

The Leadership of Nehemiah

This nine-week study is a humble attempt to examine a vast and seemingly complex subject: leadership in the kingdom of God. The study walks through the Old Testament book Nehemiah from a topical approach. Feel free to add or subtract questions that will better help you and your study group to grow in leadership.

For an additional look at leadership in God's kingdom, I recommend the book, "Spiritual Leadership," by Oswald Sanders. I found it to be very helpful and comprehensive. The book also includes study questions.

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The Leadership of Nehemiah—Lesson 1

Defining or describing an effective leader, especially a leader in the kingdom of God, is not an easy task. Effective leadership has many variables and styles. Some would say that leaders are born as leaders, while others say they are made. But the most important point is, what does God have to say about leadership.

It seems that few of us are “gifted” or “natural” leaders. Most of us in our hearts want to lead but find many weaknesses, struggles, or pressures that push us away from leading. But even a gifted leader needs much more than natural ability to lead the people of God. He must be a spiritual leader. Nehemiah was that man—an ordinary man with an extraordinarily spiritual ability to lead others. His heart, character, example, motivational skills, humility, love for righteousness, hatred for wickedness, courage, prayer, hard work and other qualities are all part of his stand-out ability to lead very effectively. He is a Biblical model of godly leadership that we can imitate in the home, at work and in the church.

1. Define a leader: what qualities, skills, character, actions, etc? Make a list. What differences and similarities are there between God’s desire for leaders and the world’s desire?
We will use this list in future discussions to compare to Nehemiah.
2. We will let Nehemiah become the definition, of sorts, for biblical leadership. Let’s start by reading 1:1-11, 5:1-6, and 13:6-11. We all have annoyances and pet peeves, things that bother us. But honestly, often these things are of the flesh. What “bothered” Nehemiah? What was his immediate response to what bothered him? Why is this an important quality of a leader? What kinds of things bother you, or should bother you?

The Leadership of Nehemiah—Lesson 2

A leader has to know where he is going, because by simple definition of the word “leader,” he is leading someone somewhere. Now there may be times we are moving and leading even if we don’t quite know where we will end up. But overall, the Lord would want his leaders to have general and even specific direction for their own lives and for the lives of their followers.

Nehemiah determined where he should go, and he led the people in that direction.

1. In 2:12, God had put something on Nehemiah’s heart. What does this mean? What is significant about this for a leader? How do you know if God has put something on your heart, or whether it is simply man’s idea?

Discuss seemingly contrasting thoughts: Psalm 25:4-5,8-9 indicate that the Lord will teach us his ways and paths. This could include very specific, tangible direction for those whom you are leading. Then read Nehemiah 5:7 and Deuteronomy 1:23 where Nehemiah and Moses seem to make decisions based on, “It seemed good to me.” Is there a conflict between these two “camps”?

Discuss scriptural commands and examples of how the leader should make decisions and lead people in the will of God.

2. In vs. 2:11-18, what was important about Nehemiah’s ride around Jerusalem before he talked to the Jews in the city? How can you do similarly in your leadership responsibilities?

The Leadership of Nehemiah—Lesson 3

Leadership take personal courage and initiative, as well as an ability to help followers have courage and not fear. Nehemiah gives us a picture of this.

1. In Nehemiah 4, the Jews faced great danger. How did Nehemiah's words and actions affect his fellow Jews? Describe a situation when someone you know had a response like Nehemiah. How did this affect you? What situations have you faced or will you face that you can follow this example?
2. In 4:6 the people worked with all their hearts. In this chapter, how did he inspire them? How can you do that with your family/church? What qualities are important for the leader to truly inspire others to have courage? How can you inspire without them feeling "burnt out" or burdened?

The Leadership of Nehemiah—Lesson 4

Nehemiah was a man who feared God and therefore had high standards of conduct and character. And he was quite bold in calling the people to that standard. Through his example, he offers us much to learn.

1. Read Nehemiah 5:1-13 and 13:1-29. Nehemiah challenged the people to a high standard of conduct. Discuss how he approached the situation. What can we learn? What qualities and heart must God's leader have to appropriately call believers to holiness?
2. In calling believers to holiness, what is the Holy Spirit's role in causing life-change, and how will the Lord use the leader towards that life-change?
3. In Neh. 5:6 and 13:8 Nehemiah was angry and displeased with the Jews. Why? Is it ever appropriate for us as Christian leaders to be angry or displeased with believers or unbelievers? Were Jesus or Paul ever angry or displeased? Do Nehemiah's responses conflict with God's commands to us in the New Testament to be patient, bearing with others, etc. (e.g., 1 Thess 5:14, Col 3:12-14)?

The Leadership of Nehemiah—Lesson 5

Throughout Scriptures, the examples of leaders, either good or bad, had a profound effect on those they led. One quality necessary for a pastor and leader is to be a good example.

1 Peter 5:3 ...not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock.

Philippians 3:17 Join with others in following my example, brothers, and take note of those who live according to the pattern we gave you.

Nehemiah was clearly an example to the Jews as evidenced throughout the book of Nehemiah.

1. In Nehemiah 5:14-19 and in other passages we have previously discussed, in what ways was he an example?
2. Does the call to be an example motivate you or pressure you? How can you lead effectively (and how can others follow) even though you are not fully complete in character?
3. What biblical and modern-day believers have been an example to you? How have they affected you? What areas would you like to continue in and/or strengthen to be a more godly example?

The Leadership of Nehemiah—Lesson 6

While the world's standards for leaders' character is lower than God's standards, even unbelievers today see a lack of character in their leaders: politicians lying and taking bribes; corporate executives greedily stealing money from the public; and athletes and coaches pushing the edge with performance enhancing drugs. And saddest of all, we often hear even of leaders in the church of God who have poor character.

Nehemiah, however, sets the pace for us and shows us that God's leaders can and should live godly lives. Godly character is essential for the leader of God's people as shown in both Old and New Testaments, including the foundational attributes of an elder in the church (1 Timothy 3, Titus 1).

1. Read Neh 5:9-19. What are a few ways that Nehemiah demonstrates godly character?
2. In Neh 7:2, Nehemiah shows how much he values character. How does godly character affect leadership abilities? Why is example in leadership important? How much does it affect the people's ability or willingness to follow?
3. Read 1 Timothy 3:1-13. What are some qualities of elders and deacons that stand out to you the most? Why? What is one area God has changed in you since getting saved? What is one area the Lord may desire you to work on next?

The Leadership of Nehemiah—Lesson 7

Biblical leadership is not about being tough guys and trying to accomplish tasks in our own strength. Rather, it is about dependence upon God and a brokenness towards him, with a childlike confidence in him. Prayer is an essential part of living that life of dependence.

Read Nehemiah 1:3-4, 2:4-5, 4:1-9, and 6:9.

1. How was prayer a part of his life? In what situations did he pray? What were the results?
2. When we pray in faith, we are not merely talking to the walls but to God Almighty. What actually happens when we pray: in heaven, on earth, and in our own hearts?
3. What prompts a leader to pray? To not pray?
4. Our convictions are generally shown by our actions. How are we as a church/ministry living out our conviction like Nehemiah? How are you personally living it out in your household and ministry?

“Prayer is a turning-point in a man’s soul...When there is much private communion with God, your soul will grow like the grass after rain; when there is little, all will be at a standstill, you will barely keep your soul alive.”

J.C. Ryle

The Leadership of Nehemiah—Lesson 8

Leaders will face ridicule and criticism from both “inside” and “outside.” If we know how to handle it with wisdom and courage, we will succeed well in our leadership. But if we miss wisdom and courage, the impact of our leadership will swing towards failure. Nehemiah was a godly man who dealt with criticism successfully, so he provides an example for us to follow.

Read Nehemiah 2:17-20, 4:1-15, and 6:1-9.

1. How did Nehemiah face criticism? How did he respond?
2. What kind of criticism will you face or have you faced? What kind of criticism bothers you the most? Does this potential ridicule and criticism inhibit you from leading?
3. How do we discern if criticism we face is valid and true, or if it contains elements of both truth and error?
4. How can you find strength to face criticism or pressure?

The Leadership of Nehemiah—Lesson 9

The story of Nehemiah offers us one of the clearer expressions in the Bible of godly leadership in action. True leaders are not merely someone randomly hired off the streets or given a title. A spiritual leader is someone who leads in an effective, godly way so that people will follow.

1. In the Lesson 1, we brainstormed a list of qualities we think a leader should have. From that list of “qualities of a leader,” how does Nehemiah stack up against it? How do you? Are there any additions or subtractions you have to this list?

2. How did Nehemiah lead in the will of God in a way that others followed? What qualities in a man prompt you to follow?

3. What are two or three qualities do you want to grow in to be a more effective spiritual leader?
 - A.

 - B.

 - C.

Work with others to develop an action plan for this growth.

- A. How will prayer be a part of my progress?

- B. What brother(s) will I team with?

- C. What are one or two key habits or activities I should change?

Miscellaneous Notes

Nehemiah exhibited many characteristics necessary for effective leadership. Donald K. Campbell lists 21 such factors (*Nehemiah: Man in Charge*, p. 23):

1. He established a reasonable and attainable goal.
2. He had a sense of mission.
3. He was willing to get involved.
4. He rearranged his priorities in order to accomplish his goal.
5. He patiently waited for God's timing.
6. He showed respect to his superior.
7. He prayed at crucial times.
8. He made his request with tact and graciousness.
9. He was well prepared and thought of his needs in advance.
10. He went through proper channels.
11. He took time (three days) to rest, pray, and plan.
12. He investigated the situation firsthand.
13. He informed others only after he knew the size of the problem.
14. He identified himself as one with the people.
15. He set before them a reasonable and attainable goal.
16. He assured them God was in the project.
17. He displayed self-confidence in facing obstacles.
18. He displayed God's confidence in facing obstacles.
19. He did not argue with opponents.
20. He was not discouraged by opposition.
21. He courageously used the authority of his position.

(taken from *Bible Knowledge Commentary*)