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## Hometown

### Part 4 – Resolving Conflict in Community

Pastor Ted Cunningham

If you're brand new to our church, welcome; we're glad you're here. We're in a series called *Hometown*. We're in Part Four today. We're going through the Book of Nehemiah. If you have your Bibles, turn to Nehemiah 5. We're picking up with opposition within the community. Last week, we looked at opposition from without and this week it's opposition from within. How do you deal with conflict in community? Resolving conflict in community.

I didn't want to start the message this way, but I have to confront two people at this church publicly. Why do you assume that's a joke coming? This morning, before the 9:00 service, two people came up to me and said, "Hey, you're looking good today; have you lost weight?" I just want to give you the other side of that compliment. The other side of that compliment is, "You looked fat last week. What have you done in the last week?" And the answer is "Nothing."

Today I am wearing the standard issue Woodland Hills teaching team uniform, which is a black Under Armor pull over. Honestly, the contract reads that you can't be on our teaching team unless you own a black Under Armor pull over, and the ladies say amen to this and this is true. Black is slimming. It's better than vertical lines. I've actually put on a couple pounds this week. I'm wearing black to help with that. So, you confronted. Stop talking about my weight. That's all I want to say around here. You don't need to discuss my weight anymore. Just knock it off, okay?

This week, our family ministries team... They look forward to this event every year. It's called the Orange Conference in Atlanta, GA. It's where children's ministry leaders and family ministry leaders gather for a few days, so it's all these likeminded people in the room. It's the people that create all of the curriculum that we use in our children and student ministries. You can imagine our family ministries team joining 8,100 like-minded leaders and the screaming and the yelling and the excitement and the games and the songs and it's insane.

Stephanie texted Amy and me... If you're new to our church, Stephanie Watson is our Family Ministries Director. She texted Amy and me and said, "You'll never believe what Reggie Joiner (the founder of this conference and ministry) is preaching on right now to open up the conference. He's preaching on Nehemiah 4," which is where we were on Sunday. He's talking about one voice and everybody coming together. Then she kind of lead me to where I could find out more about what he was talking about. It's just sacred echo, sacred echo, sacred echo.

He said this and it's a great way for us to kick into Chapter 5, Part 4 of our series. He said, "When a church ignores what's broken in a community, they forfeit their influence in the community." The whole point of this series is for you and me to develop a heart for our hometown. If you've been here for a period of time... and maybe you say, "Well I've grown complacent." Some of you have told me you've grown jaded a little bit. You had big dreams and plans and goals moving to this area and they didn't quite pan out, so you've maybe just developed a little bit of an attitude, but you've said, "I see that God has a bigger purpose in bringing me to this community."

We want to make sure, as a church, we're not just the sales force for a tourism town even though that's from where you draw your income. We also want to deal with any of the issues going on in our town and we want to hit them head on. That's what we've asked the Lord to do in this series. Help us, give us wisdom and discernment as a church, knowing we can't take on a burden for everything, but what can we do as a church to help with the poverty issues, the drug addiction issues, homelessness. How can we be a part of dealing with it? That's part of us developing a heart for our hometown. And we want to use the influence that God has given this church to be a blessing to this community, not just to ourselves; that's the goal.

We've been talking about some of the brokenness in our community and what we can do, and still asking the Lord for ways more than just a lot of the funding that we've provided over the year to Care for Kids, Parents as Teachers, backpack programs, and all of that, to meet the physical needs. We want to do more, and we know we are called to do more.

I'll be honest with you. I was hoping that after four parts into this series, God would have clearly laid out a plan for us and we'd be off to the races, but we're still working and we're still meeting and we're still praying and we're still burdened. We've talked to several of you who said part of this series has helped you understand you can't have a burden for everything. So, you're being released right now from burdens you've been carrying, but have done nothing about, and you're getting more laser focused on what God's calling you to do to meet the physical needs, the relational needs, the emotional needs in our community.

We're going to jump right into the issues that Nehemiah was dealing with because you can imagine as the work on the wall continued, they were dealing with opposition, they were growing weary, always on guard. The word picture we got last week is a spear in one hand and a trowel in the other hand. They were having to fight off and defend and be ready to keep the work from slowing down, but they couldn't do that and not continue to rebuild. They had to do both at the same time. So, imagine that weariness setting in and on top of that, a famine had hit. And this famine was the underlying issue, but then there were three groups that were dealing with this famine and there was an issue that was affecting the entire community and we'll start by looking at what the issue was.

Nehemiah 5 – **1 Now the men and their wives raised a great outcry against their fellow Jews.** So, this is not against the governor of Samaria. We're now talking about inside their community. **2 Some were saying, "We and our sons and daughters are numerous..."** In other words, their families were large. **"...in order for us to eat and stay alive, we must get grain."** So, there was a shortage of food altogether for this family.

There was another group. **3 Others were saying, “We are mortgaging our fields, our vineyards and our homes to get grain during the famine.”** “We’re having to sell stuff off in order to make it through this time.”

A third group. **4 Still others were saying, “We have had to borrow money to pay the king’s tax on our fields and vineyards. 5 Although we are of the same flesh and blood as our fellow Jews and though our children are as good as theirs...”** In other words, we’re starting today with the idea of whether you are affluent or impoverished, you carry the same value. This is the point they are trying to make. “...**yet we have to subject our sons and daughters to slavery.**” “It’s gotten so bad that we’re selling our sons and daughters to work in order to get grain to pay for the taxes.” Something must be done about this.

**“Some of our daughters have already been enslaved, but we are powerless...”** The issue they’re dealing with is not just wealth and affluence, but it’s the affluent taking advantage of the impoverished. I want you to hear this clearly to start the message today, money is not evil. According to the scripture, the love of money is evil. Wealth is not evil. The love of wealth and leveraging it just to bless yourself and not others, that’s the problem. But having money and being affluent doesn’t make you an evil person. So, whatever your political bent is, we’re not supposed to look at the impoverished as though they are lessor, we are not to look at the affluent as though they’re taking advantage all the time just because they have more and so we should take it from them. That’s not the issue going on here. The issue is the affluent are taking advantage of the impoverished. **“...because our fields and our vineyards belong to others.”**

So, dealing with those three issues, we’re going to get great perspective from Nehemiah on how to confront well. We’re actually going to look at five helpful ways that you can confront issues well. He’s going to do this well, he’s going to hit it head on.

How many of you absolutely love, like you get passionate about confrontation? We call you a drama queen. No, I’m kidding, we don’t call you a drama queen. But, you’ve met that person. Even if it’s not their conflict and they know one is going on, they just kind of like to get close to it. Those people freak me out, I’ve got to be really honest with you. I’ve got plenty of it in my own life, I don’t need to go get my boredom all up in your business.

How many of you, when conflict has to be done, you try to avoid it at all cost? How many of say, “I know something needs to be confronted, but I will not do it at all?” We’re coming after you today, those raising your hand.

### **Five Helpful Ways to Confront Issues Well:**

#### **1. Confront issues head on.**

It’s when Nehemiah gets word of these issues that are now causing conflict within the community among fellow Jews. Confront issues head on, directly deal with them.

**6 When I heard their outcry and these charges...**” The affluent taking advantage of the impoverished. **“I was very angry.”** There is some debate in Christian circles of is it okay for a Christian to get angry? I submit to you and boldly proclaim to you today that the answer to that question yes. It’s called righteous anger. Now, it’s tricky because when I step off of a plane and I see these signs now everywhere around the country that say, “Trafficking not allowed here.” They are everywhere and I’m glad our country is opening its eyes to this. But, when I think about human trafficking, that should make every single one of us angry. It should fire us up. When I think about people taking advantage of other people, whatever the social injustice may be, that should make you angry.

Where it’s tricky is to be angry at what makes God angry... Whatever he hates we should hate. We did a whole series on this in Seven. We should be angered by that, but what we do sometimes is we allow our self-interest to guide us in that anger. That’s when it becomes a problem. Nehemiah is aware of that. It says he became very angry. Why is he angry? This part I love. It’s because Nehemiah knows the law. He knows that what’s being done amongst fellow Jews is wrong. His anger is driven by the Word of God, by the Law of God.

We see this in Exodus 22, which is going to speak directly to the issue. And when you see Nehemiah addressing it, he’s going to be addressing this injustice within the community out of the law and he’s going to confront everybody with this. Exodus 22 – **25 “If you lend money to one of my people among you...”** Again, it would be among fellow Jews, the children of God. **“...who is needy, do not treat it like a business deal...”** Don’t go into it with “What can I get out of this?” “How will I earn out of this?” **“...charge no interest.”** This is God telling his children, “If there is needy among you, lend them money, but charge no interest. It’s not your job to take advantage of people.”

Why is this so important? It’s so important because the children of Israel bear God’s name. It’s so important because you and I are known by the way we love one another. Why is that so important? It’s because we are ambassadors. We represent Jesus Christ. It’s why oneness is so important. It’s why we confront issues head on. It’s why we don’t let things just sit around. We want to deal with them to protect the unity of the church.

What Andy Stanley said this week at the conference is, “Of all the things Jesus could have prayed for, he prayed for **oneness.**” Of all the things he could have prayed for, before going to the cross, he prayed for oneness. “Father, make them one. As I am in you and you are in me, that they would be in us.” That there is oneness between them. We guard this oneness. We don’t act like there is no issue. We don’t let it just go on by. We’re so serious about unity and reconciliation that we have to confront even when it’s uncomfortable, even when we know the person is going to get mad or frustrated. It’s why today we are giving you helpful ways of confronting well.

Here are some different ways people confront. I alliterated it to make the Baptists feel welcome. So, it all starts with Ds. There are those who **deny** the issue. **“There is no issue.”** This is the last group that raised their hand that says, “You know what? If we act like it’s not an issue, it won’t become an issue, it won’t grow, it won’t get any worse, it’ll just go away.” That’s a terrible way to deal with issues.

The next D is **dismiss**. “Okay, it’s an issue. **It’s just not a big deal.**” Let’s not make a bigger deal out of this than it already is.

There’s a third D and it’s **delay**. “**There is a problem, but let’s just see where it goes.**” How many know it always goes to a place of health? It always goes to a place of life. No, it always gets worse. Why? Because it’s not being dealt with. More people are getting at it. At first, it was five or six people. We chose not to deal with it or confront it, so now it’s ten people, twenty people, thirty people and, something we’re going to see in a second, it could have been handled with the five people. Now, we have to do a public confrontation because there are so many people involved. The principle we are going to see is **private confrontation always comes before public confrontation**. You always deal with it quickly.

The last one is **direct**. “**There is a problem and we will deal with it.**” There’s a fifth D that I left off and I call it the democratic way. It’s where we create issues. No, I’m just kidding. It is a joke. Lighten up. Martha, quit clapping and let’s move on with the illustration. But the direct approach is “There is a problem and we’ll deal with it” and we’re going to do it now. This is why, within the community and within the church, it’s so important for us to address issues, to confront them head on.

I’m very nervous about this message. I had a pastor friend tell me yesterday, “So, how’s Branson going? Do you like Branson? Do you like serving in a smaller community?”

He was going through this whole thing and I said, “Yeah, but I have to be honest with you. I’m really nervous about tomorrow morning.”

He said, “Why, what’s up?”

I said, “Well, whenever I preach on forgiveness, I always get nervous preaching on forgiveness because my heart is that you’d be reconciled in your marriages and in your families and with your co-workers. But, whenever I preach on forgiveness, people line up afterwards to forgive me. And it’s exhausting. Tomorrow, I’m talking about confronting well and there will be people that through the whole message, they will be thinking about how they can confront me on a certain issue.”

I’m just telling you, don’t! Start with your spouse. Start with your children. And trust the elders of this church that I submit to 100%, who have full access into my life, that can confront me on any and every issue. They’re so good at it, they confront me before I even say something now. They know what the title is or they know what the passage is... A couple weeks ago, an elder called me and said, “Hey, I know what your talking about; make sure you don’t and you don’t and you don’t...” I just put that out there so I can take a nap this afternoon, okay? Please, don’t be thinking about how you can confront me because if your heart is *I’m going to confront him. I’ve had this issue for six seven, eight months and I need to deal with it...*

What are some of the issue churches have? I wrote them down because I didn’t want to leave any of them out. I will say this. I couldn’t think of an issue our church is dealing with. There are private, individual confrontations going on, but they’re not at public level. They rarely get to that level. In

Matthew 18, we see the process that Jesus laid out is very clear. It's one on one. That's really where you want to go, it's where you want to start. Hopefully it ends there. If it doesn't, take a few people back.

The third step is that you would take it before the church. I know very few churches that follow through with the third step, but the ones who do take someone who will not repent over their sin, a church member who chooses to live a sinful lifestyle and doesn't repent over it... I do know some churches that have taken it to the third step and for that, I applaud them for following the teachings of Jesus, for being clear in their calling. Their heart is to be restored and reconciled in community.

I couldn't think of any public issues that we are dealing with, but I've been thinking about some of the churches and pastors that I've been working with and encouraging lately. I wrote down some of the issues they're dealing with that are way beyond the private confrontation to the public confrontation.

I know of one church right now looking for a new pastor. That's a big issue and the church is deeply divided over it. It's kind of like there are three groups in Nehemiah 5. One group wants a pastoral care pastor. They want someone who visits in the hospital and goes to the birthday parties and the anniversaries. Another group wants a prophetic evangelist, preaching hellfire and brimstone and bringing down the thunder. That's what they are wanting. Find that guy. And when you find that guy, you typically don't get the pastoral care with the package. Then there is the third group that says, "We had the preacher, we had the pastoral guy, but what we need is an organizer. We need an administrative leader, someone who loves long meetings and loves organizing the church." That ain't me. I didn't apply for the job. I'm going, "Okay, wow, that's a church that has to deal with things publicly; they have to address this head on."

I know another church that... And this is rare today, but I think it's going to become more and more of an issue over doctrinal issues. For the first part of ministry here at Woodland Hills, I didn't really see that as an issue in a lot of churches, but I know a church that just lost about 400 people because the pastor changed his stance on salvation and kind of went with universalism, and it was a very painful time for that church.

Another church is divided over age. There is a senior group and a young group and they're trying to figure out if they are going to be a young church or a senior church. I always love encouraging those churches. You can be what we call a multi-generational church. You can be both. I gave it to the 9:00 am where our seniors tend to reside. Isn't it funny to think they're all napping right now at home to Fox News.

But, I relate... I found myself... I know I'm 44 years old, but I'm relating more to the senior adults. I was in a meeting a couple of weeks ago and I related more to the seniors than I did to the millennials. Do you know what that means? It's time to start giving leadership away to the millennials, not holding on to the position. I'm in a meeting and all these ideas... Do you know the first thought that popped in my head when someone said, "Let's try this?" I'm thinking, *Well, we've never done that before.* I'm 80 years old. I am soon to be 110 if I don't knock off this attitude.

But, I know churches that are divided over the worship style and the worst thing you can do is never talk about it. The worst thing you could do is to act like it's not an issue and just let all these conversations go on. Address it publicly.

There's another one. I know a pastor that lost 500 people during the 2016 presidential election. As I'm listening to it, I'm going... You know, we're doing everything we can to keep from going to three services and I'm like, *Wow, I preached during the presidential election and pretty strong I felt, and more people came. I don't know what I did wrong, but could I get your notes. Maybe we can trim it up a little bit and stay at two services.* That's why I threw in that fifth D right there.

But, how about this one. This is a very serious one. The MeToo movement. I've had personal friends that have resigned their church over something one friend did 23 years ago. It was illegal. It was a crime. It came out during the MeToo movement and the church is talking about it. I know another prominent pastor in our country that it just came out and he just accelerated his retirement and resigned. I know a lot of pastors that are resigning. It seems like every week I hear about a new pastor leaving the church.

I think one of the worst things a church can do is hire a PR firm. I think the statements that come out should be from that of elders. We need to put the needs of people before the needs of an organization. I always tell churches this. When a friend of mine fell in ministry, every time they spoke publicly, they were trying to protect the brand of the church. I said, "Don't do it. Be pastoral during this time. Put the congregational needs before the organizational needs. I know you've got budgets and buildings and all of that, but don't you dare let that be your priority."

May that never be our priority here. This is one of the greatest lessons from Nehemiah 5. A book before Nehemiah, Ezra is the spiritual leader. The secular leader is Nehemiah. As we are going to see in a second, he's become the governor of Judah. He's the secular leader. He could have said, "Listen, all this going on about you being mistreated, do you not see what we're doing? We've got a big project going on over here." No, he said, "This is so important that we can't stop working on the wall. I'll stop it for a little bit to have a meeting, but we've got to address this." May Woodland Hills always be a place where the needs of people come way before projects and programs. May we never get lost in that. May we confront things head on. May you hear that from our elders.

I was going to quote this next guy, but I decided it would be better... This is exactly what it means to confront issues head on.

[Video clip of Barney Fife] "I say this calls for action and now! NIP IT IN THE BUD!"

That's it! That's all you gotta do right there. If we ever do a series on conflict resolution, it will be called Nip it in the Bud. That's exactly what it's going to be and that may be the next series after this one.

Let's move on to the next one. We left off in Verse 6. Nehemiah is very angry and for good reason. God's law is being violated.

## 2. Process your thoughts and words before you confront.

Don't confront when you're angry. If the anger is not resolving or going away, you need to deal with it. Give it some time. Stop giving your children a time out and take your own time out. Watch what he does in Verse 7.

***7 I pondered them in my mind...*** "I knew when I heard about it I became angry." We're going to see in a second that it's because of what's being accused of the nobles and the officials and Nehemiah is part of it. He's part of the problem. He's doing the exact same thing. So, he's got to take some time to process this. Scripture affirms this time and time again, but we are to be slow to speak, quick to listen. We did a whole series on this as well. Be a good listener. Don't rush, don't go in there with guns blazing like you're going to take the person out. Ponder, give it some thought, think about the words you're going to use, think about the ownership you're going to take.

***...and then accused the nobles and officials.*** It was a private confrontation first. We don't know exactly how that private confrontation went, but it went from private to public. ***I told them, "You are charging your own people interest!"*** This is a violation of God's Law. Don't charge the needy interest. ***So I called together a large meeting to deal with them...*** It was private and now it's going to public.

## 3. Confront only those involved in the conflict.

Start with the one on one, start with those involved, don't bring one other voice into the conflict. Deal with them and then if necessary, take it public and that's where we pick it up. ***8 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.*** Conviction is setting in.

***9 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?"*** We are bearing the name of God here. The way we deal with each other is a reflection on him. Let us do this well. He's saying that it must stop. He's confronting, but in the middle of this confrontation, this fourth point is so important.

## 4. Accept blame and make immediate changes.

When you're pondering the confrontation, you're going to come up with some things you need to apologize for. You're going to come up with some things that you participated in and that's exactly what happens to Nehemiah. He says, "I'm part of the problem, but I'm not just going to fess up to it, I'm going to make immediate changes." Some people will say, "I'm sorry. Will you forgive me?" Do you know what a great apology is? "I'm sorry. Will you forgive me? And here's what I'm going to do in the future to avoid this type of behavior or these types of words." He accepts blame, but then he moves on.

A great leader is someone who takes blame and gives credit. Some of you have worked with leaders and they are bad leaders because when you get an idea or a thought, they run it up the chain and they sell your idea, your thought as their own so they can look good to the boss. But, then when something goes

wrong, it's not the same approach. If something goes wrong, then now that's back on you. Great leaders do just the opposite of that. When they pass that information on up the chain, they make sure that person knows that it was your idea, that it was her idea. And then they accept the blame and that's what Nehemiah does as we continue to read.

***10 I and my brothers and my men are also lending the people money and grain. But let us stop charging interest!*** "Lending was okay, but we've got to stop this 1% interest that we're charging them each month, which would be 12% over the year." He takes the blame. ***11 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.***"

To me, this is fantastic. This week, my wife... We have new neighbors on our street. They moved into our neighborhood and they have five German Shepherds. Before you go judging me, dog lovers, we accept all breeds here at Woodland Hills Family Church, okay? We're not coming down on a breed. Five of any breed is a lot. If it's a Shizue, that's a lot of one dog. Some might say they're harmless, but I just want to remind you they are a drug sniffing dog. So, they are intimidating animals in packs of five. They move in, I'm not home, Amy calls me pretty emotional. She had walked down our street. By the way, if our new neighbors are visiting today, I'm grateful you're here; welcome to Woodland Hills Family Church. We accept all breeds, all neighbors; everybody is always welcome at Woodland Hills and we mean that.

Amy calls me and she is emotional. She was walking our dog. We have a Cockapoo. That's not meant to be funny; it's literally the kind of dog we have. She's named Daisy. Amy is walking Daisy down the street and all five dogs charge. You can imagine Amy. She freaks. She picks up our 18-pound Cockapoo like an offering to the Lord, she holds the dog above her head on her tiptoes while the five dog surround her going at our dog.

There's somebody in here with a German Shepherd. Denise Bevins has Don's Magnum, so we're not against German Shepherds, but five of them, we're definitely against. Amy was overwhelmed. And then I was like, *Oh no, what do I do. Do I have to go confront these neighbors? I don't want to confront. Let's just walk on other streets.* I spend my life confronting people. I don't want to confront neighbors that I have to see every day. I can hide from you people all week long, but... I didn't want to do it.

A couple of days later, we were walking down another street. We can't walk down our street anymore and we're kind of bummed by that. My dad pulls up. He lives a couple of streets over. He pulls off to the side of the road and rolls down the window. We're having a conversation and I start telling him the story I just told you.

At just that time, the neighbor pulls up. Amy is with Daisy about 10 to 15 yards from me. He rolls down his window and he says, "Are you the family with the little dog?" "Yeah, this is her right here." He has a booming voice. He says, "I owe you and apology. My dogs were out and I'm here to tell you it will never happen again." I look at my dad. We were just in the middle of this conversation about these neighbors. I go, "Are you listening to that?" Amy and I are stumbling over our words, "Thank you! Wow, that's fantastic."

My dad and I were both just in awe over it, but do you know what that guy did? He said, "I'll take the blame. I'm sorry. My wife got on me." That was in the conversation too. He accepted the blame and then made immediate changes. "It will never happen again." Wow.

Compare this to another neighbor we had years ago, and I don't need to tell you his name; it's Paul Purvis. He was the pastor of First Baptist Forsyth. I was inside our house and it was winter. I hear my daughter scream. She's seven or eight years old. Parents know the difference between the scream that says they're fine and they want attention and the scream where they fell and got hurt and it's not bad enough to actually get up from where we're sitting. This was the scream that needed immediate attention because death was on the horizon. I ran out of the house and Paul's dog had my daughter's hood and was dragging her across the yard. Well.. I've chased off bears if you can believe that. No, I haven't, but I ran out to save my daughter screaming and yelling STOP! and the dog ran off.

I call Paul. That one I confront. That's a little bit different than someone going after your dog. It's your child. I go, "Hey, Paul, yeah guess what just happened? I just walked outside and your dog was dragging my daughter across the front yard."

To which he said, "Oh, that dog's harmless, Ted."

"Okay, let me... I don't know if you heard that first statement I just made. He was dragging my daughter across the front yard." Paul's a friend. Paul came over and got the dog.

But, I'm going where do you go in a relationship or in a confrontation when someone says, "My fault, it's not going to happen again, forgive me." Where do you go with that? If you keep going, you're the problem. If you don't accept an apology of a person and then hear the changes... I think that's the key. Sometimes we just apologize, but to say here are the immediate changes. There are some of you in here right now that are looking at me going, "I need to talk to you after this message." No. You don't.

***12 "We will give it back," they said. "And we will not demand anything more from them. We will do as you say."*** Now, here's how the chapter ends, and I love this. I love this chapter.

## **5. Model the behavior you want to see in others.**

Don't change the behavior you want to see in others. Model the behavior you want to see in others. If you are coming to a confrontation, do it with behavior that says, "This is how I think both of us should be acting." But if you come in with guns a blazing, what do you expect? Model the behavior. Now watch. He is taking ownership of this. He's just said we're going to stop it, and now we're going to see the behavior that backs up the immediate changes that he's making.

***14 Moreover, from the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes, when I was appointed to be their governor in the land of Judah...*** So, we don't necessarily know... Some say he may have been given the title of governor or it was led in that direction on his first trip there, even before he inspected the wall. Maybe it happened sometime after the wall was built. Remember only took 52 days to build. ***until his thirty-second year—twelve years—neither I nor my brothers ate the food allotted to the governor.***

They were given a certain portion of food and wine. He's going to model in his behavior what you should do with affluence to take care of those who are in need. ***15 But the earlier governors—those preceding me...*** Now he's going to give an example of bad leadership. He's going to say they didn't leverage their influence well. ***...placed a heavy burden on the people...*** Even going beyond the allotment. ***...and took forty shekels of silver from them in addition to food and wine.***

Here's another term of someone not leading well. ***Their assistants also lorded it over the people.*** We did a whole series on this years ago. We're supposed to leverage our influence to bless people. You being successful in your hometown, you making a good bit of money in your hometown, that's not for just you. You are called to leverage your affluence, you're called to leverage leadership, you're called to leverage your wealth, you're called to leverage your money to be a blessing to other people. You can get into the debate over whether or not it is that the government's role to take it from you and help you leverage that or are you just supposed to be a generous person? I'm going to argue that you are called to be a generous person. You're called to be one who refreshes others, not one who takes advantage of others.

***But out of reverence for God I did not act like that.*** "I realize now I have a responsibility as a leader to demonstrate to the nobles and the officers that I just talked about, the officials that I make sure they see me acting in a way that I called them to act." ***16 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.***

***17 Furthermore, a hundred and fifty Jews and officials ate at my table, as well as those who came to us from the surrounding nations.*** Our place of leadership and our affluence was meant to bless and care for other people. ***18 Each day one ox, six choice sheep and some poultry were prepared for me, and every ten days an abundant supply of wine of all kinds. In spite of all this, I never demanded the food allotted to the governor, because the demands were heavy on these people.*** Doesn't it sound familiar? I love this text. It kind of foreshadows what the apostle Paul said when he said, "When we came to share the Gospel of Jesus with you, we weren't a burden to you. We worked day and night with our hands. We had a trade that we worked at to provide for our physical needs, so we wouldn't put any additional burden on you." I love when these themes come out in the scripture.

In Verse 19, you see his prayer to the Lord. You might see it as "I'm doing the right thing, so Lord, I need you to bless me," but this is Nehemiah saying "Lord, I want to do the right thing and I'm not going to look to people to be my source. You are my source. You are the one that provides for me."

***19 Remember me with favor, my God, for all I have done for these people.*** "I'm not going to ask it back from them, I'm going to do what you've called me to do and then I'm going to receive it from you."

This is how we want to end today and this what we want to continue moving forward with next week as we talk about Chapter 6. Our church must leverage our influence for the betterment of this community. We have grown as a church, we're able to do great things in this community, but would you pray with me that God would continue to use us to be a life-giving church to the community, not just for ourselves. I think this is one of the saddest things for me when conflict comes up in the church, it distracts us from what we need to be doing. That's why we want to resolve it quickly. We don't let things just drag on and on. Nip it in the bud!

Is there anything worse than sitting in a meeting and there's some confrontation taking place and you leave the meeting with no resolve. Even if we don't agree, you can confront an issue and walk away not agreeing, but we don't need to keep having this meeting like Ground Hog's Day. We need to move on. We've got work to do. We've got stuff to do. The way we leverage our influence in another way is our oneness, being united together to the betterment of the community. Let us never be the church where we better ourselves inwardly with what we can provide for ourselves and doing things for ourselves and projects and programs for ourselves, but let us always have the eyes to see the needs of other people. Lord, leverage our influence to bless our hometown.

Father, it's in the name of Jesus that we thank you for our time today. Thank you for the example in Nehemiah, one who confronted well. He confronted the issues head on. May we take this to heart as a church. As issues need to be confront, may we not come into it with assigning blame, but accepting blame of our part of the conflict. May not one confrontation take place in this church this week where someone leads out with assigning blame. May every single one lead out with, "This is what I did; would you forgive me?" May it start with the accepting of blame.

Lord, we want to be a church that is one, a church that is united because the threat outside of the church is still there and it will always be there until the Lord Jesus returns for the church. I believe this church is on Satan's radar and we have to have a trowel in one hand and a spear in the other hand. May we work together as a church family to continue to do the work that you have called us to do. I ask that blessing upon this church and that we would leverage the influence to bless others in our community.

It's in the name of Jesus that everyone agreed and said... Amen.