



SERIES NINE: DISCIPLESHIP AND CIVIC DUTY

**SESSION 3: *ECONOMIC STIMULUS: WORKING THE SYSTEM
FOR CHRISTIAN CAUSES***

The Seed

Acts 25: 11 – 12

“If, however, I am guilty of doing anything deserving death, I do not refuse to die. But if the charges brought against me by these Jews are not true, no one has the right to hand me over to them. I appeal to Caesar!” After Festus had conferred with his council, he declared: “You have appealed to Caesar. To Caesar you will go!”

Words to Know

- **Assistance:** *aid or help*
- **Faith-based Initiative:** *a program designed to expand the capacity of religious and community organizations to provide federally funded social services in order to help others.*
- **Partnership:** *an agreement between two or more parties to work toward a common goal.
(companionship, brotherhood, joint interest)*
- **Proselytize:** *evangelize (to encourage someone to convert to a faith.*
- **Subsidy:** *money granted from a government to a private enterprise for the public good. (help, support, aid, reinforcement)*

This week's lesson, I would like for you to compare your responses to the questions to my responses. If you have anything to add that I did not include, please share it through email and I will make sure it gets posted. My email address is newhopewellsundayschool@gmail.com.

Part 2 – Nurturing the SEED Questions

1. How did both men follow the examples of proper leadership outlined in the New Illustrated Bible Commentary?
 - Ezra
 - Declined a military escort, since he wanted to sanctify God's Name to the King of Persia. Ezra 8:21-23
 - Involved others and gives them credit for their participation. Ezra 8:15-20
 - Prayed and confessed before his people. After the completion of this prayer, the people propose and implement the solution, with Ezra simply endorsing their plan. Ezra 10:2-4
 - Pulled his hair in sorrow upon learning of the intermarriage in his community. Ezra 9:3 & 4

- He realized that confrontational top-down rebuke would not be effective, and he therefore contrived an alternate plan to bring members of his community into the process. However, one could argue that Ezra believed in this model of leadership as the ideal. He was not an authoritarian leader. He wanted others to take active leadership and participatory roles. He also wanted to create a leadership that could perpetuate itself, rather than forcing the community to become entirely dependent on him. Ezra 10:44

Nehemiah

- When Nehemiah comes from Babylonia to Israel in 445 b.c.e., no other names are listed with him. Nehemiah dominates the narrative and forcefully exerts his own power and authority.
- Accepted a military escort: The king also sent army officers and cavalry with me. (Neh. 2:9)

- Nehemiah threatens and uses physical force against the people:

Also at that time, I saw that Jews had married Ashdodite, Ammonite, and Moabite women; a good number of their children spoke the language of Ashdod and the language of those various people; and did not know how to speak Judean. I censured them, cursed them, flogged them, tore out their hair, and adjured them by God, saying, “You shall not give your daughters in marriage to their sons, or take any of their daughters for your sons or yourselves. (Neh. 13:23–25)

Ezra tears out his own hair; Nehemiah tears out others’ hair.

- Gave himself credit for everything. Neh. 13:22 & 31
- Repeated stress on his personal accomplishments–Nehemiah makes it appear that the religious state of the people was entirely dependent on him. He attributes the spiritual decline and other woes on the fact that he had left the community and returned to Babylonia (Neh. 13:6).

2. Was a clear mission stated for both men? Yes there was a clear mission for both men. Ezra's mission was to teach the Torah and rebuild the communities and Nehemiah's mission was to rebuild Jerusalem's walls.

3. Do you have a sense of what motivated Ezra and Nehemiah to their calling? If so, what is it?

Ezra – “For Ezra had set his heart to study the Law of the Lord, and to do it and to teach his statutes and rules in Israel.”

Nehemiah – Nehemiah had a heart for God and the people. He was troubled when he found out that the work in Jerusalem had stopped. Nehemiah had a passion for the cause, and just like Ezra, he volunteered for the job.

4. What role did prayer play for Nehemiah? Nehemiah was a man of constant prayer as can be seen in the fourteen recorded prayers in the short book of Nehemiah. Before he set out on the project, Nehemiah prayed. When he approached the king, he prayed. When he was in trouble, he prayed.

5. How did each man respond to the gifts offered by their kings? Ezra did not explain the king's favor in terms of good luck. Rather, he credited God with putting "such a thing as this into the heart of the king" to send Ezra to Jerusalem Ezra 12:7 Nehemiah did not believe that trusting God meant he should not seek the king's protection for his journey. Moreover, he was pleased to have "officers of the army and cavalry" escort him safely to Jerusalem. Neh. 2:9

Note how different Nehemiah's approach to this issue was from Ezra's. Whereas Ezra believed that trusting God meant he should not ask for royal protection, Nehemiah saw the offer of such protection as evidence of God's gracious hand of blessing. This disagreement demonstrates how easy it is for godly people to come to different conclusions about what it means to trust God in their work..

6. Make note of any other leadership qualities exhibited by Ezra and Nehemiah, as well as King Cyrus and King Artaxerxes.

Nehemiah has the God-given gifts, anointing, and vision to inspire other leaders and the people to get excited about and commit to the impossible-seeming task of rebuilding. The people are not particularly skilled, there is already opposition, and the Jews have lived under the oppression of others for more than 70 years. However, as a result of Nehemiah's leadership and skillful administration, work on the city wall begins. All along the way, Nehemiah prays, remains involved and informed, and makes sure the project stays on course. When real threats arise, he reassures the people while at the same time deriving a new plan that involves protecting the workers. He asks for God's protection and guidance again and again, addresses the people's fears, reassigns work as needed, and keeps casting the vision—of a rebuilt wall done by the people themselves. All the while, Nehemiah stays faithful to his God and works to earn the respect of all with whom he is in contact.

Ezra

For Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the Law of the Lord, and to do it, and to teach statutes and ordinances in Israel”

(Learn)

A leader of a team needs to learn the history and context related to the organization and the strengths and characteristics of the team members; and needs to understand the issues to be faced. But at a deeper (and more important) spiritual level, the Christian must learn to know God. He needs regular, intimate time with God, because this is what gives him the *capability* to lead.

(Live)

This means that the actions of the leader must reflect what he has learned with authenticity. He must “walk the talk,” demonstrating consistency between values and actions, and this is what gives him the *credibility* to lead. It is only after growing deep in his relationship with God, and then applying and reflecting God’s truth in his life, that he can move on to step three, which is to **lead** by teaching, guiding, and showing others the way.



Fruit from the SEED

Ezra and Nehemiah took proper advantage of the generosity of their kings. A 2009 survey by the Pew Forum (refer to the “Supplemental Section”) revealed that people generally believe religious organizations should also accept funding to help them provide social services. One person in ten surveyed has had to seek relief from some religious group. When viewed from the perspective of the appropriateness of such programs, a majority of African Americans, Hispanics, and white evangelical favor churches applying for funding. But 63% believe organizations that proselytize should be ineligible for funding. Over the next few weeks, read the Pew survey and learn more about requirements for funding faith-based and neighborhood partnerships.

I could not find the information listed about the Pew survey but this what I found about the government partnership with faith-based organization.

The White House Office of Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships, established by President Barack Obama, expanded partnerships between the government and faith-based and community organizations for the delivery of social services. In a provisions called the Charitable Choice Provision:

Under the provision:

- Faith-based groups may not be excluded as providers.
- They need not abandon their religious identity to receive government funds: They may retain religious criteria for selecting officers and board members, as well as religious art or symbols that they have on their walls.
- Hiring decisions may be based on the faith of applicants, as long as that practice does not conflict with local and state laws.

As Ezra and Nehemiah set out on their journey's they accepted help from King. Cyrus. They did not abandon God but also knew the rebuilding of the city and the temple would be costly and requires economic support from the king. The king did not ask them to abandon God but supported their mission.



Closing Prayer

Father, we ask You to fill us with the knowledge of Your will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding. And we pray this in order that we may live lives worthy of You – so that we may please You in every way. May we never cease to bear fruit in every good work as we grow in our knowledge of You. Strengthen us with all power according to Your glorious might so that we may have great endurance and patience for the work You call us to. Lead us to the proper funding sources – and may we find favor there, as Nehemiah and Ezra did. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen