



THE HEART OF A LEADER • Leadership

What Do I Need to Know About the Passage?

Nehemiah 1:1-2:5

Nehemiah was not written to be a manual for spiritual leadership. We need to be clear about that up-front. But Nehemiah was a spiritual leader and the book of Nehemiah is somewhat unique in the meticulous details provided by the narrative. It would seem, step-by-step, God does desire us to see how the task of rebuilding Jerusalem's city wall was accomplished, and how Nehemiah gave leadership to it.

The work of any ministry requires spiritual leadership. The reason for tracing this theme through Nehemiah is that we give a great deal of attention to the "spiritual" aspect of "spiritual leadership" and rarely focus on the "leadership" of it. That's what this study will do.

Background

Nehemiah is cupbearer to the king of Persia. The Jews had been taken captive by the Babylonians. You might recall, for example, Daniel's dealing with Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon. The Persians, however, conquered the Babylonians and, among other things, inherited the exiled Jewish population. Shortly after taking power the Persians allowed some of the exiled Jews to return to Jerusalem.

The year is about 444 B.C. and Nehemiah, as well as many others Jews, are still in Persia, not among the original group who had returned. Nehemiah gets word from a friend, Hanani, that the wall surrounding Jerusalem is in ruins. No wall, no protection. Without it, Judah is as vulnerable as a child in Time Square.

The Heart of Nehemiah

Nehemiah responds to the news with mourning, fasting, and prayer. Many Jews are concerned about the state of the wall, but Nehemiah is devastated. Why? Nehemiah knows that Jerusalem is not just a city, it is God's city, and as such, it is to mirror His glory. Likewise, the wall that once protected it now stands as a monument to the decayed spiritual life of the Jewish people. Every day that it remains in this condition brings more shame to the Jews and mockery to God. Nehemiah is able to see the wall and its significance through God's eyes, giving him spiritual insight. He's consumed with a passion for God which causes him to see more than a broken wall. He sees a standing insult to the God he loves.

Seeing the circumstances from a spiritual perspective, Nehemiah realizes that the immediate need is not for concrete or spackle or mud or bark or whatever they would need to physically fix the wall, but repentance. The wall was in this state for no other reason than the Jews had rebelled and rejected God, and therefore

What's the Big Idea?

This study looks at the heart of a spiritual leader. A spiritual leader is passionate about God and seeing His kingdom manifest on earth. It's this passion that causes a spiritual leader to 1) take ownership and responsibility for change 2) act courageously to bring change about and 3) demonstrate a "dynamic determination" to see the task through.

What's the Problem?

We passively accommodate our spiritual decay, degeneration and compromise, rather than avail ourselves to lead transformation and godly change.



repentance was the necessary foundation – not spackle, not mud. Notice the contrition in Nehemiah's prayer, "We have acted wickedly toward You. We have not obeyed the commands, decrees and laws You gave Your servant Moses."

The Heart of a Spiritual Leader

As we look at Nehemiah through a lens of leadership, the first thing we note is an unusual passion and zeal for God. It physically upset him to think of God not receiving the glory due Him. He also sees the situation from a spiritual perspective. While others simply see a broken wall, or weakened defense, Nehemiah sees a great deal more. He sees the spiritual battle and spiritual implications – the wall stands as an insult to God, a testimony to Judah's rebellion, a foothold for Satan and the enemies of God, a monument to spiritual apathy and neglect. Nehemiah sees the spiritual reality.

It is interesting to note that the great era of modern missions was begun by individuals who were able to see the multitudes of the world through God's eyes – as those spiritually lost. They were also compelled with a similar zeal to see God glorified in every corner of the world. They realized that the uncompleted task of fulfilling the Great Commission mirrored the spiritual complacency of the church, and that the church needed to repent, step out and act.

The Heart of Nehemiah

Nehemiah's heart and spiritual vision set him apart as a leader, but notice something else in his prayer: "Give your servant success today by granting him favor in the presence of this man" (the king). Nehemiah was willing to pray that God would use him to change the situation. He was available and willing to act.

No doubt many lamented the state of the wall, but had anyone done anything about it? Leaders don't sit on the sideline complaining or barking out orders, they lead by example and they lead by action, and others file in line behind them. Such action often requires moral courage on the part of a spiritual leader. It's not just that they act, but they do so in the face of danger, opposition, and fear. There are always risks, and leaders count the cost. In making this request of the king, Nehemiah puts his neck on the line, risking his life.

In this sense, Nehemiah points to Christ. He acted on our behalf, He stepped in to lead us out of our spiritual decay and destruction. He's the architect of the building project of our salvation. And He courageously put his life on the line to save us, and do for us what we could never do for ourselves. "Jesus is our shepherd" is the same thing as saying Jesus is our ultimate "spiritual leader."

The Heart of a Spiritual Leader

In recent studies of some of history's greatest leaders, there were several traits that were found to be common to most all of them. One of those is referred to as "dynamic determination." This trait relates to the will, and speaks of a leader's ability to initiate and establish momentum; to break free from the lethargy that often keeps others from getting started. There is a courage and boldness to act and a tenacity to sustain the initiative. Leaders are willing to act when others will not. Nehemiah seems to assume a basic principal that all spiritual leaders should. "How can I ask God to do something that I myself am unwilling to be involved in?"

What's Our Response?

You want the group to begin to pray for God's heart in how they see others, the campus and the world. You want them to repent of their own apathy toward sin and desire Christ to use them to be spiritual leaders in the circumstances He has placed them.

This study will also allow you to establish some of the characteristics of a godly leader, creating categories by which to understand the roles of a leader.

And you want them to begin to see Jesus as the ultimate Spiritual Leader, which of course is a part of what it means for Him to be our great Shepherd.

What Are the Questions?

Nehemiah 1:1-2:5

LAUNCH

While we often talk about spiritual leadership, we rarely talk about what it means to lead. What would you say are the most important qualities of a leader? Of all of the popular figures in society, who do you think is a great leader?

EXPLORE

Read Nehemiah chapter 1.

1. Why is Nehemiah in Susa, and where is Susa anyway?
2. What is the situation back in Jerusalem and how did it get this way?
3. As everything in Jerusalem is saturated with spiritual meaning, what does this state of affairs say about the spiritual condition of Judah?
4. Why does Nehemiah see a need to mourn, fast and confess?
5. Essential to a spiritual leader, Nehemiah is able to see and feel the spiritual reality of the situation where others don't. Can you think of time when you've experienced this?
6. What area of your life and ministry would you say is in need of repair? Where are you vulnerable – where does Satan have easy access into your life?

Reread 1:5-11.

7. What, in Nehemiah's prayer, do you think found favor in God's eyes?
8. What is repentance and how is it different from confession?
9. In what ways do you find Nehemiah's prayer convicting as it relates to your own prayer life?

10. For every aspect of the situation, Nehemiah takes personal responsibility (to repent, speak to the king, rebuild the wall). What does it mean to take responsibility?
11. When you think of all of the responsibilities in your life, are there any where you are less than responsible?
12. Spiritually speaking what have you taken responsibility for (e.g., the spiritual well-being of a disciple, your own spiritual life)?

Read 2:1-6.

13. To step out and lead invariably requires courage. What is courage? How does Nehemiah exercise courage?
14. Spiritual immaturity often separates faith from actions, and actions from prayer. Describe how faith, action, and prayer work together (integrate) in this passage.

In studies of history's greatest leaders, a common characteristic was something called "dynamic determination." This trait relates to the will, and speaks of a leader's ability to initiate and establish momentum, to break free from the "initial pull of gravity" that often keeps great plans from getting off the ground.

15. On a scale from 1 to 10, who do you know that is a 9 or a 10 in "dynamic determination?"

APPLY

16. What are two lessons you learn about godly leadership from Nehemiah? How does your heart need to change in order to be this kind of leader?
17. In what ways did Jesus demonstrate spiritual leadership on our behalf? How would you say Jesus is currently leading in and through your life?
18. What, in your spiritual life and ministry, has required or is requiring you to be courageous? How about "dynamic determination?"
19. What current steps of obedience are requiring your faith to stretch? In what ways are your actions expressing a lack of faith in God's willingness and ability?

What Are the Answers?

1. Susa was the capitol of Persia, where many Jews had remained since the Babylonian captivity.
2. The wall around Jerusalem remained in rubble since the Babylonians had leveled the city 152 years earlier.
3. It suggests spiritual decay and the absence of God's protection.
4. He rightly understood the root of the problem to be spiritual, stemming from Judah's disobedience of God.
5. Allow the group to discuss.
6. You want the group to see the spiritually metaphor of the wall surrounding "the Holy City."
7. Discuss. Faith, repentance, humility, a concern for God's glory, a willingness to be used to change the situation.
8. Repentance is a complete change of direction often accompanied by deep remorse.
9. Allow the group to discuss.
10. Taking ownership and action. To be accountable for.
11. Allow the group to discuss.
12. Allow the group to discuss.
13. Courage is the willingness to put oneself at personal risk for a greater good. Nehemiah could have lost his life making this request of the king.
14. Even as Nehemiah makes the request, he is praying to God, trusting God to give him favor in the king's eyes.
15. Discuss. You want the group to wrestle with why we aren't crying out for change the way Nehemiah did.
16. Allow the group to discuss.
17. This question is to get the group to see in Jesus the model of spiritual leadership and how He has exercised it in our life.
18. Allow the group to discuss.
19. Allow the group to discuss.

Memorize

...Give your servant success today by granting him favor in the presence of this man.
Nehemiah 1:11