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Tower of Strength

“The name of the Lord is a strong tower
The righteous runs into it and is safe.”
—Proverbs 18:10

Leadership Tips From Nehemiah

Nehemiah is one of those books of the Old Testament that doesn't get very much attention.

Nehemiah is an account of the rebuilding of Jerusalem after the captivity. The Babylonian army had taken all the children of Israel into a foreign land, in 586 BC. After seventy years of exile, they were released to return home if they desired. Some Jews returned to Jerusalem in 536BC under the leadership of Zerubbabel. In 458BC, another group returned under the leadership of Ezra the scribe. Finally, Nehemiah made the trip to Jerusalem in 445BC.

The book of Nehemiah is a story of God-centered leadership of God's people. Nehemiah knew that for God's people to be everything they needed to be, they had to strengthen the fortifications of Jerusalem. This book records how Nehemiah came to this conviction, how he communicated that vision to all the people, and how led them to its completion.

1.) He Acted on a Need.

In chapter one, Nehemiah is going about his every day life as cupbearer to the Persian king, minding his own business, so to speak. Suddenly he received an unexpected visit from his brother Hanani and some men from Judah. They brought news that “the remnant there in the province who survived the captivity are in great distress and reproach, and the wall of Jerusalem is broken down and its gates are burned with fire” (1:3).

Nehemiah didn't just shrug his shoulders. He didn't just rationalize that he lived in Susa and the problem was hundreds of miles away in Jerusalem, and his life was just fine thank you very much. Instead, he “sat down and wept and mourned for days; and was fasting a praying before the God of heaven” (1:4).

Nehemiah was convicted! He saw a need that had to be filled, and he decided that he was the man to do it. He decided that God's kingdom was worth more than his own comfort, that Jerusalem and the people of God needed to be his first priority.

That is the first step to leading any project for God. Determine what is lacking in the kingdom, have a firm understanding of what *ought* to be happening, and determine to be the one who works on the problem.

Do you think the church needs to do better at teaching its members about family life? Start a class on families. Do you think that the folks on your street need to hear about Jesus? Be the one to organize the effort or send them all letters of invitation. Do you believe the landscaping needs to be upgraded? Call a work day, put shovels in hands, and get the job done. Think the church is missing the family atmosphere it once had? Open your home once a month and start addressing the need.

So many good works get short circuited because the internal monologue goes: “This needs to be done; I wonder who will do it?” Rather, say, “this needs to be done; I will get on it right away!”

2.) He Prayed for Success.

As you read Nehemiah, you are struck by the amount of time he spends in prayer.

Nehemiah starts with prayer. As soon as he hears the news of the sorry state of Jerusalem, he fasts and prays (1:4–10). Not only does he praise God, but he reviews the events that brought the Jews to this situation. When he makes up his mind that he must request leave from the king—no easy task for a slave—he specifically prays, “Lord I beseech You, may Your ear be attentive ... and make Your servant successful today and grant him compassion before this man [the king]” (1:11).

And Nehemiah continued to pray and talk to God throughout the entire process. When Nehemiah actually gets his audience with the king, immediately he stops and whispers a prayer to God (2:4).

In 2:12 he speaks of his mission as “what my God was putting into my mind to do for Jerusalem.” And in 7:5, it is what “God put into my heart.” In 2:20 Nehemiah was confident that “the God of heaven will give us success.” When enemies surrounded him, Nehemiah cried out, “hear O God, how we are despised! Return their reproach” (4:4, 9). Nehemiah asked God to “strengthen [his] hands” (6:9). He credited God with all the victories (2:8) and thanked Him. It’s almost as if Nehemiah perceived the presence of God at each and every turn! He thinks of God as a friend, a counselor, a lord, who stands at his elbow at all times.

It is important to ask God to participate with you in whatever endeavor you begin. Check it with His word to see that it is right, and beseech His blessing in prayer. Proverbs 16:3 says, “Commit your works to the Lord, and your plans will be established.” Psalm 127:1–2 says, “Unless the Lord builds the house, they labor in vain who build it. Unless the Lord guards the city, the watchman keeps awake in vain.”

3.) He Gathered the Materials.

Nehemiah knew that he couldn't accomplish such a huge task without making preparations first. So in chapter 2, he thought ahead, anticipated all his needs for travel and for lumber, and requested all the materials he would need from King Artaxerxes.

And I said to the king, "If it please the king, let letters be given me for the governors of the provinces beyond the River, that they may allow me to pass through until I come to Judah, and a letter to Asaph the keeper of the king's forest, that he may give me timber to make beams for the gates of the fortress which is by the temple, for the wall of the city and for the house to which I will go." And the king granted them to me because the good hand of my God was on me (2:7-8).

Every big project needs a materials list. "For which one of you, when he wants to build a tower, does not first sit down and calculate the cost, to see if he has enough to complete it?" (Luke 14:28). Many easy jobs have turned into whole-day projects because of too many trips to Home Depot. Even in spiritual matters such as a gospel meeting or a vacation Bible school, good leaders will look ahead and be sure all the tools and equipment and manpower are available to keep the job running smoothly and brought to a successful finish.

More on this subject next week...

—John Guzzetta

Quote of the Week:

"This is an age of syncretism. People are trying to harmonize and unite many different schools of thought and come up with a superior religion. Our evangelical churches are in danger of diluting the faith in their attempt to understand the beliefs of others. Mysticism, legalism, Eastern religions, asceticism, evolution, and man-made philosophies are secretly creeping into churches. They are not denying Christ, but they are dethroning Him and robbing Him of His rightful place of preeminence."

—Warren Wiersbe