

FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH, 9-1-13 AM NOTES
"THINKING BIBLICALLY ABOUT LEADERSHIP"
NEHEMIAH 2:1-20
Non-Series Message

Matthew 20:25-28 (NKJV) ²⁵ You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those who are great exercise authority over them. ²⁶ Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant. ²⁷ And whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave—²⁸ just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many."

True spiritual leaders desire the success of those they lead and are willing to sacrifice to make it so.

"If you truly understand your accountability before God as a leader, you will begin to see why Christ portrayed the leader as a servant. He was *not* suggesting, as many have supposed, that lowliness alone is the essence of leadership. There are plenty of humble, meek, tenderhearted, servant-minded people who are not *leaders*. A true leader inspires followers. Someone who has no followers can hardly be called a leader. So while it is certainly true that leadership demands a servant's heart; it is by no means the case that everyone with a servant's heart is thereby a leader. There's far more to leadership than that."

—John MacArthur

"Spiritual leadership is knowing where God wants people to be and taking the initiative to use God's methods to get them there in reliance on God's power."

—John Piper

The Historical Background of Nehemiah

- * 586 BC – The Babylonians take Jerusalem
- * 539 BC – The Babylonians fell to Cyrus, King of Persia
- * 538 BC – The first group of Jews return to Jerusalem
- * 486 BC – Xerxes (Ahasuerus) took the throne
- * 465 BC – Artaxerxes took the throne
- * 445-446 BC – Nehemiah takes up the task to rebuild the wall

Vision is the ability to see the God-desired end product, to be passionate about it, and then to develop a God-guided plan to accomplish it.

"Leaders must see what others don't see and then challenge others to follow until they do see."

—Warren Wiersbe

I. Leaders Practice God-Directed Preparation (vv. 1-16)

A. Leaders Have a Prayed-Through Plan (vv. 1-10)

Proverbs 21:1 (NKJV) "The king's heart *is* in the hand of the Lord, *like* the rivers of water; He turns it wherever He wishes."

"It is possible to move men through God by prayer alone."

—Hudson Taylor

Hebrews 6:12 (NKJV) "that you do not become sluggish, but imitate those who through **faith and patience** inherit the promises."

The presence of faith does not mean the absence of organization and plans.

Proverbs 16:9 (NKJV) “A man's heart plans his way, but the Lord directs his steps.”

First, the king's permission was obtained (2:4-5), second, the king's protection was obtained (2:7, 9), and third, the king's provision was obtained (2:8).

B. Leaders Have an Accurate Assessment (vv. 11-16)

Leaders take time to count the cost and hear from God about the exact direction God wants them to take.

II. Leaders Practice God-Centered Motivation (vv. 17-18)

There are two basic kinds of motivation—external and internal.

“I have nothing to offer but blood, toil, tears, and sweat...We shall not flag or fail. We shall go on to the end. We shall fight in France, we shall fight in the seas and oceans, we shall fight with growing confidence and growing strength in the air; we shall defend our island whatever the cost may be. We shall fight on the beaches, we shall fight on the landing grounds, we shall fight in the fields and in the streets, we shall fight in the hills; we shall never surrender...” —Winston Churchill

Philippians 1:20b (NKJV) “...Christ will be magnified in my body, whether by life or by death.”

III. Leaders Practice God-Empowered Determination (vv. 19-20)

“The door to opportunity swings on the hinges of opposition.”

—Adrian Rogers

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If I asked everyone who is a leader here today to raise their hand, many of you would not raise your hand when really, you should. Leadership is much broader than most people think. Because many don't realize that they are leaders, they are way less effective than they could be. Husbands and Fathers are leaders of your family. Perhaps the position of leadership that has the greatest potential to impact the future is that of a mother with young children. Sunday School teachers for all ages are leaders; choir and orchestra members are leaders of worship; school teachers are leaders; small business owners are leaders; those in a supervisory position at the factory or business are leaders; coaches are leaders; ministry directors are leaders – I think you get the idea. Every believer is to be a disciple maker (the Great Commission says so) and discipling another person involves leadership. Indeed, leadership is much broader than most people think. Someone has said that the church is the most leadership intensive enterprise on earth! One reason so many churches flounder is that so many Pastors don't know how to

biblically lead people. In my first seminary experience back in the 1970's I did not have a single class on leadership! There are two things within the church relating to leadership that causes me great concern. First are those with positions of leadership who won't lead. Second are those who copy the pragmatic leadership patterns of the world. Pastors are all too often abandoning their God given role of shepherd and trying to run the church like the CEO of a business. Personally, I think that if you are a Christian, whatever leadership position you have inside the church or in the world, it is to be spiritual leadership. Spiritual leadership was best defined by Jesus in **Matthew 20:25-28 (NKJV)** “²⁵ You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those who are great exercise authority over them. ²⁶ Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant. ²⁷ And whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave-- ²⁸ just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.” According to Christ, the greatest leader is the person who has a servant heart, sacrifices for those under their leadership, and is selfless. A proud, self-promoting person is a poor leader by Christ's standards. That doesn't mean that the Christian leader is not firm, not strict in areas that demand strictness, or doesn't bring unpleasant consequences on those who refuse to follow their leadership. The bottom line is that true spiritual leaders desire the success of those they lead and are willing to sacrifice to make it so. Let me balance what I just said with a quote: “If you truly understand your accountability before God as a leader, you will begin to see why Christ portrayed the leader as a servant. He was *not* suggesting as many have supposed, that lowliness alone is the essence of leadership. There are plenty of humble, meek, tenderhearted, servant minded people who are not *leaders*. A true leader inspires followers. Someone who has no followers can hardly be called a leader. So while it is certainly true that leadership demands a servant's heart; it is by no means the case that everyone with a servant's heart is thereby a leader. There's far more to leadership than that.” [John MacArthur, *The Book on Leadership*, page vi]. My favorite definition of spiritual leadership that includes all of the above is from John Piper: “**Spiritual leadership is knowing where God wants people to be and taking the initiative to use God's methods to get them there in reliance on God's power.**” [John Piper].

There are hundreds of books out there on leadership (many of them very well written), but in my opinion, the best resource for learning how to lead is the Bible. The Bible has so much to say about leadership and especially in the book of Nehemiah. I believe that the book of Nehemiah is the greatest treatise on leadership ever written.

Let's set the scene for this book.

An Historical Background of Nehemiah

- * 586 BC – The Babylonians take Jerusalem
- * 539 BC – The Babylonians fell to Cyrus, King of Persia
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The events of the book of Nehemiah take place about 445-446 BC. In about 586 BC the Babylonians took Jerusalem. They carried off most of the inhabitants who were not killed some 700-800 miles to Babylon. The temple was destroyed and the walls that surrounded Jerusalem were torn down and the gates were burned. In 539 BC, the Babylonians fell to Cyrus, the King of Persia. Cyrus was a humane leader and as was prophesied almost 200 years earlier by Isaiah the prophet, Cyrus allowed some of the Jews to go back to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple and their homeland. The first group of Jews returned in 538 BC under the leadership of Joshua and Zerubbabel (recorded in Ezra 1-6). The foundations of the temple were laid at that time but because of opposition from non-Jewish neighbors, the rebuilding project was stopped for 15 years before it was completed. After the reign of Darius the Mede, Xerxes (also known as Ahasuerus) took the throne in 486 BC. He was the king who chose Esther as his Queen. Here is the part that brings us up to the book of Nehemiah. In 465 BC, Artaxerxes (the son of Xerxes) took the throne. We are told in Nehemiah 1:1 that the events of the book of Nehemiah took place in the 20th year

of Artaxerxes (about 445 or 446 BC). That helps put Nehemiah in its historical context. It is interesting that the King's stepmother was Esther which may explain his close relationship with Nehemiah and his willingness to help the Jews.

Today, we are going to look at Nehemiah 2, as we learn to think biblically about leadership. In chapter one, God gave Nehemiah a task and a vision for rebuilding the broken down walls around Jerusalem. Let me say a few words about vision as it related to leadership. Vision is the ability to see the God desired end product, to be passionate about it, and then to develop a God guided plan to accomplish the vision. Without a God implanted vision, it is impossible to lead a disciple, a family, a business, a ministry, a crew, or a church. Someone said that being a leader is tough today because you can't be sure if the people behind you are following you or chasing you. Here is who people follow – people follow passionate people who know where they are going. Jesus knew where He was going. He saw the cross but He saw beyond the cross to the resurrection and the glory and the transformed lives of those who would receive Him and make up His church, His bride. That vision drove him and set His timetable for all that He did. Someone said, "Leaders must see what others don't see and then challenge others to follow until they do see" (Warren Wiersbe). When we get before God and seek His face, He will give us His vision – the end view of what He has called us to. This vision, of course, will never contradict His word. The main thing I want you to see in today's message is that while a vision is essential in effective spiritual leadership, a vision is not enough. What else is there? Let's look at Nehemiah 2.

I. Leaders Practice God Directed Preparation (V1-16)

A God given vision must be translated into a workable plan. Visionaries who cannot get their vision down into a plan won't have followers for very long. Those who follow a leader must see some concrete plans for the fulfillment of the vision. Let's see how Nehemiah's vision of a city with walls was carried out.

A. Leaders Have a Prayed Through Plan (V1-10)

The kings of Persia were absolute in their ruling. They didn't have any "checks and balances". This particular king, Artaxerxes, had a reputation for never changing his mind. Earlier, he had put a stop to the rebuilding of the wall around Jerusalem. We get that from Ezra 4:17-23. Nehemiah knew that in order for the vision to be accomplished, the king's mind had to be changed and Nehemiah knew that only God could change it. Nehemiah knew that God is sovereign and all powerful and he knew the truth of **Proverbs 21:1 (NKJV)** "The king's heart *is* in the hand of the Lord, *like* the rivers of water; He turns it wherever He wishes." This is an amazing truth. The word translated "rivers" is really "channel" and could even be an irrigation channel. The heart (which includes the will) of those in authority is in the Lord's hand and He can change their heart like a channel of water can be rerouted. It matters not whether the person is a believer or an unbeliever. Hudson Taylor, the pioneer missionary to inland China said, "**It is possible to move men through God by prayer alone**" (Hudson Taylor). When we compare 1:1 with 2:1 we find that Nehemiah had been diligently praying and waiting patiently on God to work for 4 months. Faith and patience go together. **Hebrews 6:12 (NKJV)** "that you do not become sluggish, but imitate those who through **faith and patience** inherit the promises." Let me remind you of a hard truth – only God can change a person's heart. He doesn't need you to "help Him out". Don't try to manipulate people, plan schemes, trick, or deceive them to get done what you believe needs to be done. God, in answer to believing prayer can change the heart of one in authority in His timing. While Nehemiah was waiting for those 4 months, he was developing a plan. The moment finally came in God's timing to lay out the vision before the king. In Nehemiah 2:2 the king asks Nehemiah a question. **Nehemiah 2:2 (NKJV)** "Therefore the king said to me, 'Why *is* your face sad, since you *are* not sick? This *is* nothing but sorrow of heart.' So I became dreadfully afraid". Why was he so afraid? To be sad in the king's presence was a capital offense. It was considered as a sign of a possible plot against the king. Nehemiah knew that this was God's ordained timing [Read 3-4]. The Lord had made the King's heart open. Nehemiah, who lived in an atmosphere of prayer, breathes a prayer no doubt asking God to guide his words. This, by the way, is what 1 Thessalonians 5:17 means when it tells us to "pray without ceasing".

What we see next in the text is that during these 4 months, Nehemiah has developed a strategy, a plan for accomplishing the vision God has given him. A vision is exciting; producing a **strategy** to accomplish the vision is hard work – real hard work. I remember many years ago a young man who was a member of another church in our community, making an appointment with me. He was filled with excitement about a vision he had for a Powell youth center where kids could go after school and hear Christian concerts and be entertained and also witnessed to. He wanted financial help from our church to pull it off. I tried to affirm his noble vision and not be a bucket of cold water thrown on his enthusiasm. I did, since he was asking for financial help, have to ask him some questions. Who was going to staff the Youth center? What kind of financial accountability would there be? Did he have a proposed budget as to how the money would be spent? He really didn't have very many answers. I was nice but told him to develop a strategy to fulfill his vision and then come by and see me again. That was about 15 years ago and I've never heard from him. **The presence of faith does not mean the absence of organization and plans!** Organization and specific plans are concrete manifestations of faith. **Proverbs 16:9 (NKJV)** "A man's heart plans his way, but the Lord directs his steps." Let me speak to you parents whose children are still young. Do you have a burden from God to raise up Godly young men and women? I believe that most of you do. You may even have a vision of your son and / or daughter grown and walking with God and glorifying Him with their life. But do you have a prayed through strategy? Do you have prayed through, written out goals and convictions about training them and having them in church and what activities they will be a part of and what activities they will not be a part of. If you don't, good things like sports, dance, gymnastics and the like will consume them and there won't be time for eternal things. Notice what Nehemiah had planned and prayed through and presented to the king. First, the King's **Permission** was to be obtained (V4-5), second, the King's **Protection** (V7, 9), and third, the King's **Provision** was obtained (V8). God had prepared the king's heart, and he gave Nehemiah everything he asked for and even more. Verse 9 says that the King also sent an armed escort with him and later we find out that the King named him as the governor and Nehemiah didn't even ask for either of those!

B. Leaders Have an Accurate Assessment (V11-16)

What was Nehemiah doing during these three days? For one thing he had just come 700-800 miles likely on the back of a camel! There was probably some rest in getting over "camel lag", but primarily he was making an assessment of the situation and developing specific plans for getting the work done. Don't think of his task as being like putting a fence around the city. The wall would cover a distance of more than a mile and would need to be 3 feet thick and about 20 feet high. Effective leaders are not a bunch of vague positive thinking, "it will all work out somehow" people. They are realists who recognize problems and see the depth of commitment and the cost to see the vision accomplished. Leaders take time to count the cost and hear from God about the exact direction God wants them to take. Nehemiah took an honest and no doubt painful look at the size of the task set before him and the inhabitants of Jerusalem. There was the size of the task, the history of failure, and a discouraged group of residents from which the workers must arise. Nehemiah needed to hear from God. You see the results of these 3 days in Chapter 3 as he organizes the people in a brilliant way to accomplish the task.

II. Leaders Practice God Centered Motivation (V17-18)

There is an old Chinese Proverb that says, "He who thinks he is leading and has no one following is only taking a walk". Whatever area of leadership you are in, you must have the people you are charged with leading, follow you. Nehemiah could not build the wall alone. Notice in verse 17 all the pronouns ("you", "we", "us", "we"). How do we motivate people to follow? There are two basic kinds of motivation – external and internal. External motivation depends on rewards and consequences. It isn't always wrong, especially when leading young children, but it is not the most effective kind of motivation long term. External motivation has a short lifespan.

Internal motivation is just what it sounds like; it is motivation using that which is not material. It appeals to what is right and good and it doesn't promise anything external or material. This is the kind of motivation Nehemiah almost exclusively uses. Nehemiah motivated those he was leading with the glory

of God. In verse 17 he motivates them to build the wall, “that we may no longer be a reproach”. That word “reproach” can be translated “disgrace”. He was motivating them by the possibility of glorifying God instead of bringing a reproach upon Him. In verse 18, he turns their gaze upon the power of God and that made the task look more “do-able”. In the last 100 years, perhaps the most effective internal motivator was Winston Churchill. Here was a man who motivated a nation to fight against incredible odds and win by using 100% internal motivation. Listen to these excerpts from his speeches: “I have nothing to offer but blood, toil, tears, and sweat.” “...we shall not flag or fail. We shall go on to the end. We shall fight in France, we shall fight in the seas and oceans, we shall fight with growing confidence and growing strength in the air; we shall defend our island whatever the cost may be. We shall fight on the beaches, we shall fight on the landing grounds, we shall fight in the fields and in the streets, we shall fight in the hills; we shall never surrender...” [Quoted in “Hand Me Another Brick” by Chuck Swindoll, P65]. Churchill and Nehemiah used the same type of motivation. Here is another reason that the prime type of motivation in the Christian life ought to be internal and not external. The “Health, Wealth, and Prosperity” teaching that is so common today is totally external in its motivation. It feeds the flesh and makes God subservient to man and makes selfishness the prime motive for the Christian life. It all falls apart when someone gets cancer and it’s not immediately healed or they loose their job or their business fails. When your motivation in all you do is the internal motivation of the glory of God, every “setback”, every tough circumstance, every battle becomes another opportunity to glorify God. Internal motivation gives us an eternal mindset as we realize that this life isn’t it and all that counts is that as Philippians 1:20 says – “Christ be magnified in my body whether through life or through death.” As you read through this great book, you find Nehemiah again and again intrinsically motivating the people by pulling their attention away from the immensity of the task to the power of God and from the hardship and danger they were experiencing to the glory of God.

III. Leaders Practice God Empowered Determination (V19-20)

Anytime you set out to lead those you have been placed over in a way that is pleasing to God, you will have opposition. Someone said, “The door to opportunity swings on the hinges of opposition” (Adrian Rogers). Wherever the realm of your leadership, you will be opposed and if there is not a dogged determination to persevere in God’s strength and power you will fail. I promise you opposition will come whether it is in your own family, your workplace, your ministry, or wherever you seek to exercise Godly leadership. The Lord may give you a stubborn child, a difficult class, a horrible boss, etc. Get a bulldog grip on the vision from God and the promises of God and don’t let go.

CONCLUSION

How are you leading? Are you seeking to make disciples? Are you leading your family? Get a vision from God, develop a prayed through plan, motivate internally those who you are leading, and never give up when tough times come. If the vision for those you lead is from God, He will accomplish it.