

LESSON 3 – NEHEMIAH: A GODLY LEADER

APRIL 19, 2020

Background Scripture: Nehemiah 1-4, 12

Lesson Passage: Nehemiah 1:1-11; 2:1-6, 17,18; 3; 4:1-4, 8, 9, 21-23; 12:27-30 (NIV)

Introduction: It is no surprise that when we look at many of our national and local elections, we often find ourselves not voting for a person we want but voting for the lesser of evils. The world is in a leadership crisis, and the answer is not more training or more education. The answer is God. God is the ultimate leader and the reproducer of leaders. In fact, Scripture declares that there is no authority but that which comes from God (Romans 13:1). Leadership comes from the Lord and godly leadership is a gift from Him.

And, possibly one of the greatest books in the Bible that we can learn about leadership from is the book of Nehemiah. When somebody wants to learn about worship, they go to the Psalms. When somebody wants to learn about wisdom, they go to Proverbs. But where should a person go to learn about leadership? Many would say that we should go to the book of Nehemiah. Nehemiah, the cupbearer to the king of Persia, persuaded the king to support the rebuilding of the city of Jerusalem (Nehemiah 2:5) and motivated Israel to rebuild ruins that had been abandoned for more than 140 years. He led the rebuilding project while under the constant threat of attack by Israel's antagonistic neighbors. He completed the rebuilding of the walls around Jerusalem within only fifty-two days. If this were not enough, Nehemiah demonstrated great humility and wisdom as he enabled Ezra and the Levites to help bring spiritual revival to the nation of Israel. The book of Nehemiah is a tremendous narrative on godly leadership. May God use us to be the answer to this leadership crisis in our communities and ultimately in our world today.

We have learned much about leadership by studying the lives of Bible characters. Previously in our series we have learned from Noah, Abraham, Moses, Joshua, Deborah, David, Joseph, Abigail, Daniel, Peter, Paul, Jesus, and Lydia. Today, we'll look at our last leadership lesson from Nehemiah.

Scripture Reference: Nehemiah 1:1-11 NIV

1 The words of Nehemiah son of Hakaliah: In the month of Kislev in the twentieth year, while I was in the citadel of Susa, 2 Hanani, one of my brothers, came from Judah with some other men, and I questioned them about the Jewish remnant that had survived the exile, and also about Jerusalem. 3 They said to me, "Those who survived the exile and are back in the province are in great trouble and disgrace. The wall of Jerusalem is broken down, and its gates have been burned with fire." 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. 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, 6 let your ear be attentive and your eyes open to hear the prayer your servant is praying before you day and night for your servants, the people of Israel. I confess the sins we Israelites, including myself and my father's family, have committed against you. 7 We have acted very wickedly toward you. We have not obeyed the commands, decrees and laws you gave your servant Moses.

8 “Remember the instruction you gave your servant Moses, saying, ‘If you are unfaithful, I will scatter you among the nations, 9 but if you return to me and obey my commands, then even if your exiled people are at the farthest horizon, I will gather them from there and bring them to the place I have chosen as a dwelling for my Name.’ 10 “They are your servants and your people, whom you redeemed by your great strength and your mighty hand. 11 Lord, let your ear be attentive to the prayer of this your servant and to the prayer of your servants who delight in revering your name. Give your servant success today by granting him favor in the presence of this man.”

Scripture Reference: Nehemiah 2:1-6, 17,18 (NIV)

1 In the month of Nisan in the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes, when wine was brought for him, I took the wine and gave it to the king. I had not been sad in his presence before, 2 so the king asked me, “Why does your face look so sad when you are not ill? This can be nothing but sadness of heart.” I was very much afraid, 3 but I said to the king, “May the king live forever! Why should my face not look sad when the city where my ancestors are buried lies in ruins, and its gates have been destroyed by fire?” 4 The king said to me, “What is it you want?” Then I prayed to the God of heaven, 5 and I answered the king, “If it pleases the king and if your servant has found favor in his sight, let him send me to the city in Judah where my ancestors are buried so that I can rebuild it.” 6 Then the king, with the queen sitting beside him, asked me, “How long will your journey take, and when will you get back?” It pleased the king to send me; so I set a time. 17 Then I said to them, “You see the trouble we are in: Jerusalem lies in ruins, and its gates have been burned with fire. Come, let us rebuild the wall of Jerusalem, and we will no longer be in disgrace.” 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.

Scripture Reference: Nehemiah 3 (Due to limited space, Nehemiah 3 is not printed. Please read entire chapter to get complete *history*).

Scripture Reference: Nehemiah 4:1-4, 8, 9, 21-23 (NIV)

1 When Sanballat heard that we were rebuilding the wall, he became angry and was greatly incensed. He ridiculed the Jews, 2 and in the presence of his associates and the army of Samaria, he said, “What are those feeble Jews doing? Will they restore their wall? Will they offer sacrifices? Will they finish in a day? Can they bring the stones back to life from those heaps of rubble—burned as they are?” 3 Tobiah the Ammonite, who was at his side, said, “What they are building—even a fox climbing up on it would break down their wall of stones!” 4 Hear us, our God, for we are despised. Turn their insults back on their own heads. Give them over as plunder in a land of captivity. 8 They all plotted together to come and fight against Jerusalem and stir up trouble against it. 9 But we prayed to our God and posted a guard day and night to meet this threat. 21 So we continued the work with half the men holding spears, from the first light of dawn till the stars came out. 22 At that time I also said to the people, “Have every man and his helper stay inside Jerusalem at night, so they can serve us as guards by night and as workers by day.” 23 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.

Scripture Reference: Nehemiah 12:27-30 (NIV)

27 At the dedication of the wall of Jerusalem, the Levites were sought out from where they lived and were brought to Jerusalem to celebrate joyfully the dedication with songs of thanksgiving and with the music of cymbals, harps and lyres. 28 The musicians also were brought together from the region around Jerusalem—from the villages of the Netophathites, 29 from Beth Gilgal, and from the area of Geba and

Azmaveth, for the musicians had built villages for themselves around Jerusalem. 30 When the priests and Levites had purified themselves ceremonially, they purified the people, the gates and the wall.

Memory Verse: *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 (Nehemiah 2:18) NIV*

Topic Explored: *"Nehemiah: A Godly Leader"* ~ Nehemiah was a man of prayer. Throughout this story, beginning in chapter 1, when he heard that the wall of Jerusalem had been broken down, and its gates had been destroyed by fire, we see that Nehemiah was a man of prayer. We read about him weeping, mourning, fasting and praying to the God of heaven for many days. Christian leaders need to be people of prayer. Nehemiah had a vision to rebuild the wall of Jerusalem. He asked God to bring him success in the carrying out of this vision and in gaining the support of the king. We read throughout his story that he believed that the work would be accomplished because of God. And when the wall was completed, we read that their enemies and all the nations around them were afraid for they perceived that the work had been accomplished with the help of God. As Nehemiah did, Christian leaders need to depend on God for vision and the ability to carry it out.

Lesson Focus: Nehemiah 1:1-11

Verses 1-11 ~ Effective leadership begins with an internal concern, passion to move forward. Nehemiah was so emotionally moved by the report about the condition of his city and his people that he mourned, fasted, and prayed for 4 months. After hearing that the wall of Jerusalem had been broken down, and its gates had been destroyed by fire, we find him weeping, mourning, fasting and praying to the God of heaven for many days. He confessed the sin of his people and himself and asked God to bring him success in rebuilding the wall.

Lesson Focus: Nehemiah 2:1-6, 17

Verses 1-6, 17 ~ In Nehemiah 2, Nehemiah asks the king to be sent to Judah to rebuild the wall. The king seeing the sadness of Nehemiah's heart, granted him what he asked, with Nehemiah indicating that the good hand of his God was upon him. In Nehemiah 2:18, Nehemiah tells the people – the Jews, the priests, the nobles, the officials, and the rest who were to do the work – of the hand of God that had been upon him for good, and the words that the king had spoken to him.

Nehemiah stated the problem: "We are in trouble and a disgrace. The city is in ruins." The solution: "Come, let us build the wall of Jerusalem". Nehemiah stated his vision simply. All good visions should be simple enough to communicate to the people. They replied, "Let us rise up and build". Here, Nehemiah is casting a powerful and compelling vision for the people. He can influence and motivate them by recalling his answer to prayer and the support of the king. Nehemiah would soon run into opposition. He and his workers were jeered and despised by the people, who asked Nehemiah if he was rebelling against the king. But Nehemiah confidently replied to them in Nehemiah 2:20 "The God of heaven will make us prosper, and we His servants will arise and build, but you have no portion or right or claim in Jerusalem."

Nehemiah 3: ~ If you read Chapter 3 in its entirety you will notice one name missing, Nehemiah's! Chapter 3 is when we really find out Nehemiah is a leader. Chapter 3 tells us about the repair work that was done under Nehemiah's leadership.

Lesson Focus: Nehemiah 4:1-4, 8, 9, 21-23

Verses 1-4, 8, 9, 21-23 ~ we find Nehemiah continuing to deal with opposition that began in chapter two. In verses 7-8 we read that when Sanballat, Tobiah, the Arabs, the Ammonites, and the Ashdodites heard that the repairing of the walls of Jerusalem was going forward and that the breaches were beginning to be closed, they were very angry. They all plotted together to come and fight against Jerusalem and to cause confusion in it. What was Nehemiah's response? In verse 9 we read that they prayed to God and set a guard as a protection against them day and night. He dealt with this problem with a combination of both spiritual (prayer) and the human (guard) solutions.

Lesson Focus: Nehemiah 12:27-30

Verses 27-30 ~ After much continued opposition from Sanballat, Tobiah and Geshem the Arab, major conflicts from his own leaders, the nobles and officials, and the rest of their enemies, finally, we read about the dedication of the wall of Jerusalem, a celebration of gladness and thanksgiving for what God had done. They rejoiced with great joy, and we are told in verse 43 that the joy of Jerusalem was heard far away. We can see that Nehemiah was an excellent and godly leader who continually prayed to God for help and direction.

Let's talk about it. . .

What are some lessons we can learn from Nehemiah's leadership? (*Possible Answers:*

- ***He motivated the people.*** *Nehemiah told the people that were to do the work of the hand of God that had was upon him for good and the words that the king had spoken to him. They responded, "Let us rise up and build".*
- ***He demonstrated leadership courage.*** *Nehemiah dealt with problems among his own leaders (Chapter 5). He was angry, and in confronting them told them that what they were doing was not right. Too often, leaders want to be liked by their team more than leading them. But you can't have it both ways. Either everyone likes you, or you lead them. Nehemiah demonstrated leadership courage in confronting his leaders.*
- ***He effectively dealt with opposition.*** *Nehemiah effectively dealt with these roadblocks to achieve the success with which he had asked God's help. He steadfastly trusted God for success in the rebuilding of the wall, and this led him to be able to resist the opposition he faced from his enemies.*
- ***He delivered results.*** *Despite all the obstacles that he had to deal with – from both his enemies and his own people – Nehemiah achieved incredible results, completing the work in only 52 days.*
- ***He celebrated achievement.*** *Celebrating successes is too rarely done by leaders. Once a goal is achieved, leaders often just go on to the next objective. Leaders should stop and thank our teams for their hard work. Just a simple pizza lunch with some of the leaders thanking the team for their efforts would let them know that they are appreciated. Nehemiah is an excellent example for us as a leader.)*

Making it personal:

- We are always on a journey with God. We rest for a brief time, but we do not stop. We keep seeking the new land that God is calling us to reach. God always has something else for us to do. We cannot become what God wants us to be by remaining what we are.
- At the core of Nehemiah's planning was prayer. Too often, leaders will dive into a project without seeking God, and rely solely on the plans they've made. The other extreme is to ignore your planning altogether because you figure that God will "make it all come together." Both extremes are the opposite of good leadership. Trust God, but also use the resources God has given you.

- Nehemiah led the entire project with a servant's heart. While the phrase may seem cliché today, Nehemiah was literally a servant leader. As part of the king's court, he was essentially the chief servant in charge of serving drinks to the king's table. As the new governor of Judea, Nehemiah took the challenge and lead as a servant.

Closing Prayer: *“Dear Lord, help us not to say yes when no is the right answer. Help us balance our time to be most effective and to accomplish Your will more than the will of others. Never allow our plan to get ahead of – or in the place of – Your plan; because Your way is best, and we will always be most successful when we wait for You. Never let us get so proud or arrogant that we forget we are nothing apart from Your hand upon our life. In Jesus' Name we pray. Amen!”*