

# taking action!

small group material



www.studentlife.co.nz

Turning Lost Students into Christ-Centered Labourers

## THE PLANS OF A LEADER • Leadership

### What Do I Need to Know About the Passage?

Nehemiah 2:4-3:31

Sometimes Christians avoid the process of planning because something about planning seems to hint of self-effort. If that is indeed the case, we should hope the designers of our cars, bridges and airplanes weren't Christians. Further, I'd bet the designers of the Ford Fiesta were believers.

But while we want to be sensitive to the Spirit's leading and reliant upon the Lord, this does not imply we shouldn't be prepared. "Spirit-led" shouldn't be a euphemism for "slacker." Preparation and planning are a part of taking responsibility and practicing good stewardship of what God has entrusted to us. In Nehemiah we see balance between these two principles – diligent planning and reliance upon God.

#### Nehemiah 2:4-10

Looking at Nehemiah's prayer in chapter 1, it's evident he lacked in neither faith nor reliance. In chapter 2, in the midst of asking the king to return to Jerusalem, Nehemiah "prayed to the God of heaven, and [then] answered the king." Through the entire drama, Nehemiah is in constant prayer.

We tend to create a false dichotomy: either we are the ones who are doing the labor or God is. But the apostle Paul refers to himself as a "co-laborer" with Christ. Co-laboring is a collaborative effort. Thus the prefix "co" and not "uni." God gives wisdom, but we need to plan. God opens doors, but we must walk through them.

In this passage, Nehemiah asks the king for the resources necessary to rebuild the wall. We wouldn't consider building a house, room, or even a hamster cage without planning out our supplies. The work of ministry deserves no less.

#### Nehemiah 2:11-16

By the time Nehemiah arrives in Jerusalem, he already has two of the essential ingredients of a well crafted plan. First, he's got a goal. As they say, "aim at nothing and you'll hit it every time." His objective is to rebuild the wall of Jerusalem. He's also gone to Home Depot on the way to Jerusalem and compiled all of his building materials – done and done! But something's still missing.

Nehemiah still doesn't know exactly what needs to be accomplished. To get that information, he needs to assess the current state of affairs (how much of the wall is destroyed, and where). So Nehemiah makes a thorough inspection of the wall because current reality provides a fixed starting point. Now Nehemiah can say, "Here's where we are (current reality), here's what we have to build it with (our resources), and here's what we are going to build (goal)."

#### Nehemiah 2:17-20

While Nehemiah has garnered the raw materials for the project, unless he's planning

### What's the Big Idea?

Spiritual leaders need to plan and prepare while at the same time remaining prayerful and reliant upon God.

### What's the Problem?

We tend to either presume upon God to do our work for us or plan and prepare as though we don't need Him.



to outsource the work to India, he needs a labor force. And this is a challenge; trees can easily be cut down, but laborers must be recruited. To recruit someone to a task – especially if you aren't paying them – they need to see the importance of it. And so Nehemiah gives an impassioned speech persuading the Jews to throw their hands and backs into the project.

Notice how he motivates them. He asks, do “you see the trouble we are in?” Here's a clearly expressed problem and need – “the question is not ‘Will people attack?’ but ‘When?’” Then comes an appeal to integrity and self-respect, “Let us rebuild the wall...and we will no longer be a disgrace.” And, most importantly, he gives them confidence that “the gracious hand of God” will prosper the effort.

The term associated with this kind of a speech is called “vision casting.” It's what leaders do to garner people-resources. Throughout Scripture you'll find many such speeches. Perhaps the most notable are found in Deuteronomy where Moses seeks to motivate the people to take possession of the Promised Land, as well as follow the Lord. God's people often need prodding to do what they know is right. Good leaders, like Nehemiah, know how to prod and motivate. Godly motivation is always truthful, and good motivators should be leery of exaggeration, manipulation or just plain annoying people. Godliness must pervade every aspect of motivational communication. Often, passion for the Lord and His plans is as compelling as the content of the speech.

### Nehemiah 3:1-32

Nehemiah knows what he's attempting to do. He also has a picture of the “current reality,” so he knows where he's starting from and what needs to be done. And, now, he has the people and lumber to get the job done. You have to love it when a plan comes together! All he needs now are some practical action steps (who should do what, when). In chapter 3, we get to see those action steps as Nehemiah delegates to each person their specific role in the project.

While this may seem easy, “the devil” as they say “is in the details.” Good leaders give careful thought to the action steps and think-through who is best gifted and motivated to do them. Nehemiah, for example, had people working on the section of the wall that protected their own home, thus tapping intrinsic motivation.

So how do you come up with action steps? You ask the question “what needs to happen, in what order, to get to our goal?” Then you find the right person or people to be responsible for that step. It's simple unless you're planning a moon launch. Then it's not.

### Intellectual Flexibility

We already looked at “dynamic determination”. The second common trait of great leaders is called Intellectual Flexibility, which speaks of a person's ability to synthesize information and then draw insightful analysis and application out of it. After assessing the problem, Nehemiah knew what had to be done to fix it. He took raw data and turned it into a feasible plan. That's intellectual flexibility.

### Jesus and Planning

While Nehemiah is a model of planning, he is only so because Jesus is model of planning. Here's what I mean by that: If we never witnessed this same planning, strategy and preparation in Jesus' ministry it wouldn't be a priority in our spiritual leadership. But we do. As you read through the gospels you clearly see that where Jesus goes, when He goes, what he says and does and to whom are anything but random happenstance or just “playing things by ear.” His ministry is brilliantly conceived and executed, and yet there is always prayer, and reliance upon the Father.

## What's Our Response?

You want the group to see that spiritual leadership involves thoughtful planning and you also want them to understand the basic elements of constructing a plan.

At a heart level you want the group to see that there is nothing unspiritual about planning and preparation and that Jesus' ministry was as strategically conceived and as tightly formulated and executed as a plan can be.

Yet, good stewardship is never a substitute for prayer, faith and reliance upon God to lead, direct and empower. The term “spiritual leader” alludes to the need for both.

## What Are the Questions?

Nehemiah 2:4-3:31

### LAUNCH

What was the most difficult responsibility you've ever had? How did you handle it? Do you see yourself as a person who can manage complex situations? Complex personalities?

### EXPLORE

Read Nehemiah 2:4-10.

1. What would you say are Nehemiah's first acts of leadership?
2. Some people see planning as unspiritual, or even "worldly." Why?
3. As Nehemiah makes thoughtful preparations, how do you still see the dynamic of faith, prayer, and reliance?
4. What other biblical examples can you think of that demonstrate the importance of having a plan as well as relying on God?
5. Can you think of a biblical example of a leader who didn't have a plan or strategy?
6. In what way do you plan for things? Do you let your day just happen or do you plan it out?

Read 2:11-16.

7. As a spiritual metaphor what might be the significance of the gates being broken or destroyed?
8. As Nehemiah demonstrates, constructing a feasible plan requires an accurate assessment of "current reality." From a spiritual perspective what are some of the realities of this campus – good and bad?
9. At this point, Nehemiah has three critical components

of a feasible plan. Fill in the following:

**A Goal** (What specifically is Nehemiah trying to accomplish?):

**A Starting Point** (What is the analysis of the current situation of the wall?):

**Resources** (What are the critical resources Nehemiah has acquired for the project?):

Read 2:17-20.

10. Nehemiah lacks one more crucial resource – people. What does he do to recruit laborers to the project?
11. What words does he use in his speech that would have been motivating and would have "cast vision" for their involvement in God's plan?
12. Can you think of other "vision" speeches in Scripture spoken to capture hearts to accomplish God's plans? What's the most visionary talk you've ever heard?
13. At what point does motivation turn into manipulation?

Read 3:1-32.

14. When you have a clear goal, know what your current situation is, and have the resources to accomplish it, all that remains are the specific "action steps." Summarize Nehemiah's practical "action steps."

### APPLY

15. How do you see signs of planning in the ministry of Jesus? In what ways do you see Him gathering resources and "vision casting?"
16. What are the potential spiritual pitfalls in planning, recruiting, strategizing and vision casting? How does Nehemiah avoid these pitfalls?
17. What are the critical elements of planning implemented by Nehemiah?
18. Using Nehemiah as a model, write out a ministry plan. It can be for a Bible study, an outreach, or even a plan to learn the Scriptures.

### What Are the Answers?

1. Allow the group to discuss.
2. It can seem like self-effort, and not relying on God.
3. Through the whole process Nehemiah is constantly praying! Every step he takes is done in faith that God will provide. See "What Do I Need to Know about the Passage?"
4. Discuss. Joseph is a good example as he planned and prepared for an impending 7-year famine. Jesus too had a specific plan.
5. Discuss. Perhaps Jonah.
6. Allow the group to discuss.
7. There's no right answer but you want them to see the significance of the wall in representing the spiritual condition of Judah and a metaphor we can apply to our lives.
8. Allow the group to discuss.
9. Allow the group time to answer or fill out.
10. He gives a motivating speech and gives them a vision for why they should want to be involved.
11. He appeals to their national sense of pride. He says, "Let us rebuild the wall...and we will no longer be a disgrace." Then he tells them of how "the gracious hand of God" was upon him, trying to encourage them that God is in this plan, and thus it will succeed.
12. In the book of Deuteronomy (the final chapters), Moses gives several speeches to motivate the people to take possession of the Promised Land and follow the Lord.
13. Godly motivation is always truthful, and good motivators must always be careful not to exaggerate or move away from the truth in any way.
14. Among other things, he has each family take responsibility for rebuilding a sections of the wall, usually the section that would have guarded their home.
15. You might have the group take time and page through the gospels looking for examples. There are many.
16. He is always reliant and prayerful, always careful to say that it was God who put the plan upon his heart.
17. Having a goal; assessing current reality; gathering resources; planning action steps.
18. Give the group time to come up with plans and have them share.

### Memorize

Have the group try to remember the essential ingredients of planning:

- Setting a Goal
- Assessing Current Reality
- Gathering Resources
- Designating Key Action Steps (what key steps, in what order?)