CORNERSTONECONNECTIONS
NOVEMBER302024

Scripture Story: Nehemiah 5; 6.
Commentary: *Prophets and Kings*, chapters 54; 55.

getting it right



THINKSTOCK

keytext

"For the poor will never cease from the land; therefore I command you, saying, 'You shall open your hand wide to your brother, to your poor and your needy, in your land.' "

(Deuteronomy 15:11, NKJV)

flashlight

"We were all debtors to divine justice, but we had nothing with which to pay the debt. Then the Son of God, who pitied us, paid the price of our redemption. He became poor that through His poverty we might be rich" (*Prophets and Kings*, p. 652).

what do you think?

We should devote ourselves to acts of kindness and good deeds especially to believers or nonbelievers? Explain your answer.

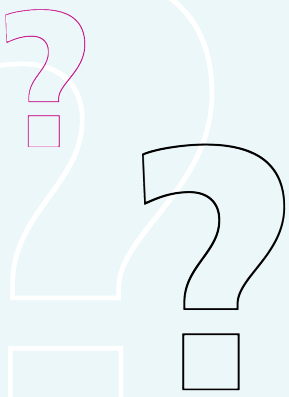
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Read Galatians 6:10 and consider whether you think what Paul is asking is backwards or right on. Why?

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did you know?

He who truly fears God, would rather toil day and night, and eat the bread of poverty, than to indulge the passion for gain that oppresses the widow and fatherless or turns the stranger from his right" (Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, p. 651).



INTO THE STORY

our vineyards belong to others.'

"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 charging your own people interest!' So I called together a large meeting to deal with them 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.

"Now the men and their wives raised a great outcry against their fellow Jews. 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 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

"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 us stop charging interest! 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.'

" '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 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."

(Nehemiah 5:1-13, NIV)

OUT OF THE STORY

This week's story occurs while the people of God are trying to rebuild the walls but can't contribute financially because of their poverty. Briefly describe what you see happening to God's people in this story.

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Circle the words "we," "our," and "us" as they recur in this passage. How do these words reveal a sense of solidarity against injustice?

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What is Nehemiah's reaction to injustice in verse 6? Explain how this kind of anger is good.

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How did God's original instructions serve to prevent this kind of tragedy? (Read Exodus 22:25; Deuteronomy 15:7, 8, 11; 23:19.)

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How do Nehemiah and the faithful people respond to the injustice? How do they begin to remedy the problem?

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Reflect for a moment on the significance of buying the slaves back in Nehemiah 5:8. What is the response of the nobles and the wealthy in this story to Nehemiah's rebuke?

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What is the message God has for you in this story?

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In a sentence, write what you think the good news is in this passage.

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What other stories or events in Scripture does this passage remind you of? In what way(s)?

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punch lines

"If anyone is poor among your fellow Israelites in any of the towns of the land the LORD your God is giving you, do not be hardhearted or tightfisted toward them. Rather, be openhanded and freely lend them whatever they need. . . . Give generously to them and do so without a grudging heart; then because of this the LORD your God will bless you in all your work and in everything you put your hand to" **(Deuteronomy 15:7-10, NIV).**

"Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ. . . . Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers" **(Galatians 6:2-10, NIV).**

"When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. . . . They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. . . . Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved" **(Acts 2:1, 42-47, NIV).**

further insight

"By deeds of liberality toward His poor we may prove the sincerity of our gratitude for the mercy extended to us."—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, p. 652

Sabbath

Read Galatians 6:10.

We acknowledge God's ownership by faithful service to Him and our fellow human beings, and by returning tithe and giving offerings for the proclamation of His gospel and the support and growth of His church. Stewardship is a privilege given to us by God for nurture in love and the victory over selfishness and covetousness. Stewards rejoice in the blessings that come to others as a result of their faithfulness" (Fundamental Belief 21, Stewardship).

Today's Bible verse asserts we should be good to "all people," but read Paul's words and think about why those words are true. What might our church be like if we started with Paul's words and followed Nehemiah's actions? How might these words be relevant for the people in Nehemiah's day?

Sunday

Read Nehemiah 5:1-13.

Read the passage in the *Into the Story* section of the student lesson and respond to the study questions provided. How is the theme of slavery and redemption portrayed in this section of Nehemiah? What provisions did God make to prevent this from happening? What is more surprising: the horrible slavery the rich engaged in or the fact that they obeyed the command of God and immediately made it right?

Monday

Read Nehemiah 5:5, 6.

Consider the message of the *Key Text* in this week's lesson that reveals how the sinful practices of Israel caused Nehemiah to become angry. In every person there is a sense of "ought" that stirs humanity to decry slavery. Nehemiah could not believe his countrymen were taking advantage of the poor seemingly without conscience. When in your life have you witnessed something terribly wrong and didn't know what to do about it? Why is it important that you speak out against evil with effectiveness like Nehemiah?

Tuesday

Read 2 Corinthians 8:9 and Romans 5:17.

In this week's *Further Insight* quote from *Prophets and Kings*, Ellen White connects the way Nehemiah and others purchased back their people from slavery to how Christ redeemed humanity from sin. In fact, "by deeds of liberality toward His poor we may prove the sincerity of our gratitude for the mercy extended to us" (*Prophets and Kings*, p. 652). What opportunities do we have today to demonstrate our understanding of what Christ did for us by extending compassion to others?

Wednesday

Read Galatians 6:2.

Read the *Punch Lines* in this week's lesson and choose two verses that you think Christians today need to understand and rewrite them in your own words. (Use the Notes section in the back of this journal to rewrite these verses.) Be sure to paraphrase this passage according to how it speaks to you. Pray that God gives you an opportunity to share these words with someone else this week.

Thursday

Read Nehemiah 5:12.

The positive way the people of God respond to Nehemiah's challenge is comforting. Is there a cause or an opportunity to serve someone in need that you and your friends can do as a group? Nehemiah's individual courage is remarkable, but some of Christianity's finest moments are when a community of people get together and do the right thing. Gather your friends together and plan a small act of liberation for someone in need.

Action Plan

Friday

Read Genesis 6:6-8; 1 Kings 18:36-39; Daniel 3:16-18; Daniel 6:21, 22; John 3:16; and John 15:13.

Throughout Scripture there are those who have stood alone in the way of evil. While true believers are drawn to their side for support, it takes a tremendous amount of courage to stand first. Whom do you recall in the pages of the Bible or history that have made such a stand for the right? How are they remembered?

It is interesting to watch Nehemiah seemingly work alone as a compass for truth and goodness in this story. But equally inspiring is the powerful way the people respond as a unit. Reflect on your journey with Christ and note the great group moments as well as crucial times when you, or someone you know, stood alone for what is right.

this week's reading*

Prophets and Kings, chapters 54; 55.

**Royalty and Ruin* is a special adaptation of *Prophets and Kings*, created for you by the Ellen G. White Estate and Pacific Press®. Get more information about it by going to www.cornerstoneconnections.net and clicking on "Conflict of the Ages series." By following the weekly reading plan, you will read at least one book of the Conflict of the Ages series each year.