

## Legacy

### Part 6 – For This People

#### Intro

The Jewish people found themselves in a very difficult and dangerous place last week – they were at the halfway point of their journey. Under Nehemiah’s leadership, the people had built the wall all the way around the city, halfway up its full height. Every step of the way they faced threats, attacks, ridicule, and doubts. The most recent attack – which came from all sides of the globe – caused the people to fall into deep despair. They were overcome with fear and worry. Their adversaries had rallied together against them from all sides of the wall.

Nehemiah was forced to adjust his plan. Unable to allow everyone to work on the wall at the same time, he divided the people into groups: those carrying stones, others building the wall, and some standing guard ready to fight. Along with re-allocating personnel, Nehemiah also modified work schedules and time off. Instead of going home after an 8-hour day, the workers were asked to remain along [and inside] the city walls...literally sleeping in their clothes. No lunch breaks, no vacations. The Jewish people were asked to sacrifice more than they had ever sacrificed before. This frenetic pace was necessary and justifiable for a season; however, it is not sustainable for long periods of time. Nehemiah is about to discover this truth, with deafening reverberation.

#### Nehemiah 5:1

**Now there arose a great outcry of the people and of their wives against their Jewish brothers.**

There is always a danger for leaders to focus on accomplishing the greater mission over the good of the individual person. Leaders have an uncanny ability to grin and bear it through the most difficult and painful moments of life.

However, in doing so they fail to recognize that most people don’t care about accomplishing the mission for the future as much as they are concerned about their personal welfare for the moment. And it’s not a bad thing at all. But it is part of leading and part of moving people forward that leaders tend to overlook – until there is a *great outcry*.

Over the next few moments several complaints begin to surface that threaten the rebuilding effort.

#### The Great Outcry [5:2-5]

##### **1) Work/Family Tension [No Grain for Food]**

Because the men were busy with the wall, there was little time to farm for crops. The people also faced extreme famine which made producing food even more difficult.

##### **2) Mortgaging Property [Fields for Grain]**

The people began mortgaging their lands for money to purchase grain. They were forced to leverage their future for the moment.

##### **3) Slave to the Lender [Trading People for Taxes]**

Because the people were forfeiting the right to their fields – unable to produce food or money – they became slaves, not to the Persian government but to one another, by borrowing money to pay taxes.

The people were in a no-win situation. It was impossible for them to have any hope, or desire to continue in their current state.

### **5:6-7**

**I was very angry when I heard their outcry and these words. I took counsel with myself, and I brought charges against the nobles and the officials. I said to them, “You are exacting interest, each from his brother.” And I held a great assembly against them**

Nehemiah has this internal dialogue going on and grows very upset with himself first and then the officials who are complicit as well. The wealthy were making money off of their countrymen’s financial distress – something forbidden by their laws.

Realizing he was partly responsible for allowing the people to find themselves in this difficult position and knowing that he was the one who must correct the situation, Nehemiah gathers them together and lays down a new directive that this practice must stop – including himself.

What happens next is true leadership. We tend to equate leadership with bold statements, large followings, and commanding respect. However, in the economy of God the reverse is true. Leadership is not the one being served most. It is the one doing most of the serving.

### **5:10**

**Moreover, I and my brothers and my servants are lending them money and grain. Let us abandon this exacting of interest.**

Nehemiah had given some of his own money to allow the people to purchase grain. The difference is that he wasn’t requiring interest in return. He saw a people in need and acted in compassion. Instead of taking advantage of weakness, he became weaker to make others stronger.

However, he still knows that making these loans put the people in an unbearable position – even though he did not charge interest or take his people as slaves in return. Nehemiah does not seek to distance himself from wrongdoing. He accepts responsibility and calls on the wealthy leaders to join him in absolving their loans and returning property back to their brothers and sisters.

*The officials and nobles were silent and could not find a word to say.*

Then Nehemiah reaches into the depths of selfless leadership rarely ever seen in the world.

### **5:14**

**Moreover, from the time that I was appointed to be their governor in the land of Judah, from the twentieth year to the thirty-second year of Artaxerxes the king, twelve years, neither I nor my brothers ate the food allowance of the governor.**

Nehemiah is referred to [for the first time here] as the governor of the land. As the governor, he would have been afforded several luxuries for his service to the people. It was well within his right to tax the people not only for the common treasury, but for his own personal capital and living expenses as well.

A little foreshadowing by the author reveals that Nehemiah was the governor for 12 years [during his first term]. During that time, he never once taxed the people for his own personal life. A sharp contrast to the officials who were exacting interest and enslaving their own people.

Simon Sinek – TED Talk – Captain Swenson

In 2013, U.S. Army Captain William Swenson was awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor for his bravery on September 8, 2009. On that day, Swenson was on a mission near the Afghan-Pakistani border – assisting a team of government officials visiting local village elders – when their team was ambushed, and ultimately surrounded on 3 sides.

Instead of taking cover to protect himself, Captain Swenson ran into live fire to begin rescuing the officials and those who were severely wounded. One of the people he rescued was his Sergeant. Swenson and another soldier picked the Sergeant up and delivered him safely to the medivac helicopter.

One of the remarkable things about that day is one of the medivac medics happened to be wearing a GoPro [camera] strapped to his helmet and captured the entire scene. It shows Swenson and the other soldier placing the wounded Sergeant into the helicopter. And then you see Captain Swenson bend over and give this man a kiss before returning back to rescue more.

At the end of the story Sinek shares the question he could not shake – *where do people like that come from?*

***In the military, they give medals to people who sacrifice themselves so that others may gain. In business, they give bonuses to people who sacrifice others so that they may gain.***

***Simon Sinek***

He continues to say, *we have it backwards.*

**5:15**

**The former governors who were before me laid heavy burdens on the people and took from them for their daily ration forty shekels of silver. Even their servants lorded it over the people. But I did not do so, because of the fear of God.**

Unfortunately, this is a leadership [human] reality that has been true for thousands of years. Two of Jesus' closest followers, James and John, struggled with this same sense of position, authority, and power. This same mindset of desiring for others to serve them.

***And Jesus called them to him and said to them, “You know that those who are considered rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. But it shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”***

***Mark 10:42-45***

Nehemiah, like Jesus, lived his entire life out of selfless service because of his reverence, respect, and passion for the Name and mission of God. He was able to sacrificially serve the people because He faithfully lived for God and His purposes...not for his own.

**5:16**

**I also persevered in the work on this wall, and we acquired no land, and all my servants were gathered there for the work.**

Nehemiah was not concerned with title, position, or rank. He did not use his authority to command respect or service. Instead, he used his influence and his time to serve alongside the people.

***The true price of leadership is the willingness to place the needs of others above your own. Great leaders truly care about those they are privileged to lead and understand that the true cost of the leadership privilege comes at the expense of self-interest.***  
***Simon Sinek – Leaders Eat Last***

When you and I choose to serve others [which is what leadership really is], we sacrifice our own personal desire for gain and advancement. At that moment, it becomes more about *us* than it does about *me*.

#### **5:17-18**

**Moreover, there were at my table 150 men, Jews and officials, besides those who came to us from the nations that were around us. Now what was prepared at my expense for each day was one ox and six choice sheep and birds, and every ten days all kinds of wine in abundance. Yet for all this I did not demand the food allowance of the governor, because the service was too heavy on this people.**

To better understand the full extent to which Nehemiah lived out selfless service we have to see the magnitude of how deep his conviction was willing to go. At times, Nehemiah entertained up to 150 men at his table. Some were his reigning officials leading alongside of him, while others were dignitaries from other nations who were traveling through the region.

One each occasion, Nehemiah took on the burden of caring for and providing for these men himself. How, we are not sure. It's possible he acquired great wealth as the cupbearer to the king while he lived in Persia. The significance, though, is in the fact that Nehemiah was well within his rights [as governor] to have taxed the people to cover the expenses but was unwilling to add to his people's plight. He never once entertained the notion.

Nehemiah, at the same time, did not take what was *rightfully* due him [as Governor] AND used his own resources for the people. Leaders give to the cause AND take nothing for themselves. Unfortunately, we have too many men and women seeking to gain for ourselves, no matter at what cost it requires of those around them.

***What's good for the individual is rarely what's good for the organization.***

***Andy Stanley***

He goes on to ask a more piercing and soul-wrenching question.

***Are you here to create a great organization or are you using the organization to create a name for yourself?***

***Andy Stanley***

#### **5:19**

**Remember for my good, O my God, all that I have done for this people.**

How would your legacy best be described [and felt] to this point in our lives? Are you living for and serving others or are you asking [and using] people for our own personal gain? History will remember. And the kingdom of God will feel the affect.