean believing that you are worthless. It means refusing to make yourself the center. We learn to notice and value the interests of others alongside our own.

Then Paul points to the ultimate model: **Jesus**. *“In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus.”* Jesus does not use His position for self-promotion. He takes the posture of a servant and gives Himself for others. The Gospel itself confronts ME-centered living.

For followers of Jesus, the question becomes less *“What do I want?”* and more *“What would look like Jesus here?”* (See: Galatians 6:2)

Think About It:

1. What words in Philippians 2:1–2 emphasize the shared identity and unity of Christians?
2. Why would selfish ambition and vain conceit be especially destructive within a community that is supposed to be “one”?
3. What does it mean to look not only to your own interests but also to the interests of others?
4. Why does Paul point to Jesus rather than merely giving Christians a list of rules for becoming less selfish?
5. How does the mindset of Jesus provide the opposite picture from what was happening among the wealthy leaders in Nehemiah 5?

Takeaway:

Jesus moves us from “What’s best for me?” to “What would love require of me?”

MAKE IT PERSONAL

Nehemiah 5 asks us to consider what our choices are doing to the people around us.

Reflection Questions:

1. Where are you most tempted to make life primarily about your schedule, your comfort, your preferences, your money, your opinions, or your way?
2. Is there any area where your choices are unintentionally creating additional weight for someone else?
3. Have your words recently been building people up or adding to their burden?
4. Where might selfish ambition or the need to be right, recognized, comfortable, or in control be affecting your relationships?
5. Is there something the Holy Spirit may be asking you to STOP?
6. Is there something you need to MAKE RIGHT?
7. Who around you is carrying a burden that you could help carry?
8. What would having “the mindset of Christ Jesus” look like in one specific relationship this week?

LIVING IT OUT

The Church is a body. When one part lives entirely for itself, the entire body becomes weaker. But when God's people choose humility, service, generosity, forgiveness, and love, the whole body becomes stronger.

Paul says: *“Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.” — Galatians 6:2*

This week, begin to move intentionally from ME-centered living toward WE-centered living.

Action Steps:

1. NOTICE THE WEIGHT.

Pay attention to the people God has placed around you. Who is carrying something heavy right now?

2. CHECK YOURSELF.

Ask honestly: Are any of my attitudes, words, expectations, or actions making someone's burden heavier?

3. STOP.

If God reveals something harmful, don't excuse it or defend it. Stop doing what is hurting another part of the Body.

4. MAKE IT RIGHT.

Where possible, repair what has been damaged. Apologize. Restore. Step in. Give back. Help carry what your actions may have placed on someone else.

5. CARRY SOMETHING.

Serve someone. Encourage someone. Give generously. Show up. Use what God has given you to make another person's load lighter.

6. ASK THE JESUS QUESTION.

Instead of beginning with “What do I want?”, ask: “What would look like Jesus here?”

For LifeGroups:

ENCOURAGE EACH OTHER

Share

- Where do you most clearly see the difference between ME-centered and WE-centered living in Nehemiah 5?
- What part of this chapter challenged you most?
- Where are you tempted to prioritize your own interests over the good of others?
- Can you think of a time when another Christian helped carry a burden for you?
- Is there a burden you're carrying right now that the group could help you carry?
- What is one practical way you can make the Body stronger this week?

Pray Together

Pray that God would help you:

- Grow in genuine reverence for Him.
- Recognize selfish ambition and pride in your own life.
- Treat one another in ways that reflect the heart of Jesus.
- Have courage to stop harmful patterns.
- Make things right where relationships have been damaged.
- Notice and carry one another's burdens.
- Become a church marked by humility, generosity, service, forgiveness, and unity.
- Live in such a different way that people around you can see Jesus through His Church.

“Let’s lay down ME, choose WE — and let the way we love one another point people straight to the glory of God.”