

HAND ME ANOTHER BRICK: TIMELESS LESSONS ON LEADERSHIP

A Leader—From the Knees Up!

Nehemiah 1:1–11



LET'S BEGIN HERE

Few Old Testament characters surpass Nehemiah in the potency of their *leadership*. God used him to motivate and direct a relatively small group of people in building a wall around the city of Jerusalem and then to establish a godly government. Nehemiah discovered Jerusalem's desperate need and then brought it before God in prayer. It is highly significant that the *first* place we find this great leader is *on his knees*. Leadership requires prayer.



LET'S DIG DEEPER

1. Orientation (Nehemiah 1:1, 11)

Without fanfare, Nehemiah identified himself as the book's author and later as King Artaxerxes' cupbearer (Nehemiah 1:1, 11). In this trusted position, Nehemiah acted as a protective screen between the public and the king. In addition, we are told that the action starts in the month of Chislev, or December, in the "twentieth year" of the king's reign, about 444 BC. We're also told that Nehemiah was in Susa, the capital of Persia as well as much of the civilized ancient world at that time. In this setting, Nehemiah lived out his normal, day-to-day routine. But it was all about to change.

2. Situation (Nehemiah 1:2–3)

Nehemiah may have lived in the Persian capital, but the capital of his heart was Jerusalem. One day, witnesses from Jerusalem relayed that the people in Nehemiah's homeland were in a calamitous, miserable, and depressing situation (Nehemiah 1:2–3). They suffered criticism and harassment from their enemies, lived in constant fear of attack, and—like the crumbled wall that surrounded them—their spiritual lives were in ruins.



Quotable

*Do you have
a problem
with people? It
probably won't
get resolved until
you take it to
God in prayer.*

— Charles R. Swindoll



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3. Reaction (Nehemiah 1:4–11)

Nehemiah's reactions were neither negative nor critical. As a great leader, Nehemiah responded to the needs of Jerusalem and its people with clear recognition, personal concern, an appeal to God, and availability.

First, *Nehemiah clearly recognized the need*. The beginnings of this theme are barely audible in the simple opening line: “When I heard these words” (Nehemiah 1:4). Although he worked in a palace, Nehemiah did not allow his heart or mind the luxury of ivory-tower preoccupations. He was not afraid to see the real problems, especially when it came to hearing about the needs of those closest to his heart.

Second, *Nehemiah was personally concerned with the need*. The low, melodious tones of recognition suddenly gave way to the thunderous volume of remorse: “I sat down and wept and mourned for days” (1:4). The rhythm of intense sorrow boomed and a steady shower of intense feelings ensued: “I was fasting and praying before the God of heaven” (1:4). Nehemiah allowed the anguish and misery of his people to pierce his heart. And from that wound, Nehemiah's mourning for his people along with his passion were poured out in sonorous refrain before the Lord.

Third, *Nehemiah brought the need to God first*. The third theme picks up on the final sweeping crescendo of verse 4: “I was . . . praying before the God of heaven.” His heartfelt petition is recorded in verses 5–11, and here Nehemiah displayed the essence of his leadership. He resisted the normal temptation to pick up the conductor's baton and orchestrate the reparation of the wall himself. Instead, he fell on his knees, beseeching the One whose place it is to conduct all the affairs of humanity and to meld their efforts into one harmonious plan.

Fourth, *Nehemiah was available to meet the need*. With this final theme, the overture of leadership reaches its finale. Amid the climactic strains of Nehemiah's petition (1:11), an essential leadership quality emerges—availability. But in order to be available to meet the need of rebuilding the wall, Nehemiah had to overcome a hurdle: King Artaxerxes. This brings us back to the opening premise of our study—the primary importance of prayer in leadership. For as we will see in the next lesson, only God has the power to mold and move the heart of a king.



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A CLOSER LOOK

Acting from Our Knees

The wall around Jerusalem lay in ruins . . . and God wanted that wall rebuilt. Nehemiah served as a cupbearer to a Persian king. Hearing of his city's plight, Nehemiah responded not only in action but also in prayer. All of us who follow God's leading must place a high priority on prayer. Prayer makes us wait and forces us to leave the situation with God. Prayer clears our vision because it helps us view the situation through God's eyes. Prayer quiets our hearts because it is God's method for removing our worries. Prayer replaces angst with peace. Knees don't knock when we kneel on them! Prayer activates our faith, because after spending time with the Father, we are more prone to trust Him. God delights in accomplishing what we cannot pull off alone.



LET'S LIVE IT

Our study of Nehemiah 1 leaves us with at least four reasons why prayer is not only important but vital in leadership.

First, *it makes us wait*. We can't earnestly pray and at the same time rush ahead of God with rash actions. Prayer forces us to take a breath, adjust our attitudes before the Lord, then act.

Second, *prayer clears our vision*. It enables us to see the situation through God's eyes and not our own.

Third, *prayer quiets our hearts*. We cannot continue to worry and pray at the same time. One will snuff out the other, depending on which one we choose.

Fourth, *prayer activates our faith*. And with that faith comes an attitude of hope and peace that replaces the petty and critical attitude that is evident when we haven't spent time in prayer.

Great leadership begins with heartfelt, genuine submission to the headship of the Divine Leader. We express this submission by offering to God in prayer all our worries, concerns, challenges, hopes, and disappointments.

What is the single most pressing concern you are facing today in relation to your realms of leadership and those who follow you? Are you struggling with the temptation to worry about this issue? Why, or why not?



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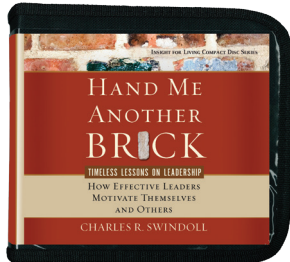
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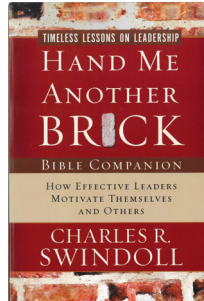
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