

THE POWER OF SELFLESSNESS

Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death--even death on a cross!

Philippians 2:5-8 (NIV)

❖ Understanding the Background of Chapter 5:

1. Nehemiah's main focus was REBUILDING the wall and RESTORING Jerusalem.
2. He was prepared for EXTERNAL OPPOSITION and willing to fight it.
3. Jews were asked to leave their harvest to rebuild, creating FINANCIAL hardships.
4. Many were making SACRIFICES others were GAINING from their sacrifice.

❖ The Curse of SELFISHNESS... The Deception of Callousness (vs. 1-5)

Now the men and their wives raised a great outcry against their Jewish brothers. Some were saying, "We and our sons and daughters are numerous; in order for us to eat and stay alive, we must get grain." Others were saying, "We are mortgaging our fields, our vineyards and our homes to get grain during the famine." Still others were saying, "We have had to borrow money to pay the king's tax on our fields and vineyards. 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."

Nehemiah 5:1-5 (NIV)

1. The FAMINE plus FINANCIAL hardships led to an OUTCRY for JUSTICE.
2. Parents were having to SELL their land and even their CHILDREN to survive.
3. The rich were exploiting the poor despite GOD'S WORD and GOOD of the CITY.
"If one of your countrymen becomes poor and sells himself to you, do not make him work as a slave... but as a hired hand till he can repay".

Leviticus 25:39-40 (NIV)

➤ Key Truth: If SATAN can't tempt you from WITHOUT, he attacks from WITHIN.

❖ The Call to SACRIFICE... A Courage to Call Out (vs. 6-11)

When I heard their outcry and these charges, I was very angry. 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 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. 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? I and my brothers and my men are also lending the people money and grain. But let the exacting of usury stop! 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."

Nehemiah 5:6-11 (NIV)

1. Nehemiah had a RIGHTEOUS INDIGNATION... he was DUMBFOUNDED.

Learn to do good. Seek justice. Help the oppressed. Defend the orphan. Fight for the rights of widows.

Isaiah 1:17 (NLT)

2. He responded with BOLDNESS despite this groups POWER and PRESTIGE.
3. For him, their SIN demanded an IMMEDIATE RESPONSE... not just empty words.

➤ Key Truth: Leaders need to SPEAK BOLDLY for TRUTH with a motive of LOVE.

- ❖ The Commitment to SERVE... The Character of True Conviction (vs. 12-13)

"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. 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.

Nehemiah 5:12-13 (NIV)

1. The leaders APOLOGIZED, but to Nehemiah that's not enough... he wanted ACTION.

But someone will say, "You have faith, and I have works." Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works.

James 2:18 (NKJV)

2. Nehemiah demanded they take an OATH and threatened God's JUSTICE.
3. From Nehemiah's CHALLENGE came true CONVICTION and real CHANGE.

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... 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. Furthermore, a hundred and fifty Jews and officials ate at my table, as well as those who came to us from the surrounding nations.

Nehemiah 5:14,16-17 (NIV)

- ❖ Closing Truth: The mark of a great leader is not his SPEECH but his SACRIFICE.

Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, serving as overseers--not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy for money, but eager to serve...

1 Peter 5:2 (NIV)

"For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

Mark 10:45 (NIV)