

HAND ME ANOTHER BRICK: TIMELESS LESSONS ON LEADERSHIP

Getting off Dead Center

Nehemiah 2:11–20



LET'S BEGIN HERE

When Nehemiah journeyed to Jerusalem to rebuild the wall, he faced the immense task of inspiring those around him to pick up bricks and begin a grueling project. Some were young novices with soft, callous-free hands. Others were old and accustomed to living without the wall—perhaps lethargic and disinterested. They all came from different walks of life with diverse expectations. The sands of time had smothered much of the patriotic zeal that had once burned in the hearts of the Jews. It's easy to see that motivating them was one of Nehemiah's first challenges of leadership. Through Nehemiah's example, we can learn how to motivate people to “get off dead center” and to rise up and begin a massive project.



LET'S DIG DEEPER

1. Private Investigation of the Scene (Nehemiah 2:11–16)

Nehemiah described his arrival in Jerusalem in the first half of Nehemiah 2:11: “So I came to Jerusalem.” He then dropped out of sight in the next phrase: “and was there three days.” Three days without a word to anyone. No luncheons with city officials, no press conferences, no guided tours around the wall, no fireworks or parade down Main Street. Only silence.

The reason for Nehemiah's baffling behavior comes to light in verses 12 and 16. While he avoided public attention for three days, Nehemiah was meeting with an important official, the real “Mayor of Jerusalem,” Yahweh. He took a private tour of the walls—at night, without sharing his purpose publicly.

After arriving in Jerusalem, Nehemiah's first order of business was to seek silence and solitude for the purpose of undisturbed reflection. During those first three quiet days, Nehemiah paused to learn. He purposefully avoided the crowds and the political fanfare that would have undoubtedly accompanied a leader with the authority of King Artaxerxes. Nehemiah concerned himself with the task itself—without the pressure of public opinion. Great leaders exhibit this same character trait of pausing to learn, to gather information, to size up the job with their own eyes.



Quotable

*A leader
doesn't earn
respect in the rush
of public activity
but by what
he does when he's
all alone.*

—Charles R. Swindoll



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2. Open Discussion of the Need (Nehemiah 2:17–19)

With the opening phrase of verse 17, Nehemiah left the harbor of silence and solitude and launched into the sea of the public eye. Now we hear the well-informed speech Nehemiah used for recruiting. In Nehemiah's first address as God's leader for rebuilding the wall, he identified with the people and committed himself to the task of helping to protect their homeland.

Nehemiah removed any doubts about whether he was just a prattling official with papers from Persia or a genuine brother who shared the distress and reproach of the Jews. The people were motivated by Nehemiah's sincere offer of blood, toil, tears, and sweat to rebuild the city's protective wall.

Nehemiah also laid out the hard facts about the dire situation. He made no effort to motivate the people with external rewards or gimmicks like new chariots, campouts at the Dead Sea, or bricks in the wall with their names on them. Though workers need to be adequately compensated, strictly material incentives produce short-lived enthusiasm and lead to feelings of entitlement. Enduring motivation is that which comes from within—intrinsic motivation that appeals to their immaterial, spiritual desires. Nehemiah appealed to the Jews' desire to do what God wanted them to do—to assume national prominence again as God's holy people.

3. Direct Criticism of the Plan (Nehemiah 2:19–20)

No sooner had Nehemiah convinced the Israelites to stand and rebuild than they encountered some of the same kinds of ridicule and mocking. But Nehemiah stood his ground against the verbal volleys and put on the line the reputation of the promise-keeping God of Israel. Nehemiah had a commitment to do the right thing, which fueled the passions of the righteous to complete the rebuilding project.



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LET'S LIVE IT

Nehemiah devoted his iron constitution and inexhaustible energy to the salvation of Israel and to the values Israel stood for in a pagan world. But most importantly, he focused his total concentration on the Lord in every circumstance:

- *Alone*: in deliberate solitude
“I did not tell anyone what my God was putting into my mind to do for Jerusalem.” (Nehemiah 2:12)
- *In public*: among his people with motivational words
“I told them how the hand of my God had been favorable to me.” (2:18)
- *Under attack*: before his enemies with sharp rebukes
“The God of heaven will give us success.” (2:20)

After observing each of these three elements of a godly leader's spiritual focus, which do you feel is most lacking in your current realms of leadership? Write out a plan for this week that will allow you to take a concrete, credible step toward strengthening this aspect of your leadership.



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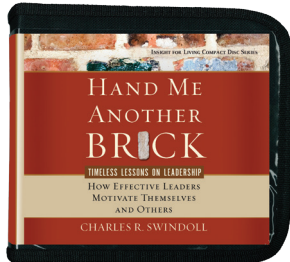
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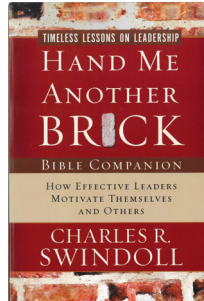
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