

HAND ME ANOTHER BRICK: TIMELESS LESSONS ON LEADERSHIP

How to Handle a Promotion

Nehemiah 5:14–19



LET'S BEGIN HERE

We've all experienced or witnessed demotions, cutbacks, downsizing, or layoffs—dreadful realities that prompt a run on self-help books. Occasionally, God promotes His people in a marked fashion, but we seldom hear messages or read books about what God says to those who have experienced a promotion. Using Nehemiah's own experience as the basis of our study, we learn how to pass the test of integrity that comes with a promotion.



LET'S DIG DEEPER

1. Promotion: An Axiom to Remember (Psalm 75:5–7)

In describing the much-coveted process of promotion, the psalmist forged a timeless truth: the promotion of every child of God comes by God's sovereign grace, not because a person is in the right place at the right time, morally good, more gifted, well-educated, or highly trained.

Good examples fill the pages of Scripture. God promoted Joseph from prisoner in Egypt to preeminent ruler over Pharaoh's empire. God exalted Daniel, a Hebrew exile taken to Babylon, to serve as King Nebuchadnezzar's right-hand man. God even promoted Amos, a rugged country farmer with fig-stained hands, to go before the polished priest Amaziah and announce God's judgment. These leaders kept their heads and maintained their integrity in spite of their promotions. And they refused to demote God from His position as Lord of their lives.

Nehemiah provides perhaps the best illustration of someone who responsibly handles a promotion. Even though he was born and reared in a time when the Jewish people were living in captivity under another nation, God exalted him to the prominent place of cupbearer to King Artaxerxes (Nehemiah 1:11). And when Nehemiah voluntarily took a demotion to rebuild Jerusalem's wall, God had another promotion in store.



Quotable

A Christian leader's private life is constantly under the devil's attack. Choose to stand firm—no matter what.

—Charles R. Swindoll



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GETTING TO THE ROOT

The Source of Promotion

In the Hebrew text of Psalm 75:5–7 we find three words all derived from the same root: *rum*. The first, *lamarom*, translated “on high”¹ (Psalm 75:5), refers to a sense of arrogance, self-exaltation. The word *hariym*, or “exaltation” (75:6), describes the process of ascending from a lower to higher place.² Exaltation does not come from anything in this world, though worldly minded people may believe it does. Where does *hariym* truly come from? Verse 6 says that God is the One who “exalts” (*yariym*). But Psalm 75 makes an important contrast and clarification. God is also the One who “puts down.” So both promotion and demotion come from God—not from the world or from our own doing.

2. Promotion: An Example to Follow (Nehemiah 5:14–19)

In the midst of gates being rebuilt, stones replaced, and enemies rebuffed, it became apparent to the people that Nehemiah was an outstanding leader. So they promoted him to the highest office in the land of Judah—governor.

Nehemiah, a wise and godly leader, said yes when God cast His decisive vote in Nehemiah’s favor. As soon as he had accepted the appointment as governor, though, he faced four major areas of testing that come with every promotion: privileges, policies, projects, and people. And the key to surviving this onslaught is integrity.

Privileges. Every promotion comes equipped with its own special set of privileges, rights, benefits, and special favors. Few can resist using them without abusing them. Nehemiah did not abuse his privileges; he chose instead to exhibit integrity.

“For twelve years, neither I nor my kinsmen have eaten the governor’s food allowance” (Nehemiah 5:14). Although Nehemiah had the right to indulge and enjoy a sumptuous diet built into the governor’s budget, he restrained himself—over a long period of time. With the people still facing hardship, Nehemiah exercised self-control and refused to presume on his office and the people.

Policies. Nearly every promotion carries with it the pressure of former policies. No matter what the position, almost all promotions involve stepping into someone else’s shoes—and policies. And that means pressure to do what has always been done or pressure to try something new. In his new job, Nehemiah faced three corrupt policies passed on from his predecessors. They had enforced heavy taxes, extorted food and money, and allowed their servants to oppress the people. The political and social scavengers who fed off of this way of life surely put pressure on Nehemiah to look the other way. But we can see Nehemiah’s resolve in just one sentence: “I did not do so because of the fear of God” (5:15).



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Projects. Not only did Nehemiah avoid taking advantage of the people, he also didn't slack off on his God-given work (Nehemiah 5:16). He and his servants weren't there to buy land for themselves or accumulate power or wealth; they were there with a goal in mind. Although his newfound political position afforded great opportunity for distraction, Nehemiah never lost sight of his primary task: building the walls of Jerusalem.

People. With more than one hundred fifty people to feed at his table every day, including officials from surrounding nations (5:17–18), Nehemiah could have focused exclusively on parties, politics, and protocol, forgetting about his God-given work. Or he could have obsessed over the project and forgotten about the needs of the people. Nehemiah resisted the temptation to mistreat or neglect his people or to regard his needs as more important than theirs.



LET'S LIVE IT

Every promotion tests the integrity of leaders in the areas of privileges, policies, projects, and people. Nehemiah exhibited absolute integrity in his promotion. There was no credibility gap, no cause for suspicion or wondering.

In what areas of your life and leadership do you need to evaluate your integrity? Complete the following chart, assigning yourself a letter grade and explaining why you assigned yourself that grade.

Test	Grade	Explanation
Privileges		
Policies		
Projects		
People		

ENDNOTES

1. Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 2006), 928–29.
2. Brown, Driver, and Briggs, *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*, 926–27.



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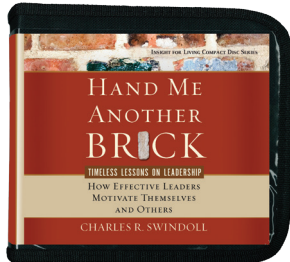
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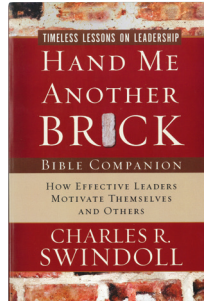
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