

Nehemiah: A Leader of Leaders

Nehemiah 4:6

Introduction:

The more I read and study the Old Testament, the more impressed I am with the way it teaches us through narratives of ordinary men and women of faith.

The narratives are full of applications—the how-to of living faithfully.

They are also filled with life lessons—directions on how to address tricky situations.

Consider with me, the account of Nehemiah!

Henry H. Halley said, “Nehemiah was a man of prayer, patriotism, action, courage, and perseverance.”¹

What then can we learn from a leader of leaders?

I. Nehemiah cared about God’s people.

Read with me the opening chapter of The Book of Nehemiah.

Hear his concern.

Listen to how he addressed God.

Pay attention to the requests he makes and what they are based upon.

He asked the visitors concerning the Jews who had escaped and had survived the captivity, and about Jerusalem—the dwelling of the people.

When he heard of their condition, Nehemiah wept and mourned; he also fasted and prayed.

Nehemiah requested God’s listening ear and for God to respond according to his great and awesome character with lovingkindness.

He commended the people to God as “sons of Israel Your servants,” three times in this prayer (vv. 6, 10, and 11).

Nehemiah confessed the sins of the people and his sins and their lack of reverence.

He petitioned God to remember his covenant and promises on behalf of the Lord’s servants.

Nehemiah appealed to God for success.

II. Nehemiah was a prayer warrior.

He prayed for four months before making his request known to the king (1:1 and 2:1).

From the month Chisleu (Key-slev 1:1) to the month Nisan (Knee-sun 2:1), Nehemiah’s heart was saddened (2:2).

He asked King Artaxerxes for a leave of absence so that he might return and rebuild Jerusalem.

After four months of praying, Nehemiah again prayed before responding to the king’s question, “What would you request?” (2:4).

Artaxerxes gave permission, protective letters, an escort of army and horsemen, and letters for supplies to accomplish his plan.

In Nehemiah’s prayer for success with God’s help, he confessed the sins of the children of Israel (1:6-7).

¹ Henry Hampton Halley, Halley’s Bible Handbook, 1965 ed., s.v. “Nehemiah,” Zondervan, Grand-Rapids, 235.

In prayer he requested that God punish the adversaries.

In 4:4, for opposing the work, “Hear, O our God, how we are despised! Return their reproach on their own heads and give them up for plunder in a land of captivity.”

In 6:14, for the scheme to intimidate and discredit, “Remember, O my God, Tobiah and Sanballat according to these works of theirs, and also Noadiah the prophetess and the rest of the prophets who were trying to frighten me.”

He led the people in asking for God’s help against an army being assembled and coming up to Jerusalem (4:9).

He asked God to strengthen his hands, so he did not become discouraged when claims were made that the Jews were rebuilding the wall so they could rebel and take Nehemiah as their king (6:9).

Nehemiah said, “Such things as you are saying have not been done, but you are inventing them in your own mind.”

He said, “For all of them were trying to frighten us, thinking, ‘They will become discouraged with the work and it will not be done.’ But now, O God, strengthen my hands.”

Nehemiah petitioned God to remember him “according to all that [he had] done for [the] people,” (5:19), “according to the greatness of [God’s] lovingkindness” (13:22), and “for good” (13:31).

III. Nehemiah lived a life of faith.

He had confidence in God and God’s cause; therefore, he was enthusiastic.

Nehemiah turned the king’s acknowledgment of his sad face being about a saddened heart into an invitation.

He said, “Why should my face not be sad when the city, the place of my father’s tombs, lies desolate and its gates have been consumed by fire?” (Nehemiah 2:3).

Faith believes God will provide the opportunity at the right time.

Faith also trusts that God has heard sufficient prayers and will answer quickly.

God will work in and on the hearts of people to bring about His will.

Nehemiah acknowledged God had put it in his heart to accomplish the work in Jerusalem (2:12) before he went out to inspect the walls.

When Artaxerxes granted permission, Nehemiah said “the king granted them to me because the good hand of my God was on me” (2:8).

It was put into Nehemiah’s heart “to assemble the nobles, the officials and the people to be enrolled by genealogies (7:5).

There were twelve key leaders, clan leaders, priests, Levites, singers, gatekeepers, Temple servants, descendants of Solomon’s officials, and families without genealogical records.

God moved leaders among the people to give expensive gifts to help finance the work (7:70-73).

As Nehemiah urged the leaders to begin the task of rebuilding the wall, he told them that the hand of God had been favorable to him and the encouraging words of the king (2:18).

Then he pointed out that “God had frustrated” the plans of their enemies (4:15), and “Our God will fight for us” (4:20).

Nehemiah was always honoring God and showing His part in their success.

IV. Nehemiah utilized his talent.

Nehemiah had great leadership and organizational ability as he was the driving force in the rebuilding of the wall in 52 days, with half the people working and half standing guard.

His concern led to a plan which he acted upon rallying the people who had a mind to work.

He was persistent in reestablishing and purifying the worship of the Jews.

He faced ridicule and threats from enemies of the Jews head-on.

He wisely sought God's help and then set a guard for protection.

He insisted that the wealthy Jews restore what they had taken from their poorer brothers and walk in the fear of God.

Nehemiah joined forces with Ezra who read the Book of the Law to people.

As Ezra read, the Levites explained the meaning of the passage being read.

As the people understood the reading, they wept.

Nehemiah and Ezra said to the people, "This day is holy to the LORD your God; do not mourn or weep...for the joy of the LORD is your strength" (8:9 and 10).

The reading and understanding of the law brought on revival and a special document was written up and signed by the leaders of the people, beginning with Nehemiah (Ch. 10).

He appointed duties for specific needs to be met among the leaders so they would not hinder God's work or rival among themselves (13:30 and 31).

V. Nehemiah did not compromise.

Nehemiah withstood the enemies of God and refused to compromise with friend or foe.

The written document in chapter ten recorded six promises the people made to God.

They would not intermarry with non-Jews (v. 30).

They would obey all the Sabbath laws (v. 31).

They would take care of the Temple (vv. 32, 34, and 39).

They would observe all the sacred festivals (v. 33).

They would dedicate to the Lord the firstborn of their sons and animals (v. 36).

And they would pay their tithes (vv. 35, 37, and 38).

Assigned to the document seal were the names of the priests, the Levites, the political leaders, the gatekeepers, the singers, the Temple servants, and others.

Despite the written document and the agreement of the people to abide by it, Nehemiah still had to issue several reforms as he encountered various problems (Ch. 13).

VI. Nehemiah distributed great advice.

When dealing with enemies, pray to God and set a watch.

When being mocked and made fun of (2:19; 4:3), Nehemiah overcame it with confidence in God (2:20); "The God of heaven will give us success; therefore we His servants will arise and build..."

Enemies filled with anger and hatred (4:1) were overcome by prayer and hard work (4:4-6).

Hearing conspiracies and conflicts (4:7-8) was overcome by prayer and watchfulness (4:9).

Discouragement from friends (4:10 and 12) was overpowered by faith and persistent courage (4:13-14).

Selfish greed (5:1-5) was confronted by rebuke and self-sacrifice (5:6-17).
Distractions and the want to compromise (6:1-14) were put down by stern refusal (6:3, 8, 11).

Nehemiah navigated some difficult situations with relative ease because of his character—who he was and how he was living.

Application:

Do our words and actions demonstrate that we care about God's people?

The Book of Nehemiah begins with prayer and closes with prayer.

No ministry can ever be separated from prayer.

Godly leaders must be prayer warriors.

A life lived by faith trusts God and follows what God puts in the heart of His servant to do.

Leaders utilize the talent they have while rallying others to lead.

Tolerance of evil leads to spiritual stagnation, which leads to indifference on doctrinal matters; the final result being moral and spiritual degeneration.

Nehemiah distributed great advice through the ways he managed his life, enemies of the Jews, temptations, discouragement, selfishness, and compromises that needed to be refused.

Conclusion:

You too can be a leader for God's people if you care about them, become a prayer warrior, live a life of faith, utilize your talents, refuse to compromise or distribute great advice.

Nehemiah was a leader of leaders because he possessed all of these qualities.

Do you have the courage to renew your commitment?

Lasting results from reform and revival require constant renewal and constant courage.

Every invitation of the Lord is an opportunity to reform and revive our hearts, souls, minds, and strengths by hearing and believing His Word, repenting of sin, and confessing Jesus as the Savior, then submitting to baptism through obedient faith.

May God bless you with the courage to commit to follow Him or renew your commitment.