

THE MAKING OF A LEADER
Nehemiah: Lesson 1 on Leadership
Nehemiah 1:1-4

INTRODUCTION.

Proverbs 28:2 *"A nation will be strong and endure when it has intelligent, sensible leaders."* Circle the words "strong" and "endure". Those are the two benefits of having good, strong leadership. I think you could apply this verse to your family. I think you could say a family will be strong and endure when there is good leadership. You can still apply the same to a business, a church, a group and a nation etc. There are rapid changes and upheavals and we need stability. It comes from leadership. On the leadership pyramid, as the leadership expands and the tasks expand then there is stability. But if the tasks are greater than the number of leaders the pyramid falls over.

THE BACKGROUND OF NEHEMIAH'S STORY.

In 586 BC the city of Jerusalem in Israel was destroyed. Jews were deported over to Babylon which is now Iraq. They were to be kept there for 70 years. But in 537 the first group of Jews was allowed to return. In 516 the Temple was rebuilt. In 458 Ezra led the second group of Jews back to Jerusalem. Then in 445 Nehemiah asked permission to return to Jerusalem with a third group to rebuild the city walls. Where is it happening? Jerusalem. The Problem is that the city walls needed to be rebuilt. Today we use other means to protect our cities like radar. We don't need walls. But in those days if a city was walled and an enemy came against it, it might take 2, 4, 6 months for the enemy to break in. The walls were very important. The Jews had been taken away in captivity into another country. They were finally allowed to trickle back in. Finally they were allowed to rebuild the Temple. But the city was still in ruins, rubble. All the walls were falling down. It was junk and they were living in a heap.

They were vulnerable to attack and harassment because they had no protection. Because they were defenseless they were also discouraged and defeated. When an army would come into a city and take it over, the first thing they would do is destroy the walls. That was a symbol that they were defeated and helpless. Basically, the wall of the city of Jerusalem torn down was a disgrace to the people of God. It said God has forsaken you. Why were they in captivity in the first place? It was the sin of the nation. God said, if you guys don't get your act together I'm going to allow an enemy nation to come in, and He did. But now He is allowing the Jews to come back, the Temple has been rebuilt but the city is still in rubble, a big mess, and the walls are broken down. People are living in rubble, low morale, and they are defeated, discouraged, and depressed. What do you do when you have that kind of situation? You need a leader. (Read Nehemiah 1:1). Notice: Nehemiah first says "I was in the city of Susa". This was written in first person.

Nehemiah wrote this book. This is his journal. This is his account of how he was about to get permission from a foreign king, who was not even a believer, to go back and rebuild the walls of Jerusalem when he himself [the foreign king] had ordered that they not be rebuilt when they had started to be rebuilt earlier. Last part of v. 11, he says *"I was the cupbearer to the king."* This tells us what Nehemiah did for a living, who he was, and what his occupation was. What was a cupbearer? If he was going to go back and try to rebuild the wall, obviously he is not a contractor but he is a cupbearer. He was the person the most trusted by the king. The reason he was called cupbearer was because part of his job was to taste the wine before the king drank it to make sure it was not poisoned. There were a lot of assassination attempts in those days. The king was

paranoid and fearful so they would have a guy who would test all of the wine. If he keeled over they knew that was bad wine! It was a pretty dangerous job.

The point I want to make here is that Nehemiah had to be absolutely loyal and trustworthy, a Jew brought over in captivity or actually he was probably born in Babylon because they had been there 70 years, but he was not a Persian and he is second in command. Isn't it neat how God has a way of always getting His men in the right position at the right time? Nehemiah is really a major figure in the Persian government. Verse 1 says in the month of Chislev his brother Hanani has been on a trip to Jerusalem and he comes back. Jerusalem is about 800 to 1000 miles from Susa. In those days that would take probably about two months travel on camel and it is all across the desert. It is major hard driving. His brother comes back and Nehemiah says, gives me a report about all of our relatives, what is happening over there in Jerusalem? Hanani says, "It is all bad news, the people are in the pits, our relatives are discouraged, the walls have not been rebuilt. They have got the temple rebuilt but the whole city lies in ruin. All these guys are coming in invading the city and the people are discouraged, depressed, and low morale. It is bad news!"

Nehemiah's reaction in v. 4 *"When I heard these things I sat down and I wept and for some days I mourned and I fasted and I prayed before the God of heaven."* Nehemiah's reaction was four things: he wept, he mourned, he fasted, and he prayed. He is really taking this thing seriously. He is saddened by this. He is embarrassed for the people of God. He says, I prayed and in the next few verses, 4-11, he gives us the prayer. Notice it says, *"for some days"*. Circle that phrase. He didn't do it for just one day. How long did he do it? In v. 1 he tells us this is the month of Chislev when he heard about it. In chapter 2, the very first verse, he says the month of Nisan of the twentieth year of king Artaxerxes he gets the chance to go. He has been praying all of this time. From these two Persian months it had been four months. Nehemiah had been praying, weeping, fasting, and mourning for four months. He took this seriously and very deeply in his heart. He prayed for four months straight. Nehemiah is a man of prayer. He has 11 prayers; there are more prayers in this book than almost any book of the Bible.

WHY DID GOD CHOOSE NEHEMIAH AS A LEADER?

1. NEHEMIAH WAS SENSITIVE TO THE NEEDS

Nehemiah's reaction is pretty incredible. Nehemiah has it made. He is at the peak of his career. Nehemiah is living on easy street, the second best position in the kingdom. He's got a great salary; he doesn't have to rock the boat. The problem in Jerusalem must seem like a million miles away. He is never even seen Jerusalem. He was born in Babylon because they had been there 70 years. When he hears about God's people depressed, discouraged and defeated he takes it seriously. *Leaders are sensitive to the needs of people around them.* That is the first principle of leadership I want to bring out of this book. Most of the world would love to have your problems. There problems are "Am I going to have food today?" and we are worried about "My shoes don't match my purse!" You could turn on your TV any night and see all of these needs but become callused because we see them all of the time. The point I want to make is this: The people that God uses are people who care about the things God cares about. And God cared about the fact that the walls of Jerusalem were broken down. Since God cared about it, Nehemiah cared about it and that made him a leader. Bob Pierce, the founder of World Vision, used to say, "Let my heart be broken with the things that break the heart of God." That is the first step in being a great leader, sensitivity to the needs around you.

Discuss:

- a. *Are you sensitive to the needs around you?* _____

- b. *How do you feel about them?* _____

- c. *What are you doing about them?* _____

2. NEHEMIAH WAS DEPENDABLE

He had a proven track record. We see that the king considered him so trustworthy he gave him the most reliable position of the kingdom; cupbearer. He entrusted his personal security to him. There was enormous trust there. The point I want to make here is that God uses people who are trustworthy, reliable, and dependable. Luke 16:10-13. This tells us four ways to test our faithfulness. This gives us four ways God tests our faithfulness to see if He is going to use us or not. One of the ways He tests us is how we serve in another person's ministry before He gives us our own. Another way is what do we do with our money? The Bible tells us that the way you manage your money determines how much God can bless your life. Your giving determines to a great degree how much God can bless your life. If you cannot be trusted with unrighteous mammon who is going to trust you with true spiritual riches?

Discuss:

- a. *Luke 16:10 -13. What is the test of faithfulness?* _____

- b. *Can you consider yourself trustworthy, reliable and dependable? What do you need to change?*

3. NEHEMIAH WAS AVAILABLE

When the situation needed a leader, Nehemiah said, "I volunteer! Here am I, send me!" He had the job, the position that everybody else wants and the problem is a thousand miles away, two months away across the desert on a camel and he says, "I'll go! I'm not even a contractor but I'll go rebuild the wall!" God still chose him even though he didn't have the skills for that particular job. But he was sensitive, dependable and he was available. God is not looking for ability in

leaders as much as he is looking for credibility, dependability, and availability. Those qualities are a matter of choice. You may say, "I don't have certain gifts or talents or intellect." That doesn't even matter to God. What matters are, Are you credible? Do you have character? Are you growing in character? Are you sensitive to people? Are you dependable? Can God rely on you? Dependability is much more important than ability. Are you available? Nothing happens until someone provides leadership for it. Everything rises or falls on leadership. God wants to use you as a leader in your home, your business, or your church.

PERSONAL EVALUATION.

As we close, let us do a little personal evaluation. How about these three reasons God used Nehemiah? Am I sensitive to the needs around me? Ask yourself that. Or am I so caught up in what I'm doing and my plan that I can't hear God's voice? Am I sensitive? That is why God chose Nehemiah. Am I aware of what my wife's greatest needs are? My husband's needs are? Am I sensitive enough to be aware of what my kids' greatest needs are? Am I aware of the needs of the people that I work with? Am I aware of the greatest needs in my church? Could I name them right now? Do I even care? What breaks your heart? Does your team losing on TV upset you more than people around you are going to die and go to hell unless we reach them with the good news? What breaks your heart? How about dependability? Can I be depended on? Am I reliable? How about availability? Am I available to God? To be used in any way that He wants to use me?

DISCUSS:

1. *What four things did Nehemiah do that showed his passion after receiving Hanani's report?*

2. *What breaks your heart like this?* _____

A VERSE TO REMEMBER

Nehemiah 1:4:

When I heard these things, I sat down and wept. For some days I mourned and fasted and prayed before the God of heaven.

PRAYER.

"God, I want to be willing to be used by you anywhere, anytime, anyway. Lord, I want to be sensitive, dependable and available to you. In Jesus 'name. Amen.

THE LEADER'S PRAYER LIFE
Nehemiah: Lesson 2 on Leadership
Nehemiah 1:5-11

INTRODUCTION.

I would like to begin by reading a couple of quotes. Richard Elworth Day, from *Filled With the Spirit*: "It would be no surprise if a study of secret causes were undertaken to find that in every Golden Era of human history it proceeds from the devotion and righteous passion of a single individual. There are no bona fide mass movements; it just looks that way. At the center of the column there will always be one person who knows his God and knows where he is going." E. M. Bounds, *Power Through Prayer*: "We are constantly on a stretch, if not on a strain, to provide new methods, new plans, new organizations to advance the church and secure enlargement and efficiency. But men are God's method. The church is looking for better methods; God is looking for better men." God said that a long time ago in Ezekiel 22:30 (Living Bible) *"I (God) looked in vain for anyone who would build again the wall of righteousness that guards the land, who could stand in the gap but I found not one."* God is looking for people to use. He is looking for leaders. Nothing happens until somebody provides leadership.

Everything rises or falls on leadership. We are looking for better methods, machinery and motivations. God says, I'm looking for better people; people that I can use. We are in a series on leadership, looking at the life of Nehemiah. In a presidential campaign, a number of the candidates were questioned about their private life. The typical response was "It's none of your business." One guy said, "My private life in no way affects my ability to govern this nation." Nothing could be further from the truth. God says the exact opposite. Today we're going to get our first inside look at the heart of Nehemiah. Nehemiah was a man of prayer. Nine different times in this book he prays. In Nehemiah 1 we have one of the great prayers of the Bible. We learn a lot about people by listening to their prayers. We are going to get an inside look at this man, Nehemiah. We are going to see what his private life is like. We are also going to learn how to pray the kind of prayers that gets answered. God liked to answer Nehemiah's prayers. If we can figure out what Nehemiah does then we can figure out what we can do to have our prayers answered.

Three questions:

1. When should I pray?
2. Why should I pray?
3. How should I pray?

I. WHEN SHOULD I PRAY

The men had come back from Jerusalem and said Jerusalem is in ruins. The first thing Nehemiah did (v. 4) he wept, he mourned, he fasted, he prayed. Verse 4 also says he prayed for "some days". A leader does more than pray, but he doesn't do anything else until he prays. This is the starting point for what we want to look at. Leaders make prayer a first priority; losers make prayer a last resort. That is the difference between a leader and a loser. Orange County is full of what is typically known as personality Type A people -- activists, on the go, prone to heart attacks, want to get the job done, achievement oriented, goal oriented and busy people. How many of us often find ourselves too busy to pray? Nehemiah says before we do anything else we must make time to pray. We will see how Nehemiah used prayer. There are nine different occasions that he prayed. Nehemiah was a man of action. Nehemiah is an organizer, motivator, and manager. He likes to do things. He built the wall around the city in 52 days. Yet, instead of immediately going out and doing something, when he heard that something was wrong the first

thing he did was get alone with God. He didn't form a committee. He got alone with God and prayed. This was the pattern of his life. There were nine different instances in his life. He was a man of prayer.

II. WHY SHOULD I PRAY?

1. It shows I'm depending on God.

The reason why we don't pray more is because we don't think we need to. We think we can handle it by ourselves. We think we can do it on our own. When you have a problem the human reaction, the natural reaction for you is to think, "Now what am I going to do about this?" instead of stopping and saying, "God, what do you want to do about this?" Yet the Bible says in John 15 *"Apart from me you can do nothing."* That is the only way we bear fruit. Matthew 5:3 *"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."* There is nothing God won't do for the person who is depending on Him. My usefulness as a leader begins when I recognize my total dependence upon God. The way I know I'm depending on God is that the first thing I do when a problem comes is I pray.

Discuss: *what is the relationship between leadership and dependence on God?* _____

2. It lightens my load.

The reason why Nehemiah prayed was because he was distressed by the bad news. He was a very sensitive person and very compassionate. He felt things very deeply. It says he wept over the ruins. But rather than simply mourning or moaning, he prayed. He took the problem to the Lord. He didn't just complain and gripe and wallow in self-pity. He took his broken heart to the Lord. The name Nehemiah means "The Lord is my comfort". When Nehemiah's heart was broken over the things that were going wrong in Israel, he took his problem to the Lord. God honors prayer that comes from a genuinely concerned heart. He longs to hear us say, "Lord, I can't handle this. I don't know how to do it. Help me!" That's the prayer that He likes to answer. The fact is that leaders take their burdens to the Lord. Isaiah 40:31 *"They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength. They shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint."* If you're going to be a leader, it produces stress. Great leaders find their strength on their knees.

3. It releases God's power.

Nothing else releases God's power like the prayer of faith. Jeremiah 33:3 God says, *"Call to me and I will answer you and show you great and mighty things which you know not."* Prayer can do whatever God can do! Whatever God can do, prayer can do. Prayer taps in to the very resources of God. Many of you came in here very fatigued. Prayer taps you in to the resources of God. When God is brought in on a project, it turns the impossible into the possible.

III. HOW SHOULD I PRAY?

We have a sample of a leader's praying in v. 5-11. You can learn a lot about a person by the kind of prayer that they pray. A canned prayer indicates a dried up spirit. A selfish prayer indicates a selfish spirit. Some prayers are like Christmas lists. Selfish prayers indicate a selfish heart. Impressive prayers indicate an arrogant, prideful heart. We learn a lot about Nehemiah by looking at the kind of prayer he prayed. Remember that Nehemiah, when he first heard about the downfall of Jerusalem, prayed for four months. This is not just a casual prayer. If you want to know how to pray, study the book of Nehemiah and particularly this prayer. Whenever people in the Bible ask God to do something they always presented a basis for it. They always said, "God I want you to do this because..." and they had a reason for Him to do it. There are many different reasons depending on the circumstance. Every time you find a prayer in the Bible, they gave a reason. A key question you want to ask yourself when you pray is this, "Why should God answer my prayer?" Why should I ask God to answer this prayer? The Bible teaches us that the right kind of praying is giving God a reason to answer your prayer. Don't just say "I want this" or "This is my desire" -- Give Him a reason why you're praying this.

FOUR SECRETS TO ANSWERED PRAYER FROM THE LIFE OF NEHEMIAH.

1. Base my request on God's character

This is the greatest reason to give to God. "I'm expecting you to answer this prayer because of who you are. You are a faithful God. You are a great God. You are a loving God. You are a wonderful God. You can handle this problem, God!" Nehemiah comes to God and says, "God, I want you to do something back over in Jerusalem. Verse 5 *"O Lord God of heaven, the great and awesome God who keeps His covenant of love with those who love Him and obey His command."* Nehemiah said three things about God:

1. You're great -- that's God's position.
2. You're awesome -- that shows His power.
3. You keep your promises -- God's covenant.

The first thing Nehemiah did was he acknowledges who God is. That's what praise is. Acknowledge who God is and His greatness. Nehemiah is saying "God, I know our situation is in a mess, but I'm just reminding myself you're in control. I know that the problems over there in Jerusalem may be great but you are greater, you're bigger, and you're bigger than this mess." He starts off by getting the right perspective. In starting to have answered prayer, say, "God, I want You to answer because of who You are. You've given us all of these things, these promises. You are a faithful God, a loving God, and a merciful God" -- all these things the Bible tells us He is. You base your request on God's character.

Discuss:

- a. List what Nehemiah said about God _____

- b. In the situation you/family/ministry/ or work are facing what can you say about God?

2. Confess the sin in my life.

This is step number two if you want to have answers to your prayers. The Jews had disobeyed God. As a result, God said, "All right, if you don't obey me you're going to lose the land of Israel." And they lost it. Because they had not obeyed God they lost their city, Jerusalem, the Temple and were taken into foreign captivity -- all because they had disobeyed Him. Many of the books of the prophets are about this very thing. (Read Nehemiah 1:6) Part one of Nehemiah's prayer is to base his request on who God is. "God, you're a great God. You're awesome! You keep your promises!" Part two, I admit who I am. He says, "We've sinned." Look at how many times he uses the word "I" and "we". He says "I confess... myself... my father's house ... we have acted wickedly ... we have not obeyed." It wasn't Nehemiah's fault they went into captivity. He wasn't even born when this happened seventy years earlier. He was most likely born in captivity. Yet, he is including himself in the national sins. He says "I've been a part of the problem". There is personal confession and there is national confession. We're taught to confess my sins. When was the last time you confessed the sins of the nation? Or the sins of your family? Or your church? Or your friends? We don't think that way. We're very individualistic.

Our society has taught us the concepts of you're only responsible for you. And that's just not true! You are your brother's keeper. We are all in this together. If there's one phrase I never want to hear it's "I've got to do what's best for me!" All kinds of things get justified with that phrase. It doesn't matter whether I'm leaving my wife/husband and kids or whatever else, I've got to do what's best for me! Nehemiah says "Not only do I have personal sin to confess but I have corporate sin. I'll accept the blame for other things. Another Law of Leadership: Leaders accept the blame but losers pass the buck. If you want to be a leader, you accept the blame and share the credit. Losers are always accusers and excusers. They're always making excuses why things didn't/couldn't happen; it's always somebody else's fault. Leaders accept the blame. *"We have sinned against You."* The point is that all sin is ultimately against God. When you break a human law you are ultimately offending God. When you hurt somebody else, you're ultimately hurting God. David said, *"Against Thee and Thee only have I sinned"* when he had committed adultery and murdered a guy. But he knew the sin was against God. Leaders accept the blame.

Discuss:

a. *What sins did Nehemiah confess?* _____

b. *Are there any sins you need to confess that you have committed? What about sins that your organization has committed? Pray and confess.*

3. Claim the promises of God. (Read Nehemiah 1:8-9)

Notice it says "if ... I will" Then again He says "if ... I will". He has a warning and a promise. Nehemiah is praying to the Lord and saying, "I want You to remember what You told your servant Moses." Can you imagine saying "remember" to God? He's reminding God what He had said in the past. God warned us through Moses that if we were unfaithful we would lose the land of Israel. But You also promised that if we repent You'd give it back to us. All through the Bible you find God's people reminding God about what He said He wants to do. David did it. Abraham did it. Moses did it. All the prophets did it. "God, I want to remind You of one of Your promises..." then they'd share it. Let us ask ourselves: Does God have to be reminded? No. Does He forget what He's promised? No. Then why do we do this? Because it helps us remember what God has promised. Nothing pleases God more than when you remind God of one of His

promises. Do kids ever forget a promise? Never. So you have to be very careful about making them. The Bible says we're imperfect fathers and if we imperfect fathers know that we need to fulfill our promises to our kids, how much more does a perfect Father, a Heavenly Father, intend to keep the promises He's made in His word.

Prayer transforms God's promises into performance. Prayer is taking God at His word. It's holding God to His promises. It's asking God to do what He's already promised He wants to do. Nehemiah says "God, first I'm basing my prayer on Who You are. Then I'm admitting who I am. Then I'm reminding You of what You've said." There are over 7000 promises in the Bible waiting to be claimed. A Story is told about the guy who died and went to heaven and found these warehouses all over heaven. He asked, "What are these warehouses?" Answer, "There are gifts and things in there." The guy wanted to see them. There was a tag on every item: spiritual situations, relationships, cars, homes... Every tag says the same thing: "Never asked for".

God never shuts His storehouse until you shut your mouth. God wants to bless you more than you want to be blessed. But you must claim the promises of God. Nehemiah could claim these promises because he knew them. The promises he mentions in these verses are Leviticus 26:33 and Deuteronomy 30:4. When was the last time you memorized a promise out of Leviticus or Deuteronomy? The point is, the strength of my prayer life is determined by how well I know the promises of God. The secret of successful praying is pleading the promises of God. "God, you said it and because of what You said and who You are, I thank You that the answer is on its way. I'm expecting You to meet my needs." We need to learn the promises of God.

Discuss: state the promise that God had given Moses? _____

4. Be very specific in what you ask for. (Read Nehemiah 1:10)

In order to get specific answers to prayer you've got to make specific requests. If you make general prayers, how will you know if they are answered? Nehemiah has the whole prayer just to have the little request at the end. "When I go before the king to ask to be released to go build the wall, give me success when I make that request to the king." Nehemiah is willing to go to Jerusalem. He was available. He was willing to rebuild the project. But he knew he'd have to get the king's permission first who was definitely not a believer. You don't just let your right hand guy walk away. The king has the power of death and life over anybody. Nehemiah was asking a leave of absence for three years, to go back to his home town and rebuild a wall the king had ordered not to be rebuilt.

This was the reason he was asking for success when he went to talk with the king. He's not hesitant to pray for success. He's very bold in his praying. Have you ever prayed, "Lord, make me successful?" If you haven't, why haven't you? What is the alternative? A failure? There is nothing wrong with praying for success if what you're doing is ultimately for the glory of God. Pray boldly. Pray that God will make you successful in life for the glory of God. That's what Nehemiah did. This is a valid prayer. Give me success! Point: If I can't ask God to bless what I'm doing, then I'd better start doing something else. If you can't ask God to make you a success at what you're doing, you should be doing something else. God doesn't want you to waste your life. Remember this is just a sample prayer of four months of praying. What did Nehemiah do during these four months? Did he have this one prayer and he prayed it over several times a day? No, I doubt it. If Nehemiah was praying over a four month period his prayer probably evolved into this. Like our prayers do a lot of time.

You start praying for something and then it gets clarified. That's one of the purposes God delays answering prayers many times; He wants us to clarify. I can imagine Nehemiah began with something like, "God, you've got to do something about those people over there. Please help them." He probably prayed that for a number of weeks. Finally, God probably said, "Nehemiah, aren't you being hypocritical? If you're so concerned, why don't you get involved?" Probably, sometime during that four month period a little light went on in Nehemiah's mind that said, "I could be the answer to that prayer. Maybe God could use me to go rebuild the wall. I'll do it! I'm available!" Over a period of time he probably got the concept. First he prayed, "God help them over there," then he said, "Maybe God could use me as an answer to that prayer." Now he's finally praying, "Give me success." William Carey who founded the modern missionary movement used to say, "Expect great things from God; do great things for God." That's a good motto for every Christian.

CONCLUSION.

Four marks of Nehemiah's prayer that are the same four marks you need to have in your praying if you're going to be a leader who has his/her prayers answered on a regular basis:

1. ***It's a prayer of conviction.*** It's a prayer of conviction of who God is. It's conviction that God is a just God, a great God, in control. He wants to hear me. He wants to answer my prayers. It is conviction acknowledging who God is. This is what praise is all about.
2. ***It's a prayer of confession of what I am and who I am.*** "God, I've blown it. I've made mistakes and I'm imperfect." Be very specific.
3. ***It's a prayer of confidence in what God has promised.*** "I know who you are, I know what I am, and I know what You've said." God said it; I believe it -- that settles it! If God said it, that settles it, whether I believe it or not. Claiming God's promises. The promises are the keys that unlock the answers to prayer. You've got to learn those 7000 promises.
4. ***It's a prayer of commitment.*** "I'm willing to be part of the answer. God, You can use me. I commit myself. I'll be part of the solution."

We're talking about leadership. Every one of you is a leader because leadership is influence. You are leaders in different parts of life. The issue is not whether you're a leader or not, it's whether you're a good leader or not. The first step in leadership is to develop a private life, time alone with God -- a personal, daily, devotional walk. If you want to be a leader, develop your prayer life. Learn to pray like Nehemiah prayed. Watch the doors of heaven open up. In the next study we're going to answer the question, "What do you do after you've prayed?" I've prayed, I've been praying about the situation. What do I do next? A leader does more than pray but he doesn't do anything until he prays.

PERSONAL EVALUATION:

I'd like to walk you through these four steps. Think of one thing you've really had your heart set on. It's a real prayer request you'd like to pray. First, in your heart, base your request on who God is. Before you give the request to God, say, "God, I know You can answer this request because You are..." and tell Him what He is. A great God, a loving God, a merciful God. You listen to our prayers. You are a faithful God, You keep Your promises. On the basis of that make your request.

Number two, "God, I confess the sin in my life." Ask God if there is any sin He needs to reveal to you. We commit them specifically; we need to confess them specifically. Don't make a blanket approach, "God, forgive all my sins." Is there an attitude or action you need to change? Ask God to cleanse your life. Then would you claim the promises of God. If you can't think of one right now, I suggest Philippians 4:19 *"My God shall supply all your needs according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus."* Thank God that He gives us these promises. Then be very specific in what you ask for. Lay your request out to God. Some of you need to pray that God would make you successful in a certain venture or project. If you're not sure that God wants you to do it, get something you're sure God wants you to do. If I can't ask God to bless what I'm doing, I'd better start doing something else.

DISCUSS:

- a. *What was Nehemiah's primary request?* _____
- b. *What do you learn about Nehemiah's character from his reaction and his prayer?* _____

- c. *Nehemiah got more confident as he prayed and fasted. How does this compare with what you have experienced in prayer?* _____

- d. *As you think of your church / organization, are there any reports that you are hearing that you need to petition God?* _____
- e. *What will you do to take a risk and be part of the answer in that prayer?* _____

A VERSE TO REMEMBER

Nehemiah 1:5: Then I said: "LORD, the God of heaven, the great and awesome God, who keeps his covenant of love with those who love him and keep his commandments,

PRAYER.

"God, I'm willing to be part of the answer. I'm willing to be used by You in any way for the answer." Thank You, Father, for these lessons we've learned from this great leader Nehemiah. May all of us develop our prayer life and grow closer to You. In Jesus' name. Amen.

HOW A LEADER PLANS

Nehemiah: Lessons 3 on Leadership

Nehemiah 2:1-9

INTRODUCTION.

Last week we looked at the first thing a leader does. He prays. He/She does other things besides pray but that's the first thing they do. The next step a leader does is plan. You pray and then you plan. This passage reveals Nehemiah as a master planner. We're going to look at the six things he did. But first, three reasons why you ought to plan.

I. WHY PLAN?

1. God does it.

Jeremiah 29:11 *"For I know the plans I have for you" says the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not harm you, plans to give you a hope and a future."* 1 Cor. 14:33 *"For God is not a God of disorder but of peace."* He plans. If God plans, it's OK for us to plan.

2. God commands it.

1 Cor. 14:40 *"Everything should be done in a fitting and orderly way."* Prov. 4:26 (GN) *"Plan carefully what you do, and whatever you do will turn out right."* Prov. 16:9 *"We should make plans counting on God to direct us."*

3. Its good stewardship.

Ephesians 5:15-17 (Phillips) *"Live life, then with a due sense of responsibility, not as men who do not know the meaning of life but as those who do. Make the best use of your time. Don't be vague but grasp firmly what you know to be the will of the Lord."* Time management involves making the best use of opportunities. That requires planning. It's good stewardship to plan. It's not good stewardship to go through life without any planning at all.

II. HOW LEADERS PLAN

1. Think it through

v. 1, "In the month of Nisan" -- Nehemiah had gotten this burden four months earlier and for four months he's been waiting for something to happen. Now, something happens. What had been happening between when Nehemiah first got the idea of rebuilding the wall and when he actually got the opportunity to present his program to the king? What had he been doing? He'd been praying, but he also had been planning. We know that by the way he responded to the king when the king said, "What do you want." Nehemiah knew what to ask for because he had been planning. Howard Hendricks said, "Nothing is more profitable than serious thinking, and nothing is more demanding."

Leaders need time to think, time to get away. Leaders make time for think time. A law of leadership. Proverbs 13:16 *"A wise man thinks ahead; a fool doesn't and even brags about it!"* Prov. 14:8 *"The wise man looks ahead. The fool attempts to fool himself and won't face facts."* It's wise to spend time thinking about your life. Ask yourself three questions: Where am I now? Where do I want to be? How will I get there? That's what Nehemiah did. He was thinking it through. He was praying for four months but he was also planning. What happens when you pray and plan? God gives you a vision. That's the mark of all leadership. You've got to have vision to be a leader. **Leadership Law:** *Failing to plan is planning to fail! You've got to think it through.*

Discuss:

a. What shows that Nehemiah had thought about what needs to be done? _____

b. How Nehemiah did gave evidence of having a well thought through plan in verses 1-9? _

c. Why is thinking important to leaders? _____

d. What do you learn from proverbs 13:16; 14:8? _____

2. Prepare for opportunities

When opportunity knocks, you need to be ready to open the door. All of life is full of opportunities. There are overlooked opportunities all around us. A lot of times we're not ready for them. (Read Nehemiah 2:1). This is the moment Nehemiah has been waiting for. He's been praying for an opportunity to present his idea to the king. He's got an opportunity now to state his case. Because he had planned he was ready with the answer. Notice he had a sad face. He had a burden he couldn't hide. He was getting a little discouraged by now. "God, aren't you going to do anything about this wall. I've been praying for it." Finally the king says, "What's wrong, Nehemiah?" Notice it says "*I was afraid.*" He was literally scared to death. In those days it was a capital crime to be sad before the king. The kings were very fickle in those days. They didn't want any downers. They didn't want anyone raining on their party. If you frowned in the presence of the king you'd get your head cut off.

If you were depressed in the presence of the king, that was it! Notice it says, "*This is the first time I ever appeared sad.*" That is a real gamble. Not only that, but Nehemiah is going to ask permission for a leave of absence. In those days if a king did not like your request that meant he didn't like you. No wonder Nehemiah was frightened. On top of that he was going to ask permission to go rebuild the walls of Jerusalem and the king himself had said the walls could not be rebuilt! He's standing before a king who has the power of life and death. He has reason to be afraid. **Leadership law:** *Leaders move ahead in spite of their fears.* There is a myth that leaders are never afraid. Courage is moving ahead in spite of your fear. Notice what Nehemiah did with his fear. The king said to him, "What do you want? You're upset obviously." It says Nehemiah prayed.

He sends up a little quickie prayer. This isn't the four months of prayer; he's already done that. This is the quick one! A silent, quick, on the spot prayer. "God, give me wisdom. Help me know what to say." Then he answered the king in v. 3 (Read). He chooses his words very carefully; he assures the king of his loyalty, "*May the king live forever!*" Remember, this guy is also a bodyguard. If he's sad maybe he also knows of some assassination plot. The king's asking why his number one man is upset. Nehemiah appeals to the Eastern respect for ancestors, "*My father's graves are in ruin.*" The Eastern guys were into taking care of the ancestor's graves. The king's response was, What do you want? The next three things Nehemiah asks for are evidence of planning.

Discuss;

- a. What opportunity did Nehemiah take advantage of? _____

- b. Why was it easy for Nehemiah to give a response? Give evidence to your answer. _____

- c. Share the opportunities you have missed previously for lack of preparedness? What have you learn from Nehemiah? _____

3. Establish a goal (Read Nehemiah 2:5)

Nehemiah gets specific here. He establishes a goal. He wants to rebuild the wall. He's very specific; he wants to rebuild the wall. Goal setting is the next step in planning. You have to have a target. If you aim at nothing, you're going to hit it. Ask yourself three questions: What do I want to be? What do I want to do? What do I want to have? Those are the questions you ask in establishing a goal. There are two common errors we make in goal setting: We set them too low and we try to accomplish them too quickly. Inch by inch anything is a cinch. Set big goals; make big plans – so big that God has to bail you out! God loves big planning. It honors God to be a big planner. This is what I'm expecting God to do. Not what I can do, this is what I want God to do! Nehemiah said, I want to go rebuild a wall around a whole city. He'd never build a wall. He'd never built anything. He was a cupbearer. He had a big goal. We set our goals too low and we try to accomplish them too quickly.

4. You set a deadline (Read Nehemiah 2:6)

You first get the prayer behind you. Then you think it through. Then you prepare for the opportunities. People say, "That guy has all the luck. He gets all the breaks." I've found that the more I plan, the luckier I get. The opportunities are there you just have to be ready for them. Then you establish a goal. And then number four, you set a deadline. He established a deadline. A goal must have a deadline. If your goal doesn't have a deadline on it, it's not a goal. This is the scheduling part of planning. You know what you want to do and then you know when you want to do it. Ask the question: How long will it take?

Nehemiah 5:14. Nehemiah actually came back to Medo-Persia twelve years later. Nehemiah was popular with this king. The king didn't want him to leave. The king asked, "How long are you going to be gone?" This showed that the king really liked Nehemiah. Why did Nehemiah throw in "... with the queen setting beside him..."? My guess is that she had an influence over the king's receptivity. Probably Nehemiah and the queen were friends. He was the king's right hand man. She's setting there; he's pouring the wine, everybody's happy. Nehemiah says, "I'd really like to go back and rebuild the wall around the city where my father's graves are." Probably the queen influenced Artaxerxes to let Nehemiah go. Maybe Nehemiah timed it this way. But God had a time in it. Nehemiah established a deadline.

Discuss: why is it important to set a deadline? _____

5. You anticipate the problems. (Read Nehemiah 2:7)

He's already asked for permission to go; now he's asking for protection. It's about 800-1000 mile journey between Iraq and Israel. He's got to go through a lot of provinces. You didn't travel freely in those days. You had to go through proper procedures. Nehemiah said, "I want you to give me letters of authority so I'll have clear sailing and when I get over there, there is no problem. I need traveling permits to travel unhindered." This implies that Nehemiah had thought it out. Remember he's just asked here on the spot, "What do you want?" He had already thought it through. This is a clear example of planning. He was not just praying during those four months but he was also planning so that when the opportunity arose he could say what he needs.

Question to ask yourself in your own planning when you're anticipating problems: What could hold me back? In planning a project, ask yourself, Why don't I have it already? What could hold me back? What are the problems? What could go wrong? If anything could go wrong, it will. Nehemiah is thinking ahead. He's already thought ahead where he wants to go. Now he's anticipating the problems. **Leadership law:** Managers focus on solving today's problems, leaders focus on solving tomorrow's problems. Both of these are absolutely essential to any organization, family, business -- you need both managers and leaders. But they are not necessarily the same. Managers must focus on the day to day details -- today's problems. Leaders, the task of leadership, are to anticipate problems that nobody else is even thinking about.

They figure out a way to overcome the problem before they even get there. A leader must think further in advance than everybody else to figure out what the problems are so that when you get there; you already know how you're going to deal with them. Management, on the other hand, which is just as essential a task, is dealing with the day to day problems. Both are necessary. Proverbs 22:3 (Living Bible) "*A prudent man foresees the difficulties ahead and prepares for them; the simpleton goes blindly on and suffers the consequences.*" Ever known anybody like that? I've been a simpleton many times in my life when I did not foresee the problems. One of the laws of life is that it's always easier to get in than it is to get out. It's easier to get into debt than it is to get out of debt. It's easier to get into a relationship than out of a relationship. It's easier to fill up your schedule than to eliminate things from your schedule. It's a principle of life in every area. A wise man counts the cost. Proverbs 27:12 (Living Bible) "*A sensible man watches for problems ahead and prepares to meet them.*" Part of planning is to anticipate problems in advance and plan for them.

Discuss:

- a. What shows that Nehemiah was anticipating problems? _____

- b. Nehemiah was asked "what do you want?" does the answer he gave show prior planning? _____

- c. What does proverbs 22:3; 27:12 tells us? _____

- d. *Are you planning for a project right now or in the future? Ask yourself; what could hold me back? What are the problems? What could go wrong?*

6. Calculate the cost (Read Nehemiah 2:8)

This is the budgeting part of planning. Principle number 4 is the scheduling part of planning, this is the budgeting part. In planning it takes both time and money. Have you learned that everything in life has a price tag? Here we have his third request. Nehemiah gives the king a shopping list. "First, I want you to let me go. Then, I want you to give me the protection to get there. And by the way, I want you to pay for it too." He asks for lumber to build three things: I want to build the beams for the city gates -- he had thought it out. Then he said, I'm going to need lumber for the city walls. Then, I want lumber for my own house. Remember, Nehemiah is not a contractor. He's never built anything in his life. He's a cupbearer. Yet, when the opportunity arose he rattled off exactly what he needed. Why? He had planned. The first step of leadership is prayer. The second step of leadership is plan. How did Nehemiah know what to ask for? Evidently he calculated the cost. How in the world did he know there was a royal forest near Jerusalem? Advance planning.

This whole chapter indicates that he already knew what he was doing when he got into the situation. He even knew the name of the foreman. He had already figured all of this out way in advance, so that when the opportunity arose he was prepared for the opportunities. The point I want to make is God has wonderful opportunities for you but you must be prepared to take advantage of them when they come. If Nehemiah had not had his planning done he wouldn't have been prepared. But because his planning had been so well thought out he knew exactly what to ask for. He had calculated the cost. Luke 14:28 *"If one of you is planning to build a tower, he sits down first and figures out what it will cost to see if he has enough money to finish the job."* Who's speaking? Jesus. Jesus is advocating counting the cost. Notice what we've just looked at is quite a risk. All Nehemiah's asking for he's asking a pagan king to do. He lays out all of his requests very clearly and he trusted the Lord. Notice: He asked for the king's permission. "Can I have permission to go build a wall?"

This is a life or death situation. If the king doesn't like your request, it's off with your head. He's scared to death. The king says, OK. If most of us had gotten that far, most of us would have breathed a sigh of relief and beat a hasty retreat. We wouldn't have dared ask for anything else. But Nehemiah hangs in there and tries further. He asks for the king's protection. "I want you to give me these letters of protection." The king doesn't flinch on that so Nehemiah continues. Nehemiah asks for the king's provision. "Why don't you pay for it? Cut the timber from your forest?" I can imagine Nehemiah because I've been in these kinds of situations. When you realize you haven't gotten kicked out yet, you continue. Nehemiah was taking tremendous risks asking this. **Leadership law:** *Leaders are willing to ask others for assistance.* You'll never be a leader until you learn how to ask people for help. No leader can do it on his own. James 4:2 *"You do not have because you do not ask."*

How many people have you said, "No" for many times: "She really wouldn't want to do this". You don't know what people will say no to. Let people say no for themselves. It takes incredible boldness to do what Nehemiah does to ask a pagan king who has death and life in the power of his hands. It was very risky business. But because he had prayed for four months and because he had planned for four months his faith was strong enough that even though he was standing there with his knees shaking to death he kept pushing it. The wisest risks are those taken after prayer and planning. In Proverbs 21:1 *"The king's heart is in the hand of the Lord and He directs it like a water course wherever He pleases."* If God wants to move it any direction, He can. Here is a

clear example of that proverb where God took a pagan king's heart and moved it all around. The point is that God is a specialist in changing hearts. Some of you have projects you want to get done, but you're not the CEO of your company, you're in middle management. I want to say to you, the heart of the executive is in the hand of the Lord and He can turn it wherever He wishes. The company president's heart is in the hand of the Lord. You need to remember that. God is in the business of changing hearts. It's up to Him. He's sovereign.

Nehemiah did not try to manipulate the king. When he was asked "What's wrong?" he was honest: "My home town is in shambles." He didn't make up some fake story. He didn't make up a story about going back to Jerusalem under false pretenses. He didn't manipulate the king. He didn't trick him. He didn't play games with him. He didn't use any deceit. He talked to God about him. When you have a boss who is unsympathetic to a project, a goal you want to do don't manipulate him, don't play games with him. Just talk to God about him. Because the heart of the king is in the hand of the Lord and He can turn it. Don't ever try to change anybody's heart. You can't. When you try, that's manipulation. Let God change the heart. v. 8 after all of these things he's asked, Nehemiah's conclusion: *"Because the gracious hand of my God was upon me, the king granted my request."* Underline "the gracious hand of my God was upon me." Notice Nehemiah gives all the credit to God. Remember this is autobiographical.

The part we're looking at in this series on leadership is the first half of the book. The second half of the book may have been written by Ezra because it's not in first person. But the point is Nehemiah does not say "Look at what my planning did." He knew that God was behind it all. He knew it was not due to his cleverness. A mark of spiritual maturity is when you recognize God's hand behind those people who may be delaying you in a project that you know is going to change the world. Nehemiah says, "God was with me." But if Nehemiah hadn't prayed and planned and set this thing up, nothing would have happened. Proverbs 16:1 (LB) *"We can make our plans, but the final outcome is in God's hands."* v. 9 *"So [after the incident here] I went to the governors of the Trans-Euphrates [now he's started out on his journey; he's heading for Jerusalem] and I gave them the king's letters and the king had also sent army officers and cavalry with me."*

The king sends a military escort. Nehemiah didn't even ask for that. He got more than he asked for. This is Eph. 3:20 *"God is able to do more than you think or ask or imagine."* He got more than he asked for. He thought he was really stretching asking for so many different things but as the king leaves he says, "By the way, you have a military escort to take you." This was a flat out miracle. When God finds a person with vision He provides the resources. Nehemiah had. He was sensitive and available. He began to pray. The burden he had for other people was translated into a vision. Persistent prayer changes a burden into a vision. When a person gets a vision, watch out! There is nothing that God won't do for a person who has a vision from God.

CONCLUSION

The summary of this chapter is a beautiful example of the harmony that takes place between God's part and man's part in accomplishing things on earth. God's part is the sovereignty part. Our part is the prayer and planning part. We pray for God to set up circumstances that are out of our control. Then we plan for all the things that are under our control. It's not one or the other. It's not "Pray and let the spirit lead." The Bible says that's foolishness. It says the wise man plans. It's not just plan. It's not just up to you. It's both. God's part and my part. Its prayer, leaning on God, planning, doing the best I can. Prayer and planning go together. They're both important. Because Nehemiah had done his homework, when the opportunity arose he was ready. **Leadership Law:** *Leaders prepare for success rather than worry about failure.* You don't see

Nehemiah worrying about what happens if it doesn't work. He's not worrying. He's just planning and praying as if it's inevitable.

PERSONAL APPLICATION

How many of you really want to grow spiritually? The fact that you are doing this study means that you want to grow spiritually. What plans have you made for that? We plan everything else in our life, why don't we plan our spiritual growth? Do you have a plan to read through the Bible? Do you have a plan to set aside a certain time every day for prayer? Do you have a plan to talk to that person at work about the Lord? Do you have a plan to invite him over to dinner at your house, get to know him and then invite him to church? Have you planned it or are you letting it just spontaneously happen? Very few things happen spontaneously. You need a plan for witnessing, Bible reading, for prayer and for all of these different things in your life.

Are the plans you have ones that you just think up and then ask God to bless? Or are you getting your plans from the Lord? How do you know the difference? If you're getting your plans from the Lord they'll be big enough for Him to fit in them. Someone said: "Make no small plans for they have not the power to move the souls of men." Big thinking attracts big thinkers. We have some of the biggest thinkers I've ever met in this church. This church has big dreams and big dreams attract big thinkers. Little dreams attract little thinkers. Whatever your plans, make them big enough they show off God to the world -- that God is a great God! Are you spending more time or more energy worrying about failure than you are about planning for success? That's a waste of energy.

DISCUSS:

- a. *What was Nehemiah's third request?* _____

- b. *What is Jesus advocating for in Luke 14:28?* _____

- c. *What do you do after counting the cost and you can't afford?* _____

A VERSE TO REMEMBER

Nehemiah 2:8: And may I have a letter to Asaph, keeper of the royal park, so he will give me timber to make beams for the gates of the citadel by the temple and for the city wall and for the residence I will occupy?" And because the gracious hand of my God was on me, the king granted my requests.

PRAYER:

Heavenly Father, may we take our lives seriously and realize as You've said in Ephesians 5 to live life with a due sense of responsibility, not as men who do not know the meaning of life but as people who do. Lord, help us to make the best use of our time. And, as You said, to not be vague but to grasp firmly what we know to be the will of God. Lord, help us to think through where we're headed, to know the direction of our lives, to ponder the path of our going. Help us to be prepared for the opportunities You place before us. Help us to establish goals for our life and set deadlines and anticipate the problems and count the cost and apply these six principles of planning to our life this week. In Jesus' name. Amen.

HOW A LEADER MOTIVATES OTHERS

Nehemiah: Lesson 4 on Leadership

Nehemiah 2:10-20

INTRODUCTION

We're going to look at another important leadership skill. We've said that at first a leader prays. Then he plans. Then the next thing you do is you have to make a presentation to get people to cooperate with you. Success is never a one-man show. Nehemiah knew that he could not rebuild the wall without the help of other people. When he goes to Jerusalem, the people are defeated, apathetic, living among ruins. Twice before in the last ninety years somebody has tried to rebuild the wall. They've failed twice. They have no confidence. They're negative. For ninety years they've been saying it can't be done. Nehemiah arrives on the scene and within a matter of days he has rallied the support of the entire city.

He puts them together, mobilizes them, and rebuilds the wall in 52 days. This was something that had not been done in 90 years. The question is how did Nehemiah pull it off when other people had failed? Was he a miracle worker? He was just a great leader. And he understood the principles of motivation. I want this session to be very practical. There are many times these principles can be very helpful to you: When you are promoted to a new job; when you need to get the cooperation of other people; when you need to sell an idea; when you need to introduce change into an organization, a family, your school, your work; when you want to get a project off the ground. When you have any of these situations in your life what we're going to talk about will help out. Take these steps.

BEFORE MOTIVATING OTHER PEOPLE?

Let's look at the things Nehemiah did.

1. EXPECT OPPOSITION (Read Nehemiah 2:10)

The fact is that the moment you say, "Let's do something," someone will jump up and say, "Let's don't." When God's people rise and say, "Let's build," Satan says, "Let's arise and oppose." People are naturally resistant to change. They don't like it. They want the status quo, which is probably Latin for "the mess we're in". People resist change for a variety of reasons. Leaders figure out what those reasons are and deal with them. He names two leaders of the opposition. You'll find these people all through the book of Nehemiah. Sanballat was the governor of Samaria; Tobiah was the leader of the Ammonites. Nehemiah has not even arrived in Jerusalem yet and there's already opposition. How did Nehemiah know that they were going to oppose him? He must have sent scouts on ahead in advance to find out who was going to oppose him. I Cor. 16:8-9 *"I will stay here at Ephesus. There is a real opportunity here for a great while and a worthwhile work, even though there are many opponents."* Circle "opportunity" and "opponents". First leadership law tonight: ***There is no opportunity without opposition.*** If you're going to help change people or change the situation, expect opposition.

2. WAIT FOR THE RIGHT TIMING (Read Nehemiah 2:11)

In motivating others and suggesting change, timing is everything! Have you ever had a good idea killed because of bad timing? Timing makes a big difference. He stops for three days. Nehemiah does not make some grand entrance, flash the flags, bands playing, arrives in on a white horse.

He doesn't proclaim, "I'm here to save the day. Now get to work!" When he arrives in Jerusalem, the first thing he doesn't do is get brick and mortar together. He didn't even announce why he was there. He did nothing for three days. What was he doing for those three days? We don't know. Four probabilities:

1. He was probably resting, recovering from a long journey. He had been on a camel, crossing the desert. Another Leadership Law -- *You never make a major decision when you're tired; it will probably be wrong.* Fatigue clouds your perspective.
2. He may have been praying. We know he was a man of prayer.
3. He most likely was planning. He probably was reviewing his strategy.
4. He was building curiosity. He arrives with a king's escort, into a town that is defeated and discouraged. He goes to his home and says nothing for three days. Don't you think that caused a little curiosity?

Do you think the existing power structures in Jerusalem said, "What is this guy here for? What is he going to be doing?" For three days the speculation is rising. What is Nehemiah doing? By the third day everybody has heard of Nehemiah. He's actually using the delay to his advantage. He's using it for psychological build up so that when he presents the proposal, they'll be ready to listen. Eccl. 3:7 says *"There is a time to be silent and a time to speak."* Eccl. 8:6 says, *"There is a right time and a right way to do everything."* Circle "right time". If you're going to share in changing a life or a situation, you've got to wait for the right timing. Jesus had a profound sense of timing in the ministry. Many times in His life He would say, "It's not time yet. My time has not yet come."

Discuss:

- a. What tells us Nehemiah waited for the right time before mobilizing others _____

- b. What do we learn from Ecclesiastes 3:7 about timing? _____

- c. Is there a time that you have mobilized people for a certain task before the right time? What was the response? What did you learn? _____

3. GET THE FACTS FIRST (Read Nehemiah 2:12-16)

In v. 12-16 we have Nehemiah's research party of actually going out and inspecting the walls of Jerusalem. He goes on and explains how at midnight he's out traveling around the walls of the city, actually inspecting. He is personally inspecting the damage in the middle of the night. He only takes a small group with him. He obviously didn't want to attract attention. Every good leader knows exactly what Nehemiah is doing here. He is doing his homework. His background checks. This is the lonely part of leadership, the un-glamorous part of leadership. It's the part nobody ever hears about. It's the guy doing his preparation, checking out the situation, getting the facts. v. 14 says there was so much rubble he even had to get off his horse and walk through it.

At this point the size of the project probably starts to sink in and he thinks, "This is worse than I thought. Why did I volunteer for this? I've never built anything in my life." (Read V.16) Why is he being so secretive about this survey? Because he didn't want the plan to be stalled before it got out of the starting gate. There had been 90 years of negativism and he didn't have all the facts yet. Is it easier to promote a good idea or kill a good idea? Have you noticed that negative people tend to be more vocal than positive people? Nehemiah doesn't have all the facts yet so he says before I even announce what I'm going to be doing, I'm going to get the facts. Leadership Law: *Leaders protect their plans from premature death.* Third Leadership Law: *Good leaders do their own research.* Nehemiah understood his opposition, he has created a curiosity, and he has gathered all the facts, Now finally Nehemiah is ready to lay all the cards on the table. V. 17 "Then I said to them." Now he's ready in how to motivate people.

Discuss:

- a. *State the facts that Nehemiah gathered?* _____

- b. *Why do you think Nehemiah did this yet he had the full picture as told to him in chapter one?*

- c. *Why was he secretive about his survey?* _____

- d. *Read proverbs 23:23, 18:13 and 14:15 and write down what you learn* _____

- e. *Do you always get the facts right before relaying them? What harm does it cause in giving wrong facts to the people you are mobilizing for a task?* _____

HOW TO MOTIVATE PEOPLE

I. IDENTIFY WITH YOUR PEOPLE (Read Nehemiah 2:17)

All good leaders do this. They associate with their people. He didn't walk in as an outsider, having never been to Jerusalem and say, "You guys are a bunch of failures. You can't get this thing rebuilt. It's been 90 years and nothing's been done on it." When you blame other people you decrease the motivation. When you accept the blame you increase the motivation. He doesn't play the role of an outside expert here. He doesn't say, "I'm going to rebuild the wall... I'm going

to be your savior." He says, "I'm one of you and it's our problem." Good leaders identify with their people. That's good for motivation. It's good for parenting too. You get a little bit better response from your kids when they feel like you understand them that you identify with their problem. **Leadership Law:** *The best ideas are not mine or yours they're ours.* You identify with your people.

Discuss: *How did Nehemiah identify with the people he wanted to motivate rather than condemning them?* _____

II. PAINT THE SERIOUSNESS OF THE PROBLEM (Read Nehemiah 2:17)

He comes to the people: "I've got some stuff to tell you but first the bad news." Rather than minimizing the problem, he emphasizes it. These are emotional word pictures he uses here. "The place lies in ruin ... burned with fire ... we're in disgrace." He's emphasizing the seriousness of this. Why? Because these guys had been living with this for years. Isn't it a fact of life that when you live with a bad situation long enough, you start ignoring it? If something breaks in your house the first two or three weeks it really bugs you; six months later it's still broken. When you live with a situation long enough you can become apathetic about how it is. In dramatizing, he refocuses their attention to the problem "We have got a mess." He's getting them to face the facts. A leader Step faces the facts; the leader gets the people to face the facts. Change never occurs until we become discontent. If you want to create change in your school, work, home, office -- one of the marks of a leader is he creates discontent.

If you're content you don't want to change anything. That means you're going to have to put up with some criticism, because anyone who stirs the pot, rocks the boat, is in trouble. They're shaking up the status quo. That's the mark of the leader. How did he do it? He used two motivators. He appealed to their self-esteem. He said, "We've got to go out and build this; we're in disgrace. We could do better than this. We're God's people and we're living in rubble. The city is torn down. The walls are torn down. The place is in shambles and a mess. We're in disgrace." I think that was a breath of fresh air to these people. This leader is different because he's concerned about us. He doesn't just have his own agenda. He's concerned about us and he realizes we're demoralized. He's says I want to come in here and raise your level of esteem so you're not in disgrace any more. This was a strong motivator but even deeper than that, he appealed to an even higher motive which was concern for God's glory.

Not only were the Jews being disgraced but God was being disgraced. Who were the Jews? God's people. The whole world was laughing: "Those poor Jews! They say they worship the true God. They can't even rebuild their own city. They say their God's the greatest God of the whole world, but they can't even get their walls rebuilt; they're living in rubble." It was an embarrassment to God and a poor testimony. When Nehemiah said, we're in disgrace! He was not only appealing to personal self-esteem but he was appealing to the fact that God's name was being defamed. It was a bad testimony. When Nehemiah dramatized the problem he does not use external motivators. These are both internal things: self-esteem and God's glory. He doesn't use external motivator: We're going to rebuild this wall; whoever gets their section done first gets an all-expense paid vacation to the Dead Sea! He doesn't use external things. The older you get, the less external motivations work. External motivators work great on kids. But the older you get those kinds of motivators don't work anymore. **Leadership Law:** *The greatest motivation in life is not external, nor internal, but eternal.* Nehemiah says, "Let's rebuild the wall for the glory of

God! So God's name is not in disgrace. Let's rebuild the wall for the kingdom of God and for the glory of His people." He was challenging them with the right kind of motivations.

Discuss:

- a. *What statements show how Nehemiah paints the seriousness of the problem?* _____

- b. *Do you think the people in Jerusalem had not seen the ruins? Why in your own opinion were they not doing anything about it?* _____

- c. *Have you been in a situation where you are the only one seeing the magnitude of a problem? How did you involve others?* _____

III. ASK FOR A SPECIFIC RESPONSE

You don't just pump them up; you give them something to do. You don't just have a big rally -- then say, isn't that great! Let's all go home. In v. 17 he says, "Everything is in a mess; let us rebuild the wall." He calls for action. He appeals for help. He asks for a specific response. Notice that Nehemiah was both realistic and optimistic. That's a balance that a good leader has. Nehemiah was realistic because the third thing he did was get the facts on his midnight ride. He saw really how bad the place was. He tells them: the walls have been destroyed, the gates have been burned. But he's also optimistic. After honestly laying out the problem, he doesn't say, "Everything is destroyed. This is impossible! Let's go home." He doesn't give up. What he does say is the opposite. "Let's rebuild."

Leadership law: *Leaders see both the real and the ideal.* They see what is but they also see what can be. A leader who just sees what can be and doesn't see what is, then is not a leader; he's a visionary. There's a big difference. A person who sees what is real but doesn't see the ideal is not a leader, he's an accountant. You've got to look at both -- what's actual and what's possible. Those two brought in harmony together produce leadership. When you see these kinds of things, you ask for a specific response. Leaders see what's real and they see what's ideal and they know that to get from the real to the ideal they have to have help. Leaders are not afraid to ask for assistance. Not too many of us like to ask for help. Most of the time we're real insecure and we only say, "I'll just do it myself!" The wall around Jerusalem was not going to be built until someone stood up and said, "It's going to take sacrifice. We're going to have to put time, money, effort, energy to do this." Leaders ask people for a specific response.

Discuss:

- a. *What specific response does Nehemiah ask for?* _____

b. A visionary leader sees both what is real and what is ideal. How did Nehemiah depict this principle (Vv. 13-17) _____

c. What are the benefits of asking for a specific response? _____

d. In our life, what have been hindrances in asking for a specific response? How will you apply the lesson from Nehemiah? _____

IV. ENCOURAGES WITH A PERSONAL TESTIMONY

In v. 18 we have Nehemiah's story and there are two parts to it. "I also told them about the gracious hand of my God upon me." He tells them about how God had called him to lead the project. The second part he tells them how circumstances confirmed his calling. "I also told them what the king had said to me." He was saying, "I didn't want this job, but I was praying over there in Susa. As I prayed for four months, I got a burden. The more I prayed about it God said, Why don't you be the answer to it. The burden turned into a vision. I said, 'OK, God, I'll do it.' It was really God's idea. He called me to come do this project. Not only did God call me but He confirmed the call when I went to the king and the king said yes. He gave me a Calvary guard and he's going to pay for it." That is a legitimate thing to ask for if somebody comes to you and says, "God told me to do this." A legitimate response is "Is anybody confirming this in your life? Or is this just something you thought up? Are there any confirmation signs?"

Nehemiah shares his testimony of how God had called him and the circumstances confirmed his calling. V. 18b is the people's response, "*I told them about the gracious hand of my God upon me and what the king had said then they replied, 'Let's start rebuilding.'*" They were excited! For ninety years nothing is going on, then Nehemiah comes saying, "God's put me here to do this. And we've got the king's permission -- the guy who wouldn't allow it to be done before is paying for it." The vision has been transferred. First he said this is my vision. He guarded it very carefully at first -- he didn't tell anybody. He went out, did the survey, didn't tell anybody. He was waiting for the right timing. Once he had all the facts, he dramatized the problem, he asked for a specific response and then encouraged them with his own personal testimony about how God called him to do this and how the circumstances confirmed God's call. Now the vision has been transferred. It's not Nehemiah's vision anymore; it's the people's vision. What was a secret for a long time is now shared.

Why did Nehemiah use his personal testimony in motivation? Because he knew one of the classic laws of leadership. *People follow people not programs.* And the people that people follow are called leaders. I Cor. 11:1 "*Follow my example as I follow the example of Christ.*" Why should anybody follow you as a leader? When are you ready to be a leader? The answer to that is "When people can see God's hand on your life." When people can sense God's Spirit in your life, can sense God's hand on your life, then you're ready to be a leader. As your pastor, if you can't see God's Spirit in my life, don't follow me! I urge you not to follow me. But if you do see God's Spirit in my life, God's hand on my life, then you ought to do everything you can to support my

leadership and cooperate with my leadership. That is the test of leadership. It's a test for anybody. Can I see God's hand on that person's life? Can I see God's Spirit on that person's life? That's the only test. Not education. Not talent. There are a lot of talented people you shouldn't follow. There are a lot of people with credentials that you shouldn't follow. But does God have His hand on your life?

V. ANSWER THE OPPOSITION QUICKLY AND CONFIDENTLY (Read Nehemiah 2:20)

Another guy is now mentioned. In v. 10, before Nehemiah arrived there was just Sanballat the Horonite and Tobiah the Ammonite. Now we notice the opposition has expanded to include a third party. Opposition usually grows as the project continues. First there are only two opponents, then a third party. As we get further into Nehemiah we find six different sources of opposition. He got it from every side! The opposition's first strategy: *"They mocked and ridiculed us."* They laughed! Those Jews are never going to get it built. They haven't done it in ninety years; they won't do it now. The second thing they do is they accused them of rebelling against the king. This excuse had been used before. Ezra 4:13 -- that was the very accusation that got the wall stopped the last time. It had worked before when Ezra was trying to get it rebuilt. The opposition went to the king and said, "The Jews are rebuilding the wall. Once they get it rebuilt, forget any more taxes from those people." Then the king issued his decree: No more wall rebuilding. It had worked before, they tried again.

Rebuilding the wall is rebelling against the king, King Artaxerxes. But now it didn't work. The reason it didn't work now is because Nehemiah is on the scene. And Nehemiah is no pushover. In V.20, Nehemiah refused to argue. If you're wise you will not argue with the opposition. Instead he points out that it's God's project and God's idea. V. 12 he said *"I had not told anyone what God had put in my heart to do."* God put the burden on him. It wasn't his idea to rebuild the wall, it was God's idea. Since it was God's idea they would trust Him for its success. That's confidence. He answers the opposition quickly and confidently. The other thing he does is expose the selfish motives of the opposition. "Who are you anyway?" They had a stake in not seeing Jerusalem rebuilt because that would reduce the size of their kingdom. He exposes the motives of the opposition. Then the opposition comes and says, "You're trying to rebel against the king of Persia." Nehemiah pulls out his letters. "I'm not rebelling against the king. I'm obeying the king of kings. Be quiet!" He deals with them confidently and quickly. This stunned the opposition. But it was only temporarily. They will see him several more times in the rest of the book. It boosted the morale of the Jews in Jerusalem. They had been defeated for years and finally here's a guy who is not afraid to stand up against these folks and say, "You don't have any historic right to this city."

I John 3:13 *"Don't be surprised, my brothers, if the world hates you."* If you start working for God, expect opposition. Anybody who does anything is going to be ridiculed. The moment you hang your sign out, somebody is going to start throwing rocks at it. The only way to not be criticized in life is to do nothing, be nothing, and say nothing. If you decide that you're going to live for Jesus Christ at work, school, or any other place, somebody is going to start laughing at you. Count on it! They're going to ridicule you. Let them laugh! They will question your motives. People will question your motives just like they questioned Nehemiah's. "Are you an empire builder? Are you on some ego trip, trying to do what nobody else has done in ninety years?" That's part of the price of being a leader. People will oppose you. Answer your opposition quickly and confidently! Kites rise against the wind not with it! If you are in middle management and you ever get moved to a chief executive position these are the steps you need to take.

There's a right way to move into responsibility and a wrong way. If you're in a company on a level with a bunch of other people and then suddenly you get promoted to be the supervisor, if you handle that right it will work out good. If you handle it wrong, all of a sudden you've got everybody fighting against you -- "Who does he think he is?" Nehemiah went from middle management in Susa, who reported directly to a supervisor, who happened to be the king, to all of a sudden being in charge of a project where he's the supervisor. A lot of people, when they make that move, can't handle the power. It's too much for them. They can't handle it. But Nehemiah shows us what to do when you move into a new job and there's a bunch of people there before you. Nehemiah moves into a situation where everybody has been saying, "It can't be done!" for ninety years. Now he's going to come in and do it!

CONCLUSION

1. *Expect opposition because it's going to happen.* There's never opportunity without opposition. If you have a good idea, great. But realize somebody is going to try to shoot it down. Realize it up front.
2. *Wait for the right timing.* Don't just, the first time you get the idea, go in and blab it to the boss, wife, and husband. Wait for the right timing. Make sure you're rested, prayed, planned. There is a time to do everything.
3. *Face the facts.* Don't go in to make a proposal to somebody and have them say, "What about this?" and you have to say, "I hadn't thought about that." You must have the facts and figures to back up what you want to talk about. *"Only a simpleton believes what he's told. A prudent man checks to see where he's going."* Good leaders do their own research.
4. *Identify with the people.* It's not "I'm here to tell you what to do." Nehemiah didn't check in and say, "I'm here to rebuild the wall. If you want to consult me I'll be in my office." He said, "We've got a problem. We're here. It's our problem. Let us rebuild."
5. *Pain the seriousness of the problem.* He used word pictures: "It lies in ruins and its gates burned with fire." He's very realistic. It would be a tough job. Leaders don't lie and say it's going to be a breeze! He's honest. But he appeals to their self-esteem and to the motive of glorifying God, the greatest motive of all.
6. *Asks for a specific response.* He was realistic and optimistic. He said, "I need your help. I can't do it by myself. We've got to work together."
7. *Encourage with a personal testimony.* As he tells the story how God has blessed him and circumstances confirmed it, you can see the faith welling up in the people. They rally around. Nehemiah realized that people loved to be led. When there is a leader who puts our interest first and cares about us, as the good shepherd lays down his life for his sheep, as Jesus said, then we follow. The vision is transferred. It's no longer just Nehemiah's idea; it's the whole city's idea. He was ready to be a leader because people could see that God's hand, God's Spirit, was on Nehemiah's life.
8. *Answer the opposition quickly and confidently.* He wouldn't argue. Those of you who are already in leadership positions one of the lessons we learn from this study is that there are going to be things God wants to do in your life and through your life that other people are not going to get excited about. Realize that. They are not always going to agree with the direction that God is leading you, but sometimes you have to take a stand. There is a challenge for all of us whether we're in a leadership position or not. If you think that everybody is going to be positive about your decision to live for the Lord, think again! They're not. You need to be prepared for criticism and ridicule. You need to decide that you're going to live for Jesus Christ no matter what anybody else thinks. That's the beginning of leadership.

Discuss

- a. *How did Nehemiah encourage the Jews?* _____

- b. *What was the people response?* _____

- c. *Why did Nehemiah use his personal testimony in motivation?* _____

- d. *Think of a time you shared your personal testimony to encourage others to act. What was their response?* _____

- e. *Do you feel it is okay to say the precious hand of my God [is] upon me” (V.18) regarding the work that you are doing? Explain why or why not/* _____

A leader is one who influence a specific group of people to move in a God - given direction” J. Robert Clinton

A VERSE TO REMEMBER**Nehemiah 2:18**

“I also told them about the gracious hand of my God on me and what the king had said to me. They replied, "Let us start rebuilding." So they began this good work.”

PRAYER:

Father, I pray today, that I would live in such a way that Your hand on my life is obvious and that Your spirit in my life is every evident. I pray that I walk before you with integrity and credibility and honesty. Help me to realize that our reward comes in heaven and You've said to beware when all men speak well of you. Help me to worry more about pleasing You than pleasing other people. I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

HOW A LEADER ORGANIZES A PROJECT

Nehemiah: Lessons 5 on Leadership

Nehemiah 3:1-32

INTRODUCTION:

As we look at today's passage it looks just like a list of Hebrew names. Many Bible commentators and preachers just skip this passage. I probably should have done that myself. The Bible says in 1 Cor. 14:40 *"Everything should be done in a fitting and orderly way."* We're looking at principles of leadership. We said first a leader prays, then he plans, then he presents the plan and motivates people. But motivation without organization leads to frustration.

PRINCIPLES OF SUCCESSFUL ORGANIZING.

1. PRINCIPLE OF SIMPLIFICATION

Keep it simple. For such an enormous project Nehemiah had a simple plan of organizing it. He didn't assign any jobs by lottery and didn't create a whole new organization and didn't force any complex charts. His plan was very simple. He organized around natural groupings. The priests in verse 1, the men of Jericho in verse 2, sons of Hassenaah in verse 3, the men of Tekoa in verse 5. These are natural groups that are already associating together. The point is, don't create organization if you don't need it. If there is already organization, try to work through it and try to work with it.

Sometimes a new leader comes into a situation and the first thing he does is start changing the whole organization. He doesn't need to do that. If it ain't broke, don't fix it. What is the most natural grouping of organization? The family Nehemiah 4:13 -- He posted them by families -- for support. **Law of Leadership:** *The strongest organizations are the simplest.* It's like toys. Blocks are unbreakable. More complex toys break. The more complex something is the more it breaks. The simpler it is, the stronger it is. The simplest organizations are strong organizations.

Discuss:

- a. Chapter 3 describes the hard work of building the wall around Jerusalem and repairing the gates. List the groups who gave themselves to the work. _____

- b. What are some of the occupations of the repairers? _____

- c. What was the place of women in this work (V.12) _____

- d. What are the most natural groupings in your organization/church/work place? _____

- e. How could you utilize such groupings to accomplish a given project? _____

2. THE PRINCIPLE OF PARTICIPATION

Work with those who want to work. A lot of leaders never learn this. They spend all their time trying to corral the lazy and the apathetic instead of working with those who want to work. I call that corralling goats. Almost everybody got involved. All available help was put to work. The religious leaders led the way. Men and women, city and country people, white collar, blue collar. There were perfume makers, goldsmiths -- everybody got involved including Government leaders and business leaders. Everybody was moving bricks. Everybody was making mortar except one little group. V. 5. *"The next section was repaired by the men of Tekoa, but their nobles would not put their shoulders to the work under their supervisors."* These guys think they're too hot, too good. They thought the work was beneath them -- moving bricks. It doesn't say what excuse they gave, but in every church you have these kinds of people. In every community, every business you have these kinds of people, hot shots that don't want to work. In every project there are two kinds of people -- workers and shirkers. Nehemiah's response to these shirkers was to ignore them. He did not focus on those who were not willing to work. He focused on those who were willing to work. He didn't lose sleep; gets bitter, waste time trying to corral them. If you're a leader, you must not worry about people who don't want to get involved. You worry about just those people who do want to get involved. Work with people who want to work. Leaders love everybody, but they move with the movers. In every organization, family, church there are some people who say, "I want to go. I want to be involved." Focus on these. Don't focus on those people who make excuses.

Discuss:

1. *Almost everyone was involved, which group was not willing to participate?* _____
 2. *Did this group deter Nehemiah from continuing with the project* _____
-

3. PRINCIPLE OF DELEGATION

When you're organizing you make specific assignments, divide up the project in specific tasks, and assign specific people to those specific tasks. What if, after Nehemiah's pep rally when he got everybody excited and they jumped up ready to go build, what if he said, "Just go start working wherever you want to work." That wouldn't have worked. What if he said: "Let's go to one part of the wall and work on the same part at once?" There would have been confusion, chaos, everybody bumping into each other.

The key word in this passage is the word "section". It's used 13 times. He walks around the entire wall and divides it all up almost counter clockwise. Obviously Nehemiah thought this out. He probably divided up the wall into sections when he was doing that midnight ride. In organization, keep it simple, work with those who want to work and then make specific assignments then delegate.

TASKS TO DO IN DELEGATION:

- a. ***Break down major goals into smaller tasks.*** This is the capacity to cut problems down to size. Nehemiah attacks this huge problem of building the wall by breaking it down into

bite size pieces. When we started Saddleback, prior to that first service we had about 12 people. I made everybody a committee of 1. We each had assignments. Somebody was to get the bulletins printed. Somebody else was to get the offering plates. Somebody else was to be the nursery. Somebody else was to be the Sunday school. We had Sunday school birth through 3rd grade and then 4th grade through college. Those were our two classes the first Sunday at Saddleback. Everybody had a specific task.

- b. Develop clear job descriptions.** Everyone deserves to know what's expected.
- c. Match the right person with the right task.** The wrong person in the wrong task causes chaos. It causes all kinds of motivational problems. In good delegating you've got to understand what the task is all about and you've got to understand what the person is good at and get them together. You've got to have the right person in the right place for God to be able to bless it. Everybody's responsibility is nobody's. Somebody has got to assume specific responsibility.

Discuss:

- a. *What shows Nehemiah delegated the work to specific people?* _____

- b. *What are the advantages of delegation?* _____

- c. *How do you feel when facing what seems to be impossible task – especially when there doesn't seem to be commitment from those you are working with?* _____

- d. *How has cooperation played a significant part in your church/fellowship or in your place of work?* _____

4. PRINCIPLE OF MOTIVATION.

In organizing any project allow for ownership. Help people feel it's their project. v. 10 say a guy made repairs opposite his house. v. 23 another fellow repaired in front of his house, v. 28 another beside his house. The priest repaired each in front of his own house. v. 29, repaired in front of his house. v. 30 a guy built his in front of his living quarters. When you build a project you let people do the things they're interested in. Where would you most likely want to be building the wall? By your house. What is the result when you allow ownership in a project? High motivation. If I'm building the part of the wall that's going to protect my house, I'll do a good job. It also saves time; there's no commuting. Walk out in the morning and start to work! Go back home for lunch!

Nehemiah is simply saying that in the project make it as convenient as possible. It's easier to protect their family at the same time. v. 1 it said Eliashib, the high priest and his fellow workers went to work and rebuilt the Sheep Gate. That was the one closest to the temple. It's called the Sheep Gate because that was the one they brought the sheep in to be slaughtered for sacrifice.

Nehemiah allowed people to work in their area of interest. That's a principle of organization. **Leadership Law:** *Good organizations allow workers to develop their own areas.*

Discuss:

- a. *In a project it is important to allow for ownership. How is ownership evident in this chapter?* _____

Does ownership create motivation? Explain _____

- _____
- b. *What is the relationship between doing what interests you and motivation?* _____

- _____
- c. *Do you feel motivated to work in your church or fellowship or your place of work as this group of people is? Explain your response?* _____

“Motivation is the art of getting people to do what you want them to do because they want to do it.” Dwight Eisenhower

5. PRINCIPLE OF COOPERATION

Encourage teamwork. Whenever you've got a project of any size and you need to organize it, realize that we accomplish so much more together than we do as individuals. This passage is the kind of nightmare passage you don't want to have when you're playing Russian roulette to find God's will. The point of it is that they worked together. The key phrase is "next to him" or "next to them". This is used twenty times in this passage. Nehemiah works clockwise around the entire wall. They helped each other. They encouraged each other. In our next study we're going to see that the whole time they were building the wall they were under attack. They needed help and support. They needed people to encourage them. B.C. Forbes, the guy who founded *Forbes* magazine said, "You spell success, T-E-A-M-W-O-R-K." Cooperation is a key principle that's built into good organization. "Coming together is a beginning, keeping together is progress, thinking together is unity, and working together is success."

Together we can do things we can't do as individuals. Geese can fly 72% farther when they're in formation than when they fly off by themselves. Who taught them that? God did. When we cooperate together, when there is teamwork there is great growth. Cooperation is a greater motivator than competition. It lasts because you feel like you're together on a winning team. People influence each other. They influence the people they're next to for good or for bad. Who's going to pull him up? When you're building an organization, a business, a church, a social club, a lay ministry you follow these principles: keep it simple, work with those who want to work, make specific assignments, allow for ownership, and encourage teamwork. **Leadership Law:** *Good organizations provide a supportive climate of trust and teamwork.* That's a mark of a good

organization. They provide a supportive climate of trust and teamwork. In the Bible, when referring to Christians in the church, the phrase "one another" is used 58 times. It's as if God's saying, "Get the message! Help each other!" There is no such thing as Lone Ranger Christians. We are together in this. We're a team. There is tremendous power in cooperation. God can overlook almost anything in a church: poor facilities, no facilities, poor doctrine. The one thing God will not overlook is disunity.

In the first ten chapters of Acts, ten times it says, "they were of one accord... of one heart ... unified." When you have unification like they did in Acts you will have the power of Acts. There is power in teamwork. It is working together in this atmosphere of trust and teamwork. "Snow is a beautiful demonstration of what God can do with a bunch of flakes." Individually, I can't do much and you can't do much, snowflakes are pretty frail. But if enough of them stick together they can stop traffic. I can't do much. I can't make an impact on this valley. You can't make an impact on the valley. But together, we're making an impact. That's teamwork.

Discuss:

- a. *How did Nehemiah utilize this principle?* _____

- b. *How many times the phrase 'next to him' or next to them is used in chapter 3? What does this tell you about cooperation?* _____

- c. *What are the benefits of cooperation according to Eccl. 4:9-10?*

6. PRINCIPLE OF ADMINISTRATION

This principle is implied all the way through the passage. You must supervise the work when you have any kind of a project. It's interesting in Nehemiah 3 that his name is never mentioned. Not once in the chapter. Where was he? He was out on the line administering and supervising. He was doing what Tom Peters calls in his book *Passion for Excellence* call MBWA – Management By Walking Around. He was walking around checking up on people, finding out what's going on. How did he know which part each guy built? He was continually inspecting, supervising. He uses the phrase "under their supervisors." v. 17 says certain repairs were made "under Rehum", v. 18 certain repairs were made "under Bavvai". There were appointed supervisors, who were helping control the work, manage it, administer it and make sure it was going. **There are two leadership laws you need to understand here:** first is *good organizations establish clear lines of authority*. They not only have clear job descriptions, but they have clear lines of authority. Second his *People do what you inspect not what you expect*. Those of you who are bosses, have you figured that out yet?

Discuss:

- a. *Who are the supervisors mentioned?* _____
- b. *Nehemiah is not mentioned in this chapter, what do you think he was doing?* _____

- c. *How did he know where each person was building?* _____

- d. *Has the project you delegated failed due to lack of proper administration? Explain* _____

7. PRINCIPLE OF APPRECIATION

In good organizations they give recognition. I believe that is the primary purpose of this chapter. We have a great honor role of faith. Nehemiah is giving credit where it is due. Two thousand years later on the opposite side of the world, we have a pastor and associate pastor mispronouncing their names but we still remember them. If they hadn't done their part and Nehemiah hadn't appreciated what they'd done, we wouldn't have known who they were. Notice several things about this principle of appreciation: Obviously, Nehemiah knew their names. That's a mark of a good leader. In this passage, there are 38 individual names of guys he said did a good job on the wall. My question I want to ask those of you who are in any kind of management position is, Do you know who's doing a good job in your organization? If you do, are you telling them they're doing a good job? That's a principle of good organization.

I have a Giant Killer Award that I give out every month. When I was in Israel, I went down to the brook where David found his five smooth stones to throw at Goliath. I picked up five smooth stones from the same brook and brought them back home -- I smuggled them. (I always believe it's easier to get forgiveness than permission.) When I went to Bethany, I bought a little slingshot from a boy on the street and brought that home. I had a plaque made with the stones and slingshot that said, "Am I gazing at Goliath or looking at the living God?" Every month I present to someone on our staff the Giant Killer Award. It's for the person who has tackled the greatest problem of the month. It doesn't mean they solved it, it just means they took it on. We reward effort in our church. I think it's important that you develop ways to let people know they're doing a good job. V. 20 have the name of one man in this list of entire names that gets honorable mention.

It says everybody did a good job, *"Next to him, Baruch, son of Zabbai zealously repaired another section from the Angle to the entrance of the house of Eliashib, the high priest."* Circle "zealously". That's the only descriptive term in the entire chapter. Everybody else did their work. Some people didn't do any work. But one guy enthusiastically did his work. Three thousand years later we know it, we know the name of that guy. We don't know what he did. Maybe he worked extra fast. Maybe he worked extra-long hours, had an especially positive attitude. The point is if you want to be recognized in your work, just do what everybody else does but do it with enthusiasm. God notices enthusiasm. It's in the Bible. God notices whether I'm working and serving enthusiastically or not. Enthusiasm is the Greek word that means "God possessed". That's what enthusiasm means. When you're possessed by God you're going to be enthusiastic.

Verse 12 *"Shallum son of Hallohesh, ruler of the half district of Jerusalem, repaired the next section with the help of his daughters."* I think that's special. In those days, women did not do men's work. They didn't carry bricks and mortar around. Women did certain things and men did certain things. Even if they did, women were never recognized in that culture. But Nehemiah recognized them. Credit to who credit is due. He wasn't any chauvinist. He said, these girls were

doing a good job. So he points them out for special recognition. Probably Shallum was a pretty smart man. He probably got all the help he wanted since his daughters were working on the wall... likely the young men on either side were more than happy to come help Shallum with his section of the wall. Nehemiah is giving appreciation and recognition. I think this is the purpose of this chapter. 5 *"The next section was repaired by the men of Tekoa. [Tekoa was a hick town, a wide spot in the road. Nothing there.] But their nobles [their upper crust -- a bunch of crumbs held together by their own dough] would not put their shoulder to the work under their supervision."*

It's interesting to me that three thousand years later everybody else is honored for what they did, but these guys are remembered for what they didn't do. What an epitaph! When these executives started making their excuses why they couldn't move brick and mortar do you think they had any idea how many people were going to know about it? Billions of Christians and believers over 3000 years knew that these guys coped out and did not do their job. Those guys blew it. **Leadership Law:** *Good organizations recognize and reward effort.* As I read this I was thinking how Nehemiah sat down and wrote his list of the people he appreciated in his work. I thought about Saddleback and the people I knew who were actively serving in our church. Who would be on it? I marked hundreds of names from the church directory of people I appreciated and this is only a fraction. There may have been a thousand people. But then I started thinking of the 400 attenders. Where are the other 75%? What are they doing? A lot of the churches run on the 80-20 principle: 20% of the people do 80% of the work.

Unfortunately that's true in most churches. It's true financially. In our church about 20% of the people handle 80% of the financial burden of this church. It shouldn't be that way. Everybody else is just along for a free ride. Nehemiah did not get up tight about these people. He did not worry about them. He said I'm going to focus on those that are working not on those that aren't working. It's not my duty to be bothered by the fact that a lot of people won't ever serve. They will come for weeks or months or years and never get involved. It's not my job to get involved, because God knows. One day God is going to reward. The Bible says Nehemiah had a list, I made a list, but the most important thing is, are you on God's list? One day when you get to heaven God's going to look at your list and see whether you were involved in His work or not. Romans 14:12 *"So that each one of us will give an account of himself to God."* This verse scares me to death! The Bible says one day I'm going to give an account of my life to God for the direction of this church, how I served Him. You are too. In Luke 16:2 it says God's going to call you into account for what you did with what you had. He is making a list -- just like Nehemiah had his appreciation list.

God is keeping a record of my service and my stewardship. It really doesn't matter what anybody else thinks. Or who knows or who doesn't know. What matters is God knows. What will God say about me and my service for Him? Will he say, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant." Or "Why didn't you do more? What is your excuse?" What is God going to say about you? If you were to die tonight what would God say about your service? 1 Cor. 15:58 *"Always give yourself fully to the work of the Lord because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain."* God has not asked any of us to go build a wall. But He has asked every one of us to be involved in ministry. To be a Christian means to be called into the ministry. That doesn't mean everybody is a pastor, quits their job and works full time. But every Christian is called to serve, to minister. A non-serving Christian is a contradiction. He expects us to be involved in service. Rom 12:4-8 *"Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not have all the same function, so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. We all have different gifts ... use them!"*

Discuss:

- a. Do you think mentioning of the people working on the different parts of the wall by Nehemiah shows appreciation? Why or why not? _____

- b. Do you think Baruch in Vs. 20 is given an honorable appreciation? Why or why not? _____

- c. What do we learn from Baruch about the quality of our work? _____

- d. Do you know who is doing a good job in your team? If you do, are you telling them they are doing a good job? _____

- e. Knowing that we shall give an account for everything we do before God and he shall reward our service what shall we do? _____

- f. What has God asked us to do in 1 Cor 15:58? Why? _____

CONCLUSION

What is my function in the body of Christ? Ask yourself that. What part of the wall are you building? We all have different gifts that God has given us to function differently. Sometimes people use spiritual gifts as a cop out. "That's not my gift." So they won't do this or that. You ought to work in your area of interest. You ought to work where your spiritual gifts lie that is a fact. That ought to be your primary area of service. But God calls you to also work beyond your area of spiritual gifts. If you were to go back and read this list of guys - - men and women -- who built the wall, there is not one professional builder listed. None of these people were "gifted" to do it. There are pharmacists, jewelers, goldsmiths. These are people who work with their hands but they weren't afraid to go out there and get their hands calloused moving bricks and mortar. There were business men, merchants, white collar people who were not afraid to get out and help on the wall. Every time we have church we have to set up and take down. Somebody has to do that. I was talking with Peter Drucker, the number one management consultant in the world. I told him, I have a church full of managers, white collar people, and executives. I can't ask them to go set up chairs every week. He said, "Why not? They need to. Any executive who won't set up chairs isn't worth his salt!" That comes from the number one management consultant in the world. If a person won't set up chairs in his church he's not much of a leader. We all need to develop a servant's heart and not be like the noble and say, "That's beneath me!"

Notice there are three kinds of work in Nehemiah 3. There were those who did not work, there were those who did some work, and we know that there was one guy who did enthusiastic work. God notices all three kinds. He noticed those who weren't doing zip! He noticed those who were doing their share. He noticed those who were going above and beyond their call of duty and doing it enthusiastically. Which three describes your involvement in God's work? Kenneth Strachan was a missionary in South America. He made this statement. It's called Strachan's theorem, "The expansion of any movement is in direct proportion to its success in mobilizing its total membership in continuous propagation of its beliefs."

PERSONAL APPLICATION:

Some of you are in leadership or management positions at work where these seven principles apply immediately in organization in your business, school, etc. You need to find a place of service. Scripture says just as each of us has one body with many members and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ, we who are many form one body and each member belongs to all the others. We have different gifts and we are to use them. Would you say, "OK Lord, I realize you were talking to me? I'm not going to make any more excuses but I'm going to find a place where part of my life can come back to you in service and ministry. I want my life to count and I want to make a significant impact."

A VERSE TO REMEMBER

1 Corinthians 15:58

"Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain."

PRAYER:

Father, I am so grateful for this study today. I need to grow closer to you and deeper in my commitment with you. I need a place to serve, to give, to share, to invest my life for eternity. I pray that you will use these principles to motivate me to action. I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

HOW A LEADER HANDLES OPPOSITION

Nehemiah: Lessons 6 on Leadership.

Nehemiah 4:1-23

INTRODUCTION

One of the great tests of leadership is how do you handle opposition? Do you panic under pressure? Do you get uptight, lose your temper, blow up, become discouraged, and give up? What do you do? If you're going to be a leader part of the job description includes putting up with attacks. We're going to look at how a leader handles opposition in Nehemiah 4. Three things: the tactics of opposition, the effects of opposition, how a leader handles it or the right response.

I. THE TACTICS OF OPPOSITION (Read Nehemiah 4:1)

I'm going to mention three of them. There are many more but these three are mentioned in the text and people will use these to stop or stall a project. They're still used today.

1. **Ridicule.** There are books out today on psychological warfare in the office place. How to psych out your competition. The world continually ridicules the church. Puts it down, argues, makes fun of God's people, characterizes them as weak, ignorant, fanatical people, all pastors are wimps or crooks. It's a constant ridicule. Why is it so effective? It's because it attacks our sense of self-worth. A lot of times we can handle everything except ridicule. The motive. "*He became very angry and greatly incensed....*" Ridicule is always the substitute for reason. Laughter is always the substitute for logic. If people can't reason you out of a position they'll just try to ridicule you.

People who ridicule you are usually just afraid. Afraid that you're going to succeed. He uses name calling, "*...those feeble Jews*". He implies that they have a selfish motive. He makes fun of their beliefs. He overstates the case. All of these are typical tools of ridicule. He says "*Are they going to rebuild it in one day?*" Nowhere is there any place they say they're going to rebuild it in one day. That's typical ridicule. They overstate their case, set up a straw man and then try to knock it over. v. 3. Ridicule is contagious. When Sanballat makes the initial ridicule Tobiah, his side kick, chimes in and starts. There's always people who will ridicule you if somebody else will take the lead. They are cowards and won't do it on their own.

2. **Organized resistance.** (Read v. 6) The opposition is getting organized. Instead of just a couple of critics we have a conspiracy. Sanballat has gathered all the disgruntled parties to resist the rebuilding of the wall. Sanballat and the Samaritans were in the North, the Arabs were in the south, Tobiah and the Ammonites were in the east, the men of Ashdod were in the west. The Jews were surrounded by these people who were conspiring against them. Have you noticed that negative people tend to gravitate together? The purpose was to fight and stir up trouble. These folks are all around. Some people, their whole purpose in life, seem to be against stuff.
3. **Rumor.** (Read v. 11-12.) The quickest way to spread a rumor is to feed on people's fears. The essence of the rumor is we're going to get you from all sides. We're going to attack you and you're not even going to know what hit you. The fact is, they didn't have enough power to do this. But the rumor of an attack was enough to incite panic. Rumor is often used by opposition. Two characteristics of rumors:

- a. *They are always spread by those closest to the enemy.* v. 12 *"Those Jews who lived near them."* The Jews outside the city of Jerusalem, who lived near the enemy, they were the ones most negative. What happens when you're around negative people all the time? You get negative. You become infected. The point here is, if Satan can get somebody inside of the camp saying, "It can't be done." then he's got a major victory. He infiltrates the ranks.
- b. *They are exaggerated when they are repeated. "Then they told us ten times over."* What happens when a rumor is exaggerated ten times over? People start to believe it. I think it was Hitler that discovered if you tell a lie long enough people are going to start believing it. The point is: the negative always gets exaggerated in a project. **Law of Leadership:** *Leaders don't swallow rumors. They may listen to them, chew on them, but they never swallow them. Because they are always exaggerations.*

II. THE EFFECT OF OPPOSITION (Read Nehemiah 4:10-11)

When you're working hard and you're bombarded by ridicule, rumor and resistance you're going to get discouraged. That's the effect of opposition: discouragement. When is discouragement most likely to occur? v. 6 *"So we rebuilt the wall until all of it reached half of its height."* Discouragement comes at the half way point. How many of you have half-finished projects around your house? Four causes of discouragement:

1. Fatigue -- *"the strength of the laborers is giving out"*
2. Frustration -- *"there was so much rubble"* Frustration is usually a matter of perception. Actually the piles are getting smaller.
3. Failure -- *"we cannot rebuild the wall"* When you're tired, everything looks impossible. Vince Lombardi said, "Fatigue makes cowards of all of us."
4. Fear -- *"the enemies will attack us"*

The opposition always has two goals. One of them is to hinder God's word and one is to stop God's work.

Discuss:

- a. *Describe the progression of seriousness in how Sanballat and Tobiah threaten the Jews and the building of the wall.* _____

- b. *In 2:19; 4:1, 3 what statement showed ridicule?* _____

- c. *What showed resistance?* _____

- d. *Was there any spreading of rumor? (V.11-12; 6:5-7) How do you know? What was the rumor?* _____

- e. *What are the effects of opposition?* _____

-
- f. Have you ever experienced opposition in your work or ministry? What was your response? _____
-
-

III. WHAT IS THE RIGHT RESPONSE TO OPPOSITION?

1. RELY ON GOD (Read Nehemiah 4:4-5).

When you're being ridiculed you don't suppress it, you confess it. Rely on God. Admit it all to God. He says, "God, we're trusting in you to defend us." He doesn't get caught up in a name calling game. Instead of calling names, he relies on God. Proverbs 26:4 *"Do not answer a fool according to his folly or you will be like him yourself."* If you're getting ridiculed for your faith, or whatever, don't answer back. That's dumb! Then you're no better than the person who's ridiculing you. If you've got a project and people are taking pot shots at you, just rely on God. Pray. The greater the opposition the more you need to pray, to depend on God. **Leadership Law:** *When you're ridiculed don't take it out on people, talk it out with God.* That's what Nehemiah does. He hears this initial ridicule but basically he ignores it and goes to God. The best response to ridicule is don't respond. Instead, you go and you pray and you keep on doing what you should be doing in the first place. The first verses say -- they ridiculed, they prayed, they rebuilt the wall. Ridicule can never stop you from doing what you're doing. Not unless you let it. If you're a leader and you're under attack, the first thing you do is pray. You take it to God. Sometimes if you ignore the opposition the criticism dissipates, vanishes. Sometimes it doesn't. Sometimes it intensifies. When they realized that ridicule wasn't working then in v. 8 it says they plotted together to fight against Jerusalem.

2. ACT ON THE OPPOSITION

How do we know that Nehemiah acted on the opposition? v. 9 *"But we prayed to our God and we posted a guard day and night to meet this threat."* They did the prayerful thing and then the practical thing. Its fine to lie in bed at night and pray, "Protect me from the burglars." But you also need to get up and lock your door! Oliver Cromwell said, "Trust God and keep your powder dry." Petition without Precaution is Presumption. Rely on God when you're being opposed. But also respect the opposition. And the stronger the opposition, the stronger the response. v. 9 *"We prayed."* Up to this time, Nehemiah has been doing the praying. Now all of the people are praying. Where did they get that idea? They've been watching their leader. Leaders lead by showing, not by telling. Nehemiah has been praying constantly for four chapters. The people are getting the idea that it must work. They start praying too. If you're a leader in your business and if you want other Christians to follow your lead, start praying.

Nehemiah's constant prayer life had affected these people. The point I want to make is that corporate opposition requires a corporate response. Now the whole people of God are praying. They prayed and they posted a guard. Nehemiah sets up an alarm system. He sets up 24-hour guards. He posts a watch. He knows his opposition. To be forewarned is to be forearmed. A lot of leaders have lost because they've underestimated the opposition. Don't just pray. Be aware. Know your opposition and don't be ignorant about what's happening. In the Bible the phrase that is used over and over again is *"Watch and pray"*. Jesus said it. Paul said it. John said it. Peter said it. Watch is the human part -- post a guard. Pray is the divine part -- trust God. Watch is

locking the door; pray is "God; I'm trusting You." You do both of these things. Rely on God and respect the opposition.

3. REINFORCE YOUR WEAK POINTS (Read Nehemiah 4:13)

Nehemiah had prayed and he had relied and respected the opposition. He had posted the guard. Then he is reinforcing his weak points, the lower points. This is where the wall was maybe only a couple of feet high. Where it's ten feet high you don't have to worry so much. The weak points, the exposed places, he's making a strategic placement. He's reinforcing his weak points. Do you know the weak points in your business? Do you know the weak points in your family? Do you know where you're most open to attack? That's the principle he's teaching us. **Leadership Law:** *Good leaders know where they are vulnerable and they reinforce that area.* If you have to make a sales presentation, then know your weaknesses and anticipate the objections and be ready to counter those objections when you make the proposal. v. 16 tell us that they are working all around the whole city. They couldn't fortify the whole city. They had no army. This is just a bunch of amateurs here building the wall.

So Nehemiah said whenever you hear the trumpet blowing, everybody run to that side and we'll know the enemy is there and we'll fight them all together. I think the principle here is, Keep your lines of communication open during times of attack, times of opposition. Nehemiah turned the entire city into an armed camp. Everybody did two things. They worked and they carried a weapon. Every time you start building for God, you're asking for a battle. If you start trying to build your marriage, you're asking for a battle. If you start trying to build up your own personal spiritual life you're asking for a battle. If you start trying to build a church, that's a battle. Every time a church starts building there is a battle. Why? It is because Satan doesn't want churches built. He gets people to oppose you. **Leadership Law:** Leaders must build and battle at the same time. If you start doing anything of significance in this world, somebody is going to oppose you. What do you do? Nehemiah had three alternatives. When everybody started opposing him with rumors, resistance and ridicule he could

- a. Give up
- b. Leave the wall and go fight -- do a preemptive strike
- c. Build the wall and arm himself defensively.

Leaders must build and battle at the same time. You never leave the wall to fight the enemy. You could spend all your time putting out fires and never get your job done. You could spend all your time greasing the squeaking wheel (the critic, the complainer, the kook) and never get your dream or whatever God's called you to do, done. You've got to learn to build and battle at the same time. Notice Nehemiah's building plan and battle plan in v. 13 *"I stationed some of the people at the lowest points of the wall posting them by families."* Why by families? When you are under attack, more than any other time, you need support. That's one of the benefits of a small group. When you are in a small group, you are less vulnerable to an attack of Satan. God never meant us to be Lone Rangers.

There is support and encouragement in small groups. Nehemiah posted by families. If a guy is working on the wall and his family is on the other side of town, he's in constant fear of "What if the enemy's attacking over there? They may be getting my family." So Nehemiah put all the families on the wall and they stayed together. If the enemy attacked at my point it's do or die! My family's there. If I don't defend them and turn and run, my family's going to get killed. There's value in support. Never fight a fight alone. When you're facing opposition, get some support. That is one of the purposes of the church. Every Sunday I preach to our folks and I know that on Monday morning they're going back to work and get beat up! To get beat up by the world. They come in bandaged and bloody at the end of the week to get patched up again. We

need support. It's tough in the business world. It's tough being a Christian at school. It's tough having Christian attitudes in a society where everything says "No, don't live for Christ; live for yourself!"

4. REASSURE THE PEOPLE (Read Nehemiah 4:14)

He's rallying the troops. He's relieving their fears. He's reinforcing their confidence. He's raising their morale. That's the task of leadership. When your business/family/church is under attack, the task of leadership is to reinforce the people, raise their morale. Don't be afraid! What did he say that renewed their confidence? *"Remember the Lord."* That's where our confidence comes from. Remember the Lord! It's interesting that a lot of wars have been fought with slogans that started "Remember..." The Spanish-American War was "Remember the Maine." World War I was "Remember the Lusitania". In Texas it was "Remember the Alamo". World War II was "Remember Pearl Harbor". All of those battle cries were based on defeats -- Remember that defeat back there, now let's go get them! Nehemiah does the exact opposite. He doesn't say, remember our defeat! Remember when we got exiled to Babylon! He says, *"Remember the Lord!"* He's saying, "Let's look at the future. Let's get our eyes off the opposition and get our eyes on the Lord."

When you're under attack, if the devil can get you to focus on the opposition he's won a major victory. You either focus on the opposition or you focus on the Lord. You can focus on the financial statement or you can focus on the Lord. You can either focus on the rising interest rates or you focus on the Lord. You either focus on the economy and its jitters or you focus on the Lord. What are you going to focus on? *"Remember the Lord!"* Remember what the Lord is like. *"Don't be afraid of them. Remember the Lord who is great and awesome."* A couple of sentences earlier where he said *"Don't be afraid"* In the Hebrew that is the same word in both places -- the word for afraid and the word for awesome. The point that he's saying here is that when you fear God then you're not going to fear other people. The fear of God replaces the fear of man. If I don't fear God then I'm afraid of men. If I'm afraid of men then I'm not afraid of God. If I'm afraid of God -- reverential fear -- then I don't fear anybody else. Because I know that what I'm doing is pleasing to Him.

Jesus said this in Luke 12. He said "Don't be afraid of people who can kill your body and then they can't do anything after that. Fear the person who can send you to hell after your body's dead." If you have a healthy respect for God and you reverence Him and you realize how powerful He is, you're not going to have any problem fearing other people. Then Nehemiah challenges them. "Fight for your brothers and your sons and your daughters and your wives and your homes." He challenges them to fight for their lives. Everything is on the line here. V. 19 *"I said to the nobles and officials, 'The work is extensive and spread out and we are widely separated from each other along the wall. Whenever you hear the sound of the trumpet joins us there and our God will fight for us.'"* He's got a trumpet as a rallying point. That's a point of reassuring the people

5. REFUSE TO QUIT (Read Nehemiah 4:15)

We know there is opposition out there. There are critics. They are ridiculing, rumoring. But that doesn't matter. We're going to keep on keeping on. We refuse to be distracted. They all returned to the wall. When the going gets tough, the tough get going. v. 8 *"They all plotted together to come and fight against Jerusalem and stir up trouble against it."* That's the first goal of opposition: to stir up trouble. The second goal is in v. 11 *"We will kill them and put an end to the work."* When you're being opposed there are always two oppositions. They want to hinder your

work and they want to stop your work. When you know that the opposition's goal is to get you to quit what do you do? Don't quit! You keep on working no matter what! Calvin Coolidge said, "Press on. Nothing can take the place of persistence. Talent will not. Nothing is more common than unsuccessful men with talent. Genius will not. Unrewarded genius is almost a proverb. Education will not. The world is full of educated derelicts. Persistence and determination alone are the overwhelming power." In spite of the opposition we've looked at, v. 21 *"So we continued to work..."* They refused to quit. *"...with half of the men holding spears from the first light of dawn till the stars came out at night. At that time I also said to the people, 'Have every man and his helper stay in Jerusalem at night so they can serve us as guards by night and workmen by day.' Neither I nor my brothers nor my men nor the guards with me took off our clothes. Each had his weapon even when he went for water."* They worked through the night. He told all the people who lived outside of Jerusalem who was commuting in to work on the wall, "You stay here". When you're under opposition, when you're under attack, it's time to stick together. They even slept in their clothes, that's how committed they were. Nehemiah led the way. He sets the work pace. He's showing endurance, being the prototype. He's enduring the same hardships the people are enduring, facing the same dangers. **Leadership Law:** *Leaders model persistence. They are the last to give up. They are the last to jump ship. They refuse to quit.*

CONCLUSION:

What does the devil want you to give up? What has he been tempting you to give up on? Reading through the Bible in a year? A career? A dream? A marriage? An idea? A ministry at church? What does he want you to give up? Your small group? If you know that that is what he wants you to give up what should you do? Keep going! There is an old legend that one day Satan had a garage sale. He was selling all of his tools that he had used over the centuries. Lying, hatred, malice, lust, greed, envy, jealousy, pride, all of these different things. Over in the corner there was one tool that was priced more than all the other tools put together. It was so priceless that nobody bought it. Why? Because it was "Discouragement" That's Satan's most important tool.

Satan may not get you to commit an immoral sin, but he can get you discouraged! A discouraged Christian is an ineffective Christian. That means that we've taken our eyes off the Lord and put them on the circumstance. Since Satan never sold it, he's still using it today. Whenever we give up, the devil wins. One of the fundamental principles of the Christian life is *Don't give up!* Persistence is the ultimate test of leadership. This is the acid test. How do you handle it when the going gets tough? When somebody laughs at you or criticizes you for being a Christian that may hurt but it cannot stop you. The secret of success is you simply outlast your critics. How do you get to be an oak tree? An oak tree is just a little nut that refused to give his ground. It doesn't take a lot of intelligence but if you just hang on you'll outlast the critics. There is nothing the devil would rather do than stall us and stop us and move us into neutral so resist discouragement and keep on.

PERSONAL APPLICATION.

I don't know where you're tempted to give up but I want to say this: God wants to say three things to you. Don't give up. Don't quit! Hang in there! Opposition comes and goes. It comes in waves. The tide may be out in your life right now but it will come back in. Hang in there!

Discuss:

- a. Why do you think Nehemiah is so uncharitable in his prayer in Vv 4-5? _____

-
- b. *Sanballat has inside help in his intimidation of the Jews and Nehemiah. What is it?* _____
-
-
- c. *In verses 13-2 how does Nehemiah handle these threats?* _____
-
-
- d. *What did Nehemiah do that renewed the confidence of the people?* _____
-
-
- e. *What did the people do after hearing the plan of those who opposed them?* _____
-
- f. *In what situation have you seen a creative solution keep the work moving forward?* _____
-
-
- g. *Does the opposition make you want to quit a job or does it challenge you to work hard to complete it? Explain* _____
-
-
-

A VERSE TO REMEMBER:

Nehemiah 4:19

"I said to the nobles and officials, 'The work is extensive and spread out and we are widely separated from each other along the wall. Whenever you hear the sound of the trumpet joins us there and our God will fight for us.'"

PRAYER:

Heavenly Father, I know that you've said in your word we should not be ignorant of Satan's schemes. Lord, help me to recognize when am discouraged the cause, whether it is fatigue, frustration, failure, or fear. Help me reinforce my weak areas by the power of Your Holy Spirit. Above all, help me to refuse to quit. I pray it in His name. Amen.

HOW A LEADER RESOLVES CONFLICT

Nehemiah: Lessons 7 on Leadership

Nehemiah 5:1-13

INTRODUCTION.

We've been studying Nehemiah from the standpoint of leadership principles because the number one need in our church or any organization is leaders. Everything rises or falls on leadership. Nehemiah has been sent by God to lead in rebuilding this wall and the day they begin, opposition begins too. Today we're going to look at how they tried to use division and discord. They tried to create internal conflict. If you don't deal with conflict then it's going to stop the work of the Lord in your life. If you're going to be a leader you've got to learn how to resolve conflict. This chapter is very important. It teaches us conflict management, the skill of dealing with conflict. V. 1-5 gives us the causes of conflict; 6-13 the cure for conflict.

I. THE CAUSE OF CONFLICT (Read Nehemiah 5:1-5)

The background of this chapter is the people have been spending all their time working on the wall. They didn't have any time to cultivate their gardens and raise food. V. 1 *"Now the men and their wives raised a great outcry against their Jewish brothers. Some were saying, 'We and our sons and daughters are numerous. In order for us to eat and stay alive we must get grain.'"* The first complaint was food shortages -- too many mouths to feed. In the next verse, we find out there was a famine. Resources and goods were in short supply. There were more mouths to feed than they had food. Inflation and high prices. Food shortages. It's interesting: they are doing the work of God, yet God allowed a famine. Why? Weren't they doing what He'd told them to do? I think that doing God's will does not exempt you from common problems of life. Just because you're doing the right thing doesn't mean your car isn't going to break down or have some major health problem or otherwise. So there was a food shortage in v. 2.

The second thing is that they were over mortgaged in their homes. v. 3 *"We are mortgaging our fields, our vineyards and our homes to get grain during the famine."* That's what you call financial bondage. They were using their equity to feed their families. They were taking their equity out of their homes and mortgaging them deeper and deeper just to put food on the table. v. 4 *"Still others were saying, 'We've had to borrow money to pay the king's taxes on our fields and vineyards.'"* High taxes are the third problem. They have to borrow just to pay taxes. They are in deep debt here. As a result of that, in v. 5, *"Although we are the same flesh and blood as our countrymen, and though our sons are as good as theirs, yet we have to subject our sons and daughters to slavery. Some of our daughters have already been enslaved but we are powerless because our fields and vineyards belong to others."* They had to have food so first they mortgaged their homes then they started selling off their family to raise money.

They are that in debt! They are forced to place their kids into slave labor to pay debts. The Bible is relevant! High taxes, high mortgage, high prices, forced to work overtime -- sounds like the business section of today's paper. But these hard times were not the root problem. v. 1 *"Now the men and their wives raised a great outcry against their Jewish brothers."* They are complaining about each other. The rich Jews were exploiting the poor Jews in a time of crisis. They were taking advantage and capitalizing on the misfortunes of the poor people. Those who had money and had food were saying, "If you'll sell me your house I'll give you food. I'll lend you money but it will be at high interest rates. And if you can't pay the loan I'll take your children as collateral." They were exploiting each other. Rather than helping and giving to the poor they're charging high interest and repossessing their homes, taking their children as slaves -- total

disregard for the misfortunes of other people, only thinking of themselves "How can I take advantage of this problem?" This was clearly against God's law. Exodus 22:25 said that Jews could not charge interest to each other. God allowed the Jews to charge interest to other people, but they were not allowed to charge interest to each other. They could loan to each other but they could not charge any interest on it.

The Bible also said that the Jew was not to enslave another Jew. If somebody was poor he could come and work for you but you were not to make him your slave. They were clearly violating God's will. The rich were blatantly violating these laws: profiteering, exploiting, and capitalizing on the famine. **Leadership Law:** *The root cause of internal conflict and discord is always selfishness.* Whether you have conflict in your family, with your boyfriend, in church, in your office, at school – the bottom line in conflict is always selfishness. Always! James 4:1 *"What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you? You want something but you don't get it."* What causes conflict? Selfishness. When my wants conflict with your wants, we've got a problem! We're going to have conflict, division. The most fulfilling part of leadership is working with people. But the most frustrating part of leadership is working with people. People tend to be selfish, including me. We want our own way. We want to do our own thing. As a result we don't always want to do the thing that's best. They put themselves first and that can be very, very frustrating. We think of ourselves and that causes conflict. It's always selfishness.

II. THE CURE FOR CONFLICT

Nehemiah knew this whole thing could blow up in his face and the wall never get rebuilt. They were exploiting each other. They had Jews fighting against Jews, families fighting against families. v. 1, the men and their wives raised a great outcry against their own people. This is much worse than fighting an enemy out there. An external enemy often rallies the troop, it builds unity. When you're fighting each other, it's dividing you apart.

HOW DOES A LEADER RESOLVE CONFLICT?

1 GETS ANGRY.

v. 1 -- *"When I heard their outcry and these charges I was very angry."* Nehemiah did not ignore the problem, he took it seriously. If you're the leader of any kind of group and the harmony of your people is threatened, you better get angry. It's very, very important. You, as a leader, are to protect the harmony of your home, your group, your Sunday School class -- wherever. Sometimes anger is very appropriate. Sometimes it's the right thing to do. This verse says Nehemiah was *very* angry. Anger is commanded by God. Ephesians 4:26 *"Be ye angry and sin not."* It is possible to be angry and not sin. If it wasn't possible then God sins. God got angry. Jesus got angry. You can get angry and not sin. One of the first things you need to do if there is disharmony caused by selfishness, you as a leader, better get angry. Take it seriously! There is the right kind of anger and the wrong kind of anger. Leadership is knowing the difference.

Nehemiah's anger is not a personal reaction. Nobody was hurting him. He is not getting angry and striking back because somebody bruised his ego. That's the wrong kind of anger. He's not striking back in revenge. That's the wrong kind of anger. But what he has is justifiable indignation. He was angry at the selfishness of these rich people. He's deeply disturbed by their exploitation. They could call a halt to the entire project just because of their own selfishness and greed. Nehemiah is thinking "What good is a wall if the people inside the wall are ripping each other off? What good is a wall if we're exploiting each other?" The point is we need to be angry

at sin. Louis Cossell says, "We are exposed daily to so much human tragedy we have experience what some have called compassion fatigue.

Having felt sorry for so many flood victims, earthquake victims and war victims we simply cannot muster the sympathy we know we ought to have for fresh casualties. But even worse than compassion fatigue is indignation fatigue. Many of us seem to have lost the capacity to get mad, at least as mad as we ought to get, about lying, cheating and stealing. To be indifferent to wrong doing, to shrug it off and laugh at it is a symptom of advanced degeneration of the moral sense. A leader without some fire in his/her bones is not much of a leader. When you see something that is destroying the harmony in your family, your church, your nation, your business the first thing to do, as a leader, is to get upset.

2 REFLECTION: THINK BEFORE YOU SPEAK

If you only do step one and don't do step two you're going to get into a lot of trouble. V. 7 *"I pondered them in my mind."* Living Bible says, *"So after thinking about it, I spoke out against these rich government officials."* These were the people who were ripping everybody off. The Hebrew word is literally "I consulted with myself". Nehemiah's first reaction was to get angry. But before he did anything else he talked to himself about it. He got alone with God, prayed about it, thought about it to get the perspective right. He planned it out and said, "God, what do you want me to say?" He talked to himself. There are some times when a leader needs to talk to himself. You don't need to go talk to anybody else. You need to set down and say, "What's really going on here? I'm ticked off. I'm irritated. I'm upset. But what's really happening?" Set aside some time for reflection and to think. Because, when you get angry your first reaction is usually wrong. You ought to get angry.

There are some things you ought to get upset about when you see selfishness preventing or harming the work of God. But before you do anything about it you do step two where you think before you speak. James 1:19-20 *"Be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry. For man's anger does not bring about the righteous life God desires."* This is the antidote. It's not a contradiction. It's clarifying what Ephesians said, *"Be angry and sin not."* There is a difference between man's anger and God's anger. Man's anger is when we act in revenge. God's anger is when we act in righteousness. There is no personal vendetta involved: I'm going to get angry because you hurt me, you irritated me, you frustrated me, and you disappointed me. That's the wrong kind of anger. You're angry out of your own selfishness. Somebody didn't live up to your expectations. What he's saying, *"Be quick to listen and slow to speak."* If you do these first two the third one is automatic. If you're quick to listen and slow to speak you will be slow to anger. And the anger you have will be godly anger after you've thought it through, consulted with yourself. You haven't just spouted off whatever first came to mind. Impulsive anger always gets you in trouble. I've seen a lot of leaders who were very effective for the Lord, in a moment of impulse blow it all. They lost their credibility just because they were impulsive.

3 REBUKE: YOU PRIVATELY CONFRONT THE OFFENDING PARTY

Go directly to the source. You don't deal with somebody else about it; talk with five or six different people to get everybody on your side. You don't say, "I've got a prayer request..." which is often sanctified gossip. You go directly to the person, directly to the source. If somebody has offended you and you go to somebody else besides them first, you have already sinned. An example: Nehemiah 5:7 *"I pondered them in my mind then I accused the nobles and officials. I told them 'You are exacting usury from your own countrymen!'"* Usury is interest, exorbitant

interest. He goes to them directly. Directly to the problem -- the people who were sinning. Matthew 18:15-17 tell us how Jesus said about how to handle conflict, wherever you are (Read).

How did Jesus tell us to treat pagans and tax collectors? Love them. He just didn't treat them like brothers. That's the difference between acceptance and approval. Only involve the people to the limit you have to involve others. First go see the person. Try to resolve it with your boss or whoever. If that doesn't work, take another person along. If that doesn't work then you involve a larger group and bring the church in on it. But he doesn't say; first go tell the whole church and then the person. If you go to someone else first, you've sinned. Notice Nehemiah 5:7 *"I pondered them in my mind and then accused..."* Nehemiah is not making a polite social visit here. He's angry and he's not glossing over the fact that these guys were ripping off other people. He's not watering it down. He is confronting them. How many of you like to confront people? If you like to confront people, you're weird! People who like to confront have a problem! How many of you like to be confronted? I hate confronting people! It is not fun. I want everybody to like me! So do you!

I don't want to be disliked and I don't want to cause hard feelings. But I've learned it is necessary to confront for the good of everybody. I have also learned that if I don't confront the problem in the church it only gets worse. It does not get better. I've also learned that the longer I wait the more courage it takes to confront. Have you ever seen the morale in an office deteriorate because of one jerk who is making everybody miserable and yet is a trouble maker and his poisonous attitudes are being spread throughout the entire office because the manager is a wimp and would not deal with it. He kept putting it off. Maybe that person who is causing everyone's problem happened to be the top producer. So the manager was more interested in profits than he was in people. He didn't care that everybody else was sick of the person, because he was still bringing in all the sales. Have you ever seen a family fall apart because the parents were afraid to discipline their kids? They were afraid that if they really disciplined them, they would lose them. That's tough love.

Privately confront the offending party. **Leadership Law:** *Leaders must have the courage to confront.* If you're ever going to be a leader, this is a skill you have to develop. You must have the courage to confront. Speak the truth in love. Leadership requires courage. Leadership is not a popularity contest. If you try to please everybody you're trying to do something even God can't do. Even God can't please everybody. A leader has the courage to say, "I don't care what the fall out is, this has got to be done. I'm going to confront this issue head on. Let the chips fall where they may! For the greater good of the family, for the greater good of the business, for the greater good of the church -- I don't care if you don't like me, but the fact is this has to be dealt with." That's what Nehemiah's doing here. He said I'm going to deal with the issue. Titus 3:10-11 Pastors and others are commanded to warn troublemakers. *"Warn a derisive person once, and then warn him a second time. After that, have nothing to do with him. You may be sure that such a man is warped and sinful; he is self-condemned."*

One of the tasks of leadership is to warn troublemakers. I've seen a lot of pastors and leaders fail to confront a derisive person out of fear of losing that person. The long term problems in the church were even greater. It doesn't happen often. In nine years at Saddleback, I've had to do a confrontation on a derisive person three times. Each time I've basically said, "Shape up or ship out!" Two times they shipped out and one time they shaped up. It is a task of leadership. The very first crisis in our church happened before we even had the first service. The church was not 12 weeks old and running about 15 people. There was one cantankerous guy in that little nucleus, who was cantankerous and opposed everything. He had been a member of a very well-known church for eleven years and every single time someone in the church said, "Let's do this...." he

would say, "Yes, but over at _____ we did it this way." He was constantly fighting everybody in the small group's decision. Finally one day I had to say to him, "Such and such church is only X miles away. If you want to go there, why don't you just go?" He and his wife and family left the church. I about died! When you lose five people and you're running 15, that's a third of your church! It was a test of my leadership. I had to tell them, "There's nothing wrong with what you're saying to do."

It takes all kind of churches to reach all kinds of people. There are lots of churches with many different styles of ministry to reach many different kinds of people. We know not everybody is going to like our church. That's OK. But this is what God has called us to do. If you don't want to get on board, you'd better leave." And they left. I agonized over that for weeks. Nine years later I look back and say that is one of the wisest decisions I've ever made. God did not want that guy to set the agenda for this church. If he had, none of you would be here because Saddleback wouldn't be the kind of church it is today.

4 RESOLUTION: PUBLICLY DEAL WITH PUBLIC DIVISIONS

Obviously in this situation everybody knew about what was happening that the rich people were ripping off the poor people. It had to be dealt with publicly. You deal with things publicly to the degree that they are known. If it is a personal sin, you confess it personally to God. If it's a private sin between you and another person, confess it privately. If it's grossed out the whole church, then you have to deal with it publicly. v. 7 *"I pondered them in my mind and then I accused the nobles and officials. I told them, 'You're exacting usury from your own countrymen.' [This was the private part and evidently that wasn't enough.] So I called together a large meeting to deal with them. I said, 'As far back as possible we have bought back our Jewish brothers who were sold to the Gentiles. Now you are selling your brothers only for them to be sold back to us.' And they kept quiet because they could find nothing to say."*

Nehemiah publicly repeats what he told them in private. He says in Persia when I was the cupbearer I used to use my personal wealth to buy Jews out of slavery and I come home to the capital, to Jerusalem, and we're selling Jews into slavery to our own people. This doesn't make sense. It's inconsistent. Why are you doing this sin? Buying your own brothers and sisters in order to make a profit? You obviously know what Leviticus says that it's illegal for you to do that so why are you doing this? The response was silence. Do you imagine that Nehemiah was nervous here? This takes guts. He publicly took on the city leaders. He is rebuking the wealthy owners of Jerusalem, the very people he must depend on to fund the rebuilding of the wall. Now who would pay for the wall, all the poor people? Who would pay for the doors, the people who didn't even have enough money for food? No. He goes to the moneybags, the very people who are funding the rebuilding of the wall and finally supporting the rebuilding. It's a real gamble. The devil is probably saying, Nehemiah if you call this public meeting and you lose their support, who's going to pay for the wall? You'll never finish the project.

But Nehemiah was committed to doing the right thing regardless. If it meant putting the wall on hold for a few days while they dealt with this sin, so be it! That shows the integrity of Nehemiah. v. 9 *"So I continued, 'what you are doing is not right. Shouldn't you walk in the fear of our God to avoid the reproach of our Gentile enemies?'"* He's appealing to their conscious. He's saying what you're doing is a bad testimony. All the unbelievers are laughing. "Those people are supposed to be godly people and they're buying and selling each other into slavery and ripping each other off." Discord is always a poor testimony. When a church gets a reputation for being a fighting church, it loses its effectiveness. The world laughs at churches that fight each other. v. 10 *"Give back to them immediately. My brothers and my men are also lending people money and*

grain but not for interest. But let the exacting of usury stop. Give back to them immediately their fields, their vineyards, their olive groves and their houses and also the usury you're charging them, the hundredth part of money, grain, new wine and oils."

The interest was one hundredth part and it was paid monthly. One percent a month equals twelve percent. We don't think that's very high interest today but back then it was enormously high interest. Twelve percent a year was scalping people. He's saying he's challenging them to make restitution. Do it immediately. The result was they repented. v. 12 *"And they said, 'We will give it back,' they said. 'And we will not demand anything more from them. We will do as you say.'"* Nehemiah must have breathed a sigh of relief at that point. That was quite a gamble to challenge the people -- those wealthy owners. Nehemiah did not take any changes. He wasn't just going to take their word for it. *"Then I summoned the priests and made the nobles and the officials take an oath to do what they had promised."* He didn't just let them get away with saying they wouldn't do it anymore. He made them take an oath, a public contract.

Then Nehemiah, with a dramatic flair, gives an object lesson, a dramatic presentation. v. 13 *"After they had done this I also shook out the folds of my robe and said, 'In this way may God shake out of his house and possessions any man who does not keep this promise.'"* In those days the men would wear a kind of apron around themselves. He takes his apron and shakes it and says, this is a symbol of what God is going to do to you if you don't keep this oath that you've taken. He's going to shake you up so bad you'll lose everything you've got. He's making a visual object lesson here. He publicly dealt with the division.

5 SET AN EXAMPLE OF UNSELFISHNESS.

We see this on down in v. 14. We're going to cover it in more detail in the next study from a different angle on the example of leadership. But the foundation of all of Nehemiah's leadership is he led by example. When he asked them to rebuild the wall, he was out on the wall rebuilding it. When he asked them to pray he had already been praying. When he asked them to stay up all night and work night and day to get it built, he stayed up night and day to get it built. When he asked them to help the poor, he'd already been doing it. That's what these next verses say. Rest of v. 13...*"Such a man be shaken out and emptied. At this time the whole assembly said 'Amen' and 'Praise the Lord!' and the people did as they promised."* v. 14 is a little biographical statement about himself and what happened when he was twelve years as governor. *"When I was appointed governor in the land of Judah neither I nor my brothers ate the food allotted to the governor. But the earlier governors, those preceding me, placed a heavy burden on the people and took forty shekels of silver in addition to food and wine. Their assistants also lorded it over the people. But out of reverence for God I didn't act like that. I devoted myself to the work on the wall. All my men were assembled there for the work. We didn't acquire any land. Furthermore, 150 Jews and officials ate at my table as those who came to us from surrounding nations. Each day one ox, six sheep, and some poultry were prepared for me. And ten days an abundant supply of wine of all kinds. In spite of all this I never demanded the food allotment to the governor, because the demands were heavy on these people."*

As the appointed governor there was a certain amount of food he could receive from people and he never took it. He realized the people were hard up. He could have exploited the people. His servants could have exploited the people like the servants of the governors in the past but he didn't. In fact he set the example. He was feeding the poor. He was helping them. He was doing all he could out of his own personal wealth. He's setting the example. Nehemiah says, as a leader I have modeled unselfishness. Why does he say that right at the end of all this stuff about conflict? Because the source of all conflict is selfishness. Nehemiah said I haven't exploited the

people, taken advantage of their misfortune. He's contrasting his approach to the people with the wealthy rulers and owners' approach, which was to exploit the people. Nehemiah never asked anyone to do what he himself wasn't willing to do or wasn't already doing. He could say with a clear conscious, "Follow my example". That's a mark of leadership. Paul was a leader like this. 1 Cor. 11:1 Paul said, *"Follow my example as I have followed the example of Christ."*

You say, "I'd never say that!" Why not? If not, you'd better change whatever you need to change in your life. People follow models. Paul wasn't being arrogant. He was saying, "At least I'm making the attempt. At least I'm making the effort." If you can't say that to people then you're not ready yet for leadership. You need to start working on the areas where you could say, Follow my example as I follow Christ. **Leadership Law:** *Leaders only ask others to do what they are already doing.* That was the secret of Nehemiah's boldness. I'm in awe how this guy stood up to these people and challenged them and publicly confronted them. He was a person of integrity. He was already feeding the poor. He had every right to stand up and say, "How come you guys aren't helping the poor instead of hurting them?" If you cannot challenge someone to follow your example, whatever you say to them is going to lose its impact. In challenging our children, I can't say "Do as I say, not as I do". That's ineffective. If I can't say, "Do as I do," then the impact of me saying "Do as I say" is worthless. Organizations have fewer conflicts when the leaders live unselfishly and model that.

PERSONAL APPLICATION.

Let me speak to those of you who are already serving in leadership positions and those of you who could be and will be in the days ahead. The very fact that you're studying this means you have a heart for the Lord. I'm going to ask you to join me in making a pact together that we will make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. Every time you walk around on our church on Sunday morning or whenever and you hear a criticism, a word, a rumor, unkindness, you'll have two buckets: you can either throw kerosene on it or water on it. I challenge you to say, "God, I want to become a peace officer. I want to become an officer of peace. Wherever there is discord, sow peace. Sometimes that means confronting. You may be sitting in a Bible study group and all of a sudden they get off in a critical vein. Somebody needs to take the leadership and say, "May I in loving kindness confront you, we are going in the wrong direction here. We shouldn't be talking this way." Care enough to confront. Speak the truth in love.

Discuss:

- a. *List the causes of internal conflicts* _____

- b. *According to James 4:1 what is the cause of conflict* _____
- c. *What steps did Nehemiah take to respond to the conflicts? How does this compare to James 1:19-20?* _____

- d. *What was Jesus teaching on resolving conflicts in Matt 18:15-17* _____

- e. *How did Nehemiah deal with the conflicts? What was the response?* _____

- f. *In what ways are leaders (spiritual or secular) today likely to assume privileges as these nobles and officials did?* _____

- g. *How do you determine what is culturally and what God's kingdom values are?* _____

- h. *What kind of internal opposition could likely come up within your church or Christian group to divert you from your real objectives?* _____

A VERSE TO REMEMBER

James 1:19-20 *"Be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry. For man's anger does not bring about the righteous life God desires."*

PRAYER:

Father, I thank You for the sweet spirit that prevails in our church as a whole. I pray that it might continue. I know that Satan tries to attack the church from the outside, but his most subtle attacks come from him sowing discord within. May I be prepared and be sensitive to the needs of other people and be a peacemaker. You've said, *"Blessed are the peacemakers for they shall be called the children of God."* I want to be like You and when I make peace am like You. I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen

THE TEMPTATIONS OF LEADERSHIP

Nehemiah: Lessons 8 on Leadership

Nehemiah 5:14-19

INTRODUCTION.

We're only going to look at six verses, a brief section but a very important section. Do you think it's easier handling success or failure? Thomas Carlyle once said, "For every one hundred people who can handle adversity there is only one who can handle prosperity." I think most people can't handle being at the top. It changes them. In fact, success destroys some people. There are three advantages of leadership:

- a. Position -- you can become more
- b. Power -- you can do more
- c. Privilege -- you can have more

These are legitimate benefits of leadership. The extra effort and work you put in you get more position, more power and more privilege. With each one of these come very great temptations that can be your downfall as a leader if you misuse it. I Cor. 10:12 *"So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall!"* We're going to look at the temptations of leadership. The three greatest nations of the world are in turmoil because of the abuses of leadership. In China: students marching because of corruption in the Chinese leadership. In the Soviet Union: protesting; in the supreme soviet there are people who have got in because of positions of favor and given positions on the soviet because they catered up to certain people. We have witness government officials that have left office because of ethical problems. "Power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely." Today we're going to look at the temptations of leadership and the antidote. The background of this is that Nehemiah is now the governor of Judah. In v. 14 he tells us that he has been the governor there for 12 years. He identifies the fact that the governors before him were different, they misused their power, they misused their privilege, and they misused their position.

THREE TEMPTATIONS OF LEADERSHIP

1. You will be tempted to misuse your position.

These former governors made unrealistic demands. *"The early governors placed a heavy burden on the people and took forty shackles of silver from them in addition to food and wine."* They overtaxed the people, they made unrealistic demands. They are unsympathetic to the situation. In our previous study, we saw they were in the middle of a famine and they had had tough times there. Once these men came to power, they abused their position. Have you ever seen anyone get a promotion at work and they suddenly become a little dictator? It changes them. They're a nice guy until they get the promotion. Then all of a sudden they start treating everybody demeaning, derogatorily, making excessive demands on people. Unrealistic demands demoralize people.

2. You will be tempted to abuse your power.

v. 15 *"Their assistants also lorded it over the people."* It was an oppressive leadership style. It was Autocratic type of leadership. Even the servants, it says, became little dictators. They were blatantly using their power. There is a difference between being a boss and being a leader. These guys had been given the position of leadership but they were misusing the position and abusing the power. How many of you like to work for a domineering leader? They never take time to

explain why they've asked you to do something. The favorite phrase of a domineering leader is "You do it because I've said so!" **Leadership Law: Leadership is not lordship.**

3. You will be tempted to profit from your privileges.

Twice in this passage it uses the phrase, *"the governor's food allowance."* Evidently the governor had a right to a certain amount or unlimited expense account. But they were misusing it. An American Express commercial, "Membership has its privileges." So does leadership. Usually they're paid more, more benefits, more freedom with their schedule, expense account. Many people can't handle that. Notice Nehemiah says in v. 15 *"I did not act like that."* He is an uncommon leader. He's a nonconformist. He did not follow the expected pattern. They'd had all of these governors that had come in and ripped everybody off and Nehemiah comes and he didn't rip anybody off. Why? v. 14 *"I was governor there for twelve years."* While he was there we learn these facts: He never took a salary, he never used an expense account, he refused to levy taxes, he refused to buy land for profit, he paid his servants from his own personal income to do public work, and he daily fed over 150 people at his own personal expense. He's saying "I didn't take any money and I didn't make any money." How many politicians do you know who could pass up the opportunity to gain? What was Nehemiah's secret? What kept him from abusing his power and position and privilege?

HOW TO KEEP YOUR INTEGRITY AS A LEADER

1. DEEPEN MY REVERENCE FOR GOD

Nehemiah wanted to please God more than he wanted to please himself. He says *"out of reverence for God I did not act like that."* What does it mean to reverence God? It means two things:

- a. I realize God put me in this position.** Nehemiah had never forgotten that it was God who sent him back to Jerusalem. God gave him a project. He never forgot that God had put him there. Psalm 75:6 *"For promotion and power come from nowhere on earth, but only from God. He promotes one and deposes another."* Great leaders realize that they are stewards. They realize that it's not their world, their church, their business; they are just the manager, the Stewart. Promotion comes from God, not from other people. Someone said, "You don't need to know the key men if you know the man who holds the keys." That's where promotion comes from.
- b. I realize that God is holding me accountable.** v. 9 *"Shouldn't you walk out of the fear of our God?"* The Bible says that *"The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom."* (Proverbs 1:7) One of the reasons I think people try to do things and get away with it is that they don't fear God. They think they can play games and get away with it. The Bible says, *"Obey your spiritual leaders and be willing to do what they say. For their work is to watch over your souls and God will judge them on how well they do."* (Hebrews 13:17) That verse scares me to death. God is going to judge me. There is no authority without accountability. The Bible says that pastors are accountable to God, leaders are accountable to God. *"We who are teachers will be judged with greater strictness than others."* (James 3:1). That's what it means to reverence God. "You put me here and You're holding me accountable of how I serve You." As a leader I am called accountable before God. There is a deep respect there for the Lord.

2. DEVELOP A LOVE FOR PEOPLE

Obviously, as we've read for five chapters, Nehemiah is a man of compassion and concern. He genuinely cared for people. We get examples of this when he got angry when the people exploited others, and he was generous with what he had. v. 17 *"Furthermore 150 Jews and officials ate at my table as well as those who came to us from the surrounding nations. Each day one ox, six choice sheep and some poultry were prepared for me. And every ten days an abundant supply of wine of all kinds. In spite of all this I never demanded the food allotted to the governor for the demands were heavy on these people."* **Leadership Law:** Losers focus on what they can get, leaders focus on what they can give. The Bible says, *"David shepherded them with integrity of heart; with skill he led them."* Good News says, *"He shepherded them with unselfish devotion."*

Psalm 78:72 is one of my life verses. I pray that God will let me shepherd with integrity and with skill. I find when I study leaders, good and bad, that the leaders who consistently abuse their powers are those who don't love people. They don't reverence God and they don't love people. Paul said, *"Because of our love for you we were ready to share with you not only the Good News but even our own lives. You were so dear to us!" (1 Th. 2:8)* Notice that he says *"We gave even our own lives."* If you really love people you're not going to abuse and misuse them. Nehemiah 5:6 his reaction when he learned people were being exploited *"When I heard their outcry and these charges I was very angry."* Love sometimes motivates you to get angry. When you see someone that you love being hurt, misused or abused, do you get upset? The very fact that he was angry here shows that he had a love for people.

3. DISCIPLINE YOURSELF FOR ETERNAL REWARDS

v. 19 *"Remember me with favor, O my God, for all I have done to all of these people."* Why was Nehemiah not caught up in the rat race like all the other leaders? Because he wasn't looking at the temporary; he was looking at the future. These leaders, who were misusing their position, abusing their power and misusing their privileges exploiting people, were only looking to get rich. We see politicians today do that all the time. Nehemiah said *"I didn't do that. I disciplined myself."* v. 16 *"Instead I devoted myself to the work on the wall. All my men were assembled there for the work we did and we did not acquire any land."* Remember from last our last study: the people were in famine and in order to get food they were mortgaging their land to buy food. The previous governors had all the food because they were taxing all the people. They said, *"We'll give you food if you give us your land."* So they were amassing little mini- empires. They were using their position and privileges to feather their own nests. Nehemiah said, I came and I didn't do that. He could have made a killing in real estate because he had all the food provided. They needed food; he could have said, *"Give me your land and I'll give you food."* He'd get it at bargain prices and they build the wall. As soon as the wall was built the land prices would go sky high because all of a sudden it's safe to live there.

He could have made a killing! But he didn't do that. Why? He revered the Lord. He loved people. He had his eyes on a future reward. He's disciplining himself which means he limits his own freedom. If you're going to be a leader, actually rather than your having more and more privileges as you go on in leadership on the leadership pyramid, is there less space or more space at the top? There's less. More is required of leaders, there are more restrictions on leaders. The higher you go in a position of authority, the more is expected of you, the more is restricted of you, the less freedom you really have. You give it up in order for these other things. A classic chapter on this is 1 Cor. 9. This is Paul's defense of his rights as a leader and he says, *"Am I not free? Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus as Lord? ... This is my defense to those who set in judgment. Don't we have the right to food and drink? Don't we have the right to take a*

believing wife along with us as the other apostles in the Lord and Cephus? Or is it only I and Barnabus who must work for a living?"

We were paying our way, the whole way we went on our missionary journey. No one was sponsoring us. v. 9 *"It's written 'Don't muzzle the ox while it's treading on grain.'"* There's a principle here that the workman is worthy of his hire. Somebody works, you ought to pay him. Just as when the ox does something for you, you feed the ox. There was a Jewish law that when the ox was trading around in a circle on the grain turning the grain into meal, you were not allowed to muzzle the ox because that was inhumane. The ox was allowed to eat the very grain it was treading on. *"If we have sown spiritual seed among you is it too much that we reap a material harvest from you? If others have the right of support from you, shouldn't we have all the more?"* Those who are in full time ministry, have the right to be paid for full time ministry. *"But we did not use this right. On the contrary, we put up with anything rather than hinder the gospel of Christ."* He was willing to limit his freedom because he was a leader. **Leadership Law:** *Losers focus on their rights, leaders focus on their responsibilities.* That's the difference between a loser and a leader. The loser is always saying, "I have my rights!" The leader is saying, "I have responsibilities!"

CONCLUSION.

Nehemiah had lots of rights. Twice in this passage he says, "I had the right to eat the food allotted to the governor." There was an allowance given to him that was due to the governor and he says he was governor for twelve years. He was the most important man in the land. He was number one. He had no direct supervisor. His supervisor was the Persian King Artaxerxes and he was 800 miles away. So for 12 years he's number one in the nation with nobody to be accountable to. Yet he did not abuse the power. He had not given in to any of these three temptations. Because he did these three things: he revered the Lord, he loved people, and he disciplined himself to look at eternal rewards. Notice the phrase in v. 16 *"... I devoted myself..."* He was single minded. He had no time for conflict of interest. He was committed to the job God gave him. He was there to build a wall, not a personal empire. His personal priorities did not involve getting rich.

Evidently he had enough to live on when he'd come out of Persia and that was enough that he didn't use his position to build a financial empire. If Nehemiah had done what the other governors had done, got involved in investments, in finances, in making money, do you think the wall would have ever gotten built as quickly? No. He said, God gave me a job to do and I'm not here to do anything else. I'm here to do what God called me to do. I'm not going to get any diversion of energy. Nehemiah disciplined himself in every area. What motivated Nehemiah to live twelve years in a position of authority, accountable to nobody except God? I think the same thing that motivated Moses. In Hebrews 11 it tells us, *"Moses preferred to suffer with God's people rather than to enjoy sin for a little while."* Sin is enjoyable. It's fun. If it were a bummer, nobody would do it. But it says *"...sin for a little while..."* You can get your kicks, all you want, but there are kickbacks. He chose to suffer with God's people rather than enjoy sin for a little while. He kept his eyes on the future reward. There are few people in the history of the world that had more potential, to have the power, privilege and position that Moses did. He was number two man, in line for number one position as Pharaoh of the most successful nation of the world at that time -- Egypt. The wealth of the world was centered in Egypt. He left it all to lead a bunch of slaves across the desert. He gave up power, position and privilege -- the very thing most of us spend our lives trying to get. He gave it up because he had his values right. He had his values right because he had his vision right. He kept his eyes on the future reward.

If you're going to be a leader you're going to be tempted in these three areas. To use your leadership for personal gain. A leader must constantly be asking himself "Why am I doing what I'm doing?" Heb. 6:10 *"God will not forget your work and the love you have shown him as you have helped his people and continue to help them."* He says the love that you've shown him helped his people. Whenever you help God's people, you're showing your love to God. God is seeing that, he's recording it and there's going to be eternal rewards. That is a legitimate motive in leadership. He's saying, I don't care about the rewards here and now but I want the rewards later on. It's like the verse we looked at a couple of weeks ago, "Are you laying up treasures in heaven?" How do you do that? By service here on the earth, By giving, giving time, money, energy, and everything. We focus not on our rights. We focus on our responsibilities. I Peter 5; 1-5 is a classic passage on words to church leaders. *"To the elders... Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, serving as overseers - not because you must, but because you are willing ... not greedy for money but eager to serve, not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock. And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away."*

There are three different terms for church leaders in the New Testament and they're all found in this same passage. "Elder" -- this is the Greek word we get Presbyterian from; they call their leaders elders. Next word is "shepherd" -- this is translated from the Greek as shepherd or pastor. The third word is the word "overseers" -- that's the Greek word we get Episcopalian from; their church leaders are called bishops. What's the difference between an elder, a shepherd, a pastor, and an overseer? None. The Bible uses three different Greek words to refer to the same people. Peter uses all three here talking to the leaders. He says to the elders, be shepherds, serving as overseers. In Acts 20, you see the same thing. An elder is a bishop is a pastor is a shepherd is an overseer. It doesn't matter what you call them. They all refer to three different job descriptions of a church leader. Elder refers to spiritual maturity. It has nothing to do with physical maturity, (Timothy was the elder at the church of Ephesus and he was a very young man) it has to do with spiritual maturity.

He says to the elders, be shepherds. A shepherd is a pastoral role and refers to the caring part of the job description -- the ministering, the counseling, pastoral care. Overseers refer to the management function of the church leader, administering, guiding, directing, and managing. He says the first characteristic of a good church leader is they realize it's God's flock. *"... be shepherds of God's flock..."* This is not my church or any of our staff's church. It's God's church. We are just entrusted with leadership, with management of it. A good leader leads out of eagerness. He leads not because he must, but because he's willing. You're concerned with what you can give not with what you can get. *"...not greedy for money but eager to serve..."* The leaders were paid, but you don't do it for the money. *"... not lording it over those entrusted to you..."* Leadership is not lordship. A real leader does not lead by being a dictator but by being an example. As a result, *"... when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away."* Discipline yourself for eternal rewards. I want one of those crowns.

The fact is, God does not put up with leaders who abuse their position, power and privileges. God snaps them out. Remember the story of Moses. God told him to speak to the rock and instead he struck it. He abused his power. God told him, You won't get to go into the promised land. David abused his leadership; he had an affair. God took his first born child. Saul abused his leadership, he did what God told him not to do and he lost the throne. Every one of the Jewish kings -- when they served the Lord, they prospered. When they started abusing their position and privilege and power, they lost their leadership.

PERSONAL APPLICATION

How many of you have ever been promoted? Do you identify with any of these temptations? You will be tempted to misuse your position. You will be tempted to abuse your power. Are parents ever tempted to abuse their power? Leadership is not lordship. It's not being a dictator. It's not domineering. Jesus said, He who wants to be greatest must be the servant of all. You will be tempted to profit from your privileges. If you get promoted, one of the things that happens is you're trusted more. Sometimes you are more flexible with your schedule. You can use that privilege and put in a full day's work or not. You can abuse an expense account. You can abuse a lot of different things that come to you in the job of leadership. Nehemiah said, "I did not do it." Why? He deepened his reverence for the Lord. 2 Cor 5:11 Paul says, *"Since then we know what it is to fear the Lord, we try to persuade men. What we are is plain to God and I hope it is also plain to your conscious. We're not trying to commend ourselves to you again but we're giving you the opportunity to take pride in us so you can answer those who take pride in what is seen rather than in what is in the heart."*

Paul is saying, I'm living transparent before you. It's in plain sight -- what you see is what you get. He says, I live that way not to impress you but because I fear the Lord. I fear what the Lord would do if I started abusing the leadership in this church. That's a godly fear and a fear that most people don't have of reverencing God and saying, God has put me here, He's put me in this position and He's holding me accountable. Therefore I can't abuse that particular situation. You deepen your reverence for God and you realize that you're accountable to Him. If you're in a position of leadership, you'll be judged in greater degree than those who are followers. You develop the love for people as we saw in Nehemiah. Focus on what you can give not on what you can get. Finally, discipline yourself for eternal rewards. Keep your eye on the goal. Matthew 25:23 This is the parable of the talents. The master gave one, one talent another five talents, and another ten talents. Two of them put their talents to work and doubled it. The other guy went and hid his in the ground. The commendation that the Master says to those who discipline themselves and use their talent wisely, *"His master replied, 'Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful with a few things. I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness.'"*

That's one of the most important verses in the Bible. That's what I want to hear the Lord say when I get to heaven. More than anything else in life the one thing that motivates me is one day I want to stand before God and hear Him say, *"Well done thou good and faithful servant."* You did your best! You weren't perfect but you did your best. You were faithful. God does not call us to be successful. He calls us to be faithful. The result of being faithful in any leadership task -- everybody is a leader, just in different situations; you're all leaders -- the result is you're given greater tasks. When you get to heaven, more responsibility will be given to you. The Bible says that the ways you use your opportunities for leadership here on earth are going to determine your leadership potential in the next life. You've been faithful in little things; you'll be faithful in many. Share your master's happiness. That's what God wants to do in your life and my life. I believe that when you look at leaders and when you find leaders who are abusing their power you can be sure that, one, they don't reverence the Lord and two, they don't love people, and three, and they're living for the here and now rather than for eternity.

Discuss:

1. *What temptations did the governors face? (V.14-15)* _____

2. *Did Nehemiah act like the rest of the governors? Explain* _____

3. *How can you compare the situation with the governors with today's government?*

4. *Have you ever been tempted to do some work for the external gain you will receive? What lessons have you learn from Nehemiah?* _____

A VERSE TO REMEMBER

Nehemiah 4:9. But we prayed to our God and posted a guard day and night to meet this threat.

PRAYER:

Lord, I pray that You would help me to lead with integrity. Help me to lead in the positions where am found -- the family, school, work, small group, Sunday School class, or any ministry. Help me when You put me in positions of privilege or power or prominence that I would not fall prey to these temptations. That's what I pray In Jesus' name. Amen.

THE SECRETS OF SUPER-ACHIEVERS

Nehemiah: Lessons 9 on Leadership

Nehemiah 6:1-19

INTRODUCTION

Today we are looking at the secrets of super achievers. I want to start by first looking at v. 15 which is kind of the punch line. *"So the wall was completed on the twenty-fifth day of Elul in fifty two days.* We have been studying Nehemiah longer than it took him to build the wall. What is the secret of this? How was he able to build the wall in 52 days? **Don't quit! He kept at it until he finished.** There has been major opposition to the rebuilding of the wall. Sanballat, Tobiah and Geshum tried all different kinds of things; Division, discouragement, and discord. They tried derision, and dread. Now they are getting desperate. The wall is almost finished. The only thing left to be done as we start chapter 6 is to hang the doors. Read the all passage and let us discuss the following before we go on in our study today

1. *List all the efforts at intimidation in this chapter* _____

2. *What kind of divided loyalties do you find in the people building the wall* _____

3. *Why did Nehemiah successfully complete the project?* _____

PRINCIPLES OF SUPER ACHIEVERS / SUCCESSFUL LEADERS.

1. KEEP WORKING IN SPITE OF DISTRACTIONS.

At first they tried to sidetrack Nehemiah. They said, Nehemiah, let us have a peace conference. Let us get together and discuss. They mentioned the plain of Ono, twenty miles north of Jerusalem. What could be wrong with that? But Nehemiah said, I'm carrying on a great project and I can't go down. Why should I stop the work on the wall and go down to you? He is saying, I'm not coming down. He would not be distracted until the wall was finished. The time for discussion is past. It is time for work. Have you known people that want to talk more than they want to work? They discuss to stop you from working?

That is what is happening here. Many churches never accomplish anything because everything they do, they assign to a committee and then they table it. More than this, they were endangering his life. Notice he says *"They were scheming to harm me."* He was discerning. They could assassinate him. They could kidnap him. He saw the harmful intent behind their request. More than that, it would delay the project. *"Why should I stop and come down to you when the work has not been finished?"* You don't want to discuss, or debate. You have a hidden agenda and want to delay the thing. You want to keep it from being built." **Leadership Law:** *The main thing is to keep the main thing the main thing.* The reason why Nehemiah finished it is because he wouldn't let anything distract him. He kept his eyes on his goal. They came to him four times but he said no each time.

Discuss: *What shows that Nehemiah continued working despite all the threats?* _____

2. YOU KEEP WORKING IN SPITE OF DEFAMATION.

They tried to slander him, discredit him. (Read vv. 5 -9). They tried to slander Nehemiah. You are just trying to build an empire. We know what you are doing. They were challenging his motives. They said, you are going to try to rebel against Artaxerxes. They said, you are setting yourself up as king and you are hiring prophets to promote yourself. They sent this letter unsealed. It was like a letter to the editor. They wanted everybody to read it. It is meant to stir up rumors. Anybody that sets big goals is going to be criticized and slandered by people who set no goals. Failures hate successes. Who is the most falsely accused man in history? Jesus. Jesus said, *"Blessed are you when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and say all manner of evil against you falsely for my sake. Rejoice and be exceeding glad for great is your reward in heaven."*(Mathew 5:11)

First they tried to sidetrack Nehemiah and then they tried to slander him. The word Satan means slanderer. When you slander somebody you are doing the work of the devil. That is his job. The Bible says that Satan is the accuser of the brethren. They guys said, we know what you are doing, Nehemiah. You are building your own little empire and you will set yourself up as king. We are going to tell the real king, king Artaxerxes on you. They were accusing him, trying to upset him. Nehemiah discerns their motive. v. 9, I know what you guys are doing, you are trying to make me upset so that I will stop working and start defending myself. Have you ever had to stop work on something because somebody was criticizing you and start defending yourself? Nehemiah said I'm not going to get caught in that trap. I'm not going to start responding to rumors and innuendos. I'm not going to get discouraged and quit. Probably the most difficult thing to do as a leader is to handle false accusations.

You want to give up! Nehemiah said I'm not going to do that. He denied the accusation and prayed for the strength. v. 9 *"They were all trying to frighten us thinking, 'Their hands will get too weak for the work and it won't be completed.'"* He said, I'm not going to get involved in an argument. What you guys are saying is not true and I'm not coming down. No matter what you say. The wall is not finished. I'm not going to give in to sidetracking and get into a discussion with you. I'm not going to give in to slander. I'm not going to quit working because of distractions and I'm not going to quit working because of defamation. I'm going to keep on going." He discerned their motives. He denied the accusation and prayed. *"Now Lord strengthen my hands."* When you are being accused you are emotionally drained. Abraham Lincoln: "If I were to try to read, much less answer all the attacks made against me this shop would close for business. I do my best, the very best I know how, and the very best I can. And I mean to keep on doing it until the end. And if the end brings me out wrong, then ten angels swearing that I was right wouldn't make a difference."

General MacArthur and Winston Churchill both said, "We don't answer criticism. We don't respond to slander. We don't respond to accusation. If we did it would take all our time just fighting attacks." Henry Ward Beecher said, "Life would be a virtual flea hunt if man was required to run down every innuendo and insinuation about him and the misrepresentations that are uttered against him." If you are going to be a leader you have to realize first there is going to be things that distract you and try to get you off course and there is going to be things that defame you and people say things against you. You can spend your time fighting criticism or you can keep working on the wall. Nehemiah said, I'm going to keep working on the wall. That is why, in 52 days, they built it. He would not give in to distractions. He would not give in to defamation. He knew their motive was to try to frighten. He would not give in.

Discuss: *How did the enemies defame Nehemiah? What was the motive of the enemies and what did Nehemiah do?* _____

3. KEEP WORKING IN SPITE OF DANGER

If you want to be a leader, a super achiever, keep working in spite of danger. First they tried to side track him (come have a conference), then they tried to slander him (what you're doing is just for your own benefit), then they tried to scare him. (Read Vs. 10 – 15). Now they are trying to scare him by danger. Evidently this man, Shemaiah was a friend of Nehemiah and he was a priest. But evidently the bad guy Sanballat got to him and bought him off. "Go tell your buddy Nehemiah there is an assassination plot on his life. We have put a hit man out on him. The only way he could be safe is to run and hide in the Holy of Holies in the Temple. The bad guys won't follow in there for fear of God." Nehemiah's response, v. 11, *"I said, 'Should a man like me run into the temple to save his life? I will not go.'"* He would keep on working in spite of danger. Why didn't he give into this?

- a. It would make him look like a coward. *"Should a man like me run away?"* I'm the leader of this thing. I'm building the wall around Jerusalem. If I run and hide in the temple what is that going to do to the morale of the people? Their morale is going to go down. I'm not going to do it! Other people are watching me. Leaders don't run away.
- b. v. 12 *"I realized that God had not sent him"* Nehemiah was a very perceptive person. He realized that this was not advice from the Lord. This guy said he was from God, "I know! I have a word to you from the Lord. Run and hide in the Temple." Have you noticed that some people, who say they are speaking for God, aren't? Some people say, "I think this is God's will for your life" and they have no idea at all. They may have a hidden agenda. Here this guy was one, a priest, and two, a friend of Nehemiah and he is giving him bad advice because he had been bought off by the bad guys. Nehemiah is perceptive. v. 14 *"These guys were trying to intimidate me."* They are trying to tell me their advice is from God, but it is not from God. You have to be aware of people saying, "God told me to tell you..." It is not always true. You don't always swallow it.
- c. v. 13 *"He had been hired to intimidate me so that I would commit a sin by doing this. Then they would give me a bad name to discredit me."* The real issue here is that for Nehemiah to run and hide in the Temple would compromise his integrity. It was against the law for anybody to go into the Holy of Holies except the priest. Numbers 18:7 says that nobody is to go into the Holy of Holies except the priest and if they do they are to be killed. They are guilty of the death penalty. For Nehemiah to play chicken after hearing of the assassination attempt and go hide in the Temple, he would be sinning out of fear.

Never break one of God's laws out of fear. If the opposition can't scare you into quitting, they are going to try to just get you to sin, to make you ineffective. Then the whole nation would say, "What is our leader doing sinning by running and hiding in the Temple?" These are the last desperate attempts of the opposition. They are the very things that will happen in your life if you are in any leadership position.

They will try to get you through discord, discouragement, defeat, derision, distraction, defamation, then through danger. Because Nehemiah refused to quit, *"The wall was built in 52 days."* That's amazing. The wall was built around Jerusalem. v. 16 *"When all of our enemies heard about this and all the surrounding nations, they were afraid and they lost their confidence because they realized this work had been done with the help of our God."* The tables have turned. For six chapters we've been seeing the Jews be discouraged. We've watched them be depressed, afraid. But the moment the wall is built, Jerusalem is a fortified city. Now who's afraid? It is the enemy. They've lost their confidence.

Discuss.

a. What scare did Nehemiah receive and what was his response? Was the scare real? What was the purpose of the scare? _____

b. How will you apply the above principles in your work or ministry? _____

FOUR CHARACTERISTICS OF A SUPER ACHIEVERS/ SUCCESSFUL LEADERS.

All of the points I made have something in common. They are all personal attacks on the leader. All the opposition in the past had been to discourage the workers. First they told them, "We're going to come kill you at night." Previously they tried to stop the project by attacking the people. Now, as a last ditch attempt because the wall is almost finished, they're going directly after the leader. In football, one of the primary goals of the defense is a sacked quarterback. If you can sack the quarterback, chances are, you'll win the game. Take him out! Everything rises or falls on leadership. No organization, no ministry, no church, no family, no school, no business can go any further than the leadership that's leading it. If everything rises or falls on leadership, then the quickest way for the opposition to halt any project, any family, and any business is to neutralize the leadership. They are doing three things here to stop the leadership. The quickest way to stop a movement is to knock off the leader. Jesus talks about when the shepherd is removed, the flock scatters. That's true today in our churches. When Satan wants to cripple a church, he takes on the leadership. Not just the pastor and those ministers, but the church leadership -- the lay leadership. You need to realize that if you want to be a leader, some people aren't going to like you. And they're going to attack you. Some people are going to try to make you fail. How you handle those attacks, those personal attacks, determines what kind of leader you're going to be. One of the basic lessons of Nehemiah is that leadership is essential for any project. With the right leadership they were able to accomplish in 52 days what for 80 years people had been saying, "It can't be done!" When you get the right catalyst, things go into action. What kind of person does it take to pull off a major project? What kind of person does it take to accomplish the impossible? Four things.

WHAT DO YOU NEED, AS A LEADER, TO SUCCEED IN THE FACE OF DISTRACTION, DEFAMATIONS AND DANGER?

1. A compelling purpose.

This is the very first element of leadership. A compelling purpose is a cause, a vision, a dream, an objective and a goal. It's something that pulls you towards that goal. It doesn't drive you, it draws you. You have to have a compelling purpose. That's why, when they came back in v. 3, and said "Nehemiah, we want you to leave the wall and come out and have a little party with us. You've been working on the wall too long. Come talk to us, Nehemiah." Nehemiah said, "*I am carrying on a great project.*" Nehemiah was very single minded. That was one of the characteristics why they were able to accomplish the impossible in 52 days. He said I'm going to do this. I'm going to stick with it. I'm going to keep the main thing the main thing. I'm carrying on a great project. Is there any great project -- an overall compelling purpose -- in your life? What motivates you to get out of bed every day? Besides making money, what motivates you to live the rest of your life?

What motivates you to keep on going? Until you have a compelling purpose for your life, you just exist. Nehemiah said, I have a great project! What are you exchanging your life for? Jesus said, "*What will a man give in exchange for his soul?*" When you give your time for something,

you're giving your life. That's what life is made up of -- your time. We tend to think that the most important thing we can give people is our money. But money can be replaced. But when you give people your time, that's irreplaceable. The mark of a great leader is first of all, to have a compelling purpose -- a predominant goal in life that motivates me to keep going. Paul says, *"Love compels me to keep going."* **Leadership Law:** *Great lives are produced by a commitment to a great cause.* Great people are just ordinary people who have made a great commitment to a great cause. That cause draws them out of themselves and makes them more than they could be on their own. You need a compelling purpose for life.

I submit to you, that the most compelling purpose in life, the greatest cause that you can give your life for is the kingdom of God. There's nothing greater that you can invest your life in. That's going to last for eternity. Most of what we invest our life in won't last 20 years much less for a thousand years. I challenge you to say, whether you have 5 years left or 50 years left, you'll invest it in the kingdom of God. Someone came to Jesus and said sum up the Bible. He said, *"Love God with all your heart and your neighbor as yourself. On this last all the law and the prophets."* (Luke 10:27) Then His last words to the church as he went back to heaven was, *"Go into all the world and make disciples, baptize them in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe whatsoever things I've commanded you. And, lo, I am with you always."* (Matthew 28:19-20) Those two things -- the Great Commandment and the Great Commission -- summarize everything a church is to do.

When we do those four things -- love God with all our heart (worship), love our neighbor as ourselves (ministry), go and make disciples (evangelism), and teach them to observe all things (discipleship) -- those are the four purposes of the church. That produces a great church -- *a great commitment to the great command and the great commission will build a great church.* (Saddleback mission statement) If you want to be a great Christian, make your life count, have a compelling purpose invest your life in those four things: loving God, loving your neighbor as yourself, going and making disciples, helping people come to know Christ and to grow in Christ. There is no greater cause than that. Unfortunately a lot of churches give in to distractions. They get distracted from their compelling purpose. "If you don't stand for something, you'll fall for anything."

2. You need a clear perspective.

Nehemiah had incredible discernment, spiritual radar. Every time a trap came up, he sensed it. He could smell it every time. v. 2 they had said come out and talk with us, he said, "They were scheming to harm me." How did he know? He was perceptive. He had discernment. v. 9 when they came and made the accusations of him setting himself up as king and eventually rebel against Artaxerxes, Nehemiah said *"They were trying to frighten us."* He looked and exposed their motives. v. 12 when the third guy said come hide in the temple, Nehemiah realized that God had not sent him. He has a very acute perception. He had the ability to anticipate a trap. If you're going to be a leader, you've got to have perception. It is wisdom. How do you get that? James 1:5 *"If any man lacks wisdom, asks God."* That's what the Bible says. When you spend time in the word of God you begin to take on the mind of Christ and you'll be a more perceptive leader. You don't fall for everything that comes. The thing that clouds our perception is fear. Nehemiah says "No matter what happens, I'm going to keep on going." You think it's going to hurt you but it's not. God's in control and God's going to help you.

3. A continual prayer

Nehemiah was a prayer-addict. His first response to everything was pray. No matter what happened, he first prayed. That's the number one thing you do when you're slandered. Instead of

taking it out on the person, you talk in out to God. Nehemiah did not get defensive and he did not retaliate when they started making all the false accusations. He just said, "It's not true" and went and prayed about it. That's all you need to do. If people are falsely accusing you as a leader, say "it's not true". You don't have to go into a long defense. Say "It's not true" and then go and talk to the Lord. Luke 18:1 *"Jesus told his disciples that they should always pray and not give up."* In your life you're always doing one or the other. You'll either pray or you'll give up. When the heat is on, when the pressure is on, you'll either pray or you'll panic. You need a continual prayer life.

4. A courageous persistence.

One of the great keys to success is the ability to hang in there! Keep on keeping on! Keep on doing what God wants us to do! "Don't give up!" We all get tired in the battle, weary. God says "Don't give up!" You need a courageous persistence. How can you be fearful and courageous at the same time? Courage is not the absence of fear. Courage is moving ahead in spite of your fear. If you're not afraid you're not courageous, you may just be dumb! You may not know how serious the matter is. Courage is when you move ahead in spite of your fear. That's what makes a courageous person. Notice v. 11 *"Should a man like that run away."* He says, "I'm not going to run away. I'm scared, I'm frightened. It's getting near the finish line. All we have to do is hang the doors and I know they probably want to kill me before the thing is finished, but I'm going to move ahead in spite of my fear. I'm not going to run away." How do you know when you're afraid? You have the insatiable desire to run. Out of the job, out of the marriage, out of the relationship, out of the house -- because I'm afraid I can't handle it. Run! I've learned that it is never God's will for me to run from a difficult situation. If I do, God will just bring another one up later on so he can teach me a lesson. Just go ahead and face it. Galatians 6:9 *"Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up."*

PERSONAL EVALUATION

Compelling purpose: If you would go back and do an analysis of your life, in what area is Satan trying to sidetrack you from the best? Satan will often use good things to keep you from the best. What is it that's taking up your time in life so that you don't have time for the things that are really important in life? What things are important? Loving God and loving your neighbor as yourself; Worship and ministry. If you're too busy to worship, too busy to have a quiet time -- you're too busy. If you're too busy to get involved in a ministry -- you're too busy. These other things aren't going to count years from now. Satan uses a subtle trap to substitute good things. You have limited amount of time. There may be some things you need to cut back so you can make time for ministry, make time for what God wants you to do. **Clear perspective:** How's your spiritual sensitivity? Do you know the Word enough to spot a trap when it comes? How about your prayer life? Is it continual? Are you praying or are you giving up? **Courageous persistence:** How persistent are you in doing God's will? Do you just do it when it's convenient? Have you ever made the decision in your life, "I'm going to follow Jesus 100% no matter what else happens, no matter what it costs, no matter what it takes, regardless of what people say about me, sidetracks, and danger? Those are the marks of the super achiever. That's how Nehemiah was able to do in 52 days what other people said can't be done for 80 years.

DISCUSS:

a. *What do you need as a leader to succeed in the face of distraction, defamation and danger?* _____

b. *What shows Nehemiah had a compelling purpose* _____

-
- c. *Did Nehemiah have a clear perspective? Explain* _____

- d. *Continual prayer life is a mark of a successful leader. Cite some of Nehemiah's prayers.*

- e. *Which statement in verse 11 shows Nehemiah had a courageous persistence?*

- f. *Why should we be persistence in doing what is good (Gal 6:9)?*

- g. *How is the work of God has called you to do a "great work" and worthy of your full attention?* _____

- h. *How could your vision be made great and clear enough so that you will not be easily sidetracked (vv.3,8 and 11)?* _____

- i. *What do you expect by way of opposition in the job you are doing for the Lord?*

A VERSE TO REMEMBER

Nehemiah 6:16

When all our enemies heard about this, all the surrounding nations were afraid and lost their self-confidence, because they realized that this work had been done with the help of our God.

PRAYER:

"Lord, take my life. I want to be usable." I remember the great sacrifice Christ has made for us. "Lord, what You've done for me deserves all I have committed back to You." Help me to have a clear perspective on what's really important in life, a continual prayer and courageous persistence. I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

HOW LEADERS MAINTAIN THEIR SUCCESS

Nehemiah: Lessons 10 on Leadership

Nehemiah 7:1-73

INTRODUCTION.

This session today, we want to look out how leaders maintain their success. When we left Nehemiah, he had just finished building the wall. He accomplished in 52 days what other people could not accomplish in 70 years. In Nehemiah 6:15 it says *"So the wall was completed on the 25th of Elul."* When I read that I have two emotions: one that I want to breathe a sigh of relief for the guy and say, "Congratulations Nehemiah, you made it! You finished! You did what you came to do! Relax! Take it easy now!" Another emotion causes the question, "Now what are you going to do? You did the project of a lifetime in only 52 days and your book is only half over? You've accomplished it by chapter 6 -- now what are you going to do?" The task is not finished. What would you do? Set back, relax, enjoy your victory, and coast along? How we handle achievement tells us a lot about ourselves, our character, and our value system.

When you finish a project, when you've reached your goal, when you've accomplished the task you set out to do, one of the most dangerous times in your life is when you've completed a goal, when you've accomplished what you've set out to do and you don't have another goal to follow it. Then you're in real trouble. Success tends to ruin a lot of people. We become unsatisfied, complacent, let down our guard, and get comfortable. As a result we lose all the momentum we had built up for this big, big project. I've seen this happen with a lot of churches building buildings. The moment the building is erected; the people breathe a sigh of relief "We've arrived! We're in the promised land!" We fail to keep on growing. We lose our progress. You can lose what you've gained if you don't watch out! We could all probably name somebody who achieved some tremendous success early in life. You'd think they would for the rest of their life, have one achievement after another.

Many people set back, become complacent, settle down, and never go any further. Sometimes, if you don't watch out, you could lose what you've already gained. We're going to look at a very important lesson in Nehemiah on How Leaders Maintain Their Success. Nehemiah is a very wise person. We're going to see how he ensured what he accomplished would last. Chapter 7 is the dividing line in this book. There are two phases in Nehemiah's life. Number one the construction phase. Number two is the consolidation phase. Chapter 1-6 is the construction of the wall. Chapters 7-13 is the consolidation of the city. These are two very distinct phases. Nehemiah has to shift hats, shift his focus, and change his roll. What you do in construction is different than what you do in consolidation. He has to use a different set of leadership skills. What we're going to look at tonight is one of the main reasons businesses go bankrupt, why churches never grow, why organizations fail.

It's what I call the transitional problem. The transitional problem is this: The leaders do not know how to grow with the organization, when they don't have the skills for the next phase. As a result the church or the business gets strangled. Often the very people who started the church, the business, the organization, strangle it to death if they don't learn these skills. There are two different types of leadership. Type One is what I call the catalyst. They get the thing going. Type Two is the consolidator. They keep it going. Type one is the designer. Type two is the developer; they develop what the designer thought up. Type One is the motivator; this is the person who gets things going, the catalyst. Type Two is the manager -- they keep things going; they know how to run things and make things run smoothly. Type One is the entrepreneur -- he typically

starts something and does it all him/herself. But as the organization begins to grow the entrepreneur must become the executive. An executive works through others.

They don't do it all themselves. They work through others. These are two very different types of leadership skills. Both types are needed in churches, families, government. In the construction phase -- building the wall -- you need Type One leadership -- the catalyst, designer, motivator, and entrepreneur. In the consolidation phase you need Type Two leadership -- people who know how to develop, manage, execute. Paul is a good example. He was a pioneer. He never stayed in one place very long. He'd get something going and then say, "You take it over. I'm going to" He'd always leave Timothy, Titus, Epaphroditus, or somebody to take over what he had started. He was a Type One leader. Timothy, Titus and the other guys were Type Two leaders. Titus 1:5 (Jerusalem Bible), *"The reason I left you behind in Crete was for you to get everything organized there."* In Good News it says *"... to put in order the things that still needed doing..."* A wise leader knows what he is and compensates by staff people. It's very rare to find a leader who can do both. It is very unusual. But occasionally you can find a leader who has the ability to be a catalyst and a consolidator, a motivator and a manager, an entrepreneur and an executive. But it's rare. Most of those guys are millionaires, at the top of corporations, they run the largest businesses. They have the ability to grow with the organization. Nehemiah was such a man. Nehemiah knew how to switch hats. He had to take off the hat that helped build the wall but once it was built, now what. He's constructed the wall, now he's got to consolidate the city. It's a whole different set of skills. In chapter 6 Nehemiah demonstrates three separate tasks of management. They are essential for consolidating growth. Most churches, 90-95%, never grow beyond 200-300 people. They get up around 200-300 and then they fall back. Up and down. They don't know how to make the transitional switch and the leadership of the church -- either the pastor or the lay leadership -- don't understand the skills that Nehemiah demonstrates in chapter 7. Unless a leader develops these skills the organization is never going to grow beyond a one man ministry.

HOW DO YOU MAINTAIN WHAT YOU'VE ALREADY GAINED?

1. You recruit leadership. You enlist, train, delegate, and get other people involved.
2. You record progress. You keep good records of your resources.
3. You raise support. You find the funds to pay for the ongoing operation.

Let us look at the three skills in detail.

1. RECRUIT MORE LEADERS (Read vv 1-3)

The first thing Nehemiah does after they finish the wall and put up the gates, is he appoints leaders. There are three different kinds of leaders he appoints here.

- a. Gatekeepers -- these were guards, watchmen, and the police of the city. Later on in the chapter it tells us that there were 138 appointed. They were to protect and keep the peace.
- b. Singers -- these were worship leaders. Worship was important to Israel.
- c. Levites -- these were assistants to the priests.

Nehemiah makes his brother, Hanani, a civil leader, in charge of Jerusalem. Then he makes Hananiah, the commander of the citadel, which is a military leader. Nehemiah is demonstrating one of the important tasks of leadership as any organization grows and that is the task of delegation. He's getting other people involved. This is getting beyond his control so he's giving up responsibility, spreading it around. Nehemiah had never read a management book, never been to a seminar but he knew these management principles. You need to spread the leadership around. The point here is that he knew no organization can ever stabilize if it's built on one person. A church, business, government cannot stabilize if it's going to be built on one person.

This is what I'm talking about when you move from entrepreneur to executive. At the very beginning Nehemiah did it all. He didn't have a committee; he didn't ask any opinions, he didn't have any other leadership. He did the whole thing. He had his hands on everything. At the beginning of any project an entrepreneur must be involved in everything. But as it grows he has to release more and more to staff people, lay leadership, etc. It's good to start with but it's not good long term management.

Nehemiah says, we've built the wall. Now it's time to make sure we don't lose what we've got. Let's spread the leadership around. And he starts spreading out and delegating responsibility. Everything rises or falls on leadership. So it's very important the type of leaders you choose. The seeds of destruction in any ministry, program, and business are always laid when you choose the wrong people for leaders. What kind of leaders did Nehemiah look for? What do you look for when you look for people to help you out? You look for the same kind of people that Nehemiah looked for.

i. Integrity. V2

That's the first thing you look for. The bottom line in leadership is integrity. If you can't be trusted who's going to follow you? If nobody is following you, you aren't the leader. "He, who thinketh he is the leader and hath no one following him, is only taking a walk." You've got to have integrity. Leadership is built on trust. If they trust you, you're the leader. If they don't trust you, you're not the leader whether you call yourself one or not. The moment you have to say to people at work, "I am the leader!" Guess what? You're not. It's built on trust.

ii. Godliness. V2

Nehemiah looked for people who take the relationship with God seriously. "... *he was a man of integrity and he feared God more than most men do.*" What does fear mean? To have reverence for God. This guy had a walk with the Lord. When God looks for leaders he looks at their personal life to see what kind of people they are, what their relationship is.

iii. Faithfulness

Both of these guys, Hanani and Hananiah, had a track record. He knew them both. Hanani was the guy who came all the way back to Persia to tell Nehemiah in the first place that the wall was down. He said, "Please come back and help us." Nehemiah prayed about it and said, "I'm going." Here is a man who had gone on this long journey just to get the whole process going. If he hadn't taken that initial step Nehemiah would never have gone to rebuild the wall. But they were faithful. They had been proven reliable. Matthew 25:23 says promotion is based on faithfulness. If we're faithful in little things, God gives us bigger things. "*Well done, thou good and faithful servant, you were faithful in little things you will be given much more responsibility. Enter into my joy.*" 2 Timothy 2:2, "*And the things you have heard me say entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others.*"

This is Paul talking to Timothy. What you've seen and heard in me, I'm giving it to you. You are to give it to reliable men, faithful men, who will also be qualified to teach others. Pass it on because of their faithfulness. Invest in faithful people. The point of this is if you want to be a leader, God chooses people -- leaders -- on the basis of two things: their personal life and their past performance. This is what you look for when you're looking for a leader. In verse 3 of chapter 7, Nehemiah, after he's selected the leaders, now gives them a clear job description. He's giving very specific instructions. Watch out, guard, be alert, and be aware. We've got the wall built, we've got the gates up, but still we have to be on our guard. The gates to a city were the key to its security. Can you imagine this tragedy: They've worked 52 days around the clock to build this beautiful wall, they've put up giant gates, and then they forget to have somebody watch

by them and some enemy sneaks in and captures the town again in spite of all the work they've done. Wouldn't that be sad?

Why is this in the Bible? There's a spiritual principle here. **It is a law of leadership:** *You must guard what you have gained.* That's what this is teaching us. You must guard whatever you have gained so you don't lose it. Don't ever assume that because you've made a certain level of achievement in life it's going to be that way forever. You must guard what you have gained. Have you ever worked real hard to lose weight? Only you do not guard and watch continually after that and gain back all that which you have lost and maybe at a faster rate and you've wasted all that effort. You've got to guard what you've gained (or lost!). Just because you've achieved a certain goal is no guarantee you're going to have that same level of achievement next week.

Spiritual application: We often make spiritual gains in our life in different areas only to lose those gains in a relatively short period of time because we were neglectful or forgetful. When I talk to people who have backslidden spiritually from the Lord I find that it's not a matter of suddenly going from loving the Lord, to hating the Lord. They've went from loving the Lord to just forgetting the Lord, neglecting the Lord -- the Bible and church. It's not a matter of love turning to hate, it's a matter of love turning to neglect. That's why the Bible says in the sower of the seeds that you have to prune, garden and weed. What does it take to grow weeds? Nothing! They grow automatically. Weeds are a sign of neglect. Spiritual weeds will grow up and chock out your life if you neglect the basics of the Christian life. Guard spiritual gains, guard physical gains -- all those kinds of things. How many people have made a lot of money and then lost it in a short period of time? They didn't guard what they had gained. I Peter 1:13 says we are to guard our minds, gird them up, cinch them up, get ready for battle. Many times in scripture, Jesus said, "Watch and pray." We need to watch our personal lives so we don't lose ground to the devil.

Discuss:

- i. *Who is to guard the city and what do you learn about where they are assigned to guard?* _____

- ii. *We previously met Hanani in 1:2. From the qualifications given why could Nehemiah trust him?* _____

2. YOU RECORD YOUR PROGRESS.

You have to set up some sort of accounting system and keep good records. When we think of accounting we usually think of financial accounting. But in this passage, Nehemiah isn't talking about financial accounting. He's talking about accounting of people. People are more important than money. We ought to keep as good of records of people in the organization as we do of the money. I'd been talking about how important it is to count and keep records of attendance in the church. A guy told me he thought that was just a numbers game. I said, "Do you count the offering?" He said, "Sure." I said, "Then what you're saying is that money is more important than people." Record your progress. In a growing organization you need to keep track of the people. The second thing that Nehemiah did in this chapter is take a census. Not only does he find out how many there are but he finds out who they are.

This is the longest chapter in Nehemiah. It's a list of decedents and genealogies. Why did God put this in the Bible? There are, in fact, three lists of names in the Bible. Chapter 7, 11, 12. There are three complete lists of people. They don't mean a lot to you or me but they meant a lot to Nehemiah. People were important to Nehemiah. v. 4 & 5. Then he goes on and lists all the different people there. Nehemiah is starting a repopulation program. He's built the walls around the city. He's put up the gates and then realizes: nobody is living in the city. While the walls were down it was a very unsafe place to live. You could get attacked there very easily. The people are out in the countryside. Now we need to get some people in the city so it is fortified internally and so that God's town will be protected. He says, I'm going to take a census to find out how many there are of us and who we are and then he says we'll take a certain percentage (like 10%) and they'll move back into the city. He's saying we need to reinforce the internal structures. That's the second thing you need to do in consolidation. He's saying, for this city to succeed we've got to have enough people in the right places to be strong. It's kind of an urban renewal program.

Whose idea was this? v. 4&5. God's. He said, God inspired me to count all those people. The New International Version says, "*God put it in my heart.*" A real leader stays in tune with God. It was God who told him to do that. What if he hadn't been in tune with God? He wouldn't have known what to do. But evidently, Nehemiah had a walk close enough with the Lord that he said, "God inspired me to keep good records." Accounting is a spiritual ministry! Accounting of people, and accounting of resources. It's a spiritual ministry when it involves his work. v. 6-69 we have the accounting of the people. In v. 7 the leaders are listed. In v. 8-25 the people are categorized by families. In 26-38 the people are categorized by the city that they live in.

In 39-42 the religious leaders and the priests are listed. In 43-45 the Levites and the singers are mentioned. In 46-56 he lists all the temple servants. In 57-60 the decedents of Solomon's servants are listed. In 61-65 people are listed who didn't have pure Jewish blood. In 66-67 some of the totals of the whole are given. In v. 68-69 he even mentions the livestock, how many cattle they have. Then we get the grand total at the bottom, 49,942 people. Nehemiah had the responsibility for a city of about 50,000 people. Why would God put these names in the Bible? Especially when you consider the fact that this list is listed exactly the same way in Ezra 2. Ezra gives this list and then Nehemiah gives the list. Why would God list all of these names two times in the Bible? It seems like a waste of space. Why? I think He did it for two reasons:

- a. These are the people who returned from Persia in the first exile return when they were allowed to come back to the Promised Land after being taken into captivity by the Babylonians. In 586 under Zerrubbabel they were allowed to come back. That took a step of faith. They had become comfortable there; they had been there 70 years. Now they were allowed to start coming back. These people are coming back on a step of faith. They are God's people. They wanted to do the right thing. They wanted to be back in their homeland where they could worship the Lord.
- b. These are the people who rebuilt the wall. The names of the different people are listed there. The point is this: God remembers and recognizes every step of faith you take. I think God wanted to have a little Hall of Fame here. Thousands of years later we know the names of the people who rebuilt the wall, who had enough faith to leave Persia and come back to their homeland to try to rebuild the temple. God remembers and recognizes every step of faith we take.

God considered these people important enough to put them in the Bible. I wonder if my name is going to be on God's honor work role. That's a good question to ask yourself. If God made a list of people who are doing His will, would I make the list? Is there anything in my life that shows that's I've done something on faith? That I'm trying to live for the Lord and do what He wants me

to do? He had an accounting of the people. The second task of management is to keep good records. Proverbs 27:23 *"Be sure you know the condition of your flocks. Give careful attention to your herds."* He's speaking to shepherds. You need to know your sheep. John 10, Jesus says, *"I am the good shepherd. I know my sheep."* One of the characteristics of a good church, a good organization, is they know who's in it. A church that's growing as rapidly as ours, that's pretty difficult to keep on top of all that. Fortunately today, we have computers!

We try to keep in touch with our people. How does it work? It works well! There are a lot of people who fall through the cracks, but we're making the effort. The Bible says that it's important. The story of the Good Shepherd who left the 99 sheep to go after the 1 lost one. How did he know one was lost? He counted. He found that 99 were there and 1 was lost. We count, not just to know who's there but to know who's not there. We need to get involved, spread the leadership around that will give us strong ministry. We need to keep good records and know where people are in their time of need.

Discuss:

1. *Nehemiah accounted for the people. How did he do this?* _____

2. *Nehemiah decides that the families who have returned should be registered. How will the registration deal with Israel's sin of mixing themselves with the people of the nations around Jerusalem?(vv. 64-65)* _____

3. *Look more closely at these lists. Why are there so many priests and so few Levites?*

4. *Why couldn't some of the people make connections with relatives?*

5. *What is the significant about Nehemiah giving the priests 530 garments and the rest of the people only giving 67 garments?*

3. HE RAISED FINANCIAL SUPPORT (Read Vv. 70-72)

Somebody had to raise the money to keep the ministry, the work of God, going. The third thing Nehemiah did was raise the money needed for restoring the Temple. He sets up a campaign -- POT -- Possess Our Temple. Notice the order of the giving. First the leaders set the example. The governor even told how much he was giving. If Nehemiah did that today we'd say he was on an ego trip. He was trying to be a model. He gave the most. His was the most sacrificial. Second,

the heads of families gave their gifts. If you were to add this all up it's more than five million dollars in our terms of money. Third, everybody else gave what they had.

Discuss:

- i. *What shows that Nehemiah raised financial support?* _____

- ii. *What one aspect of how leaders maintain their success would you like to grow in? How do you plan to grow in that area?* _____

A VERSE TO REMEMBER

2 Timothy 2:2, *"And the things you have heard me say entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others."*

PRAYER

Dear Lord, I pray now that I will continue to be faithful to you and to your church. Help me to always seek your direction in my life. I praise you for this time that I have to offer up my prayer for faithfulness Lord and ask that you grant it in the name of Jesus, Amen.

SPIRITUAL STRUCTURES: RENEWAL

Nehemiah: Lessons 11 on Leadership

Nehemiah 8:1-18

INTRODUCTION.

It never starts where you would think it would or should. Revival is hard to understand. A revival starts when signs of life and morality are all but gone. In fact, this word 're-vive' means bring back to life. When all hope is gone, when the scene cannot be any darker, then it seems it might be time for a sovereign work of God to start up. One of the most important messages of Nehemiah is that we are not to be content to have a good working facility or well-functioning church administration. We must instead press on and have an inward soul or life that exudes an organization. Of course, we are not starting from scratch. The new work is built on the foundation of what was left. But the key is for us to discover the heartbeat of the life that is supposed to fill the structures. The rebuilt wall was fine, but the spiritual vacuum of the people wrote hypocrisy on the very walls they rebuilt. One of the saddest sights is a dead church. I am not one that applauds meetings and pretends church. Vibrancy is gone. There is no passion about missions.

There is no victory over the world. There is the pervasive dullness of religiosity. The incense from your materialistic hearts is throwing manure all about God's Word. We don't see it. We don't even believe it. We would deny it. But still your fingers are more acquainted with catalogues than the Bible pages. You can find this or that coveted item much quicker than the book Zephaniah in your Bible. God has so desired that you not only know where the books of the Bible are, but they are imprinted in your hearts and minds. You are deceived if you think we have a strong church. Our refusal to give our whole hearts to God proves we are living in covenant judgment rather than blessing. Is it not time for you to break forth from the impurity of your hearts and be gathered together much like the Israelites of long ago at the Water Gate? Yes, now is the time. In chapter 8, we find the people gathered together again. We do not find that Nehemiah gathered the people this time. God gathered them. **Zephaniah 3:20** reads, *"At that time I will bring you in, Even at the time when I gather you together; Indeed, I will give you renown and praise Among all the peoples of the earth, When I restore your fortunes before your eyes," Says the LORD.*"

SIGNS OF A GREAT MOVEMENT OF GOD UPON HIS PEOPLE.

A. DESIRE FOR GOD'S WORD (READ NEHEMIAH 8:1-5)

Firstly, we discover that the people touched by the Spirit of God have a great longing for God's Word. There are six ways we can see this desire for God's Word coming alive in their hearts.

1) Focused on God's Word.

First of all these Israelites were interested in God's Word. I mean they are very interested in hearing what God had to say. The LORD had given not many things that endured through time. We have experiences but they fade. But the Word of God was something as a permanent gift. In Nehemiah they are talking about the Law of Moses, the Pentateuch, that is, the first 5 books of the Bible written by Moses. They all of a sudden were greatly aware of their need to hear what God wanted to speak to them. God wants devotion. He wants us to hold devotion times not from dead tradition but living love. We can easily see how we have the same situation as they perhaps. They did not know God's Word. They had not loved God's Word but just heard of it. But your relationship with God's Word has

a lot to do with your relationship with God. Can others tell you are in love with God by the way you eagerly study and discuss God's Word? What do you like reading the most? God longs for us to come together and ask to hear more of His Word. Next time you pick up that novel, magazine or catalogue, ask yourselves whether you in fact have just again bypassed His Word for some materialistic preoccupation, fictional adventure or indifferent business. God wants your whole heart.

2) People initiated. The next thing to note is the way the people gathered together. They gathered together as one man and they asked Ezra to read the scriptures. I cannot think of one pastor who has been asked by his congregation to have God's Word read and spoken to them. Again, we have the burden of exhorting God's people to attend regularly the few services we actually have. Ezra however was asked to read the book of the Law of Moses to the people. Have you recently read through the first five books of the Bible? Genesis is okay. Exodus for the most part is entertaining. But Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy? What would it take to have you read them? They had a great hunger for all the Word of God.

3) Longing to understand

Perhaps we would never think of our lack of love for God's Word unless we heard stories like this one here in Nehemiah. We think our Christian living is normal. But wherever revival of the church has broken out across the world, regardless of cultural background or age, the Word of God is lifted up and highly esteemed by all. To be frank, many of them no doubt would express great wonder upon hearing how we need to be exhorted to keep reading God's Word as to whether we in fact are real Christians. They look at us as if we do not have a heart for God. We can fool ourselves by saying that we are Christians because we have the Word of God but the real sign to look out for is whether we love the Word of God. This is what we see here. All the men and women and children who could understand came before him to listen

4) Length of Service

I wonder how many times people have complained about long meetings? In how many council meetings has this discussion come up in? Part of it is trying to understand the people but more than anything it is the grand confession of our hearts that do not long for God's Word. We don't have chairs so we buy chairs or pews. We don't have cushions, so we buy cushions. But here they met from early morning to midday with a minimum of 4 hours. I know that you are probably thinking that these people don't have jobs and school pressures that we do. But these thoughts really cover over the true longings of our hearts. We just do not want to admit even if we had time, we would want to hear God's Word. In fact you do have time. We have more free time than many generations before this. We can criticize and say that a longer service is not any more spiritual than a short one; a longer sermon is not more spiritual than a short one. Of course a long service does not prove anything. This is not what is even being discussed here. It was long because the people wanted it long. They longed to be in the House of the Lord.

5) Attitude of hearers

This brings us to the attitude of the believers. The people were attentive to the book of the law. Now they did have language problems. They were not learned people. They could for the most part not read. But they had this for them. They wanted to learn. They were attentive. Sometimes I see people falling asleep. Sometimes I see notes being passed or girls giggling or guys laughing. You are not being attentive to God's Word. When you are thinking about what you need to prepare for a meal tomorrow or how you are going to

finish off that report. You are not being attentive to God's Word. These people stood for hours just to hear God's Word. And they were paying a lot of attention.

6) Respect for God's Word (4-5)

Lastly, I want to mention the respect they had for God's Word. I know this was a special occasion of a sort. They had finished the wall and organized the people. But something else was being done here. The people's heart was being reformed by the Word of God. There was the scribe Ezra standing up at the wooden pulpit they made for the occasion. Six on his right hand; seven stood on his left. He was higher not only so that people could see but also so that people could hear. Most interesting is that when the word of God was opened, the people stood. These people didn't have chairs; they probably just had a blanket or flat rock to sit on. However, when the scrolls were opened, when he opened the book, the people stood up. They respected God's Word. They could sense the presence of God. They knew that God was speaking. They knew that when honored people were in your presence, they would stand. Well they stood and stood.

B. RESPONSE TO GOD'S WORD (READ NEHEMIAH 8:6-9)

Longing for God's Word directly relates to our worship of God. We have not understood the important place of reading and teaching God's Word during a worship service because we have not ever been moved by God's Word. Tradition guides us rather than God moving us. Let me make several notes regarding their worship.

1. Leader's prayer

Please note with me in verse 6 that Ezra himself was moved greatly by God's Word. Ezra responded with a great prayer of praise. I don't know if they sung, but one could imagine that the prayer held everyone's attention for in the next words the people not only said Amen but "Amen, Amen!" It is insufficient for a speaker not to respond to God's Word. The speaker leads the others into worship.

2. People's worship

Worship follows the hearing of God's Word not just by the speaker but by all the individuals making up the congregation. Here we see the people bowed low and lifted up their hands. I am not convinced that this is always necessary, but I am convinced that if you want to lift your hands and bow down or kneel, or even put your face to the ground, that this is thoroughly permissible. But don't get carried away by what others are doing. Do it only if you have to. If you worship by lifting your hands, then it should be in response to His presence and your willingness to do what He says. This is what worship is: God's people responding to the glory of God.

3. Further understanding desired

I recently read a book on what happens during revivals. One thing that occurs is long meetings. I remember one account where a revival had just begun. The speaker spoke and the people were so moved that they were crying and weeping before God. God had come close to them, or more accurately, their eyes were opened to the presence of God that is always near them. God is always here. After speaking to them, he decided it would be good to have another special meeting for the next night. But no one moved. They just stayed put. He couldn't help but preach another sermon right at that time. After a couple of more hours, he finished, but the people still didn't move. After much convincing, he finally got the people to return to their homes. But the people would be there the next night in even greater numbers.

4. Mourning and weeping

When a translation was given, then we see that even a greater understanding came over the people. I am not sure what language they translated from or to. I suppose they read it in Hebrew, the language the OT was originally written and translated to Chaldean. When they understood it, and then their hearts were particularly touched. We will not get into all the things written in the Books of Moses. But today, it is sufficient to see that they mourned and wept when they heard what God had expected of them, but they had failed to keep. We should not be surprised when we hear the people of God carried away in tears. They are very sad tears of disappointing our God but they are refreshing because of God's healing grace.

C. CELEBRATION OF GOD'S WORD (8:10-12)

Perhaps what we least understand is after God's people met God and heard His Word, they were told to stop crying. Now truly, they had greatly sinned. They can look back and see why they had sinned. They read Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. They know now why their ancestors were taken into exile. One would have thought that they should have stayed that way for a good long while. Wouldn't they need in penance to weep and weep, cry and cry, mourn and mourn? For every sin they committed, were they expected to cry for 5 minutes. No. This is not what God desired. This is because God had made that day a holy day. God marked that day off in a special way. God wanted to be remembered not just for judgment but also for grace and mercy. Let me quickly mention three things:

- a. God wanted them to be more aware of His strength than their weaknesses.
- b. God wanted them to be instilled with the joy of His presence than lingering on in a sense of shame.
- c. God wanted them to know what a wonderful thing it was to gain insight into God's Word so they could obey than just to sob over how they have disobeyed.

Simply put, they were to celebrate. And so the festival went on. God wanted to have a happy people. Happy are those who know their sins are forgiven! Anytime God comes and reveals Himself in special ways, we should celebrate. Even as God's people, we can see we do not desire Him as we ought. We are not thankful as we should be. We are easily distracted. But God doesn't want us weeping all our days. The point of grief is for recognition of wrong doing and the deciding to do right. This is a time of joy when He reveals His Word to us.

CONCLUSION

As we conclude, we must notice that God is rich in grace and man great in his sin. Man might have started looking good and ordered in his city walls, but this did not mean they were right in spirit. God had to do a special work within His people to create the inner soul of the city. This is what He does when He causes us to become Christians. We are born from above. We are made a new creation. The old has passed away; the new have come. He visits His people in special ways in a special way in our lives to accomplish His glorious purposes. They didn't deserve this special visit. Note their sins. But neither do we deserve such a visit. But may God revive us just the same. May God come to us as He came to them at the Water Gate. May the rivers of life be poured forth upon us with a stream so mighty and strong, so clean and pure, that we would weep over our sins to such a degree we need to be reminded that it is also a day of great grace.

Discuss:

1. What were the qualifications of those who attended?(Vv. 2-3) _____

2. What statement shows the reverence and seriousness of the people as they received the word of God? (Vv3-12)_____

3. Who assembles the second day? What do you think this is the case? _____

4. Verse 17 says that all the people had great joy. What was the reason for this? _____

5. What lessons can you draw from how people revered God as they received the word?

6. How much is celebration apart of your Christian life? _____

7. Is there an area in your life you know you are living in disobedience?_____

A VERSE TO REMEMBER

Nehemiah 3:20: *Nehemiah said, "Go and enjoy choice food and sweet drinks, and send some to those who have nothing prepared. This day is holy to our Lord. Do not grieve, for the joy of the LORD is your strength."*

PRAYER: Father, I long for you more than gold or silver. Nothing else could ever satisfy my soul. Reorient my affections toward you and what you choose to provide. Show me the beauty of your holiness so that in worshipping your loveliness, I exalt you. Empower me to enjoy you so that the universe marvels in amazement at how fulfilling you are. I want to worship you with everything I am, with undivided adoration. Give me a heart for you. A constant longing after you. Incite within me a deep passion for you.

SPIRITUAL STRUCTURES: REPENTANCE

Nehemiah: Lessons 11 on Leadership

Nehemiah 9:1-38

INTRODUCTION

Nehemiah 9 should be linked with Nehemiah 8, where the people heard God's Word read and wept in repentance as they realized how seriously they and their forefathers had sinned. But it was a time for a feast and so Nehemiah and the other leaders exhorted the people not to weep, but to rejoice, adding, "For the joy of the Lord is your strength" (8:10). But now, two days after the end of the Feast of Booths, the people gather again, this time with fasting, sackcloth, and dirt on them to express grief over their sins. Again the law of the Lord is read for several hours, and then the Levites, perhaps led by Ezra, pray in repentance, asking God to take note of their subservience to a foreign king (9:5-38). Because we are so prone to sin and because God is so rich in mercy, ongoing repentance should mark our lives.

WHAT WE NEED TO KNOW ABOUT REPENTANCE:

1. We are so prone to sin.

The chapter rehearses not just the sins of God's chosen people, but worse, the sins of God's chosen people in the face of His abundant mercy and grace. It is one thing to sin repeatedly if you do not know God, but it is far worse to sin repeatedly when you have tasted of God's grace and love. It's easy to read this account of Israel's repeated sins in the face of God's abundant mercy and think, "How could those Jews be so ungrateful? How could they be so hardhearted?" It's also easy to read this account and think, "How can my mate be so prone to sin? He [she] reads the Bible and goes to church where the Bible is preached. What's wrong with him [her]?" Thus we fail to apply it to ourselves. We ought to read this chapter and realize that we're looking in the mirror. It describes the propensity of *my* heart! "Prone to wander, Lord I feel it; prone to leave the God I love" (Robert Robinson, "Come Thou Fount"). Keep in mind that this prayer of confession followed and flowed out of the extended reading of God's Word (9:3). The Word of God reveals to us the true condition of our hearts. Sin deceives and blinds us to our true condition. We're prone to compare ourselves to others, invariably to those who aren't quite as godly as we are.

We think, "I'm not like other people: swindlers, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I pay tithes of all that I get" (Luke 18:11-12). Work your way through Nehemiah 9 and see as in a mirror your own heart. God brought Israel out of slavery in Egypt through His mighty power. But as soon as they encountered trials in the wilderness, they wanted to go back to Egypt. Even so, even though we have experienced God's salvation, we're all prone when we encounter hardship to think, "If this is how God treats me, forget it! I was better off when I was in the world." The chapter goes on to describe the abundant blessings that God provided for His people. But in spite of all of His goodness, "they became disobedient and rebelled against [Him], and cast [His] law behind their backs and killed [His] prophets who had admonished them" (9:26). So God delivered them over to oppressors. When they cried out to Him, He mercifully delivered them, only for them again to do evil. This cycle was repeated many times (9:27-30). Again, read it and see your own heart in the mirror. In spite of God's repeated and abundant compassion on me, the sinner, I am so prone to lust after the things of the world rather than to be satisfied with the supreme blessing of God Himself.

2. God is so rich in mercy.

God's abundant mercy is the dominant theme of this prayer. It begins by exalting God and His glorious name (9:5) and then it starts where the Bible does, with God as the almighty Creator of

everything, who gives life to every living creature. All the angels bow before Him (9:6). God chose Abram, brought him out from Ur of the Chaldeans, and gave him the name Abraham (9:7; the only Old Testament reference outside of Genesis to God's changing Abram's name). God made a covenant with Abraham to give him and his descendants the land of Canaan (9:8). God delivered His people from bondage in Egypt and provided for them in the wilderness (9:9-15). Note that God is the subject and the initiator throughout these verses. Then, after recounting the arrogance and stubbornness of the people, they pray, "But You are a God of forgiveness, gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in loving-kindness; and You did not forsake them" (9:17). Even when they made the golden calf, "You, in Your great compassion did not forsake them in the wilderness" (9:19). It continues to list the many gracious blessings that God conferred on His disobedient and ungrateful people (9:20-25). Yet in spite of their repeated rebellion, God's compassion was greater (9:27, 28, 31). You may think, "But you don't know the *extent* of my sins!" That's true, I don't know, but God does and He reveals Himself as a "God of forgiveness, gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in loving-kindness" (9:17). You may still think, "But you don't know *how often* I have sinned, even after coming to know Jesus Christ." True, but God does know and He reveals Himself here as a God who keeps on forgiving, not because people deserve to be forgiven, but rather in spite of their not deserving to be forgiven.

3. Ongoing repentance should mark our lives.

Again, there is a paradox (or irony) in Scripture. Believers should rejoice always, and yet we should mourn over our sins. This mourning for sin should be both for our personal sins as well as for the corporate sins of God's people. Ongoing repentance takes sin seriously and takes the necessary steps to break from it. True repentance accepts responsibility for sin and does not blame God. As they prayed (9:33), "You are just in all that has come upon us; for You have dealt faithfully, but we have acted wickedly." The chapter ends on what may seem like a down note, with the mention of the great distress of the nation. Because God is so rich in mercy toward sinners, whenever His word convicts us of sin or reveals the sins of our nation or our fathers, we should come before Him in repentance, appealing to His great compassion and grace.

CONCLUSION

If anyone here is overwhelmed by guilt because of your sins you will realize that God is abundant in mercy toward sinners and that His great love will draw you to the cross of Christ for forgiveness and refuge. And I pray that all of us who have tasted God's mercy will glorify Him through ongoing repentance and increasing godliness in our daily lives.

Discuss

1. *What did Israel do to show remorsefulness of their sins?* _____

2. *How long do the Israelites take to confess their sins (Vv 2-5)* _____

3. *Why do you think they spent so much time recounting their history with God?* _____

4. Summarize the content of the Israelites prayer _____

5. After praying, what did the Israelites do? _____

6. How does your life story relate of the Israelites in terms of God you have been good to me in spite of my unfaithfulness? And in case you are in distress as a result of your sins, take time to confess them to God. _____

A VERSE TO REMEMBER

Nehemiah 9:6

You alone are the LORD. You made the heavens, even the highest heavens, and all their starry host, the earth and all that is on it, the seas and all that is in them. You give life to everything, and the multitudes of heaven worship you

PRAYER

Lord I turn from all of those sins that I committed and I ask for your help in washing the memory and thoughts of that sin completely from my mind. Please restore me to faithful obedience to Your Word, and fill me with Your Holy Spirit anew, so that I may keep your commands all the days of my life."

SPIRITUAL STRUCTURES: PUTTING GOD'S TRUTH INTO PRACTICE.

Nehemiah: Lessons 12 on Leadership

Nehemiah 10:1-39

INTRODUCTION

In Nehemiah 8, we saw the beginning of a revival as God's people gathered and listened to His Word being read and explained. In chapter 9, the people repented and confessed their sins. Now, in chapter 10, they make a corporate covenant to put God's truth into practice in a number of specific areas. The chapter lists the names of the leaders who signed the covenant (9:38-10:27); the general obligation of the covenant (10:28-29); the agreement not to give their children in marriage to outsiders (10:30); to keep the Sabbath (10:31); and to provide for the ongoing maintenance of temple worship (10:32-39). We learn that Personal application of God's truth must be the outcome of any spiritual renewal. Remember the context of Nehemiah 10: There has been a lot of spiritual fervor, both joy in the Lord and mourning over sin. Emotion is fine, but you can't live on an emotional high. After you come down from the mountaintop experience, you have to face the daily grind. So here they lay out a specific plan to put the truth of God's Word into daily practice.

FIVE PRINCIPLES FOR PERSONALLY APPLYING GOD'S TRUTH:

1. It must begin with the leadership (9:38-10:27). The list begins with Nehemiah and Zedekiah, who was probably his assistant. Next to sign were 21 priests, the heads of priestly households (10:2-8). Ezra's name is not here because the head of his household was Seraiah (10:2). Then come the names of 17 heads of Levitical households (10:9-13), followed by 44 heads of leading families (10:14-27). Some of these names are identical to those on the lists in Ezra 2 and Nehemiah 7. Others represent either new families that have branched off of those from Zerubbabel's time, or more recent arrivals from Babylon. The point for us is that those in leadership set the example for others. They put their names on the dotted line and committed themselves to do what they expected the people under them to do. A mother was reprimanding her son for not telling the truth. "Johnny," she said sternly, "do you know what happens to little boys who tell lies?" "Yes," the boy replied, "they travel for half fare." He had obviously learned from his mother's leadership! If we set the example of telling so-called "white lies" when it is not to our advantage to tell the truth, our kids will learn quickly! Whether it is in our families, in the church, or in the business world, leaders must set the example by applying God's truth to their everyday lives. To preach one message and live differently is hypocrisy, and people will only follow hypocrites in hypocrisy, not in their exhortations to godliness.

2. It begins with personal holiness based on understanding (10:28-29). In verses 28 & 29, the rest of the people join their leaders in taking on themselves a curse and an oath to obey all of the commandments that God had made known in His law. The curse refers to Deuteronomy 27:15-26 & 28:15-68, which called down numerous curses on Israel if they forsook the covenant. Note that these people joined this covenant with their kinsmen. It can be helpful to be a part of a group where you help hold each other accountable in your walk with God. The Forum of care groups that we have in this church are designed for that purpose. God made us to function as Christ's body, and independent body parts, cut off from the rest, don't usually function very well! The standard to which these people committed themselves was "to walk in God's law, which was given through Moses, God's servant, and to keep and to observe all the commandments of God [Yahweh] our Lord, and His ordinances and His statutes." By referring to the Law as "God's law," given through Moses, they were affirming that they believed in the full inspiration and authority of Moses' writings as the Word of God.

Because it is God's Word, not Moses' word, they were obligated to obey it *all*. But it seems to me that most Christians have swung to the other extreme, where there is no significant difference between the way they live and the way the world lives. We may go to church a bit more. But we have adopted the world's values and goals. We're living for personal success and happiness. To the extent that God can help us in those goals; we use Him and follow His Word. But if obedience to God gets in the way of our success and happiness, we're quick to set Him aside and get on with our agendas.

3. It must extend to the home (10:30). The people agree not to give their children to intermarry with the peoples of the land. God had warned Israel of this danger when they first entered the land of Canaan (Deut. 7:3-4). Although I know of many instances where God has graciously used a believing mate to lead an unbelieving spouse to salvation, those situations do not justify disobeying the clear command of God not to enter into an unequal yoke with unbelievers (2 Cor. 6:14). Ezra had dealt with this problem a few years before (Ezra 10), and Nehemiah will be dealing with it again in a few years from this time (Nehemiah 13).

4. It must extend to our work (10:31). The Mosaic Law prohibited the Jews from working on the Sabbath, but it didn't say anything about buying from foreigners on the Sabbath, so there was a sort of loophole. But the people knew in their hearts that it was wrong to buy from foreigners on the Sabbath, and so they agreed to stop doing so. Also they agreed to let the land lay fallow every seventh year and to forgive all debts against fellow Jews on that year as the Law stipulated. In other words, their spiritual commitment led to some practical changes in how they did business. As believers should trust that the God who sees everything we do will take care of us and reward us if we obey Him. Our business practices should reflect our Christian commitment, even when it is costly or inconvenient.

5. It must extend to our church commitments (10:32-39). These verses mention a number of specific commitments to provide for temple worship, summed up by, "Thus we will not neglect the house of our God" (10:39). The phrase "the house of our God" occurs nine times in these verses. Specifically, the people agreed to pay the temple tax of one-third of a shekel annually. In Exodus 30:11-16, it was one-half shekel. Others say that the amount was reduced here in light of the people's poverty. Whatever the solution, the people agreed to support the needs of the house of God. They also agreed to provide for the burnt offerings and for a rotation system to bring the wood to keep the altar burning. They agreed to bring the first fruits of their produce to the Lord, as well as to dedicate their firstborn children and animals to the Lord by redeeming them, as the Law directed (Exod. 13:13, 15). And they agreed to pay their tithes to support the temple.

CONCLUSION

If we want to experience ongoing spiritual renewal, we need to get personal in applying God's Word in practical ways. Two final thoughts:

1. *Work on specific application of Scripture to your life.* This is always more difficult than being general, but it is always more helpful and practical. For example, you may think, "I need to be more faithful in giving to the Lord's work." That's good, but too general. Make it more specific: "I need to work on our family budget and commit to a specific amount to give each month." That's better, but you can still improve. That's specific and it's in your schedule. When it gets into your daily schedule, it gets done.
2. *Write down your specific applications.* These Jews put this agreement in writing (9:38), spelling out the details (10:30-39). Write down your spiritual priorities and goals and the

steps you need to take to reach those goals. Spend some time periodically to evaluate how you're doing and to modify your goals as needed..

Discussion:

1. *Who were the groups of people mentioned in this chapter?* _____

2. *What evidence is there that everyone was included in the covenant agreement (Vv 28-29)*

3. *Make a list of the things that the people covenant to do before the Lord.* _____

4. *Why would it be very important in their situation not to intermarry?* _____

5. *Do you think verse 29 is still binding on us today as it was on the people in Nehemiah's day? Explain why you give the answer that you do.* _____

6. *Do you take giving and tithing as seriously as they did in this passage? Why or why not? What do you plan to do?* _____

MEMORY VERSE

Nehemiah 10:35. And that they might bring the first fruits of our ground and the first fruits of all the fruit of every tree to the house of the LORD annually.

PRAYER:

I thank God for your steadfast love and mercy on us. Father, I believe your promise that you will bless us when we are obedient to Your Word. And so, without hesitation, I gladly give to you what is yours. I love You, Lord! Amen

ADMINISTRATIVE STRUCTURES: SERVANT LEADERSHIP.

Nehemiah: Lessons 13 on Leadership

Nehemiah 11:1-12:1-47

INTRODUCTION

Nehemiah 11 & 12 is another one of those portions of Scripture that you look at and think, “Why did God put this in His inspired Word?” From 11:3-12:26 there is a lengthy register of the names of the Jewish citizens. These two chapters include:

1. The families who repopulated Jerusalem (11:3-24)
 - A. Lay families in Jerusalem (11:3-9)
 - B. Priests in Jerusalem (11:10-14)
 - C. Levites, gatekeepers, and temple servants in Jerusalem (11:15-24)
2. The families who lived in the cities of Judah and Benjamin (11:25-36)
3. The priests and Levites of Zerubbabel’s return (12:1-9)
4. The high priests (12:10-11)
5. The priests and Levites after Zerubbabel and Joshua (12:12-26).
6. The dedication of the wall (12:26-43)
7. The organization of temple support (12:44-47)

These people had willing hearts to do whatever God wanted them to do, and each functioned in their own unique capacity. As we examine the section that lists the names of the Jewish citizens, four factors emerge that help us define what servant leadership involves. The section dealing with the dedication of the wall reveals four requirements for the person involved in serving:

WHAT DOES SERVANT LEADERSHIP INVOLVE?

1. It involves a willingness to live where God wants you to live.

Nehemiah got the wall built, but there were not many people living in the city (7:4). When the people returned from the exile, the walls were torn down and there was a lot of rubble from the previous destruction. It would have required a lot of work to clear the rubble and restore the city. As the former capital, the restored city would have been a major target for enemies to attack. At first there wasn’t much economic opportunity there. It was far easier to settle out in the country and farm your own plot of ground. So most of the people had been content to live in the surrounding villages scattered across the land. But Nehemiah knew that if the city was to be strong and prosperous and if the worship in the temple was to thrive, the city had to be well populated with citizens who could defend it in case of attack. As 11:1 notes, the leaders lived in Jerusalem, but most of the people did not. So they cast lots to pick one out of ten who would move to Jerusalem.

It seems that some who were not chosen volunteered to move, either in place of or in addition to those who drew the lot (11:2). The ones who stayed in the villages blessed those who were willing to move to Jerusalem. Although it was inconvenient and less desirable in some ways to move from the country to the city, these people were willing to live where God wanted them to live in order to serve His purpose. One of the first considerations that any servant of God should think about is, “Where does God want me to live?” That should be determined in large measure by the potential for your ministry in that locale. Is there a solid Bible-teaching church where you can grow and serve? That should be a primary factor in any move that you make.

2. It involves serving in the sphere in which God calls you to serve.

Chapter 11 lists the heads of families in Jerusalem (11:3-9); the priests (11:10-14); the Levites (11:15-18); the gatekeepers and temple servants (11:19-21); various officials appointed by the king of Persia (11:22-24); and, the people who lived outside the city (11:25-36). Each served in his respective sphere for the effective operation of the city and the nation. Those who lived outside of the city had to farm the land to provide food for those in the city. Each had a different role, but each role was vital to the entire cause. In the body of Christ, God has gifted us in different ways, but every part is vital for the overall functioning and health of the body (1 Cor. 12:12-30). We should learn to coordinate and complement each other without friction or rivalry. Problems often develop in the body because the eye looks at everyone from the perspective of the eye only, and the hand views everything from the perspective of the hand. But the eye should value the hand and the hand should value the eye.

The solution is not for the gifted person to sit around criticizing others for not doing what probably is not their area of gift, but rather to get involved in the areas that he thinks need fixing! The merciful person should help us all become more merciful by showing mercy. The evangelist should show us how to reach the lost. The administrator should help us get organized. God has made us all differently, and we only work as a body when we work in our sphere and affirm others in their sphere.

3. It involves a willingness to serve without acclaim.

Most of these names mean nothing to us. Some aren't even listed by name, but are lumped together with all of their kinsmen as a group (11:12-14). Zabdiel is named (11:14), although he means nothing to us, but 128 of his kinsmen go unnamed, except to say that they were valiant warriors. But 128 valiant warriors were no small part of a secure, safe city! The church needs many people like that in order to function well. This place would shut down in a week if we didn't have many who labor faithfully behind the scenes. You never see them up front, but they do what God has given them to do. They're like your vital organs: you never see them, but when one of them shuts down, you're in big trouble!

4. It involves people first and programs second.

These long lists underscore the importance of people to God. Each one of these strange, hard-to-pronounce names represents a person whom God loved and knew. Jesus said that the good shepherd “calls his own sheep by name” and that his “sheep follow him because they know his voice” (John 10:3, 4). The Christian faith is all about personal relationships, first with God, and then with one another (the two great commandments, Matt. 22:37-40). Programs should always be the vehicle through which we minister to people. If a program is not doing that, we need to axe the program and replace it with something that ministers God's Word to people. Apart from programs, if you have the proper ministry mindset, you will seek to relate to people. On Sunday

mornings, take the initiative to meet new people. Make them feel welcome here. Introduce them to others. While we can't get well acquainted with everyone, if it is a person to whom you can relate, set up a time to get together for coffee or have them over to dinner. Share your own testimony and ask them about how God has worked in their lives.

Discuss:

1. *How did the Jews decide who would live in Jerusalem? (V. 1)* _____

2. *Who were the five groups of people to live in Jerusalem? (Vv2-6)* _____

3. *How (from chapter) would all these people be taken care of materially?* _____

4. *As you read this passage, what personal decisions (past or future) about where you live and how that impacts your service to God come to mind?* _____

WHAT ARE SOME REQUIREMENTS FOR SERVANTHOOD?

The main requirement for being involved in servant leadership is that your heart is right before God. In the section describing the dedication of the wall (12:27-43) and the organization of temple support (12:44-47), there are four aspects of a heart that is right before God:

1. A pure heart (12:30).

Before they dedicated the wall, the priests and Levites purified themselves, the people, the gates, and the wall. The Old Testament rituals for purification symbolize the fact that our hearts are sinful and God is absolutely holy. Those who serve Him must be cleansed from all known sin of thought, word, and deed. All of us struggle against temptation. All of us are vulnerable to fall into sin. But if you are not guarding yourself from temptation and walking in consistent victory over sin, please do not make a claim of being a Christian. Don't get involved in any sort of service. Rather, humble yourself before God, repent of all of your sins, and take measures to protect yourself from falling again. Purity on the heart level is an essential requirement for Christian service.

2. A worshipful heart (12:27, 31-43).

The dedication of the wall was a time, not to praise Nehemiah, but to praise the Lord. Nehemiah organized two choirs to walk in opposite directions on top of the wall until they converged at the temple. They sang praises to the accompaniment of cymbals, harps, and lyres. The chapter refers six times to David, who is twice called “the man of God” (12:24, 36, 37 [twice], 45, & 46). David was a man after God’s heart because he was a worshiper of God. He had set up the whole system of worship that these people were seeking to follow (12:46).

God doesn’t want your work if He doesn’t have your worship. To worship God is to rejoice in and extol His great attributes and actions. It is to reverence God above all else. True worship is not just outward, but inward. It engages the mind, the heart, the will, and the emotions. Whether you’re setting up chairs or preaching a sermon, it ought to flow out of a heart of worship for God.

3. A joyful heart (12:43).

As you read the account of this dedication service, you get the distinct impression that these people were enjoying themselves! Have you ever been outside of a stadium when a ball game was going on inside, and suddenly the crowd roars? You know when that happens that something good happened inside! Probably someone for the home team just hit a homerun. In the same way, people should be able to walk by the church and think, “Something good is going on in there!” In fact, God has hit a grand-slam homerun for us through Jesus Christ. We need to so catch up with what God has done that His great joy radiates from this place!

4. A giving heart (12:44-47).

These people gave joyfully so that God’s work could go forward. They saw the importance of worship at the temple and they were willing to give the necessary offerings to support the many priests, Levites, gatekeepers, and singers who served there. The people did it because they “rejoiced over the priests and Levites who served” (12:44). If God is going to use you to minister to others, you need to have a generous heart. You will see the importance of supporting those who are called to serve God on the mission field. You will see the importance of supporting the local church. Just before Peter exhorts us to use our spiritual gifts in serving one another, he says, “Be hospitable to one another without complaint” (1 Pet. 4:9).

CONCLUSION

The pioneer missionary, William Carey, was a cobbler before he left for the mission field. He would keep a map of India before him in his shop, stopping every so often to study it. He longed to go there and preach the gospel. He did a lot of preaching and teaching on the side, with the result that his trade dwindled. One day a friend admonished him for neglecting his business. “Neglecting my business?” Carey said. “My business is to extend the kingdom of God. I only cobble shoes to pay expenses.” That should be the mindset of every Christian. If you know Christ as your Savior, you’re in the ministry now! But may I ask, *Are you ministry-oriented?* Is that your mindset? Are there people in your schedule on a regular basis? When you gather with God’s people, are you thinking about others and how you can show the love of Christ to them? If you’ve been coming here for more than three or four weeks and you’re thinking, “This is an unfriendly church,” you may be part of the problem! The solution is for *you* to reach out in friendliness to others. Rather than coming to get your needs met, come to meet the needs of others.

Discuss:

1. *What were the roles of the people mentioned in verses 1-26?* _____

2. *From the book of Nehemiah so far, what is the reason for their great rejoicing?* _____

3. *How important do you think the collection of these goods was to the effective running of Jerusalem and providing the worship and celebration that Jerusalem represented? (Vv. 44-47)* _____

4. *What is our reason for rejoicing? How can you apply the reason in V.43?* _____

5. *How could you give (financially and with your encouragement) to sustain supporting people (that is pastors, missionaries, youth workers etc.) in your church or fellowship?*

A VERSE TO REMEMBER

Nehemiah 12:43.

And on that day they offered great sacrifices, rejoicing because God had given them great joy. The women and children also rejoiced. The sound of rejoicing in Jerusalem could be heard far away.

PRAYER

Father, help me to seek the values that will bring me lasting joy in this changing world. In my desire for what you promise let me serve you wholeheartedly. Grant this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. AMEN

GOVERNANCE STRUCTURES: THE PROBLEM OF PERMISSIVENESS

Nehemiah: Lessons 14 on Leadership

Nehemiah 13:1-31

INTRODUCTION

After 12 years as governor, Nehemiah had returned to Persia. During his absence, spiritual permissiveness and decline set in. The time references in chapter 13 are ambiguous, so it is not clear whether the reforms of 13:1-3 took place on the day of the dedication of the wall, or at another time. But the reforms were short-lived. Spiritual compromise snuck in through the spiritual leadership. When Nehemiah returned, he found that permissiveness was rampant in the very areas the people had covenanted to stand against just a few years before! Nehemiah strongly confronted the perpetual problem of permissiveness. His example teaches us that...

HOW LEADERS DEAL WITH SPIRITUAL PERMISSIVENESS.

1. Be aware of the problem areas.

Why hadn't others in Israel dealt with these problems? Ezra may have died by now (in 13:13, Zadok is called *the* scribe, perhaps indicating that Ezra no longer held that post). Perhaps the other leaders just didn't see the problems to the degree that Nehemiah did. Before the moral slide had set in, the people had listened to the reading of Scripture, which made them aware of God's standards for holiness for His people (13:1-3). In *Deuteronomy* 23:3-5, God declared that no Ammonite or Moabite should enter the assembly of Israel because of the way those nations had treated Israel when they were in the wilderness.

The reason He did not want Israel accepting these foreigners into their midst was that they would corrupt Israel from following the Lord alone. The insidious counsel of Balaam (13:2) was for the king of Moab to get his people to intermarry with Israel, and pretty soon Israel would be just like the Moabites, following their gods. The same thing happened with King Solomon, whose foreign wives led him into idolatry (13:26). I should point out that repentant Moabites, like Ruth, were not only accepted into Israel, but even included in the genealogy of David and Jesus Christ. But those who would not give up their foreign gods would only serve to pollute Israel spiritually. They had to be excluded.

So sometime during Nehemiah's absence, the reading of Scripture had led to obedience. But then Satan wormed his way in by introducing spiritual permissiveness in four areas. Keep in mind that it was Nehemiah's knowledge of Scripture that enabled him to see these deviations. *The only way that we will detect spiritual permissiveness in ourselves and in our church is by being steeped in God's Word.*

Areas where there was spiritual permissiveness were:

- a. **Wrong relationships (13:4-9).** The temple contained some storage rooms that were used for the grain offerings, the utensils, and the tithes of the people (13:5). While Nehemiah was gone, Eliashib the high priest had cleared out one large room and one or more smaller rooms (13:5, 9) so that Tobiah *the Ammonite* could set up an apartment there! Tobiah was a mocker who strongly opposed Nehemiah's earlier efforts to rebuild the wall (2:10, 19; 4:3, 7-8). He had many connections with the Jews and had persuaded them that he was a good man. But

meanwhile he had sent threatening letters to Nehemiah (6:17-19). But here he is, setting up a personal residence in the temple!

What's going on here? Why would the high priest allow such a thing? There were probably several factors. One was that the high priest and Tobiah were related, probably through marriage (13:4). Another factor was that Tobiah had a Jewish name (which meant, "God is good"). So he wasn't *totally* Ammonite! Just partially! It's always more difficult to draw the line against a "good" person who is just mixed up on some things than against an outwardly wicked person who is spouting obvious blasphemy. Wrong friendships can seriously damage us spiritually. Paul told Timothy concerning those who hold to a form of godliness, but deny its power, "Avoid such men as these" (2 Tim. 3:5). By the way, teach your children the danger of wrong friendships and the importance of choosing friends who want to follow Jesus Christ.

- b. *Financial permissiveness (13:10-14).*** This problem was connected to the first problem. Spiritual problems seldom occur in isolation! Because the high priest had moved Tobiah into the temple, there were not enough storerooms for the tithes. So the priests had not required the people to bring in their tithes, and as a result, the Levites had to go to work in the fields to support their families, thus neglecting their temple duties.

Spiritual permissiveness invariably has a negative effect on our giving. The prophet Malachi was ministering at this time. He confronted the people for robbing God by not bringing their tithes into the storehouse (Mal. 3:8-10).

- c. *In the use of time (13:15-22).*** Even though the people had agreed in their covenant with God to keep the Sabbath holy (10:31), they quickly fell into doing business on that day, even in Jerusalem (13:15). Some merchants from Tyre, who had no scruples about the Sabbath, were doing a brisk business selling imported fish and merchandise in the city on that day. No doubt the Jews had excuses (they would have called them "reasons") for violating the Sabbath. "If I don't tread my grapes that day, they will rot!" "Everyone else is doing business then. I can't compete if I close up shop!" "All those imported fish will just rot and go to waste if we don't buy them! It wouldn't be right, to waste all that good food."

We are not under the strict Sabbath laws of Israel. But like these religious Jews, it is easy to make up excuses for why we put business and our pursuit of pleasure ahead of worship. "I'd like to spend time alone with God every day, but I've got to work long hours. When I get home, I'm exhausted and need some down time in front of the tube to relax." "I'd like to go to church more often, but Sunday is my only day to sack in, eat a leisurely breakfast, and read the paper." Spiritual permissiveness always affects how we spend our time.

- d. *In their homes (13:23-29).*** Ezra had corrected this problem just a few years before, but here it was again! Nehemiah discovered that some of the Jews had married foreign women, and their children didn't even speak Hebrew, which meant that they couldn't understand the Scriptures. We need to understand that marrying an unbeliever will not only affect us. It also has a negative impact on our children. They will grow up speaking the language of Ashdod, and not understanding the things of God.

There is no more vulnerable area of your life than that of the emotional attachments that you form with the opposite sex. Satan never comes along and says to a Christian young person, “Wouldn’t you like to marry this nice young girl from Ashdod? She will lead your children and you astray from the Lord. Your children will be half-pagan and your grandchildren will be completely pagan.” Rather, he says, “Your parents are too strict. They follow God’s laws and insist that you follow them too. But you’re missing out! Look at how much fun this sexy babe from Ashdod would be! You don’t have to marry her. Just go out and enjoy yourself for a change!” And before he knows it, the sexy babe from Ashdod has him compromising his morals, while at the same time she promises that she will follow his God after they get married.

Moral permissiveness always begins like an innocent trickle through the dam, but it subtly widens until the dam suddenly gives way. At that point, the damage is serious and widespread.

2. Strongly confront problem areas.

Some criticize Nehemiah for not being more tactful and polite, but when God’s people are being poisoned by permissiveness, politeness may not be best. If I saw you about to drink what I knew to be deadly poison, you wouldn’t want me politely to smile and think to myself, “I wouldn’t drink that, but I don’t want to impose my views on him. Each person has a right to his own opinions.” You’d want me to shout, “Wait! That will kill you!” And if need be, you’d want me forcibly to knock it from your hand.

That’s what Nehemiah did. He didn’t worry about being polite or about what people would think of him. I’m sure that he made many enemies by what he did here, but I’m also sure that he was God’s friend. Many no doubt grumbled about what an unloving, harsh man he was. But Nehemiah describes what he did with the Hebrew word *hesed* (13:14, translated “loyal deeds”), which is the word used in 13:22 (and throughout the OT) for God’s loyal love for His people. In each of these situations, Nehemiah dealt with the problem head on. There are four aspects to what he did:

- a. He discovered the problem.** You may say, “That’s a no-brainer!” But if it was so obvious, why hadn’t other leaders in Israel perceived what was wrong and dealt with it? Nehemiah saw what others did not see. As I said earlier, the reason he saw it was that he compared what he saw with what he knew from Scripture. Look at 13:7: “I came to Jerusalem and *learned* about the evil that Eliashib had done for Tobiah” Nehemiah didn’t refer to it as a creative, alternative use for the temple storerooms! He called it *evil*. That wasn’t a popular word to apply to the high priest, but Nehemiah didn’t tone it down. In 13:10, it says that he *discovered* the fact that the Levites had not received the tithes. In 13:15, he *saw* the violation of the Sabbath. In 13:23, he also *saw* that the Jews had married foreign women. In every case, he observed what was happening, compared it to God’s unbending standards in Scripture, and then took action.
- b. He got upset.** Note 13:8-9: He was *very displeased* about Tobiah’s temple apartment. In 13:11, he *reprimanded* the officials. It doesn’t take much imagination to picture him asking in a raised voice why the house of God was forsaken. In 13:17-18, he again *reprimanded* them for their Sabbath violations, and it’s clear that he was upset. The classic is in 13:25, where he got so upset that he *contended* with them, *cursed*

them (not profanity, but he pronounced a curse against them), *struck* some of them, and *pulled out their hair*, probably from their beards!

Nehemiah's explosion was as characteristic as Ezra's *implosion* had been. Both were powerfully effective, and both were to find some parallel in our Lord's encounters with evil. The shock treatment by Nehemiah was devastating in the same manner as the assault on the moneychangers, and the display of grief by Ezra (Ezra 9:3ff.; 10:1ff.) was as moving, in its way, as the lament over Jerusalem. We need to be careful with righteous anger, in that we can easily excuse sinful anger as being righteous. But when we see sins or false teachings that are damaging God's people, it is *wrong not to be angry!* To be complacent in the face of such evil is *not* to be like Jesus.

(3) Take strong, direct confrontation. Nehemiah didn't just say, "It makes me mad to see how Israel is drifting from the Lord!" and go back to his newspaper. He met the problems head on! He personally threw Tobiah's household goods out of the storerooms. Then he had them cleanse the rooms and put the grain offerings back in there. Imagine how Tobiah must have reacted when he came home, wondered what that pile of furniture was doing outside, and then opened his door and saw his apartment filled to the ceiling with grain!

With regard to the tithes, Nehemiah not only reprimanded the officials (13:11-13). He also restored them to their posts and appointed faithful men to oversee the collection and distribution of the tithes. Concerning the Sabbath problem, he commanded that the doors be shut and locked on the Sabbath (13:19-22). Then he stationed men there to enforce it. When the merchants from Tyre camped outside the gates, he warned them to leave or else he would use force against them. And he commanded the Levites to purify themselves and to stand as gatekeepers.

With regard to the mixed marriages, he not only strongly contended with those who were guilty, but when he found out that one of the grandsons of the high priest had married a daughter of Sanballat, he drove the young man away (13:28)! Before we confront anyone in sin, we need to check the flesh and make sure that our motives are pure before God. Sometimes a more gentle approach will be more effective. But we often err by thinking that gentleness means being nice. Jesus was gentle when he pronounced woes on the Pharisees and called them hypocrites, blind guides, and whitewashed tombs (Matthew 23). Paul was filled with the Spirit when he told Elymas the magician he was full of all deceit and fraud, called him a son of the devil and an enemy of all righteousness, and struck him blind (Acts 13:9-11). Sometimes sin demands a strong, direct confrontation.

(4) Be accountable to God and aware of His presence in every situation. Four times Nehemiah utters brief prayers (13:14, 22, 29, and 31). He wasn't taking this strong action against permissiveness for his own sake. He was doing it for God's sake. I think that he shot up these brief prayers for God to remember him and his enemies because he was under severe attack. You don't do what Nehemiah did here without incurring the wrath of those whose comfortable lifestyles you upset. But Nehemiah wasn't a typical politician, trying to placate both sides and work a compromise. He wasn't trying to win a popularity contest. He was seeking to please God by calling God's people back to holy living.

Nehemiah's God-ward focus is essential if we want to confront the permissiveness of our times with the right spirit. If we lose it, we can easily become self-righteous moral crusaders who look down on those who are blinded by sin. Living with an awareness of God's presence and that we must answer to Him will give us the courage to stand alone, if need be, and confront out of love.

Conclusion

It is easy to see the faults of others but to be blind to our own permissiveness. I encourage you to begin with yourself. As you read God's Word, ask yourself where *you* may have slipped into the ways of our godless culture. After you deal with yourself, I encourage husbands and fathers to give godly leadership and correction when needed to your families. When the pastors warn of spiritual dangers, rather than getting angry and leaving the church, stop and prayerfully consider whether what we say is in line with God's Word. Spiritual permissiveness is a perpetual problem. Like Nehemiah, we must detect it by God's Word and strongly confront it if we want to hear our Lord's "Well done!" when we stand before Him.

Discuss:

1. *List the things in this chapter that indicate the Israelites have backslidden from the Lord?*

2. *Compare 10:30 with 13:23-28. Do you see anything in the text that shows you why Israel had backslidden?*

3. *How did Nehemiah feel when he came back and saw how bad things were spiritually?*

4. *Nehemiah's response in verse 25 is very dramatic and physical. What principles does this suggest to you for how we should deal with sin today?*

5. *In what ways do you need to be more direct with others about their sin?*

6. *How will you like others to help you in dealing with your own sin?*

MEMORY VERSE

Nehemiah 13: 14: Remember me for this, my God, and do not blot out what I have so faithfully done for the house of my God and its services.

PRAYER

Father My soul desires you again, Lord. I need your unfailing love and your mercies that endure forever. Rescue me and raise me up from this dark pit. Father, forgive me, and welcome me back home. Let me approach you and receive your grace and forgiveness.