

## THIS MAKES ME ANGRY

MAY 29, 2022 | BUILDING TOGETHER | NEHEMIAH 5 | PASTOR SCOTT TURANSKY

This week I went to BJ's. How many of you are members at BJs? Okay, a lot of you. I'm not a member of BJ's. But I decided to walk around there and see what was all going on. As I was walking around BJ's not being a member, I felt a little uncomfortable not being a member and walking around there. I was thinking, "I think more people ought to feel uncomfortable if they're not a member. If they're an attender of a church and not a member of a church, they should feel uncomfortable being at that church." I think some people say, "Well, membership isn't in the Bible." Well, that's wrong. The word 'member' itself is in the Bible talking about how we're one body and we're members of that body where we can use our spiritual gifts and so on. Of course the concept of membership is taught throughout the New Testament about the "one another" passages and commitment and connection. That's what membership is. Commitment and connection. I'd like you to think about that. Commitment and connection. But you might say, "Well, yes, that's true. But there's nothing in the Bible about filling out a form and meeting with the elders and then attending the Navigating GraceWay class." And I would say that fits under another principle about membership, which has to do with submitting. You submit to the church you're going to and if they have a system for becoming a member, then that's an important thing that we do. It's an important part. There's an equation. It looks like this when we talk about church membership: Connection, plus commitment, over submission. All three of those concepts are very important.

I want to tell you a story about my own life where I learned this when I was quite young. I got saved when I was three years old. My parents nurtured my faith and I grew in my faith over the years. But that's the marker for me when I was three. My parents wanted me to wait a little until I got a little older to get baptized. And so I didn't get baptized till I was six. But when I was six, it was a meaningful experience for me to get baptized to enjoy that relationship with Christ in a special way as I got baptized.

When I was ten years old, my family moved to Oklahoma City and my parents wanted to become members at the First Baptist Church of Oklahoma City. But they had a requirement, an odd requirement that you had to be baptized in a baptist church in order to become a member. I don't agree with that. It seems to me that it's a problem. But my dad came to me and taught me something very important that day. He came to me and he said, "Your mom and I are going to become members at First Baptist Church at Oklahoma City. You can become a member if you'd like or you don't have to become a member. But if you decide to become a member, you're going to have to get baptized again. Now we want you understand, Scott, that your first baptism at six years old is your baptism. That's your baptism, recognizing that you were a Christian. You were a believer that was baptized. This baptism is a different kind of baptism if you choose to get baptized. This is more of a baptism of submission. Submission to the church, because that's their

requirement.” And I did choose to get baptized again. I've been baptized twice. I know some of you been baptized twice as an infant and then as a believer, but I was baptized twice. As a believer once. This second baptism was really a baptism of submission. The lesson my father taught me in that imperfect situation was a valuable lesson not just for that church, but submission is an important concept we need in life. I need that concept of submission in my relationship with my wife. We enjoy a mutually submissive relationship together.

One of the things I really enjoy about GraceWay is I get to work with Pastor Don. Pastor Don and I have agreed that we are mutually submissive. That's really important to me in coming to GraceWay that as I'm working with him that we're submitting to each other. He's a great guy to submit to. And he submits to me. So we're continually working on that submission.

I want to encourage you to think about that in regards to membership here at GraceWay. Commitment, plus connection, over submission. And maybe God would motivate you to feel uncomfortable walking around the church and being a part of the church if you are not yet a member. Now I know if you're just visiting here or you're just attending, maybe you haven't made that decision. But if this is your church, you want to submit to GraceWay's plan for becoming a member and join in with others that are members as well.

Let's pray together.

[PRAYER] Heavenly Father, we thank you for your word. As we look at it today, we ask you to open our hearts and make us receptive to what you want us to receive today from your word. Thank you for this story of Nehemiah and the example he is and the things we learn from him. We're grateful for that, Lord. Thank you very much. In Jesus' name, amen.

Last week when we looked at the story of Nehemiah, do you remember that word *charah*. That word that is anger. We talked about how anger in our lives can turn us into mean people, like Sanballat and Tobiah in the first part of Nehemiah 4. And then we talked about how living with mean people gives us more of a tendency in our lives to become mean ourselves. We need to be careful of that. And so we looked at how Nehemiah and his crew avoided becoming mean themselves in a number of different ways. Really interesting passage last week. If you didn't get to hear that sermon, I would go to [gracewaybc.org](http://gracewaybc.org) and listen to it or watch it or read it. It's all there for you to take advantage of those applications.

But here's the next thing in chapter 5, the title of my sermon today is “This Makes Me Angry.” And the reason for that is because today we're going to get another side of anger, that we should all be angry about things. Now last week I talked about we can't hold on to personal injustice in our lives. When we hold on to personal injustice that's what turns us into a mean person. I gave the illustration of our heart's too small for that, so we offload it to the Lord. He's the one who takes the personal injustices of ours and He's the one who deals with them and manages them. We give them up. But today we're going to learn about how we should be angry, not about personal injustice, but about social injustice. Today we're going to see some people who are poor, very poor, and suffering because of that. Poverty is one of the social injustices in our world today. We're going to look at the passage and see how Nehemiah handled this while he's working

on the wall, while he's protecting people. He's going to take care of some other people because of social injustice.

We're going to look at Nehemiah 5 today and I want to read the first ten verses. Would you please stand with me in honor of God's word, His inspired Word. I want to read the first ten verses. It says – *Now there arose a great outcry of the people and of their wives* (so it's not just the men, but their wives) *against their Jewish brothers. For there were those who said* (there are going to be four complaints here...complaint number one), *“With our sons and our daughters, we are many. So let us get grain, that we may eat and keep alive.”* In other words, we don't have enough food. Complaint number two: *There were also those who said, “We are mortgaging our fields, our vineyards, and our houses to get grain because of the famine.”* In other words, we're giving our houses and our fields as collateral in order to get food because of the famine. Number three: *“And there were those who said, “We have borrowed money for the king's tax on our fields and our vineyards.”* In other words, we don't have enough money to pay the taxes and so we are having to mortgage for that as well. Number four: *“Now our flesh is as the flesh of our brothers, our children are as their children. Yet we are forcing our sons and our daughters to be slaves, and some of our daughters have already been enslaved, but it is not in our power to help it, for other men have our fields and our vineyards.”* So indentured servants. Our children are going out and having to work so that we can have food. That's the fourth complaint.

Notice verse 6. Nehemiah says – *I was very charah when I heard their outcry and these words. I took counsel with myself* (that's an odd saying), *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 and said to them, “We, as far as we are able, have bought back our Jewish brothers who have been sold to the nations, but you even sell your brothers that they may be sold to us!” They were silent and could not find a word to say. So I said, “The thing that you are doing is not good.”* We need more people to say that. *“The thing that you are doing is not good. Ought you not to walk in the fear of our God to prevent the taunts of the nations our enemies? Moreover, I and my brothers and my servants are lending them money and grain. Let us abandon this exacting of interest.*

You may be seated.

What a fascinating part of the story. Here's Nehemiah working hard to build walls and protect people. And while he's doing that he's going to take care of a social injustice issue. Right there I think there's a good application for us because we get busy doing the things in our lives, but there's always the social injustices that exist in society that we need to be caring about. That we should have some visceral response about. Whether it's anger or sadness or getting upset. Whatever it is, we should feel the pain of social injustice.

Now the social injustice described here is the social injustice of poverty. Poverty is a problem in our world today. In fact, we have a measurement of poverty. When we talk about extreme poverty, we're talking about people who don't have access to clean water, food, clothing, and shelter. We have a standard to measure that in society today that anyone living under \$1.90/day would be classified as living in extreme poverty. I don't think we experience extreme poverty for

most of us. We're pretty protected in our lives. And so we don't get to see it as much as maybe we should in order to experience the anger that comes and the challenge that comes with that.

I'm going to tell you a story about a time when I came in contact with extreme poverty that really changed my life. I was thirty-three years old when I was invited to go speak and do some evangelistic crusades in Africa, in the country of Kenya. I'd never been there before. I said, "Yes, I will come if I could bring my nine-year-old son with me to go to Africa." He was thrilled. We're going to Africa. And we went there to speak in these evangelistic crusades. But we took two days to do something special. Because while we were talking about this in the community, one of the churches (you know this church probably) up in West Windsor, there's a church called Windsor Chapel. This church has a Sunday school group and they were sponsoring a child in Kenya. And they said to us, "Could you take some gifts to this child we support in Kenya?" A very personal kind of approach. I said, "Sure. We'll try." So I contacted the World Vision headquarters office in Nairobi, and they said, "Sure, come on." So we planned two days to go and visit this particular situation.

We arrived at the Nairobi office early in the morning and the people who got into the Land Rover were me and Josh, then a friend from the church where we work because she says, "This sounds a little odd to me. You're going out in the wilderness like this. I'm going with you to make sure you're safe." And then we had our translator and we had the driver of the car who was in charge of this little escapade that we were going on. And he said, "Before we go visit this girl, we're going to stop at a World Vision distribution center because today they're giving out grain." And I said, "Great, let's go." We drove two hours over roads that we would not consider roads. They were up and down and such crevices. You needed a Land Rover to travel this distance.

We pulled into this compound where hundreds of people were sitting on the ground waiting for the grain to be distributed. They knew today was the day. We got out of the Land Rover and I walked around. I've seen pictures on *World Vision* magazine of distended bellies and skin and bones. It's just hard to look at the pictures. But I was seeing this in real life in front of me as I walked around these people who were starving. Starving to death if it weren't for World Vision coming in and providing some grain for them. It was really hard for me to see all of the things that were going on.

When lunchtime came along they told us if you want to eat anything, you better bring your own food because you're not going to find it out there. So I did bring a lunch, but I was too sick to eat it. There's no way I'm going to eat food. These people are starving to death. In fact, I was willing to give my food away, my lunch. And they said, "No, no, you can't. If you gave this food to them, they would get sick on this food that you brought. Furthermore, there would be a fight that would break out if you brought out your food." So I wasn't able to give away my lunch. But I learned more about World Vision. I learned about the way that World Vision is operating, bringing barges of food over to countries where people are starving. You know, some of those barges are off the coast waiting because the government (not in Kenya but in other governments) are charging huge taxes or levies or bribes on those barges and won't let them come in. That makes me angry, especially when I'm seeing what I'm seeing in front of me. It was a terrible experience. It marked my life. That is extreme poverty.

We continued on our trip, another three-hour drive on these wild roads until we pulled up at the school where this girl went to school. Now they had no way of knowing we were coming because there was no telephones or cell phones or internet in those days. They had no idea we're coming in. When we came into the compound and they heard that we were there, they were very excited because here's a white man and his son come to visit our school. And so all the children came out and we had gifts for one of them and they were excited that this one girl is going to get these gifts. She just had her hand over her mouth and nose the whole time. She was so embarrassed that she was singled out and we're giving her these gifts. Windsor Chapel had provided a dress for her. It was a white dress for her. I don't know why you need a white dress in Africa. But anyway, gave her a white dress. And we gave her a journal she could write in. And this whole big bag of candy. They call them sweets in Kenya. We gave those to her and she was just so pleased.

Now all of this is taking place through translators, mind you, so I'm not understanding a lot of the things that are going on. But then there's this kind of something going on. And they had said to her, "Go try the dress on. Go try the dress on." So she went in and she put on the dress and she's twelve years old, and the dress fit perfectly on her. Then everybody starts to laugh. And I'm like, "Why is everybody laughing?" And even the people with me are laughing. Everybody's laughing. What's going on? They said, "Well, what they're saying is this man has brought his son who's nine years old to marry a wife. And this is the girl and this is her wedding dress, this white dress for her." So now I'm laughing. We're all laughing. It was a great experience for us.

And then they said, "Would you like to go visit her home?" I said, "Boy, this is an experience I don't want to miss. I want to go visit her home. Yes." So the girl got into the Land Rover with all of us. And we went down this walking path in the Land Rover where the brush was sweeping the sides of the car until we got a mile away. She must walk a mile to the school every day. We get a mile away and drive into the compound where there are three huts and a man standing there with a machete. I think he was wondering what in the world are these people coming into my compound for? So he was prepared with his little machete thinking he's going to do something to us if whatever. But his daughter gets out of the car and then he smiles. And when he finds out why we're there, he is so grateful. Because we represent the people who were allowing him and his family to get food and for his daughter to get schooling. What a privilege. And so he wants to show me around (all through a translator). And he's saying, "These are our three huts. I live in this hut. And my wife and my children live in this hut. And this is the hut that we cook in." These were huts, but the thatch was missing on the roof, had holes all in it because there wasn't enough grain to provide the thatch that would be used for the roofing material. This was a very poor situation. This man was dressed in what I wouldn't call a shirt. But he had a shirt kind of on that was more like a rag and he had shorts on tied with a rope.

So as we're going around and enjoying our conversation, the translator says to me, "I'm going to tell you what he just said, but you have to say no." I said, "Okay." She says, "He wants to invite you for dinner." I said, "No, no. We can't stay for dinner because we need to get on the road." And so a little bit later she translates something else as well. "He wants to give you a chicken to take home to your wife in America." And I said, "No, no." She said, "No. You can't say no. You have to say yes and receive the chicken because that is the honorable thing to do. It will be rude for you to not receive the chicken." I turned to her and I said, "I've never held a chicken. I don't

know what a chicken is. I mean, I know what a chicken is, but all I do is eat them. I've never held one." And she starts laughing. She says, "They're going to tie the string around the feet of the chicken. You'll be fine." So they handed me this chicken and we decided that we're going to throw the chicken out the window on the way home. So someone else will find the chicken because we don't need a chicken. And I'm certainly not taking it home to my wife in the suitcase.

So we start heading out and they are laughing so much about this thirty-three year old man who's never held a chicken. I'm so rich that I have other people to hold my chickens is what they're thinking. And so they're laughing and laughing. So they decided that they we would all eat the chicken at our location where we're going to spend the night and then it would be my duty to kill the chicken. I said, "Okay. I'll kill the chicken in one condition: that you take the string off the feet of the chicken. Because we have the saying in America that someone who's unorganized is like a chicken running around with their head cut off. And I've never seen that. I would like to see what that looks like." They laughed and laughed. They said, "No, no, we can't do that. Because the chicken will run away. We won't be able to find him." So I never got to see that. But I did cut off the chicken's head. They cooked up the chicken for dinner. But I couldn't eat the poor chicken. I don't know if it's because of the emotions of the day or because I held that nice little cute chicken. I don't know. But that day I experienced something really different that I would never have known before. Extreme poverty. Extreme poverty.

I think Nehemiah is experiencing some of that as these complaints are coming out. And so that's why he's so angry about what's taking place because of the social injustice. And he says this is not good. That's what he said to the people. This is not good. We need more people in our world who are going to take a stand and say, "This is not good."

There are a lot of social injustices that exist in our society. Poverty is one of them. Abortion is another where we take the side of the unborn child and we take a stand for those rights, while at the same time recognizing there's always a mom, sometimes a dad involved in that picture who's suffering and concerned. So we're trying to care for those people in the midst of that. There's racial prejudice. There's women who are abused. Sometimes the abuse is just the fact they don't earn the same amount that men do in the workplace. But sometimes there's domestic violence. Sometimes there's child abuse, sexual abuse, sex trafficking. All of these social injustices that take place should make us angry, should create this visceral response like it did with Nehemiah.

So I think you saw in verse 9 that it says *he counseled with himself*. I like those words. *He counseled with himself*. I do something like that in my own life. Because I have all these voices in my head telling me the priorities. You know, I have the dad priorities and the grandpa priorities, the husband priorities. And then I've got the GraceWay teaching priorities, and the leading of GraceWay, and the caring of people priorities. And then I've got homeowner responsibilities and I've got a car. I've got all these priorities that are coming to me. So regularly I have to have what I call an internal staff meeting to deal with all of these things in my own life. I invite Jesus to be part of that and we try to figure out which one of these priorities to work on. I know some of you are saying there's medication for that problem.

That's what Nehemiah is doing. He's pondering this. And he's saying, "Okay, I'm going to do something about this. I'm going to have an influence." And he does this in part because he's the

governor of the land and he can involve himself in public policy. Notice what he does, starting in verse 11. It says – *Return to them this very day their fields, their vineyards, their olive orchards, and their houses, and the percentage of money, grain, wine, and oil that you have been exacting from them.*” Then they said, “We will restore these and require nothing from them. We will do as you say.” It looks like all they needed was some leadership. I think there are people today waiting for some leadership. They're confused by all kinds of things going on in our world. Is there a right and wrong? So when someone says, “This is not good, this is what you need to do,” some people say, “Okay. We just needed a leader.” And that's what happens here.

*And I called the priests and made them swear to do as they had promised. I also shook out the fold of my garment and said, “So may God shake out every man from his house and from his labor who does not keep this promise. So may he be shaken out and emptied.” And all the assembly said “Amen” and praised the Lord.*

So what Nehemiah is doing is he's taking his role in public policy as the governor and making some changes. But now there's a switch in the passage, starting at verse 14. It says – *And the people did as they had promised.* But then it's going to talk about Nehemiah's personal life. Here's where I think we find some applications for our own hearts and our own lives as we're trying to address some of these things.

Verse 14 says – *And the people did as they had promised. 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.* There was a food allowance of the governor. The Persian Empire had allowed the governor to tax the people so that he could have this allowance, this allowance for food. And Nehemiah said, no, I'm not going to take advantage of the people. I'm not even going to take this allowance. I'm not going to take this financial opportunity that I have. I'm not going to do that. Instead, I'm going to allow that money to stay in the hands of these people or give it to whatever. That's what he's saying.

I think about our own lives, because that's what we do. As Christians we set a certain amount of our money aside and we say, “I have the opportunity or the privilege to take that money and use it for myself. But I'm not going to do that. I'm going to give that money to the Lord's work. And that's what we do. We limit our own pleasure, limit our own ability to have more. We set limits on that and we take some and we give it to the Lord's work. That's essentially it seems what Nehemiah is doing here.

He says – *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.* So everybody had to pay, but Nehemiah's saying I'm not going to do that. I have opportunity to do that. It's even a right that I have. Sometimes in our lives, we think that some of the new things, the upgrades, the things that we want in our lives are really rights that we have. And maybe they are. But sometimes we sacrifice those rights because of some bigger cause. And that's what Nehemiah is doing here in this story.

He says – *Even their servants lorded it over the people. But I did not do so, because of the fear of God.* This is the second time the word *fear of God* is mentioned. The fear of God is us

recognizing that God is so awesome. It's not being afraid of Him. It's so much respect for God and who He is that I want to fit into His plans, I want to give my life to the Lord, I want to be used for His service. That's what the fear of God is all about.

*I also persevered in the work on this wall.* In other words, I did my work of building the wall, while at the same time I had an eye out for social injustice. That's a good application for us. It's not saying give up everything you're doing and fight the cause for whatever social injustice you're interested in. Although you might choose to do that. He's saying while you're doing what you're already doing, keep an eye on social injustice because that's what God wants us to do.

*And we acquired no land, and all my servants were gathered there for the work. Moreover, there were at my table (now notice his generosity here) 150 men, Jews and officials, besides those who came to us from the nations that were around us. Now what was prepared (notice) at my expense for each day was (this is a huge cooking expedition here) one ox and six choice sheep and birds (I assume the birds are chickens), 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.* And then I like this last statement. A statement we also can say. *Remember for my good, O my God, all that I have done for this people.*

Lord, I'm doing this because of my relationship with you. I'm involved in my life with you and love you so much that I want to make sure that I'm not just trying to get as much money as possible. I'm not trying to spend as much money as possible. What I'm trying to do is limit some of the opportunities I have in order to care for others. What a beautiful picture.

I think more of us need to have this internal staff meeting and ask the question, "Lord, how would you like me to reorient my priorities now in my life? What would you like me to do?" I think more of us need to be angry about social injustice when we see it. More of us need to stand up and say, "That is not good. I'm going to be part of the solution."

I think this is what Jesus was trying to illustrate in Luke 10. In Luke 10, the Bible says *an expert of the law* or the ESV says *a lawyer* came to Him and said, "Hey, how can I get this eternal life that you're talking about?" And Jesus says, "What do you think?" back to him. And the man says, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength and love your neighbor as yourself." And Jesus says, "Exactly. Do that." And the Bible says then – *and the man, trying to justify himself* (very interesting statement), *says, "Who is my neighbor?"* I think he's saying, "Well, does that mean the guy on my left and right are two houses down, or two houses down on this side?" And Jesus says, "Let me tell you a story." And He tells the famous story that we all know, that story of the Good Samaritan that defines who our neighbor is. Someone who goes out of his way. The Bible says about the Good Samaritan, that he saw the man who was bleeding, the victim of social injustice. He was hurt on the side of the road and this man, the Bible says, had compassion, this internal response, visceral response. And out of that, he steps out and says, "I'm going to be part of the solution. I want to help this person."

Oh Jesus is giving an amazing message there to us about who is our neighbor. I think that we must have in our lives opportunities to fit into God's plans. Because God is concerned about the fatherless, He's concerned about the widows, He's concerned about those who are suffering,

injustice. And He's called on us as His messengers, as His Christians, as His servants to fit into His plans to be part of the work that God would have us do in our world.

I encourage you. Maybe God wants you to have an internal staff meeting and think about the things that are happening in this passage and how God might have you participate to fight the challenges of social injustice today.

Would you stand with me and let's pray together.

[PRAYER] Heavenly Father, we're grateful for the privilege of being your servants and your children. We think about all the blessings that we have and all the things that we enjoy about being your children. Lord, we know that that comes with responsibility – responsibility to be holy and to serve you and do all kinds of things. But Lord, cause us to remember the needs, the outcry of people, social injustice. Lord, I ask that you'd help us to be sensitive to that and to be able to find ways that we can care for others. Lord, as a church we support Choice One, we support Restoring Hearts that are contributing in a very real way in our community to the social injustices that take place. We ask that you would use the funds of GraceWay, that you would use the people of GraceWay, that you would use all of who we are and what we do to have a heart that follows after your heart. Thank you, Father, for your gifts that you give to us. Make us good stewards of them, we ask. In Jesus' name, amen.