

Chapter 21: God's Remodeling Project

Six leadership principles from Nehemiah

L _____

The lesson: A good leader leaves his _____, takes _____, and follows the _____ of God for a mission bigger than himself.

E _____

Lesson: A good leader gets a _____ of the situation before acting.

A _____

He motivated the leaders by _____ himself with them.
He didn't get bogged down in "_____ by _____."
Lesson: Good leaders _____.

D _____

Satan's tactics with Nehemiah (and us):

- _____ and _____
- _____ of _____
- _____

Lesson: Good leaders develop _____.

E _____

"Wherever you hear the sound of the trumpet, join us there. Our God will fight for us!"

Lesson: Good leaders _____ their team.

R _____

Nehemiah respected:

- _____
- _____
- His _____

Lesson: Good leaders respect _____, _____ and _____.

Malachi's final encouragement: Three things that need repairing *on the inside*:

- a) _____
- b) _____

In the same way, you husbands must give honor to your wives. Treat her with understanding as you live together. She may be weaker than you are, but she is your equal partner in God's gift of new life. If you don't treat her as you should, your prayers will not be heard.

1 Peter 3:7

- c) _____

What do all of these have in common? Not _____.

Discussion Questions

1. Which part of being a L.E.A.D.E.R. challenges you most?
2. How do you determine if a message from God or another source?
3. Of the three things Malachi mentioned, which one do you need to focus on repairing this week?

Teaching Script

It's no surprise that the Hebrew people were homesick after 70 years of foreign captivity. In Chapter 19, Zerubbabel led 50,000 former slaves back to the holy city in 537 B.C. Many, however, stayed in Babylon and didn't return.

Later on, Ezra had earned the favor of Persia's King during his time in Babylon. Ezra was authorized to take a second contingent of Israelites back home. He was a faithful scribe and teacher, and he was given permission not only to teach God's law but also a mandate to appoint judges and a bottomless expense account to finance his journey. So Ezra led the second group back from captivity in 457 B.C.

And now, in Chapter 21, it was Nehemiah's turn. Thirteen years after Ezra, he led the third wave back to Jerusalem. In God's Upper Story, this was the fulfillment of what He had promised to David: the survival of the remnant community, preserved during the exile, returned to the Land of Promise. The nation who had been punished for her consistent disobedience was back to rebuild the temple and restore their relationship with God. But they were easily discouraged and their work stalled. Ezra and Nehemiah were reformers who were determined not to allow this nation to fall back into her old ways. Their stories were written to encourage a fearful, discouraged, needy group of Israelites who were no longer sure of their own identity. As we'll see, Nehemiah concentrated on first rebuilding the city walls; then Ezra would focus on rebuilding the broken people.

We've had several lessons on leadership since beginning our study of *The Story*; but NO study of leadership in the Bible would be complete without including Nehemiah.

My favorite funny story about leadership is as sad as it is humorous. One day, during the French Revolution, a man was seen running down the street, chasing after a group of soldiers. Somebody yelled at him, "Why are you chasing them?" He shouted back, "I am their captain. I must discover where they are going so that I may lead them!"

It's safe to say Nehemiah was a leader out in front. As an effective leader, he should surely be grouped with Moses, Joshua, and David. But because his story is deep within the Old Testament historical books that are lesser known, the practical life lessons that he provides can go largely neglected. So let's examine six leadership principles from Nehemiah that are just as relevant today as they were 2,400 years ago.

Leave

Most leaders are called to leave where they are and move *toward* the mission God has for them. It's impossible to lead from a position of inertia.

Nehemiah was the cupbearer for King Artaxerxes, perhaps his most trusted servant. He had every excuse to stay right where he was—important job, good pay, lots of perks. But God had put a fire in his belly, a passion in his heart, and he could not accomplish the mission of rebuilding the walls from a distance. Instead, with permission from the king, he chose to leave Susa and go to Jerusalem to rebuild the walls and restore the people's identity as God's chosen.

The lesson: A good leader leaves his *comfort zone*, takes *risks*, and follows the *call* of God for a mission bigger than himself.

Last year when we studied Nehemiah in our character studies of men in the Bible, we called Nehemiah's obsession a BHAG—a Big, Holy, Audacious Goal. As a leader, do you have a BHAG that so captures you, that you'd be willing to leave your comfort zone, take a risk, and follow the call of God?

Evaluation

Although he was convinced that God Himself called Nehemiah to rebuild the walls, he evaluated each situation carefully.

First, he knew he needed the king's approval and documentation to verify his travel and mission (Nehemiah 2:5-8). He did not rush to secure these things. He patiently waited four months until he knew the timing was right.

Then, just three days after arriving in Jerusalem, Nehemiah secretly surveyed the damage to the walls under the cover of night. It was crucial that he have an accurate, firsthand assessment of the mission that lay ahead. And by concealing himself at night, he accomplished two things:

1. First, Israel's enemies couldn't stir up resistance to a plan they didn't know about.
2. Second, he had time to formulate a plan before the naysayers among his own people started with why they shouldn't or couldn't rebuild the walls.

Remember, the walls had been neglected at this point for 93 years, since the first wave returned to Jerusalem. Praying and trusting God does not mean that proper research and planning are unnecessary.

The Lesson: A good leader gets a realistic assessment of the situation before acting.

Action

Nehemiah had to turn his vision for rebuilding the walls into a reality. He challenged the local leaders to recognize the need to act. Let's read together from the bottom of page 295...

He motivated the leaders by identifying himself with them. He used "we" and "us." He didn't waste precious time endless committee meetings. And when rumors of an impending attack circulated, Nehemiah took action. He staged armed guards around the workers to who stood ready to defend their families and their city. He carefully evaluated, but **he didn't get bogged down in "paralysis by analysis."**

The Lesson: Good leaders act.

Discernment

Nehemiah faced both external and internal threats to the work of rebuilding.

His wisdom and discernment alerted him to the very real threat of an enemy attack. He discerned that what had initially begun as mocking and ridicule had *escalated* into a unified plot to strike them.

After the walls were finished, Nehemiah discerned the ill intentions of Sanballat and Tobiah. Since their other attempts to halt the work had failed, they turned to more subtle methods to undermine the final phase of the gates. By asking him to meet them "on the

plain of Ono,” which was a day’s travel from Jerusalem, he discerned that they intended to do him personal harm.

Later on, as their tactics changed, Nehemiah’s wisdom alerted him to the false “insider” Jewish prophet Shemaiah who suggested he hide inside the temple to protect himself from death threats.

His enemies retaliated with intimidation and made repeated attempts to out-manuever Nehemiah and his rebuilding project, but Nehemiah was undeterred. He encouraged his leaders and armed his people. Some worked while others stood guard. Some carried supplies with one hand and a weapon in the other. Even when Israel’s enemies enlisted an Israelite as a false prophet to undermine the progress, Nehemiah was not shaken.

Satan’s tactics with Nehemiah (and us):

- ***Mocking and ridicule*** (“a fox couldn’t walk on that wall”)—Accuser, belittler
- ***“Weapons of Mass Deception”*** (“meet us out in Laredo so we can talk”)
- ***Misdirection***—this is what sleight-of-hand magic is all about. Misdirection leads you to look in the wrong place, where the magic isn’t happening. Let me show you....

This is like throwing a rock at a distant bush and get people to shoot at the wrong target. And this is what Satan often does; he focuses us on the wrong thing. We can be deceived into believing our brothers and sisters are the real enemy. It’s brilliant finger-pointing.

Lesson: Good leaders develop *discernment*.

Encourager

Nehemiah was an encourager. Nehemiah used his personal testimony to encourage the local leaders to rebuilding the walls. “I also told them about the gracious hand of God on me and what the king had said to me.” By assuring these city leaders that both their heavenly King and their earthly king were supportive of the vision, they gained great courage, and were able to “work with all their heart.”

And once the project started, Nehemiah encouraged the workers when they were physically exhausted and emotionally weary. When their strength was giving out, he discerned that the threat of attack had worn them too thin. He knew full well that he alone could not accomplish the mission. Instead, he encouraged them with a new plan to continue the process of rebuilding with some building and others standing guard. It’s always easy to be negative under difficult circumstances, but Nehemiah’s faith was rooted in knowing his God. On page 298 of *The Story*, he shouted, “Wherever you hear the sound of the trumpet, join us there. Our God will fight for us!”

Lesson: Good leaders *encourage* their team.

Respect

Nehemiah respected God, authorities, and his subordinates.

Nehemiah never failed to give **God** full credit in the process of rebuilding the walls. From the very beginning, he prayed and acknowledged that the “hand of God” was upon him, and that it was “what my God had put in my heart to do for Jerusalem.” When they feared

an attack, he reminded them of their God. “Don’t be afraid of them. Remember the Lord, who is great and awesome, and fight for your people, your sons and your daughters, your wives and your homes.” He also showed great respect for God when he defied the false prophet’s suggestion that he hide in the temple to protect himself. He refused to consider defiling the temple to save his skin!

Second, Nehemiah respected the *rightful king’s authority*. Although he always knew that the mission was from God, he respected the authority of the king by requesting a leave of absence and garnered the king’s documented support. Romans 13 tells us a godly leader will respect his or her earthly government. He also respected the authority of the local Jerusalem priests and nobles. He presented his plan to rebuild to the local leaders who then enlisted the support of the people, and he called upon Ezra to lead the worship after the walls were rebuilt.

And last but not least, Nehemiah respected the needs of his *team*. When they were weary, he met their need for protection. Perhaps most importantly, he rolled up his sleeves and worked right along side all the other laborers. He said, “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.” In fact, the king had endowed him with the authority of a governor but he refused to use the governor’s food allowance because he did not want to burden the people with the taxes.

Lesson: Good leaders respect *God, government, and those they lead.*

And so, because of Nehemiah’s faith and leadership, the walls were rebuilt in just over seven weeks. What an incredible accomplishment! But there was still one rebuilding job left. Zerubbabel and Haggai had first rebuilt the altar and the temple. Nehemiah, the walls.

And now, last of all, there’s one more piece of reconstruction left. Ezra the priest set out to rebuild God’s people. He began by teaching them the Scriptures for the next 13 years. The people gathered to hear Ezra read, and other priests joined in to teach as well.

Let’s read from page 300 of *The Story*...

At last, they got it! They grasped the reality of God’s great Upper Story. Do you see the correlation? This is what *we’ve* been about the last six months! This is the whole point of The Story! To read God’s word, swallow it, digest it, and understand it. Time after time, for so many people, the light bulb has gone on as we’ve read through the Old Testament and seen God’s great Upper Story prevail. I can’t tell you how much I appreciate Randy’s wisdom and leadership, that before anything else, we walk through the Word of God—just like Ezra did as he read the book of the Law to all the people. Can you see that here and now, we are reliving the Ezra story: going back to the Word of God and rebuilding our hearts. What an honor to follow in his footsteps!

And now we are at the end of the Old Testament. And there’s one more messenger: Malachi. He continues Ezra’s work by telling Israel there are **three specific things that need repairing—from the inside**. Three things to focus on. Let’s read his words beginning on page 302...

- a) ***Worship.*** You're bringing leftovers, blind and diseased animals for sacrifice. Do I strike you as the kind of God with whom that might be acceptable? Instead of a fragrant aroma of sacrifice, the Lord says, "Do not light useless fires on My altar." In other words, stop wasting My time.
- b) ***Marriage.*** This is no shock at all, since the husband/wife relationship is the analogy that God has used all along with Israel. If you are unfaithful or disrespectful of your wife, you are making a mockery of what I've called for in MY relationship with YOU. If you diss your wife, you diss Me.

In the same way, you husbands must give honor to your wives. Treat her with understanding as you live together. She may be weaker than you are, but she is your equal partner in God's gift of new life. If you don't treat her as you should, your prayers will not be heard. 1 Peter 3:7

Man up and repair your marriage.

- c) ***Giving.*** Talked about this a couple of weeks ago. Bring your whole tithe, not just the table scraps, the loose change under the seat cushion of the couch.

What do all of these have in common? **Not *giving your best.*** Put another way, are you phoning it in to God? To your wife? Is your faith some halfway, half-hearted attempt to maintain a pretense of spirituality? If so, let us heed God's last words to His people before 400 years of silence: *Give your best.*

At the end, as a sign of things to come, Malachi finally told of the return of the prophet Elijah. God had restored His people and protected His faithful remnant. He had protected Judah's royal line in keeping with his promise to David. He spoke His final words of warning and promise through Malachi...and then God was silent. His people would not hear from Him again for 400 years, until the promised Elijah, John the Baptist, would step forth as God's new messenger. God's redemptive story, for now, was quietly marching toward history's climactic event.