

Life Group Topic #9
The Wounds of Internal Conflict
Nehemiah 5:1-13

WELCOME: (15 minutes)

If you could participate in any winter Olympic sport- which would you choose and why?

WORSHIP: (15 minutes)

Use whatever means possible to turn the group's attention to the wonder and majesty of our God- including music, prayer, Bible meditation and other art forms.

WORD APPLICATION: (45 minutes)

Briefly read or paraphrase the following sermon summary before moving to the heart of this section: the discussion around the application questions.

Nehemiah 5 opens with no mention of the enemy's attack because those outside attacks were no longer necessary. The goal of stopping the dream of God was being accomplished by the people of God. *It has been said that in a church quarrel the devil remains neutral and supplies ammunition to both sides.*

Nehemiah is now faced with opposition from within.

I. THE COMPLAINT OF THE POOR...5:1-5

The task of re-building the wall cannot be divorced from the social, economic, interpersonal needs of the workers. We cannot ignore underlying anger, bitterness and unresolved issues. Part of any rubble clearing will be a resolution of the unmet expectations that may have settled in as resentment, lack of involvement and the development of internal camps.

- **Hunger was rampant among the labourers.** They had no property to use as equity for loans and so no possible way of getting food for their families. Anarchy was imminent...they would soon take the food they needed.
- **Debt was crippling those who owned farms but had to mortgage them to get food.** Working on the wall meant people not tending crops which further complicated the food shortage
- **Taxes for the Persian king** had people borrowing to pay their taxes and pledging their crops, fields and vineyards. It was so bad that they were selling their children into slavery.

When there is disharmony, a breakdown in unity, it will never go away with a little passage of time. The enemy will continue to stir the pot to prevent the dream of God from being realized.

II. THE CONDEMNATION OF THE UPPER CLASS...5:6-13

Note Nehemiah's response in verse 6...I WAS VERY ANGRY!

Nehemiah followed the first principle of Matthew 18:15-16...he went directly to those who were responsible...apparently they did not listen because in v 7 Nehemiah called a public meeting...called the workers off the wall because the problem was now within and needed immediate attention. Why build the wall when there were people inside who were exploiting one another...

He called them to repent...*What you are doing is not right! Should you not walk in the fear of our God...*they needed to repent because of:

- **Disobedience to the revealed will of God...**

Exodus 22:25 *If you lend money to one of my people among you who is needy, do not be like the moneylender; charge him no interest.*

When he faced them, verse 8 says... *they kept quiet, for they could find nothing to say.* Is that ever enough? Rebuked, silenced but yet unwilling to change.

- **Putting personal prosperity ahead of other people's well-being.** They had a love of money that placed living the good life as a high priority. Nehemiah had redeemed some of the Jews who had been sold into slavery by their countrymen. So some were profiting and others were buying them back.

The dream was stopped because God's hand of blessing was lifted due to unresolved relational issues caused by sin. The nobles publicly promise, by oath, to stop charging interest and to give back the land and property that they had seized. The immediate result in verse 13 is that the people were moved to praise God...the people were satisfied...relationships were healed...the block had been removed...the dream could go ahead.

What were the steps?

- They surfaced the issues between community leaders and the people
- They made specific plans to correct the situation
- They did as they had promised. Then the spirit of woundedness was lifted and they went back to the purposes of God.

The passage of time never heals woundedness...the issues need to be surfaced ...the declaration of God's power and ability needs to happen and partnership needs to be declared and lived.

Word Application Questions:

Please keep in mind that these questions are meant as catalysts designed to get the group talking about life application.

1. Read and reflect on the text in Nehemiah 5:1-13. What internal conflicts were paralyzing the building project?
2. What most paralyzes the church today- external attacks or internal conflict? Can you give examples?
3. We learn from vs. 1-7 that some of the Jews were putting their own personal prosperity before the well-being of their fellow Jews? Does that happen in the church today? How?
4. When fellow believers develop life patterns in disobedience to the will of God- how are we to respond? (Consider Matthew 18:15-16).
5. Are there unresolved relational conflicts in your Life Group? in the church? That have short-circuited God's blessing?
6. What steps might God be asking you (individually or as a group) to follow in order to bring healing?
7. Consider the statement: The passage of time never heals woundedness. Do you agree? Why or why not?

WITNESS: (15 minutes)

This section is a vision-casting time designed to get the group strategizing and making concrete plans towards reaching outward to a lost world. Relational outreach always has the goal of ultimately enfolded those we reach into the Life Group.