

# HAND ME ANOTHER BRICK: TIMELESS LESSONS ON LEADERSHIP

## The Willing Unknowns

*Nehemiah 7:1–4; 11*



### LET'S BEGIN HERE

Tucked away in the Bible are verses that seldom, if ever, attract the attention of the hurried reader. Because our pace is so often accelerated, we miss many of the hidden treasures God has stored up for us in His Word. In this message, we'll uncover one such treasure. Nehemiah 11 recognizes the “willing unknowns,” a special group of people who served a vital function in Jerusalem but never saw their names in lights. We will consider also our own sacrificial service and learn to appreciate those who work behind-the-scenes in our homes, workplaces, and realms of leadership.



### LET'S DIG DEEPER

#### 1. Historical Background (Nehemiah 7:1–4; 11:1–3)

At the beginning of Nehemiah 7, the wall around Jerusalem had just been completed, security established, responsibility delegated, and the daily schedule set (Nehemiah 7:1–3).

Part of Nehemiah's task in restoring the city's wall was to help revive the city itself. To a Jew, Jerusalem was a place of great honor—their promised inheritance and the dwelling place of their God. With the wall in place, Nehemiah sought to bring back God's people to live inside.

To decide who would move into Jerusalem, the leaders cast lots. Though it seems arbitrary and random, God led His people in making decisions through the act of casting lots (Leviticus 16:8; Joshua 18:6–10; 1 Chronicles 24:31). As the Israelites went through this process, God selected one-tenth of the people to move into the city (Nehemiah 11:1).

God also worked in the hearts of some who hadn't been chosen by lot (11:2). This group of the willing unknowns generously volunteered to move into and help reestablish Jerusalem. Exodus 35 illustrates this concept when it describes the people of Israel who constructed the tabernacle. Those silent servants skilled in craftsmanship, embroidery, weaving, and other arts gave of their treasures, talents, and time for the service of God. Yet not one name from that



## Quotable

*If you are gifted  
in an area that  
doesn't reach  
the spotlight,  
don't worry.  
God sees  
your value*

— Charles R. Swindoll



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group of volunteers is recorded or remembered. In the same way, the volunteers of Nehemiah 11 uprooted their families, packed their belongings, and built new homes on land covered with tumbled-down structures likely overgrown with weeds and overrun with vermin.

### 2. The “Willing Unknowns” (Nehemiah 11)

Groups of willing unknowns fill Nehemiah 11. We’ve already noticed the first group, *the people who volunteered to move*. We find the second group when we glance down at 11:10–12.

*The people who worked within the temple* numbered 822—that’s quite a ministry staff! And not one of them was named. We can bet that a good percentage did jobs that most people took for granted, like dusting, lighting lamps, and cleaning up after the “big-wigs” like Jedaiah and Seraiah, whose names actually made it into the Bible. These folks served anonymously so that God’s people would be blessed as they came to worship.

The next group of willing unknowns included *those who worked outside the place of worship*. The phrase “in charge of the outside work” refers to two types of tasks: maintaining the exterior of the temple and its grounds and serving people in areas such as judging and counseling.

The fourth group consisted of *those who supported the ministry through prayer*. Have you ever seen a best seller titled *The Prayer of Mattaniah*? Of course not. That prayer warrior’s fervent words on his knees went unnoticed by men . . . but not by the almighty God. Mattaniah, Bakkukiah, and Abda probably didn’t preach, landscape, or clean, but they prayed with all their might to keep the temple ministry alive.



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### A CLOSER LOOK

#### *Learning from the Willing Unknowns*

Nehemiah 11 lists five specific groups who gave to the work of the Lord—even though their giving remained anonymous. These included those who willingly moved into the city, those who willingly worked within the temple, those who were in charge of the outside work of the house of God, those who prayed, and those who sang for the services of the house of God. In God’s eyes, no contribution is ever insignificant. Our gifts and abilities make us valuable, although not necessarily famous. What’s more, the Lord remembers every labor done in love (Hebrews 6:10). Our rewards from God will be based on faithfulness, not on applause. The public may never know the ministries we do in the shadows. But God never checks with them to measure the merit of our service or to determine our rewards. The willing unknowns are not unknown to God.



### LET’S LIVE IT

Why spend a whole message studying a bunch of people nobody ever heard of, whose names we’ll never remember? At times we all struggle with our self-esteem or self-worth. Every one of us occasionally wonders if we make any difference at all, or we question the value of our gifts and talents. But even if you haven’t wondered yourself, you can be sure the willing unknowns under your leadership have pondered these issues during moments of discouragement. This unpronounceable passage of Scripture gives us three helpful principles that can encourage us during these times of self-doubt.

First, *your gift makes you valuable, if not necessarily popular*. Being a leader can be a lonely, often thankless job. Sometimes there is little room for failure or mistakes. And others may not notice or understand the extra time and energy you devote to your role. But God sees, and He knows your heart. The same is true of those who are gifted in an area that never reaches the spotlight. They are as valuable as Mattaniah or Uzzi and just as well-known to God.

Second, *every labor done in love is remembered by God, never forgotten*. Hebrews 6:10 says, “For God is not unjust so as to forget your work and the love which you have shown toward His name, in having ministered and in still ministering to the saints.” This applies to your most public duties as well as your most private actions. Even if nobody notices your faithfulness, God does. So be faithful!

Third, *our final reward in heaven will be determined on the basis of personal faithfulness, not public applause*. The public may never know of your ministry, whether it takes place in the privacy of your prayer closet or on the back row of the choir. God will reward you in heaven based on the pure-hearted service of your life, rather than according to the number of plaques, trophies, or thank-you notes you’ve received.



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Paul wrote, “For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast” (Ephesians 2:8–9). Whether you go to heaven or not has nothing to do with your accomplishments on earth. Heaven is a free gift.

If you are not involved in serving as a willing unknown, think of a specific task that needs volunteers, either at your church, in your community, or at your workplace. Set aside your pride or personal preferences and commit to using your time, energy, or skills to help meet this need. How will you begin?



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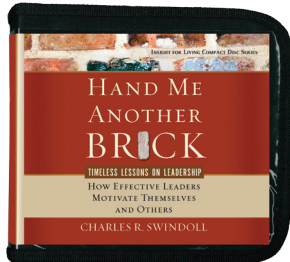
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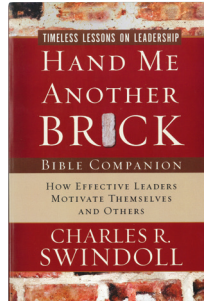
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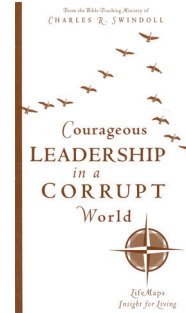
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