

# REVIVE

...A SECOND WIND

## Small Group Leader Guide

**Nehemiah 5:1-19 | Be Part of the Solution**

### Prepare: Things to do before your small group gets together

#### **Conversation Starter: Problem Solver**

- Think about a time when you were instrumental in solving a problem between other people. What was the conflict? How did you uniquely contribute to the solution? What was the outcome?
- Review Nehemiah 5:1-19 to review the content of the biblical focus. Invite God to speak to you with a fresh application of His timeless truth. Ask God to give you wisdom in teaching His message of grace and restoration to your small group. Submit your heart to God's conviction, that you may be exhorted to experience anew the timely activity of God's Holy Spirit in your life.
- Preview this material and engage with God's Spirit as He guides your study.
- Pray for your small group members by name, asking God to reveal a meaningful appreciation for their part in the family of God. Seek God's wisdom in leading your small group to apply God's word to their lives. Commit yourself to the Lord, that you would live what you teach.

#### **To The Point – What to impart to your small group**

**Key Verse: Remember for my good, O my God, all I have done for my people. (Nehemiah 5:19, ESV)**

**Objectives:** Through your time exploring this passage, your small group members will:

Discuss the internal conflicts that potentially undermined the Jews' efforts to rebuild the wall.

Analyze the role Nehemiah played in bringing resolution to these conflicts.

Apply the principles Nehemiah employed to our circumstances where God can use us to resolve conflicts that potentially derail the good work God intends to accomplish through us.

### Encounter: A suggested plan for your small group experience

**Ice Breaker: Hello, my name is Conflict**

**Prepare** If possible, find a "Hello, my name is..." name tag. If one is not available, you can make one, or print one from the Internet. On the space where you would normally write your name, instead write the word "Conflict." Wear that name tag when you come into the small group. When your small group time begins, introduce yourself.

**Say** Hi, my name is Conflict. I'm glad to be with you all today, but I just want to warn you in advance, that I tend to be disruptive. I like to have my own way and its not surprising that when I show up, some people run toward me, and others run far away from me. People typically either love me or hate me.

Let's try an exercise. I'm going to stand in the middle of the room. Now, everyone stand up and position yourself in the room relative to your inclination to engage with me. If you like conflict, stand close. If you hate conflict, distance yourself from me. If you don't care for me, but will confront me if you have to, position yourself where you think is appropriate.

Ask Why did you place yourself where you did? What is it you like or dislike about conflict? What is good about me? What's potentially bad? (Invite everyone to return to their seats)

Say As we continue in Nehemiah 5, we will see how Nehemiah addressed the conflict that arose internally, and how he addressed it. In looking at this conflict, we will discover some important principles about conflict resolution, and discover the opportunities to implement those principles into our own conflict resolution opportunities in our lives now and in the future.

Open in prayer for your time together.

Preying on one another (Nehemiah 5:1-5)

**What stands out to you in these passages?**

Responses may include:

- *There were husbands and wives giving an outcry.*
- *The outcry was against their Jewish brothers. This was an internal conflict being voiced.*
- *The workers were not being given access to enough provision to feed their family.*
- *To get grain, the landowners were having to mortgage their property - they were being extorted by their own people.*
- *The taxation was extreme and the local government were imposing this upon their brothers.*
- *The situation had become so severe that the people were being forced to put their children into debt slavery.*

**In the first two verses, we see husbands and wives voicing a complaint. Remember from earlier chapters, it is clear that entire families are involved in this work, and now they are expressing their concerns as a result. With the men working on the walls during the day and being on guard at night, it is likely that the women worked more in the harvest than was typical. What do you see in their outcry?**

*They are declaring that they are suffering because of their work, in that the wealthy are exploiting their circumstances for their own financial gain. They are bringing a "human focus" back to the work, that there are real people and real families and real lives being affected by the onerous practices of the wealthy and powerful.*

**What parallels exist between the problems faced in this passage, and what challenges face families today?**

Responses may include:

- *Many families require both the husband and wife to work, or even to work multiple jobs, just to provide for the family.*
- *We live where basic provisions are expensive (food, gas, housing, utilities, insurance, health care, etc).*
- *We live under pervasive taxation (income tax, payroll tax, property tax, sales tax, inheritance tax, use tax, sin tax, etc).*

Nehemiah's Response (Nehemiah 5:6-13)

**Look at verses 6 and 7. What do you see in Nehemiah that you can identify with and learn from?**

*Nehemiah was angry when he heard what was being done to his people...by his people. We can identify with injustice. It is right for us to be angry with oppression and wrongdoing, particularly when it is happening within our own community. We can learn by Nehemiah's example that he did not react out of anger. In fact, upon hearing the troubling news, Nehemiah thoughtfully considered how to respond. He didn't "fly off the handle." In fact, the original language indicates that he took the reaction of his "heart" (his emotional response to the news) and processed it in his mind (seeking wisdom). We see an Old Testament application of a New Testament exhortation of Romans 12:1-2.*

**What is significant to you in how Nehemiah responded to the "nobles and officials?"**

*Nehemiah provides an incredible model for conflict resolution here. First, he seeks to unite the people's identity rather than to divide them. It is easy to "dehumanize" a problem by putting common people in different categories (such as nobles and officials vs. the workers). Instead, he identifies the workers as the brothers of the local nobles and officials. Second, he brings unity through emphasizing their common interest, rather than seeking to polarize people according to their established positions that by nature are self-seeking. Nehemiah showed the wealthy that*

what they were doing was hurting their own people. Third, he proposed a better way. He boldly declared the past practices were not right, and offered the alternative. Fourth, he advised the reliance upon an objective standard, rather than a subjective one. He held the leaders accountable to God and expected them to act accordingly. Usury is the greedy accumulation for personal gain - and it is never satisfied. Nehemiah does not "villainize" lending money nor grain, but does speak strongly doing so in an unjust manner.

**In verses 12-13, the leaders agree to these terms, and they take an oath before God to return their greedy gains and change their practices. The entire community agreed, and the people kept their word. What do these verses tell us about the role God should have in our internal conflicts?**

*On our own, we go our own way. Our self-interests lead us to act without concern for our fellow man. However, when we submit to God's ways, we desire to see the entire community be protected and to flourish. These selfless actions do not forbid individual success nor initiative, but they do oppose greed and oppression.*

**Nehemiah's "Track Record" (Nehemiah 5:14-19)**

**What is significant to you in this passage?**

*Responses may include:*

- *Nehemiah served as the governor of these people for twelve years! He was no temporary leader.*
- *In the entire time, he willingly did not accept the gratuitous provisions that were historically provided for the person in his office.*
- *Even when tradition dictates an acceptability for greed, Nehemiah's sense of appropriateness was determined by an awareness of his community, his culture, and his provisions given by God.*
- *His actions offered a clear counter-point to the "business as normal" practices of his predecessors. He acted differently. In so doing, he modeled selflessness that others could practice, too.*
- *He had a big table that emphasized community identity and it welcomed outsiders. He practiced selfless hospitality.*
- *He didn't starve himself, his leaders, or his people. He demonstrated trust that God was the provider for all of His people, and there was no need to operate with a "closed fist" mentality that sought to behave with greed and selfishness.*

**Is Nehemiah's prayer self-serving? Why or why not? What from this important verse applies to us today?**

*Nehemiah's prayer, while it may appear to be self-serving or self-glorifying, is not at all self-seeking. Rather, it is a plea akin to the psalmists' faith declaration that the deeds undertaken were acts of faith and not of self-aggrandizing. He was not seeking to establish his own reputation as a great leader or the most noble of men. Rather, he was operating by a humble faith that sought not his own gain. He saw himself as a key part of the community that God was establishing, and he merely sought to be faithful to the part that God had for him in it. He was expressing his faith that he did not have to "look out for himself" because he was trusting that God was looking out for him. He could afford to be generous because God was both generous to him, and generous to the Jews through his leadership.*

**What is one "take-away" for you from this chapter?**

*Allow the group participants to respond.*

**Say** Conflict happens. It's inevitable. What is not inevitable is how we choose to respond to that conflict when it comes. As a child of God through faith in Jesus, you have a unique opportunity to be part of the solution. God has uniquely gifted you with supernatural resources to help build a selfless community that blesses the group, rather than seeks individual gain at the expense of others. Like Nehemiah, may God remember us as we strive to bless others in meaningful ways.

**Let's close in prayer:**

**Invite** the group to pray for one another. **Pray** over any needs or issues that were shared in your time together. Pray over the content discussed in your small group, highlighting the aspects that God's Spirit revealed to your group as important. **Confirm** your plans for your next gathering!