

Northwest Community Evangelical Free Church

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Sermon manuscript

SERMON SERIES: Forward - Together.

(studies in Nehemiah)

What it Takes to STOP God's Workl

(Nehemiah 5)

Study #7

Introduction: In the absence of teamwork...

Nehemiah burst onto the scene in Jerusalem, loaded for bear. He called the Jews to the great work of rebuilding the wall and setting up the gates around the city of Jerusalem.

Inspired by Nehemiah's enthusiasm and by a vision for God's glory, the people put their hands to the work with a hearty, "***Let us arise and build.***"

Excitement builds in the third chapter of Nehemiah's book. We read of the beginning stages of the wall-rebuilding project and see the power of **teamwork**. Over forty work crews labored at various places intent on one thing: Let's build this wall - and they made GREAT progress.

Teamwork propels the work forward. Teamwork, that great force multiplier, was in place in Jerusalem. Teamwork propels ANY work forward.

But the results are always ugly when teamwork is absent.

When soldiers in the field aren't all on the same page the results are tragic. Lack of teamwork in battle results in death.

In business, a company's downturn is not always due to the strength of the opposition. Often it can be attributed to the gossip among employees or to one department not communicating with another department.

When love is present, a family can endure tremendous hardships and setbacks. But, absent love, absent an attitude of "We're all in this together" no family can stand.

And how many times have we seen sports teams with superior talent miss playoffs or lose to less talented teams because the more talented team imploded due to players not playing "team ball"?

When teammates don't play "team ball" the team loses. When employees don't all pull in the same direction, the company loses. And the ultimate tragedy is that when the people of God are not walking in love, the work of God suffers.

Today, we see exactly this dynamic going on in Nehemiah's Jerusalem. This is a sad chapter. And it is sad not only for the damage done to the workers who were victimized, but for the damage done to the work.

The work of God can withstand incredible pressure from outside. In fact, the church of Jesus Christ is often healthiest in places where there is overt persecution. But the work stops - the work MUST stop - when there is internal strife.

As we open to chapter 5, we are confronted with a outbreak of exploitation. In telling the story, Nehemiah uses the term "brethren" five times to emphasize the family bonds that exist between God's people.

Unfortunately, in what we see today, those bonds are stretched to the breaking point.

Here, the death blow to rebuilding the walls around Jerusalem is supplied by insiders. The "unkindest cut of all" is delivered by Jew against Jew.

Mandatory Work Stoppage. (vv. 1-13)

The Anguished Cry of the Poor. (vv. 1-5)

The haves vs. the have-nots (v. 1)

[5:1] Now there was a great outcry of the people and of their wives¹ against their Jewish brothers.

This outcry came right in the middle of the work project, while the wall was being rebuilt. This outcry could not have come at a more inconvenient time.

But Nehemiah recognized that the situation which the complaints raised represented a need so great that it had to be dealt with immediately.

We continue reading and find that there were three different complaints from different groups of people. The outcries come from the poor (the “have-nots”) - against the rich (the “haves”).

The complaints of the poor (vv. 2-5)

[5:2] For there were those who said, “We, our sons and our daughters are many; therefore let us get grain that we may eat and live.”

One set of complaints was coming from the workers who owned no property. These folks were on the verge of starvation. They were hungry and told Nehemiah about it.

I can only imagine the feelings of parents who are unable to provide for their children. God has richly blessed Kathy and me in that we never had to face the situation of NOT having food to put on the table when our children lived at home. My heart goes out to parents who are faced with that reality - and I know it goes on all over the world today.

¹ Women are usually in the background in Jewish writings, generally, and in the book of Nehemiah, but not here. Whenever women are mentioned, there is an implicit, “*Sit up and take notice.*” Here, the woman, along with their husbands, cried out greatly.

What made it especially tough in Jerusalem was that while the poor families were suffering, their fellow Jews - with whom they were working shoulder to shoulder on the wall - were filled with all the good food they needed. Hmmm...

Others of the poor were suffering in other ways.

[5:3] There were others who said, “We are mortgaging our fields, our vineyards and our houses that we might get grain because of the famine.” [4] Also there were those who said, “We have borrowed money for the king’s tax on our fields and our vineyards.”

These were having to mortgage their property and possessions in order to get grain to feed their families. In the recent past they had been making ends meet. Now they can’t.

I wonder why...

Is it possible that they were having a hard time feeding their families because of their work on the wall? I wonder if they were giving all their time and energy to support the work of God. And now, without income or savings, they were having to sell off assets to meet obligations.

With what we have heard so far, we are sad. But what was going on will make us more than sad if we think about it.

In Jerusalem, it was worse than people suffering from a natural disaster (yes, there was a famine).² It was worse than the loss of a job forcing someone to have to borrow money to pay taxes. The poorer Jews were actually being forced to sell their children into slavery to get grain.

[5] “Now our flesh is like the flesh of our brothers, our children like their children.³ Yet behold, we are forcing our sons and our daughters to be slaves, and some of our daughters are forced into

² Can you imagine this? Nehemiah had the nerve to begin a major construction project in the middle of a famine. But, evidently, some inconvenience like a famine was not considered an insurmountable obstacle to God’s people - if God was in the work.

³ The poorer Jews pointed out the illogical cruelty of the situation as they spoke to Nehemiah, by affirming their solidarity with all Jews. They sure weren’t being treated as “brothers and sisters in the Lord”.

bondage already, and we are helpless because our fields and vineyards belong to others.”

Here is what happened. A poor family had to borrow money from a wealthy family in order to buy grain and to pay taxes. Because of the hard economic times, though, the poor family defaulted on their loan.

Unfortunately, after having given the wealthy family their property and their possessions, the only collateral the poor family had left to offer was their children. And the wealthy Jews actually took the poor family’s children from them and made them slaves.

Can we see how it might happen? You take a loan out with AIG or Lehman Brothers. After a few months you fall behind in the payments, and are soon hopelessly in arrears.

So, the lending agency takes all your possessions, including your home. That doesn’t quite cover the damage, **SO THEY TAKE YOUR BABY.**

Yes, this is sad. Hard economic times do create difficult times for some folks. But Nehemiah’s response was not sadness. He was furious.

The Voice of Advocacy (vv. 6-11)

Emotion. (v. 6)

[5:6] Then I was very angry when I had heard their outcry and these words.

Why was Nehemiah “**very angry**”?

It was not the famine. Famines happen. Natural disasters happen. People don’t name kids “Katrina” any more and babies likely won’t be named “Ike” in Houston for some time. But natural disasters don’t prompt anger.

Nor was it the poverty. Poverty is an ever-present reality in this world.

No. Nehemiah was infuriated over the exploitation of the poor by the rich, by the fact that the rich were taking advantage of those who were suffering, by price gouging and injustice and lovelessness.

And the specific charge he levels against the wealthy is that they were exacting usury, or as The Message has it, “*Each one of you is gouging his brother.*”

Confrontation. (v. 7)

[5:7a] I consulted with myself and contended with the nobles and the rulers and said to them, “You are exacting usury, each from his brother.”

Usury is not a term we commonly toss about today. It refers to nothing more than a lender charging interest on a loan. But, there were very clear instructions in the Old Testament Law about the practice of usury among the Jews.

Moses writes, ***[Deuteronomy 23:20] You may charge interest to a foreigner, but to your countrymen you shall not charge interest...***⁴

These wealthy Jews were guilty of breaking the Law of God. They were charging interest to people who couldn’t afford to pay it - and the result was that poor people were suffering terribly.⁵

Calling the people of the city together, he ***[5:7b]...held a great assembly against them.***

⁴ Again, in Deuteronomy 15:7-8, “***[7] If there is a poor man with you, one of your brothers, in any of your towns in your land which the Lord your God is giving you, you shall not harden your heart, nor close your hand from your poor brother; [8] but you shall freely open your hand to him, and shall generously lend him sufficient for his need in whatever he lacks.*** See also Exodus 22:25 - “***If you lend money to My people, to the poor among you, you are not to act as a creditor to him; you shall not charge him interest.***”

⁵ The similarities between what was happening in Nehemiah chapter 5 and what has been reported in the US over the past several days could not be more striking. While there are differences (many of those who are defaulting on loans today and losing their homes got into trouble because of greed, not need), yet the potential harm suffered by taking out loans at interest cannot be missed in 2008.

Notice something very important here. The work of rebuilding the wall has stopped. Nothing has managed to stop the work from going forward up to this point.

But, this disregard for the Law of God manifested in a gross lack of love from Jew to fellow Jew stops the work.

Next week, we are going to backtrack into chapter 4 and drift forward into chapter 6 of Nehemiah to see the wall-builders encounter overt attempts by enemies to stop the work. They tried to demoralize the workers, using threats and intimidations, discouragement and fear. It didn't work. The project continued and the work of God went forward.

But here, when lovelessness rears its ugly head, Nehemiah is forced to say, in effect, *"Forget the wall. Something is going on that is so wrong that we have to leave the work until it is dealt with."*

Lovelessness is a problem of such magnitude that the work of God cannot move forward until it is dealt the death blow.

Having confronted them with their sin, he didn't leave them in suspense about what he wanted them to do about it. He pointed the way to change, by pointing to a positive example - himself.

Positive example. (vv. 8, 10a)

Nehemiah, redeemer (v. 8)

[5:8] I said to them, "We according to our ability have redeemed our Jewish brothers who were sold to the nations; now would you even sell your brothers that they may be sold to us?" Then they were silent and could not find a word to say.

This is a reference to a practice that we know many Jews in Nehemiah's day followed. While he was in Susa, in captivity, a slave serving in the King's court as a cupbearer, Nehemiah sent money back to Jerusalem - and to other places where Jews were enslaved - to purchase Jews' freedom.

Contrast THAT practice with what was going on in Jerusalem. There, the rich Jews were selling their brothers and forcing them back into slavery.

When brought to see their wrong, they just hung their heads in shame. They were caught with their hands in the cookie jar; they had no defense.

Second, he had been helping the "have-nots" since arriving in Jerusalem.

Nehemiah, benevolent banker (v. 10a)

[5:10a] "And likewise I, my brothers and my servants are lending them money and grain."

From the very beginning of his time in Palestine, Nehemiah had made it his aim to support the poor of Jerusalem with what they needed. Again, contrast that with the wealthy who had been living in Jerusalem for the whole time and were taking the impoverished Jews to the cleaners.

Clearly, the interests of the poor were being stomped by the rich. But more was at stake than the plight of God's people. God's reputation was being dragged through the mud by the loveless behavior of the wealthy against the poor.

Negative example (v. 9)

[5:9] Again I said, "The thing which you are doing is not good; should you not walk in the fear of our God because of the reproach of the nations, our enemies?"

What would the outsiders and the observers and the enemies of the Jews say when they heard what the rich were doing to the poor? *"Ha. They are just like we are."*

There is a powerful impact bound up in the negative example of the people of God living lovelessly and lawlessly.

Why would any Persian, Canaanite or Egyptian be drawn to faith in the God of Israel if His followers behave so badly? Not a very attractive witness, huh?

Governor Nehemiah brought the meeting to a close with a crystal-clear exhortation to application.

Action plan (v. 11)

[5:11] “Please, give back to them this very day their fields, their vineyards, their olive groves and their houses, also the hundredth part of the money and of the grain, the new wine and the oil that you are exacting from them.”

First, stop exacting usury. Second, pay back what you have unjustly received. Make it right. Restitution.

To simply stop the practice of usury was not enough. The wrongs of the past had to be made right.⁶

From the first moment that he learned of the atrocities by the rich against the poor, Nehemiah was determined NOT to send a message, NOT to make a statement, and NOT to simply express dissatisfaction.

There were going to be changes.

The Glad Resolve of the Convicted (and the repentant) (vv. 12-13)

Confession: Bad for the reputation; good for the soul (v. 12a)

[5:12a] Then they said, “We will give it back and will require nothing from them; we will do exactly as you say.”

No doubt Nehemiah was glad for these comments. But as if to say, “*Talk is cheap.*” he continued with a few more choice words.

⁶ Remember the case of Zacchaeus, the Jew who served as the Roman stooge, collecting taxes against his own countrymen. When he was converted after talking with Jesus, he not only left off his former practices, he repaid those whom he had cheated.

Bound with oath/curse (vv. 12b-13a)

[12b]... So I called the priests and took an oath from them that they would do according to this promise. [13a] I also shook out the front of my garment and said, “Thus may God shake out every man from his house and from his possessions who does not fulfill this promise; even thus may he be shaken out and emptied.”

He called them to make a public promise, binding them with public accountability.

And then he placed a curse on them that would follow if they did not follow through with their promise.

The response of the guilty is most gratifying...

Conviction’s fruit: WORSHIP and OBEDIENCE (v. 13)

[5:13b]...And all the assembly said, “Amen.” And they praised the Lord. Then the people did according to this promise.

The old-time Puritans (who have gotten bad press, by the way - they were really joyfilled, godly people, by and large.) wrote in their books of “*the joy of conviction.*”

They knew that for the child of God, nothing was sweeter than the moment of spiritual breakthrough. That moment when God’s Spirit put His finger on a particular sin, conviction of the wrongness of the sin was brought home, and a deep longing to forsake the sin and to follow the path of obedience took over.

This doesn’t get enough press. That obeying God, loving people feels really, really good.

But that was what is going on here. The word AMEN, means “so be it.” It is taken from the Hebrew verb meaning, “true.”

When they said, “**AMEN**” they were saying that they agreed from the heart with everything Nehemiah was saying - from the exhortations to love and obey, to the oath by which they bound themselves, to the curse under which Nehemiah placed them.

[5:13c]...Then the people did according to this promise.

They stopped usury. They gave the people their land and possessions back. They returned the children to the poor. They returned the interest they had charged over the years.

What we have seen to this point is that lovelessness is sufficient to stop the work of God. The rest of Nehemiah's fifth chapter shows that lovefulness greases the wheels so that the work of God moves forward.

Love: The Grease on the Wheels of God's Work (vv. 14-19)

Nehemiah's Unselfishness (vv. 14-15)

Releasing legitimate perks (vv. 14-15a)

Nehemiah was the Persian appointed governor of Palestine. He was a big-wig with rights and privileges and he was paid a handsome salary for his service in government.

But, in addition, he was given a food allowance from which he could pay for meals and entertainment expenses that came with the territory of serving in the Persian government.

This food allowance money was not paid by the Persians, though. It was to be collected in the form of a tax exacted from the residents of Jerusalem. The idea was that the citizens should help Nehemiah with his entertainment bill, a legitimate expense for government officials.

Nehemiah could have rightfully taken the Governor's food allowance. But he didn't ever take it.

[5:14] Moreover, from the day that I was appointed to be their governor in the land of Judah, from the twentieth year to the thirty-second year of King Artaxerxes, for twelve years, neither I nor my kinsmen have eaten the governor's food allowance. [15] But the former governors who were before me laid burdens on the people and took from

them bread and wine besides forty shekels of silver; even their servants⁷ domineered the people.

And why, despite the fact that everybody knows that governors take the allotted food allowance, did Nehemiah NOT take the food allowance?

Compassion's source (v. 15b)

[15b]...But I did not do so because of the fear of God.

Nehemiah acted with compassion, and did not burden the people, because he feared God. A true fear of God always works itself out as obedience to God and love to others.

Fear of God moved Nehemiah to condemn usury. And it is what prompted him to not take all that was rightfully his as governor.

According to the Bible, there are some things that are more important than our own personal rights.

The testimony of God's people before a watching world is one of them. Paul encouraged believers to allow themselves to be wronged and defrauded rather than engage in a Christian vs. Christian lawsuit.⁸

In 1 Corinthians 8 and 9, he encouraged us to be willing to give up rights for the sake of weak Christians, and for the sake of those outside the church.

Sometimes, if you sacrifice something to which you have a legitimate right, you move farther down the road toward maturity, you give a taste of God's love to someone else, the Gospel makes progress in your neighborhood, or your church becomes a bit more Christlike. (You might even protect the Body of Christ from needless squabbling and prevent a work stoppage.)

⁷ And, if the treatment they received from the former governors wasn't bad enough, we read that even the servants of the former governors took advantage of the poor Jews. Here, minor government officials (bureaucrats) lorded it over the people.

⁸ 1 Cor. 6:7 - ***[1 Corinthians 6:7] Actually, then, it is already a defeat for you, that you have lawsuits with one another. Why not rather be wronged? Why not rather be defrauded?***

As this part of the story comes to a close, Nehemiah rehearses WHY he was in Jerusalem in the first place. And, he tells us that all of his actions have been taken in light of that one purpose.

Single-Minded Devotion (vv. 16-18)

Never forgetting the MISSION (v. 16)

[5:16] I also applied myself to the work on this wall; we did not buy any land, and all my servants were gathered there for the work.

Nehemiah never bought land. Sure, he could have. He certainly had the money to do it. But, he had not come to Jerusalem to invest in real estate.

He stayed on his purpose. He and his servants gave themselves to the work because he was a man of “one thing.”

III: secular examples; athletes, businessmen, politicians, etc..

III: Others who were people of one thing - David (with some notable lapses; Noah (the ark); Paul, Philippians 3.

And, because he was a “one thing” kind of man, he wouldn’t allow any activity to derail him from fulfilling that task for which he had come.

Refusing to burden the workers (vv. 17-18a)

[5:17] Moreover, there were at my table one hundred and fifty Jews and officials, besides those who came to us from the nations that were around us. [18a] Now that which was prepared for each day was one ox and six choice sheep, also birds were prepared for me; and once in ten days all sorts of wine were furnished in abundance.⁹

⁹ The amount of food King Solomon required for one day makes Nehemiah’s amount appear minuscule. From 1 Kings 4:22-23: 300 bushels of fine flour; 600 bushels of meal; 10 fattened oxen; 20 pasture-fed oxen; 100 sheep; plus deer, gazelle, roebucks, and fattened fowl. But, in comparison to the relative lack of wealth in Jerusalem at the time of Nehemiah, he had to provide a whale of a lot of food.

Here, Nehemiah enumerated the people who were at his table and the food that was his responsibility.

There were 150 regulars at every meal. In addition, there would be the “drop-ins” from all over the empire. *“Oh honey, put on another four lambs. Thirty five more Persians are coming to dinner tonight.”*

And where did the money come from to pay for the food that all of these guests ate? Well, since he wasn’t taking the Governor’s food allowance, it must have come from his own pocket.

To have demanded that the people of Jerusalem pay him the food allowance would have been to his advantage. But, it would have stretched the people he had come to serve to the breaking point.

It would have actually frustrated his true purpose for being in Jerusalem. He would have been guilty of the same type of wrongdoing as the wealthy Jews, if he had further burdened the people with his Food Allowance.

God-centered, start to finish (v. 18b-19)

[18b]...Yet for all this I did not demand the governor’s food allowance, because the servitude was heavy on this people. [19] Remember me, O my God, for good, according to all that I have done for this people.

And the whole chapter ends with Nehemiah, as he so often did, praying.

[19] Remember me, O my God, for good, according to all that I have done for this people.

Was this a selfish prayer? Not at all. We have seen throughout the book already that Nehemiah was a real prayer warrior. He knew that the people would soon forget his sacrifice, but he banked on the fact that God wouldn’t.

So, no, he didn’t act out of strictly humanitarian, altruistic motives. His motives were theological.

Why didn't he take the food allowance, even though others had? Because he feared God. And what did fearing God lead him to? It led him to a long term commitment to the work of God.

In verses 14 and following we come to the second section of chapter 5. In the first section, we saw the sad story of the rich taking more than was due them, contrary to God's Law, and in direct violation of LOVE.

In the second section, though, we have the beautiful contrast of Nehemiah himself taking less than should have been coming to him, less than what the Law allowed, but acting in accord with the highest principles of LOVE.

Conclusion:

Now, I'll bet that nobody here has been charging interest to anybody else here, and forcing the children of one member's family into slavery.

So, what do we DO with this chapter?

Having seen the critical importance of LOVE among the people of God, what one step could you make this week to build (or rebuild?) loving relationships with someone in the family of God at Northwest?

And NOW, the work on the wall can continue.

What stops the work of God? Opposition from without doesn't. Discouragement, intimidation, and threats need not.

But, LAWLESSNESS against God and LOVELESSNESS from believer to believer is sufficient to require a work stoppage. There is no going forward if we are not obeying and loving.

This is a perfect time for each one of us to stop and evaluate the temperature of our relationships with each other. Let's get practical.

Are the relationships you sustain with your brothers and sisters in Christ warm (by that, I don't mean, "They're not all that hot".)?

Or, are they cool, cooling, even cold? Is there someone with whom you need to be reconciled? Is your "love quotient" warming?

The family of God can weather any external opposition as long as the fires of love, generosity, and compassion burn toward one another.

If you need to take steps to restore a once-warm friendship, or to move toward someone else in love, take it from Nehemiah 5, today is the day. Don't delay.

However, when love thrives, so does Kingdom work. Charles Colson writes about his early Christian experience in the book, Born Again.

In that book, he says that next to his conversion, the most profound step in his spiritual life was taken when a member of his prayer group, a member of the House of Representatives from Minnesota, asked President Ford if he could serve out the rest of Colson's prison term, because of problems in the Colson family.

God used that expression of love, offered to Colson at a time of deep need, to help him see spiritual realities.

And, when you sacrifice yourself, when you give up your "rights" to build up a brother or sister in Christ, when you lovingly serve God's people, you bring a smile to God's face.

God is not pleased with the work that His people are doing UNTIL and UNLESS we, His people, are living obedient lives, and are actively loving each other. Until these are in line, get off the wall.

Come up with a concrete, practical application.

We might think of 1 John 3:17, which says, “But whoever has the world’s goods, and beholds his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in him?”

In John 13:34-35, Jesus says, “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. But this all men will know that you are My disciples if you have love for one another.” People learn something about Jesus and about our relationship with Him by the way we treat each other.

This chapter comes 12 years after he arrived in Jerusalem. After 12 years of faithful, dedicated service.

This is not a case of “friendly fire” - accidents happen in warfare and that is tragic. This is more insidious. This is lovelessness. And lovelessness is enough to stop the work of God.

So, you’ll notice, right off the bat, the courage of Nehemiah. He addressed the big wheels of his world, by himself, on behalf of the nobodies.

Throughout the history of the church, certain men and women have distinguished themselves by selflessly standing for the oppressed.

Two sterling examples from the past are William Wilberforce and Lord Shaftesbury, of England. Wilberforce almost single-handedly removed the scourge of slavery from the British Empire in the early 1800’s. And Shaftesbury led in child labor law reform, fought for humane treatment of the insane, and succeeded in improving the health care system for the lower classes of English society. Both Shaftesbury and Wilberforce find themselves in a great company of men and women of God who have worked to alleviate human suffering, because of a firm conviction that ALL people are made in the image of God and are therefore deserving of humane, noble treatment. And this conviction was also what moved Nehemiah.

If you are seeking to effect change in a system, or in another person, nothing works like a positive, personal example. Lead the way. Moms and dads, church leaders, Sunday School teachers, student leaders - take the hint from Nehemiah and point the way to honesty and faith and love through your actions.

Ill: joy like that taking over in your own heart.....

The selflessness of Nehemiah provided a necessary model of generosity to the people of Jerusalem.

Ill: orient to the forfeiture of rights; our perceived need to take all that we have coming to us.

For a very long time, I have been in love with this book, and with the main character - Nehemiah - who is quite a character. He is unpretentious, bold - and quite human.

For a vision to become a reality, someone must put his or her neck on the line.

Nehemiah wasn’t weak or unstable. He was burdened.

Now is the time for us to focus afresh on the reason for our existence, the goals of our corporate life, the vision for our future - and how to see that vision fleshed out.

If the visionary doesn’t act, something significant won’t get done.

Consider using some examples from Zach’s Dry Bones letter about the bad impact that the believing community can have on the work of God for its lovelessness.

Consider giving up the “ministry expense” allowance at Northwest to fund ministry - whatever the Elders choose.

Have you ever seen “friendly fire” in the work of God - when God’s people have treated each other as enemies?

Likewise, when a body of believers is united by love and a common commitment to Christ, no amount of outside interference will be able to derail them from their task. (That is why the persecuted church is often so powerful and effective.)

BUT, in a church where love grows cold, forward movement stops. In a church fight, Satan stays neutral and supplies ammunition to both sides.

Over the past two Sundays, we have seen the people of God at work rebuilding the wall around the city. This morning, that good work comes to a complete standstill because of lovelessness and injustice.

What we will see today is what we know from experience anyway. And that is that opposition from without is nowhere near as devastating to the cause as opposition from within.

The cartoon character, Pogo, is famous for saying, “*We have met the enemy and he is us.*”¹⁰

¹¹ Perhaps just as often we’ve seen or felt the destructive effects of a lack of teamwork. Can you think of times when you’ve seen teamwork’s absence do its deadly work - in sports, business, family, church?

Sometimes, as a result of all we experience and witness (personally or vicariously through the news media) we are tempted to suffer from

¹⁰ Walt Kelly first produced that line on a poster for Earth Day, 1970.

¹¹ According to the Gospels, money is very important. Love for it will keep some people out of Heaven. Its proper investment will bring the Gospel to some who will thereby believe and go to Heaven. It can be used to meet the needs of the saints. Or, its mishandling can create discord and trouble in the Body of Christ. In Nehemiah 5, Paul’s words, “the love of money is the root of all sorts of evil” (1 Timothy 6:10) ring true.

compassion burnout. But Nehemiah suffered no such burnout, as we see in the verses which follow.

Throughout the book thus far, we have seen that Nehemiah's heart beat with the heart of God. And, when he saw gross inequity, unfairness, and injustice, he was grieved.

His heart was broken over the exploitation of the poor and the powerless. The crass display of lovelessness moved him to action.

He was genuinely upset about the plight of the oppressed poor. When he heard about the lack of love running rampant through Jerusalem, he was infuriated.

According to this verse, what had Nehemiah done for the Jews since arriving in Jerusalem?

***What effect did the misbehavior of the Jews have on outsiders? (v. 9)

What effect does the misbehavior of Christians have on outsiders today?
12

Bring a tablecloth or blanket or towel and shake it out (verse 12).

III: Handel's Messiah - the AMEN chorus

What is the motive behind his concern for the people's well-being? Where does sacrificial love originate?

Sometimes you're so concerned with the alligators around you that you forgot that the reason for the journey was to get to the other side of the swamp.

¹² In the overwhelming majority of places in the Bible where repentance is used to describe a change of a pattern of behavior, it addresses God's people. When the word is used with reference to the "repentance" of the non-believer, it generally describes a change of mind regarding where trust is placed for salvation. ie. coming to place one's faith in Christ, as opposed to anything or anyone else.