

FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH, 3-4-12 PM NOTES
"NEHEMIAH"
#17 in Series, "The Glory of God in the Old Testament"

"Spiritual leadership is knowing where God wants people to be and taking the initiative to use God's methods to get them there in reliance on God's power."
—John Piper

"O Lord, make us intensely spiritual, but keep us perfectly natural and thoroughly practical."
—Samuel Chadwick

I. Repairing the Walls (Chapter 1-6)

A. Preparation for Rebuilding the Walls (Chapter 1-2)

1. The Problem (1:1-3)

2. The Burden (1:4-11)

3. The Strategy (2:1-16)

Proverbs 21:1 (NKJV) "The king's heart *is* in the hand of the Lord, *like* the rivers of water; He turns it wherever He wishes."

"It is possible to move men through God by prayer alone."

—Hudson Taylor

4. The Casting of the Vision (2:17-20)

B. Organization for Rebuilding the Walls (Chapter 3)

C. Opposition in Rebuilding the Walls (Chapter 4-6)

"Most [leaders] want to be liked and appreciated by their followers. When their motives are routinely questioned, or when their actions are misjudged, the joy drains out of their leadership position, and they are left questioning whether their calling is worth the pain. Whereas the most loyal friends can be sporadic in their affirmation, opponents can be like a dripping faucet, relentlessly communicating their displeasure."
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"Often the crowd does not recognize a leader until he has gone, and then they build a monument for him with the stones they threw at him in life."
—Oswald Sanders

1. Derision (4:1-6)
2. Discouragement (4:10)
3. Danger (4:11-14)
4. Discord (Chapter 5)
5. Deception (6:1-4)
6. Defamation (6:5-19)

II. Reviving the People (Chapter 7-13)

A. The Word Is Proclaimed (Chapter 8)

B. Sin Is Confessed (Chapter 9)

C. Sin Is Confronted (Chapter 13)

Nehemiah 13:25 (NIV) "I rebuked them and called curses down on them. I beat some of the men and pulled out their hair. I made them take an oath in God's name and said: 'You are not to give your daughters in marriage to their sons, nor are you to take their daughters in marriage for your sons or for yourselves.'"

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If I had to pick one word to describe the emphasis of the book of Nehemiah it would be “leadership”. In my opinion, Nehemiah is the greatest book on leadership ever written. We live in a day where there is a serious shortage of Godly leaders in every area – church, business world, media, government, and especially in the home. For a Christian, all leadership in every realm has a spiritual dimension. That is true for a president or officer in a company, a school teacher, a school administrator, a Pastor, a Sunday School teacher, a coach, a supervisor in a factory, a Mom with her children, and every husband and Father. Whatever the realm of your leadership, if you are a Christian, you are a Christian leader. You don’t take off your relationship with Christ as Lord and leave it in the car when you go to work. The people you are to lead are a stewardship from God and you must give an account to Him for how you have led. For those who are not in any special type of leadership position right now, listen carefully because you likely will be some day and even if not you need to understand what is involved in leadership so you know how to cooperate with and pray for Christian leaders. My favorite definition of spiritual leadership is from John Piper: **“Spiritual leadership is knowing where God wants people to be and taking the initiative to use God’s methods to get them there in reliance on God’s power” (John Piper)**. Leadership, spiritual leadership for a Christian in any realm is about applying Scriptural principles to your situation and relying on God’s wisdom and power to carry out Godly guidance. The greatest examples for leadership don’t come from the business world or the military world or the political world; they come from the Scriptures! Whatever realm of leadership you are in, you will learn more from Nehemiah, Moses, Elijah, Esther, Daniel, Sarah, Mary, Peter, John, Paul, and especially Jesus than you will ever learn from Donald Trump, Bill Gates, Steve Jobs, Nick Sabin, or General George Patton.

If you were writing a book today on the life of Nehemiah, here are some possible chapter titles you might come up with:

- * How to Gather Information and Form a Successful Plan
- * How to Organize Your People for the Accomplishment of a Task
- * Dealing with a Difficult Boss
- * Motivating those You Lead to Accomplish the Task
- * Dealing with Opposition
- * How to Succeed where Countless Others Have Failed
- * How to Win Without Intimidation

All of these topics and more are covered in the book of Nehemiah.

Let’s set the context of the book. Nehemiah went to Jerusalem from Babylon in about 445 BC. Ezra (who wrote the book of Nehemiah – Ezra and Nehemiah are one book in the Hebrew Bible) had been in Jerusalem about 13 years when Nehemiah got there. While the temple had been rebuilt in 515 BC, the walls around the city were still broken down. To rebuild the walls around the city was the primary reason Nehemiah came back to Jerusalem.

One of the things that we will see in Nehemiah’s life that made him a great leader was his balance. He had a tough hide balanced by a tender heart. He was balanced between trusting God and yet using great management and organizational skills. Samuel Chadwick, a great Bible teacher of several generations ago made a request in prayer that would perfectly describe Nehemiah. He prayed, “O Lord, make us intensely spiritual, but keep us perfectly natural and thoroughly practical”. That was Nehemiah!

The book of Nehemiah can be divided into two sections: The repair of the walls around Jerusalem and reviving the people. We will spend the majority of our time in the first section.

I. Repairing the Walls (Chapter 1-6)

Who was Nehemiah? He tells us in 1:11 that he was the King's cupbearer. That may sound like a menial servant's position, but it was much more than that. We have historical evidence that in the Persian Empire the cupbearer tasted the king's food to make sure it had not been poisoned, but he was someone that the King completely trusted. There was such a close relationship between the cupbearer and the King that it was said that next to the Queen, the cupbearer was the closest person to the King. It was a position that carried with it much prestige and many benefits much like our President's Chief of Staff.

A. Preparation for Rebuilding the Walls (Chapter 1-2)

1. The Problem (1:1-3)

Nehemiah was just doing his job when he is hit with a problem and given a deep burden from God to deal with the problem. Leaders deal with problems. That is a fact of life. The problem that is relayed to him by his brother is that the walls of Jerusalem had not been rebuilt. Why is that such a big deal? Walls in that culture had a literal purpose and a symbolic purpose. The literal purpose is that a wall kept unwanted people out of the city. Jerusalem (as we will see throughout this study) was surrounded by enemies. Marauding bands could sweep down on the city at any time and steal crops, wealth, and harm the people without a wall. There was no security apart from a wall. The people were in distress without this necessity. There had been numerous attempts to build a wall before, but all of them failed. Someone needed to do something. There was a desperate need for a leader. There was also a symbolic significance to a wall around a city. A wall was a sign of status and honor. The bigger the wall, the more important was the city. The people of Jerusalem were beaten down and demoralized. They had no security (that brought them distress) and they had no significance (that brought them dishonor). I want to make application to today. Like a literal wall around a city, God's truth revealed in His word when applied to our lives is what brings security and significance to a community and to a nation. We find ourselves today in a culture where the walls have been torn down. God's truth has been abandoned and even ridiculed. We desperately need spiritual leaders in business, the government, the schools, the homes, and in the churches to restore the wall of God's revealed, clear, absolute, inerrant truth.

2. The Burden (1:4-11)

What Nehemiah was experiencing was a burden from God. It was a supernatural thing. Nehemiah obviously was open to God, but God placed a burden on him for the area of leadership where God called him. Jeremiah experienced that burden that gave him a passion to see repentance in Judah. Even though he became incredibly discouraged, nothing could stop him. Paul had that burden that gave him a passion to get the gospel to the gentiles whatever the cost. Some might describe this burden as a "call from God". Either is accurate. God places a call or a burden on the lives of His leaders to passionately go into an area at often great cost to themselves to be God's man, God's woman to deal with the problems and see God's solution. Your burden (call) may be to vocational service in the church as a Pastor, missionary, or another position; it may be to impact young lives as a teacher; it may be to live out Biblical principles in the business world; it may be to coach; it may be to minister to people's physical needs in the medical profession; it may be to raise up children who love the Lord with all their heart and their neighbor as themselves and you are willing to forego a career and many nice material things because you are passionate about what God has called you to and burdened your heart for; it may just be a burden or calling to pray for the nation, the church, and the lost. The reason we see so little passion from God's people in a world of torn down walls is because His people are so filled with self-centered pursuits that they are not open to a call, a burden from God. When Nehemiah heard of the situation in Jerusalem, he was burdened by God and a passionate fire burned in his heart to do something about it. The fact that Jerusalem was more than 700 miles away didn't stop him. The fact that the king would have to "sign off on it" didn't dampen his passion. He had a confidence that God was sovereign and he began to fast and pray and mourn and weep for his people and the city of God. A burden (a call) goes way beyond just feeling bad about some need or problem. It goes down deep and grips us and drives us to our knees and causes us to weep and mourn before God. Is there anything that you are passionate about? Is there anything that God has so burdened you with that a passion for it burns in you and you mourn and weep and fast and pray? If not, are you open to it?

3. The Strategy (2:1-16)

A burden or calling must be translated into a workable plan. Nehemiah knew that in order for the vision to be accomplished, the king's mind had to be changed and Nehemiah knew that only God could change it. Nehemiah knew that God is sovereign and all powerful and he knew the truth of **Proverbs 21:1 (NKJV)** "The king's heart *is* in the hand of the Lord, *like* the rivers of water; He turns it wherever He wishes." Hudson Taylor, the pioneer missionary to inland China said, "***It is possible to move men through God by prayer alone***" (*Hudson Taylor*). When we compare 1:1 with 2:1 we find that Nehemiah had been diligently praying and waiting patiently on God to work for 4 months. Faith and patience go together. While Nehemiah was waiting for those 4 months, he was developing a plan. The moment finally came in God's timing to lay out the vision before the king [Read 3-4]. The Lord had made his heart open. Nehemiah, who lived in an atmosphere of prayer, breathes a prayer no doubt asking God to guide his words. This, by the way, is what 1 Thessalonians 5:17 means when it tells us to "pray without ceasing".

Notice what Nehemiah had planned through and presented to the king: 1) The King's **Permission** [V5], 2) The King's **Protection** [V7, 9], 3) The King's **Provision** [V8]. God had prepared the king's heart, and he gave Nehemiah all that he asked for and even more. Verse 9 says that the King also sent an armed escort with him and later we find out that the King named him as the governor and Nehemiah didn't even ask for either of those!

4. The Casting of the Vision (2:17-20)

After assessing the situation in Verses 11-16, Nehemiah meets with the people he has been called to lead to lay out the vision of what God has called him to do. Nehemiah motivated them with the power of God and the glory of God. In verse 17 he motivates them to build the wall, "that we may no longer be a reproach". That word "reproach" can be translated "disgrace". He was motivating them by the possibility of glorifying God instead of being a reproach upon Him. In verse 18, he turns their gaze upon the power of God and that made the task look more "do-able". As you read through this great book, you find Nehemiah again and again pulling their attention away from the immensity of the task to the power of God and from the hardship and danger they were experiencing to the glory of God. When opposition arises in verse 19, Nehemiah comes right back to the power of God and the glory of God in verse 20.

B. Organization for Rebuilding the Walls (Chapter 3)

A good leader motivates those he or she is leading to take responsibility for what is delegated to them. Each person had a clearly defined area of responsibility. Nehemiah showed great leadership in assigning sections of the wall that was closest to where the people lived. That gave them extra motivation. This wall was going to protect their family!

C. Opposition in Rebuilding the Walls (Chapter 4-6)

The opposition was constant and took various forms. Someone said, "The doors of opportunity swing on the hinges of opposition." Henry Blackaby in his book "Spiritual Leadership" (page 248) says, "Most [leaders] want to be liked and appreciated by their followers. When their motives are routinely questioned, or when their actions are misjudged, the joy drains out of their leadership position, and they are left questioning whether their calling is worth the pain. Whereas the most loyal friends can be sporadic in their affirmation, opponents can be like a dripping faucet, relentlessly communicating their displeasure." AMEN!!! Oswald Sanders said, "Often the crowd does not recognize a leader until he has gone, and then they build a monument for him with the stones they threw at him in life" [Quoted in Henry Blackaby, "Spiritual Leadership" p248]. Notice all the different forms that Nehemiah's leadership had to deal with.

1. Derision (4:1-6)

It is interesting that Derision or ridicule was the enemy's first attack. The fear of derision or ridicule is a powerful deterrent to courageous leadership. The goal of ridicule is to make the task look impossible and those attempting a great work to look ignorant. No one wants to waste their time or money on something impossible and no one wants to appear ignorant. Derision demoralizes people and so you would expect that the enemy would use it generously since it targets the lost person's fallen nature and the believer's flesh. They ridiculed based on the impossibility of the task. Do not be shocked or intimidated by ridicule,

derision, mockery, or intimidation attempts. In fact, if you don't experience some ridicule in your area of leadership, perhaps the enemy doesn't think that you're making a big enough difference to bother with.

2. Discouragement (4:10)

For me, opposition from the outside, while not pleasant, doesn't really bother me too badly. I can take the angry phone calls and emails from those outside the church and bring them before the Lord and pray for the angry, ridiculing person. The opposition I struggle with as a leader is opposition from within. I struggle with the negative, hopeless comments of those who are identified with us. Satan's main tool that he uses both with the leader and with those under your leadership is discouragement. Discouraged people become negative, complaining, and stubborn. Here is why they were discouraged. They got their eyes off the goal and focused on the rubbish, the obstacles. There will be times when you and those you lead will become discouraged. That is why leaders must keep bringing those under their leadership back to the vision of what God has called you to.

3. Danger (4:11-14)

When the enemy can't stop with derision or discouragement, he will often times threaten with physical danger. Nehemiah prays and posts a guard. There is no contradiction there. Nehemiah in verse 14 turns the focus of the people from themselves and their circumstances to our great and awesome God.

4. Discord (Chapter 5)

What Nehemiah faces in chapter 5 is probably the most dangerous of all the threats he has faced as a leader [Read 5:1]. The Jews were preying on one another. No wall building is recorded in this chapter! Because of famine, the poorer people had to borrow from the wealthier people for food and to pay taxes. Some of the poor had to sell themselves and their children as indentured servants to pay off their debt. Nehemiah viewed this as a spiritual problem more than a financial problem [Read 5:6-12a]. What an example of quick decisive leadership to stop what could have destroyed the completion of the vision.

5. Deception (6:1-4)

If Satan doesn't succeed as a roaring lion, he comes as an angel of light [Read 6:1-2]. Nehemiah saw through their deception and answered in 6:3 [Read].

6. Defamation (6:5-19)

The devil is called the slanderer. He begins to stir up the enemies of God's people to slander Nehemiah. His response is in 6:8-9 [Read]. Nothing could stop this man. That is why he is my hero.

[Read verse 15]. Even with all the opposition from within and without, the wall was finished in 52 days. It was an amazing feat of engineering, administration, and management, but the real reason it succeeded was Nehemiah's God empowered leadership.

II. Reviving the People (Chapter 7-13)

A. The Word Is Proclaimed (Chapter 8)

When those of us over 50 think of Watergate, we think of the scandal that caused President Nixon to resign. Some 2400 years earlier there was another water gate – a literal gate in Jerusalem where a great revival took place [Read 8:1-3; 5-6]. Verse seven indicates that a group of the Levites and some other men went among the people and in small groups helped them to understand the word. That is the principle our Sunday School is based on. Then in verse 8 we learn how the word is taught effectively. [Read Nehemiah 8:8].

* They read distinctly – That means to separate or pick a text. In other words they broke it down into bite sized chunks that were manageable.

* They gave the sense – They provided insight and understanding. The NIV says, "making it clear and giving the meaning". Here is where word studies, context, customs, and illustrations come in.

* Helped them to understand – The truth of God's word was put in language they could understand and there was application to their life.

That is a description of expository preaching! If that became the method from the pulpits of America, the church would see a great revival.

B. Sin Is Confessed (Chapter 9)

As did Ezra in Ezra 9, the Levites begin to pray and confess the sins of the people as they recount the history of Israel. This long prayer concludes with a covenant the people make with God.

C. Sin Is Confronted (Chapter 13)

It seems that the people had slipped back into the marrying of non-believers just as Ezra had encountered some 13-14 years earlier. There was also a disregarding of the Sabbath laws. Nehemiah dealt with them perhaps a little more harshly than Ezra had 14 years earlier. **Nehemiah 13:25 (NIV)** “I rebuked them and called curses down on them. I beat some of the men and pulled out their hair. I made them take an oath in God's name and said: ‘You are not to give your daughters in marriage to their sons, nor are you to take their daughters in marriage for your sons or for yourselves.’”

CONCLUSION

Oh what an example of leadership we have in Nehemiah. Study this book on your own and keep notes that relate to how godly leaders lead. Then, apply these principles in the area of leadership that God has called you into. (3228)