

Tusculum Hills Baptist Church  
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PEOPLE PROBLEMS

Nehemiah 5

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Let's recap where we are in the story of Nehemiah.

- Although the Jews had been allowed to return to Jerusalem almost one hundred years before, the walls of the city had still not been rebuilt.
- Nehemiah was a Jew but was born far away and worked for a king.
- When he heard the walls had not been rebuilt after 100 years, he immediately began to pray and ask for God's favor as he committed himself to helping rebuild the walls.
- The king he worked for provided Nehemiah with supplies and a security detail so he could return to Jerusalem and rebuild the walls.
- He inspired and motivated the people to rebuild the walls.
- A wide variety of people helped rebuild the walls.
- Sanballat and other area leaders ridiculed and plotted against Nehemiah and the builders, but Nehemiah and the people made a plan for their defense and continued to work.
- During all this, the foreign king that ruled over the region made Nehemiah the governor.

In today's sermon, we are going to talk about a problem that arose among the people of Jerusalem. We are going to consider four tips to remember when you have a problem.

- Carefully consider the issue.
- Look for the cause that is closest to home.
- Work towards a Biblical resolution.
- Always set a good example.

## Let's say one of our confessions together:

God can do whatever he wants, whenever he wants, wherever he wants, with whomever he wants, for as long as he wants, without anyone's permission.

## 1-WHEN YOU HAVE A PROBLEM, CAREFULLY CONSIDER THE ISSUE

### SCRIPTURE: Nehemiah 5:1-7

*Now the men and their wives raised a great outcry against their fellow Jews. <sup>2</sup> Some were saying, "We and our sons and daughters are numerous; in order for us to eat and stay alive, we must get grain." <sup>3</sup> Others were saying, "We are mortgaging our fields, our vineyards and our homes to get grain during the famine." <sup>4</sup> Still others were saying, "We have had to borrow money to pay the king's tax on our fields and vineyards. <sup>5</sup> Although we are of the same flesh and blood as our fellow Jews and though our children 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." <sup>6</sup> When I heard their outcry and these charges, I was very angry. I pondered them in my mind...*

**EXPLANATION:** As the new supervisor, Nehemiah became the go-to person for complaints. While his primary concern was the rebuilding of the wall, he could not ignore the problems that were arising. The people were hungry. Even the women, who were normally silent, began to ask for help. Taxes placed a financial burden on the people and the taxes went to the ruling Persian king. There were no free meals or government subsidies. As a result, the people were mortgaging their property—and sometimes their children—and were still left without enough food to sustain their families. The situation was dire, and it angered Nehemiah.

- Why do you think Nehemiah was angry?
- Was he angry that the people were complaining?
- Was he angry that the people were hungry?
- Was he angry because he did not want to deal with the problem?
- Was he angry at God for not providing?

Although we are not given a lot of information about why Nehemiah was angry, it is important that we take a minute to recognize his emotional response and how he handled it.

Nehemiah was like us. He was human, and as a human, he experienced all the same kinds of emotions that we do. Nehemiah did not ignore his feelings, but he also did not waste time obsessing over them or give in to them. He did not start hollering and making a scene. Instead, he carefully considered the problem before proposing a solution.

**APPLICATION:** Being angry is not necessarily a sin; however, our anger can lead us to sin. Ephesians 4:26 says, “*In your anger do not sin’: Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry.*”

Problems can cause a wide range of difficult emotions. In order to avoid sin, it’s important to take a breath and feel the emotion without acting or reacting. The Bible says Nehemiah pondered the issue. In other words, he spent time thinking about it.

- When you are faced with a problem, what is the first thing you do?
- Do you pick up the phone and call your spouse or your mother and complain?
- When someone makes you mad, are you quick with a biting comeback?
- If you are the victim of some sort of wrong, do you seek revenge?
- When you get an email you do not like or you read an online post that angers you, do you hit the reply button at the speed of light?

There is a reason old timers used to tell us to count to ten when we are angry. Any time our emotions are in high gear, we need to step back and take a breath. We need to give ourselves time to logically think about the issue and what’s really going on.

## **2-WHEN YOU HAVE A PROBLEM, LOOK FOR THE CAUSE THAT IS CLOSEST TO HOME**

**SCRIPTURE:** Nehemiah 5:7-8

*I pondered them in my mind and then accused the nobles and officials. I told them, “You are charging your own people interest!” So I called together a large meeting to deal with them<sup>8</sup> and said: “As far as possible, we have bought back our fellow Jews who were sold to the Gentiles. Now you are selling your own people, only for them to be sold back to us!” They kept quiet, because they could find nothing to say.*

**EXPLANATION:** There was not much Nehemiah could do about the taxes. The people were under the control of a foreign king, and as such, they had to do what he wanted. Paying taxes to a foreign king was not going to go away. Nehemiah realized that the taxes were not the primary problem. The primary problem was the behavior of his own people. The Jewish lenders were charging interest and mortgaging their fellow citizen's lands and children in return for loans.

**APPLICATION:** When we face a problem, it's important that we carefully consider who is responsible. At first glance, we may want to point the finger at someone else. Like Nehemiah, there may be a legitimate reason to think that the government or some other nameless entity is to blame. When we can blame someone like the president of the United States or the president of our company for something, then the problem becomes too big for us. We then use this as an excuse not to do anything about it. However, when we look closely, we may discover that the root of the problem is much closer to home. In fact, we may be the problem.

It's important to not point the finger too quickly and to be honest with ourselves. The only way we can know whether our problems are the result of our sin is to be in communication with the Lord. We have to pray for his wisdom, and we have to know his word. If we pray for God to reveal the sin in our hearts and lives, he will. When we are faced with a problem, we should:

- Carefully consider the issue.
- Look for the cause that is closest to home.

### **3-WHEN YOU HAVE A PROBLEM, WORK TOWARDS A BIBLICAL RESOLUTION**

**SCRIPTURE:** Nehemiah 5:9-13

*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?"<sup>10</sup> I and my brothers and my men are also lending the people money and grain. But let us stop charging interest!<sup>11</sup> Give back to them immediately their fields, vineyards, olive groves and houses, and also the interest you are charging them—one percent of the money, grain, new wine and olive oil."<sup>12</sup> "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. <sup>13</sup> I also shook out the folds of my robe and said, “In this way may God shake out of their house and possessions anyone who does not keep this promise. So may such a person be shaken out and emptied!” At this the whole assembly said, “Amen,” and praised the LORD. And the people did as they had promised.*

**EXPLANATION:** The reason Nehemiah was able to go to the wealthy individuals and address their incorrect behavior was because Nehemiah knew what God had already said about this issue. Deuteronomy 23:19-20 says, *“Do not charge a fellow Israelite interest, whether on money or food or anything else that may earn interest. <sup>20</sup> You may charge a foreigner interest, but not a fellow Israelite, so that the LORD your God may bless you in everything you put your hand to in the land you are entering to possess.”* This law specifically forbade Israelites from charging interest on loans to one another.

Nehemiah knew that this problem was not a mistake. It was not an oversight. It was not a result of a foreign power. It was a personal problem, a problem of sin. The Israelites were not doing as God had commanded them to do, and as a result, people were going hungry. Sin always has consequences. Sometimes we face the consequences personally, but sometimes our sin causes other people to suffer.

While Nehemiah was not at fault in this situation, he recognized that the sins of the nobles were causing the people to suffer. As a leader and mediator, he had an obligation to intercede on behalf of the people. What did he do?

Verse 7 indicates that he first approached the lenders privately. When they did not readily correct their ways, he dealt with the problem publicly. Nehemiah’s actions are examples of the New Testament advice given in Matthew.

**SCRIPTURE:** Matthew 18:15-17

*“If your brother or sister sins, go and point out their fault, just between the two of you. If they listen to you, you have won them over. <sup>16</sup> But if they will not listen, take one or two others along, so that ‘every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.’ <sup>17</sup> If they still refuse to listen, tell it to the church; and if they refuse to listen even to the church, treat them as you would a pagan or a tax collector.”*

**APPLICATION:** The Bible teaches that if you have a problem with an individual, you should first go to them privately and try to address the issue. If that does not work, you should then take along someone else who might be able to mediate. If the person still does not want to listen, it may be time to involve the church, if it is a church-related matter. And if that still does not work, then you are to treat them like you would treat a “pagan or a tax collector.” How did Jesus treat pagans and tax collectors? He loved them, but he did not condone their sinful actions. When we are faced with a problem, we should:

- Carefully consider the issue.
- Look for the cause that is closest to home.
- Work towards a Biblical resolution.

#### **4-WHEN YOU HAVE A PROBLEM, ALWAYS SET A GOOD EXAMPLE**

**SCRIPTURE:** Nehemiah 5:14-19

*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. <sup>15</sup> 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. <sup>16</sup> 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. <sup>17</sup> Furthermore, a hundred and fifty Jews and officials ate at my table, as well as those who came to us from the surrounding nations. <sup>18</sup> 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. <sup>19</sup> Remember me with favor, my God, for all I have done for these people.*

**EXPLANATION:** As governor, Nehemiah could have legitimately benefited from the perks of his position. However, he chose to not take anything that would somehow make the people’s lives harder or burdens more severe. In addition, he chose to sacrificially give. Nehemiah did not do this to impress the people. He did it out of reverence for God.

**APPLICATION:** We cannot always solve every problem that arises in our lives or the lives of those around us. We cannot make people do what is right, even if we recognize the harm in their actions. Like Nehemiah could not control whether famines occurred or how much the king taxed, there are many things that are outside our control. When a problem is within our means to solve, then we have an obligation to do everything we can to solve it. When it is outside of our ability, then our obligation is to provide a good example. Jesus lived a life of love and sacrifice, and he calls us to do the same.

So when you have a problem:

- Carefully consider the issue.
- Look for the cause that is closest to home.
- Work towards a Biblical resolution.
- Always set a good example.

**INVITATION:** The title of today's sermon is People Problems because the truth of the matter is that all of this world's problems somehow or other involve people. Whatever problem you are facing today, take heart, it's temporary, and God promises that if you submit it to him, he can work it out for your good and his glory.

In John 16:33, Jesus said, *"I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world."*

This promise of peace was given to Christ-followers. If you do not know Christ as your personal Savior and Lord, then let me encourage you. You do not have to deal with the problems of this world on your own. Jesus wants to help you.

We are living in a different day and age than Nehemiah. However, humans still have the same concerns. Jesus wants to give you peace.

This past week, I had a really sad funeral of a man whose life was cut way too short. I met with his sons who were about ages 9 and 13 or so. I told them, "All that matters right now is Jesus. He is our only hope."

And I tell you the same thing today: Jesus is our only hope.

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I use the NIV translation of scripture because of its conversational nature. Feel free to go to Bible Gateway and copy and paste whichever translation you want to use. This transcript has been edited to an outline format that improves readability and therefore may not exactly follow the video edition.

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