

# Nehemiah - the Leader's Personal Life

## Neh. 2:9-20

**INTRODUCTION:** Since we are in a series on Leadership. I thought I would take this opportunity to share with you my favorite leadership parable of all time. It's about a Canadian Goose. This one goose in particular had decided that flying south was just too much trouble... so he figured he would skip it this year. However as November set in, the Goose had never felt so bad. He thought to himself, "I need to get out of here!". So he began to fly... it was raining that day. Rain began to accumulate on his wings, formed to ice... until he could no longer move them. He realizes he's about to die. He glides down and makes his landing in a Canadian barn yard.

A cow comes by. Steps over the bird and drops a plop right on the bird. The bird is so discussed and he says, *"I'm freezing to death I'm on my last leg and the last thing that happens to me is this cow drops a plop right on top of me"*.

About 2 minutes later he said, "You know, It's warm in here". All of a sudden he realizes he's going to live! The ice melts off his wings! He's so happy he begins to sing underneath this stuff.

As he singing the barnyard cats comes by and hears him, moves the plop and eats the bird.

**There are three morals to this story.**

- Not everybody that drops a plop on you is your enemy
- Not everybody that takes that stuff off of you is your friend
- If somebody drops a plop on you keep you mouth shut

**INTRODUCTION:** What Proverbs is for Wisdom, what the Song of Solomon is for Intimacy in Marriage, what Psalms is for Worship the book of Nehemiah is for Leadership. Nehemiah is beyond a Harvard Level treatise on the essential ingredients of great leadership.

I believe John Maxwell was right - Every does rise and fall on Leadership.

- **When a family has great leadership** - you can see it in every member of that family, there is a confidence, a peace, a purity in that family that is unique.
- **When a company has great leadership** - there is prosperity, a security, the employees gain far more than income... they grow personally.
- **When a church has great leadership** - The Word is clearly taught, disciples are made and the work is reproduced.

At the same time we've all seen families where there is poor leadership - everyone member suffers. We've all worked in companies where there is poor leadership - there is a lack of stability and a pervasive fear. We've all seen churches where there is poor leadership - the church becomes self-centered, and loses its vision for reaching the world.

Every person under the sound of my voice should take it as a personal challenge to grow as a leader - and there is NO BETTER PLACE TO START than the book of Nehemiah.

If you can embody the principles of Nehemiah - it will affect your relationship with your spouse, your impact on your kids, your enjoyment of your career - it will change everything.

**CONTEXT:** We began this study a couple of weeks ago looking with Nehemiah in Suza a Citadel of Persia serving as Cup Bearer to King Artaxerxes, when he received a visit from his brother who had recently visited Jerusalem. Nehemiah was expecting a good report. It seemed that God was doing what he had promised in Deuteronomy where he said that if the people worshipped false gods they would be scattered among the nations... but if they repent... he would take them from the uttermost parts of the earth and raise up Israel again as a great nation.

It looked like it was happening... Ezra and Zerubbabel had rebuilt the temple, surely the next report would be positive, but it wasn't positive at all - just the opposite. Nehemiah's brother reported that the walls were torn down, the gates were burned and the people who were there were in great shame and derision.

Last week we saw that Nehemiah had his Popeye Moment, "He had all he could stand and he couldn't stand no more". He spent 4 months in prayer, then boldly asked the King not only to allow him to return, but to pay the bill. Miraculously, God gave him favor with the King and he agreed to Nehemiah's request. That's where we pick up in Nehemiah 2:9.

**TEXT: Nehemiah 2:9–20 (ESV)**

<sup>9</sup> Then I came to the governors of the province Beyond the River and gave them the king's letters. Now the king had sent with me officers of the army and horsemen. <sup>10</sup> But when Sanballat the Horonite and Tobiah the Ammonite servant heard this, it displeased them greatly that someone had come to seek the welfare of the people of Israel.

Parenthetically, in 1907 the Elephantine papyrus was discovered which records that at the same time Nehemiah was rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem that Sanballat the Horonite was the Governor of Samaria. So you are familiar with the animosity that existed between the Jews and the Samaritans... so you can imagine that this Samaritan Governor didn't want to see a strong Jerusalem.

<sup>11</sup> So I went to Jerusalem and was there three days.

## 1. The Leader's Energy

Now, what is that all about. He had prayed fervently for 4 months, he had traveled 800 miles to rebuild this wall. NOW he has arrived... what will this amazing leader do first? Take a nap.



### LEADER'S LISTEN:

This bucket represents your EMOTIONAL reserves, ENERGY reserves, this is what you have to pull from in order to lead. Every time you lead, you pour a portion of what's in this bucket out. It can be refilled, but it cannot be filled completely.

- **When it's full** - you are fully yourself, you are kind to people, you make good decisions, you take initiative, you lead with authority and confidence.
- **When it's empty** - you are different, you are rude, you make bad decisions, you are gripped with fear, you don't want to lead at all, when you do lead you lead from fear instead of confidence.

**NOW LISTEN:** Whose responsibility is it to make sure the bucket is full? YOUR'S! It's not your boss's responsibility. It's not your family's responsibility. It is your's!

Nehemiah understood this principle, so before he tackled the greatest leadership task of his life - he takes a three day break.

What did he do to refill his tank? We don't know. Perhaps:

- Sleep
- Went for a walk in nature
- Got around some good friends
- Got away from people
- Maybe he read a good book

There are dozens of ways you can refill, but it's your responsibility to know how YOU refill and to discipline yourself to make sure your tank is at full capacity.

By the way - this is where most of the worst decisions people make come from. Generally, they hit an age where the capacity of their bucket is not what it used to be... as you get older... the bucket gets smaller, it empties quicker. **Emotional Buckets get holes.**

### Proverbs 4:23-27 (ESV)

<sup>23</sup> Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life.

That's wonderful advice - but how do you do it? Solomon tells us...

**a. Consider what you hear**

<sup>24</sup> Put away from you crooked **speech**, and put devious talk far from you.

The things you read, the songs you listen to, the people you talk to - either fill your tank, or poke holes. When you are trying to keep your emotional tank full - guard what you allow to influence you.

**b. Consider where you look**

<sup>25</sup> Let your eyes **look** directly forward, and your gaze be straight before you.

This speaks of focus. When your emotional tank is nearing empty, stop and remember that you are not called or expected to do everything. Discover your life mission. If you don't know it yet, discover what it is for this season.

**EXAMPLE:** In 10th grade you may not know your LIFE mission, but you do know the mission for this SEASON. Be a good, godly and influential student.

**c. Consider how you think**

<sup>26</sup> **Ponder** the path of your feet; then all your ways will be sure. <sup>27</sup> Do not swerve to the right or to the left; turn your foot away from evil.

Solomon is telling you to THINK INTENTIONALLY. You decide what you will think about.

**Philippians 4:8 (ESV)**

<sup>8</sup> Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, **think about these things.**

When people hit rock bottom, I have found that more often than not, they are thinking on untruths. What their spouse may be doing, what the boss might be thinking. THINK on, Dwell on, what you KNOW to be true.

**You have an enemy who is waiting to catch your tank on empty.**

You don't think it was random chance that Satan came to Jesus after 40 days of intense fasting do you? He hit him while he was physically weak. That is when he will hit you as well.

**Let me show you a verse you may not have given sufficient attention to earlier.**

**Nehemiah 2:1b–2 (ESV)**

<sup>1b</sup> Now I had not been sad in his presence.

He didn't say - "I had not appeared sad", he said, "I had not been sad".

Now don't think for a minute that Nehemiah didn't have difficulties, bad days, pain... the reality of sin touches everyone. But Nehemiah said, "I see my attitude and my emotional state as MY RESPONSIBILITY".

I want to suggest to you that THIS is one of the Key reason God choose Nehemiah for this particular task. He took personal responsibility for his attitude and emotional energy.

YOU NEED TO DEVELOP A PERSONAL PRESCRIPTION FOR LIFTING YOUR SOUL.

*Not only the Leader's Energy...*

## 2. The Leader's Honesty

Nehemiah had the ability to see TWO things vividly clear -

- a. He had a Vision of **Reality**
- b. He had a Vision of **Possibility**

**Someone has said** - "*optimism without realism is just a pleasant delusion*"

Leaders must understand that **FACTS are FRIENDS**. Unless you can embrace the reality of where you are, you will be unable to accurately chart a course for where you desire to be. Notice how Nehemiah did this...

<sup>12</sup> Then I arose in the night, I and a few men with me. And I told no one what my God had put into my heart to do for Jerusalem. There was no animal with me but the one on which I rode. <sup>13</sup> I went out by night by the Valley Gate to the Dragon Spring and to the Dung Gate, and I inspected the walls of Jerusalem that were broken down and its gates that had been destroyed by fire. <sup>14</sup> Then I went on to the Fountain Gate and to the King's Pool, but there was no room for the animal that was under me to pass. <sup>15</sup> Then I went up in the night by the valley and inspected the wall, and I turned back and entered by the Valley Gate, and so returned. <sup>16</sup> And the officials did not know where I had gone or what I was doing, and I had not yet told the Jews, the priests, the nobles, the officials, and the rest who were to do the work.

Nehemiah was doing his homework... he was doing research.... No amount of **hard work** can overcome **smart work**.

- The wise **carpenter** says - measure twice, cut once.
- The wise **woodman** says - sharpen the axe twice, swing the axe once.

Solomon said - Know well the condition of your flocks, and pay attention to your herds.

- Leaders are always learning, they are always inspecting.

LISTEN: No one should know more about the state of your organization than you do. No one should know more about your field of endeavor than you do. Leaders are learners.

Great leaders are constant learners, inspectors.

**ILLUSTRATION:** You may not know this, but every week of my life I'm looking at the trends of this church. I can tell you: Before COVID - the second service was outpacing the first service in growth by about 8-10%, not a huge difference, there is a near 50/50 split. Most of the CONVERSION growth came out of the second service. Most of the GIVING came out of the first service.

I can tell you in a healthy church the worship ministry should run about 10% of attendance. Student ministry is about the same, children's ministry is about the same. We want to have at least 65% of our people engaged in small groups or Sunday schools.

ILLUSTRATION: For so many it's like the old cartoon where the young archer shoots the arrow first, then draws the bulls-eye. You can't miss that way.

NOT Nehemiah - he had a clearly defined win. I saw things as they WERE and as they COULD BE.



**NOW - Apparently Nehemiah assembled the leaders, the elders of Jerusalem and now he's going to cast vision and ask for buy in. Notice what he does.**

<sup>17</sup> Then I said to them, "You see the trouble we are in, how Jerusalem lies in ruins with its gates burned. Come, let us build the wall of Jerusalem, that we may no longer suffer derision."

He didn't begin by saying, "Israel is the greatest Nation on the Planet", "we are God's people". He said, "look around you - this is pitiful.... do you see this?"

The fact is - they probably didn't see it. If they did, they hadn't done anything about it. If they are like most people, they had probably ***grown accustomed and comfortable with the norm.***

**Leaders have to SEE things other people don't SEE, and SAY things other people won't SAY.**

Leaders must be GRIPPED with how things COULD be to such a degree that they CAN NOT ACCEPT things as they are.

That's one of the burdens of leadership. You can never fully celebrate the state of things as they are, because you are haunted by the unmet potential of your organization.

Great leaders strategically use their perspective to move others to holy discontent.

**Vance Havner** said the Pastor's job is two fold - *He is to comfort the afflicted, but he is also to afflict the comfortable.* Nehemiah is afflicting the comfortable.

Do you see the trouble we are in?

Nehemiah assumes the obvious question. Ok, we see it... but why you? Why should we follow you?

### **3. The Leader's Resume**

<sup>18</sup> And I told them of the hand of my God that had been upon me for good, and also of the words that the king had spoken to me.

He calls them to follow his leadership not because of his education, not because of his talent and skill, but very simply because of God's hand of approval upon his life.

He calls past favor to testify of future promise.

- This is what David did when he faced Goliath - **1 Samuel 17:37 (NASB95)**  
<sup>37</sup> And David said, "The LORD who delivered me from the paw of the lion and from the paw of the bear, He will deliver me from the hand of this Philistine." And Saul said to David, "Go, and may the LORD be with you."

BY THE WAY - You should be keeping track of your spiritual resume. Write down your little victories... they will be what one day will fuel your major battles.

18b. And they said, "Let us rise up and build." So they strengthened their hands for the good work.

**CONCLUSION/INVITATION** - Let me ask you three questions:

1. How is your Energy? Whose responsibility is your energy?
2. How is your Honesty? Do you know honestly and accurately the state of your organization? Your family? Your small group? HAVE YOU CLEARLY DEFINED A WIN? Are you consistently getting wins? Do you celebrate wins well?
3. What is your real resume?