

“How To Stop Strife (Nehemiah, Part 5)”

Text: Nehemiah 5:1-19

In Nehemiah 5 the community was starting to self-destruct because of some festering grievances. Even though the walls were nearly complete, Nehemiah had to stop what he was doing and turn his attention to the divisions that were developing between his workers. In the midst of a *great work* for a *great God* Nehemiah 5:1 says “...*there was a great outcry of the people and their wives against their Jewish brethren.*” Most everyone had been working with all their hearts to re-build the walls, but there were others whose alarming acts of greed resulted in widespread suffering and injustice. Nehemiah heard their complaints and he “...*became very angry...*” with righteous anger (5:6). Instead of just going off on the people in the heat of the moment, Nehemiah paused and took the time to give *serious thought* to the matter (5:7).

In confronting those whose selfishness had created the strife:

- Nehemiah appealed to their love (5:7). They were brothers and sisters who needed to dwell together in unity.
- Nehemiah reminded them that God had redeemed them for a purpose (5:8). God hadn’t redeemed them from Egypt and Babylon and returned some of them to Jerusalem just so their fellow-Jews could then return them into bondage just to make money.
- Nehemiah’s appeal was based on God’s Word (5:9a). He told them *what they were doing was not good*—they were going against God’s clear commands.
- Nehemiah reminded them of their witness (5:9b). They were to *walk in the fear of their God in order to avoid the reproach of the nations.*
- Nehemiah set the example (5:10-11). While he himself had lent money he didn’t charge his countrymen any interest.
- Nehemiah called them to clear action (5:12-13). Fortunately, they were eager to obey and quick to make things right. What started off as a serious problem that threatened to derail their mission turned into a corporate worship service with shouts of praise!

Regardless of how others behaved, Nehemiah was governed by what was pleasing to God. He didn’t live extravagantly, but instead, he lived generously. Because he loved and revered God, he also loved the people he was called to serve.

Here’s some principles to ponder from Nehemiah 5:

1. There is a direct correlation between the effectiveness of our mission and how we treat each other.
2. Relational problems are inevitable, and we can’t ignore them. While it’s painful to stop strife it will only get more difficult the longer you wait. “*The first price you pay is always the cheapest.*”
3. We must take the initiative to restore relationships, whether we want to or not. Don’t wait for the other person to come to you—you need to go to them. If you’ve been hurt, go to that person and talk it out as Jesus commanded in Matthew 18. If you’ve hurt someone

else, go to that person and humbly confess what you did and ask for forgiveness according to what Jesus said in Matthew 5.

4. God's reputation is at stake when we have conflict. Let's be like Nehemiah, and *walk in the fear of God*, not only to avoid the reproach of unbelievers but also to make God attractive to those who need Him.

Discussion Guide/Action Steps

1. Exercise self-control over your emotions.
2. Love God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength. Then, love yourself by becoming the kind of person God wants you to be. Then, love others the way God wants you to treat them.
3. Here's some practical action steps we can take to stop strife:
 - a. Make sure that your anger is righteous. Be angry and sin not.
 - b. Think before speaking.
 - c. Meet face-to-face; this way you can more correctly read their body language and understand the intonation of their words and sense the true nature of their heart and spirit. Don't spread your conflicts to other people—go directly to the one you're upset with.
 - d. Seek resolution / restoration of the relationship / reconciliation. Nothing is sweeter than when two that have separated come back together again into wholeness.