

Daily Devotional, November 6, 2020 Open My Eyes, Open My Ears, Open My Heart

¹⁴ ***“Moreover, from the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes, when I was appointed to be their governor in the land of Judah, until his thirty-second year—twelve years—neither I nor my brothers ate the food allotted to the governor. ¹⁵ But the earlier governors—those preceding me—placed a heavy burden on the people and took forty shekels of silver from them in addition to food and wine. Their assistants also lorded it over the people. But out of reverence for God I did not act like that.” Nehemiah 5:14-15 (NIV)***

Life after captivity wasn't quite what the people of Israel expected it to be. They returned to their land only to be plagued with financial hardships. Throughout Nehemiah chapter 5 we read the sad accounts from these people. They cry out wondering how they are going to buy grain to feed their families. Many have gone into deep debt trying to keep food on the table by mortgaging their fields and vineyards. Interest rates were high and if a payment was missed the land could go to the lender leaving the family with no income. Others were in a position to do the unthinkable and sell their children into slavery in order to have food.

With this being the climate around Nehemiah it would have been understandable for him to want to watch out for himself and for those that he cared for. He could have demanded food to be provided for him as well as for his assistants. He wouldn't have needed to worry about taking care of those he loved because the people would provide what he needed. He could then focus on leading without concerning himself with daily food provisions for himself.

It could have been easy for him to justify taking from the people. Didn't he deserve to be paid? Wasn't this how it was done? The people provided for the previous governors why should it be any different with him?

Nehemiah opened his eyes though. He saw the people's suffering and chose to lead differently. Nehemiah feared God and knew he could not treat his fellow brothers and sisters in a way that would bring them more harm. He demanded that the debts of the people should be forgiven and demanded that they stop mistreating each other.

Nehemiah shows true character and leadership in this moment. He used his position to make people's lives better and not as an opportunity to benefit himself. His actions were motivated by his trust and fear of the Lord.

We are living in a time where it would be easy to look out just for ourselves and those we love. However, just as in Nehemiah's time there are people who are struggling all around us. We are not the only ones affected by this horrible virus. Some are economically challenged, not having enough food for their families, possibly due to layoffs from their jobs, or severe cutbacks as many businesses are barely hanging on. Others may be dealing with chronic illness or disabilities. They may be having difficulty in getting out to shop or pick up medications or make it to medical appointments. Still others are battling loneliness and the anxiety that may bring, let alone the constant bleak reports they receive through the news media.

What need is God revealing to you that you can make a difference in? Be in tune to your friends and neighbors and family members who could use your help. This may seem like an old, tired message, but we should never stop listening to it and be attentive, now more than ever as we head into the winter months which make mobility more difficult and force us to stay indoors. Lead differently, follow God's lead.

Lord, please open my eyes. Please let me see those around me that are in need of my compassion. Open my ears and compel me to listen to them, to hear their needs. Give me the heart to be interested in their troubles and provide for me the means to help them. In Christ's name, Amen.