BIBLE STUDY

Under Construction

RESONATE

Under Construction

Finishing Touches

There are needs all around us: the co-worker in a nearby cubicle, the coach of your child’s little league team, the student in your class, the neighbor next door. We should not hide ourselves from others, but instead meet them where they are. This week we will learn how to do just that for those around us.

DAY 1 / DAY 2 / DAY 3 / DAY 4 / DAY 5

DAY 1

The Word

Today’s Scripture: Nehemiah 5:1-5

Have you ever had anyone come and tell you their problems? Nehemiah had a multitude of people who approached him about their needs.

Nehemiah 5:1-5

> 1 Now the men and their wives raised a great outcry against their Jewish brothers. 2 Some were saying, "We and our sons and daughters are numerous; in order for us to eat and stay alive, we must get grain."
>
> 3 Others were saying, "We are mortgaging our fields, our vineyards and our homes to get grain during the famine."
>
> 4 Still others were saying, "We have had to borrow money to pay the king's tax on our fields and vineyards. 5 Although we are of the same flesh and blood as our countrymen and though our sons are as good as theirs, yet we have to subject our sons and daughters to slavery. Some of our daughters have already been enslaved, but we are powerless, because our fields and our vineyards belong to others."

Verse 1-5: These people were helpless. They had no recourse for action. The wealthy were exploiting them. The religious leaders were ignoring the problem. Their king was a foreigner living in a distant land. What were they to do? They finally joined forces and approached the one person who could possibly help.

Nehemiah had come to the land to lead a building project. He was encouraging the people to build the wall of Jerusalem. In the middle of work, he is approached by a problem that had nothing to do with wall building. Needs do not come to us at a timely matter. People need help even when it is not convenient to us.

I have a neighbor who loves to talk. So, in the past, I have avoided her. I have actually looked out my window before getting the mail to ensure she was not out there as well. I did not have time to get “caught”. God convicted me of this sin over the holidays. She brought me cookies and also hearty conversation. At first, I was thinking about all I had to do and she was interrupting me. But as she spoke, she shared about all the neighbors, how they were doing. I realized that while I was peeking out the windows to avoid her, she was bonding with the people around us. She even witnessed to an elderly neighbor before the woman passed away. She was building relationships, I was hiding. If someone who lived near us was in



trouble, I would not be the one they would want to speak to, it would be my neighbor. I was so convicted. She was willing to be inconvenienced by others in order to help. I had not.

Nehemiah had built enough trust in these people that they knew they could approach him with their needs. He was the “neighbor” who had taken time to build a rapport with them. He had not been there as long as others, but he was approachable.

People all around us are hurting. Everyone has some sort of problem. Are we showing them that we are open to listen? Or are we hiding behind our doors?

DAY 1

Up Close and Personal

Ask the Lord to help you to be available to others.

Would others consider you a good listener? How could you improve in this area?

Have you ever had someone approach you with a problem but you were too busy? How can you better handle this type of situation?

How could someone stop avoiding others and instead build bridges?

DAY 2

The Word

Today's Scripture: Nehemiah 5:6-11

When I was working as a counselor, I was accused of favoring one peer counselor over another. It was unfounded claim. My fellow counselors did not come to my defense even when I was being yelled at by the head of the program. That night the two fellow counselors came to my house and told me how honorable I was, how I was right, how the head of the program had a malicious agenda, etc. I told them, "You both needed to speak up and say this when I was being wrongly accused. By speaking truth now, you have not helped the situation. You saved your own selves and left me out to dry and you know you were wrong or you would not be here now. You should have defended me but you stayed silent. Your words are worthless to me now." I never trusted those two counselors again. When they had the power to act, which would have righted a wrong, they stayed silent. Their silence caused me to suffer.

Injustices take place all the time: in the home, in the workplace, on teams, at school, in courts, in governments, everywhere. We cannot right every wrong in this world. However, when a problem is shared with us, we do have the responsibility to act as far as is possible to make the situation right. Nehemiah was shown a community of needs caused by injustice. He did not stay silent. He did not just say "I'm sorry". He acted on behalf of the people.

Nehemiah 5:6-8

> 6 When I heard their outcry and these charges, I was very angry. 7 I pondered them in my mind and then accused the nobles and officials. I told them, "You are exacting usury from your own countrymen!" So I called together a large meeting to deal with them 8 and said: "As far as possible, we have bought back our Jewish brothers who were sold to the Gentiles. Now you are selling your brothers, only for them to be sold back to us!" They kept quiet, because they could find nothing to say.

Verse 6-8: Nehemiah did three things here that teach us how to respond to the problems with others. First of all, he empathized with them. His righteous anger was in response to the situation. He agreed that they were being treated unjustly and was mad with them. Second, he thought through a plan of action. Not all situations are going to be as drastic as this. Some are going to be as simply as getting one child to say he is sorry to his sister. However, whatever the need is, a plan needs to be thought through. This prevents us from reacting, which could make the matter worse. Third, we follow through with the plan of action. In this case, it involved calling in the people who were abusing the poor.

I love this verse: “They kept quiet, because they could find nothing to say.” I wish this was always the case. I have had to confront others and this is not usually the response. I often have received anger, justification, shifting the blame, and a variety of other things. Dealing with difficult situations is not easy but if we do not get involved we become a part of the problem. Nehemiah shows us how to confront others about their sins.

Nehemiah 5:9

> 9 So I continued, "What you are doing is not right. Shouldn't you walk in the fear of our God to avoid the reproach of our Gentile enemies?

Verse 9: Nehemiah confronted them with the truth of the situation. He was straightforward with his words. He did not use false flattery or take forever in getting to the point. He told them how they were wrong.

Nehemiah 5:10

> 10 I and my brothers and my men are also lending the people money and grain. But let the exacting of usury stop!

Verse 10: Nehemiah was living a life that was an example to others. He was not calling the nobles and officials to do anything that he himself was not doing. He was not being hypocritical. He was exhorted them to live out God’s standard w hich he and his brothers were already actively carrying out.

Nehemiah 5:11

> 11 Give back to them immediately their fields, vineyards, olive groves and houses, and also the usury you are charging them—the hundredth part of the money, grain, new wine and oil."

Verse 11: After confronting them and showing them a godly example in his life, Nehemiah gave them a plan of action to right the wrong. Thus, the nobles could respond to an invitation of godly living. Instead of just telling people they are wrong, we need to let them know how they can live in a right or godly manger. Nehemiah helped them to see how to do this.

The people were suffering from emotional and physical needs. The nobles and officials had a spiritual issue. Nehemiah helped both groups. He addressed the sin in the nobles and officials which in turn would benefit the hurting and hungry people. The needs around us are different, but God can give us the wisdom in how to address them. But we must be willing to act instead of remaining silent.

DAY 2

Up Close and Personal

Ask the Lord to give you His wisdom in helping with the needs of those around you.

Do you need to help someone? Write down a plan of action based upon Nehemiah’s example.

Are you someone who deals with problems or avoids them? How can you be godly in your approach to confrontation within the framework of your personality?

Often people avoid confronting others because of the sin in their own personal lives. In what areas of your life do you need to bring under God’s control so that you can set yourself as an example to others? (Please know that no one is perfect. Do not let the enemy keep you from confronting others in truth based upon your own inadequacies. However, we need to strive toward blamelessness.)

DAY 3

The Word

Today’s Scripture: Nehemiah 5:12-13

Nehemiah confronted the nobles and officials. He spoke to them about sin and repentance. When finished, the men had the opportunity to respond. They could have rejected Nehemiah. They could have said, “Who does this guy think he is? We’ve lived here longer than him. Who is he to tell us what to do? Does he think he is better than us? Who made him our spiritual leader?” There were many responses they could have made, but thankfully they chose the path of humility and change.

Nehemiah 5:12

> 12 "We will give it back," they said. "And we will not demand anything more from them. We will do as you say." Then I summoned the priests and made the nobles and officials take an oath to do what they had promised.

Verse 12: The men chose to respond to godliness. However, Nehemiah did not just take them at their word. Instead, he called in the priests for accountability. This is a wise move for leadership. Often, people say they will change yet we do not take the time to hold them accountable to their words. People need to be held to the standard.

Twelve step programs are created around this premise. People are given a sponsor who holds the recovering addict accountable to the changes he claims he wants to make in his life. In order for this to work, the recovering addict must be transparent to the sponsor and in turn the sponsor must be willing to confront any swerve from recovery. This relationship brings change to the lives of both people involved.

We live in a day and age of plastic smiles. We do not want to air our dirty laundry in front of others. Yet, the Scripture tells us to confess our sins to one another (James 5:16). We are to be open and honest and real. This leads to spiritual growth. We must be willing for others to hold us accountable to the truth. These nobles and officials were challenged with righteous living and they responded with praise.

Nehemiah 5:13

> 13 I also shook out the folds of my robe and said, "In this way may God shake out of his house and possessions every man who does not keep this promise. So may such a man be shaken out and emptied!" At this the whole assembly said, "Amen," and praised the LORD. And the people did as they had promised.

Verse 13: The men responded to the higher standard of godly living. In fact, they were excited to do so. Often we act as if we are burdening others if we call them to holiness. In truth, we are freeing them to live the adventure that God has planned for them. It is sin that weighs us down; purity frees us from guilt and shame.

The ultimate goal in confrontation is not to win a debate or to prove that you are right. The true goal is to bring everyone closer to the Lord. These men's sins had kept them from their relationship from God. Now, in repentance, they were connected to Him once again.

DAY 3

Up Close and Personal

Confess any sin you are struggling with. Ask someone to hold you accountable in this area.

Who will you ask to be your accountability partner?

What are the benefits of accountability?

Can you give an example of how accountability influenced your life or how you helped someone else by confronting him with truth?

DAY 4

The Word

Today's Scripture: Proverbs 28:16; Nehemiah 5:14-16

All of us are aware of the need for leaders. From the home to national government, authority is necessary to maintain control. While leadership is designed to protect those under the umbrella of the authority, often an abuse of power occurs. This can lead to devastating effects.

Proverbs 28:16

> 16 A tyrannical ruler lacks judgment, but he who hates ill-gotten gain will enjoy a long life.

Verse 16: Many leaders have hurt their people by oppressing them. Nehemiah, however, gives us an example of a leader who lifted up the people and helped them instead of using them to meet his desires.

Nehemiah 5:14

> 14 Moreover, from the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes, when I was appointed to be their governor in the land of Judah, until his thirty-second year—twelve years—neither I nor my brothers ate the food allotted to the governor.

Verse 14: Nehemiah was given a large allotment of food because he was the governor of the area. This food was his right for governing the land. Nehemiah forfeited this right in order to serve as an example to other leaders in the area and also to provide help for the people. He recognized that they had been mistreated in the past and he did not want to inflict anymore hardship upon them.

Nehemiah 5:15

> 15 But the earlier governors—those preceding me—placed a heavy burden on the people and took forty shekels of silver from them in addition to food and wine. Their assistants also lorded it over the people. But out of reverence for God I did not act like that.

Verse 15: Previous governors had inflicted a heavy load on the people. Due to their poor examples, even the assistants began oppressing the common folk. Leaders are always setting an example. From parents to presidents, they are an example to those who are under their authority. It is important for leaders to show the right way. The true standard for leadership is submission. When a leader is submitted to the Lord, then there actions will benefit others instead of hurt them.



Nehemiah 5:16

> 16 Instead, I devoted myself to the work on this wall. All my men were assembled there for the work; we did not acquire any land.

Verse 16: Leaders should work. Often people want to be the “top man” at the job in order to not have to work. We hear of stories of CEOs with their private planes and daily golf games. But a true leader under the Lord works. Not only does he work, he is devoted to his work. He wants to do the best job possible. For our work is unto the Lord. Nehemiah’s work ethic inspired others: they were assembled for the work. They were not there for investments, for leisure, for gain; they were there to get the job done. Nehemiah was a leader who truly benefited those around him.

DAY 4

Up Close and Personal

Pray for those in leadership positions that they may honor the Lord with their work.

How have you taken advantage of any leadership position you have been in?

How will you begin to be a leader that benefits others?

As someone under leadership, how have you been a support to the leader?

How can you be a better support system to the leaders in your life?

DAY 5

The Word

Today's Scripture: Nehemiah 5:17-19; Revelation 22:12

We learned yesterday that a leader needs to even deny himself things "due him" in order to help others. A good leader also is willing to freely give to others.

Nehemiah 5:17-18

> 17 Furthermore, a hundred and fifty Jews and officials ate at my table, as well as those who came to us from the surrounding nations. 18 Each day one ox, six choice sheep and some poultry were prepared for me, and every ten days an abundant supply of wine of all kinds. In spite of all this, I never demanded the food allotted to the governor, because the demands were heavy on these people.

Verse 17-18: Imagine entertaining one hundred and fifty people every day as well as other tourists that come to town! Yet, Nehemiah freely gave to others in order to set an example before the officials of the land. By teaching them generosity, he showed them how to care for the people.

When most people think about leaders, the word "generous" does not usually come to mind. Often the only people they are generous to is themselves. Sadly, they have not learned that the people's devotion is not won by selfishness. It is when they give that the people's hearts are won.

Generosity is a characteristic that can be cultivated in our lives. It is not our natural instinct, which any toddler fighting over a toy will easily prove. However, we can learn to be generous because we know the Generous Giver.

Nehemiah 5:19

> 19 Remember me with favor, O my God, for all I have done for these people.

Verse 19: Nehemiah could give to the people because he knew that God would give him eternal rewards. He knew that the Lord would remember his good acts towards the people. Because God is faithful to give to us, we can be faithful to give to others.

Revelation 22:12

> 12"Behold, I am coming soon! My reward is with me, and I will give to everyone according to what he has done.

Verse 12: We will be rewarded. God will remember all that we have done for other people. Nehemiah could lead faithfully because he served a Faithful Leader. We can do the same.

DAY 5

Up Close and Personal

Praise the Lord for remembering our deeds and for being willing to reward us.

How are you a generous giver to others?

Who is learning from your example of generosity?

How does knowing that God will reward us one day help us to be generous now?