

# HAND ME ANOTHER BRICK: TIMELESS LESSONS ON LEADERSHIP

## Taking Problems by the Throat

### Nehemiah 13



#### LET'S BEGIN HERE

One of the occupational hazards of leadership is the need to face, analyze, and solve problems. While supervising the construction of the wall and later while governing the people of Jerusalem, Nehemiah faced and wisely dealt with many knotty, complicated problems. In this final message, we observe Nehemiah as he addressed four more critical issues.

Nehemiah refused to let problems conquer him. Intensely desiring to please the Lord, Nehemiah took sin “by the throat” wherever he found it. Throughout our study we have seen him ward off enemies and stir up a glorious spirit of revival among his people. But nowhere is his indomitable spirit more obvious than in his response to the four serious problems recorded in Nehemiah 13. From his example, we will draw several timely, applicable principles for our own realms of leadership.



#### LET'S DIG DEEPER

##### 1. Four Critical Problems (Nehemiah 13:1–31)

Nehemiah's time in Jerusalem was amazingly fruitful, but he was honor-bound to return to his former position as cupbearer to King Artaxerxes (Nehemiah 2:6). We don't know exactly how long he was away from Jerusalem before asking permission to return (13:6). However, it was long enough for the children of Israel to get themselves into some serious trouble—the kind of trouble that could eventually deafen the ears of the whole nation to the words of the Lord. Though they were once eager to listen and obey (13:1–3), their eagerness waned, leading to four major problems Nehemiah had to face upon his return to Jerusalem.

First, he discovered a *compromising companionship* (13:4–9). An Israelite priest, Eliashib, offered part of the temple as a private hotel suite for one of Jerusalem's worst enemies: Tobiah. You may recall that Tobiah had been an opponent of the rebuilding project from the beginning. Yet while Nehemiah was away, this man wormed his way not just behind the walls of the city, but inside the sacred walls of the temple. And the high priest allowed it. But when Nehemiah returned and discovered what had taken place, he stormed through the temple and did some long-overdue house cleaning (13:7–9). Nehemiah's response was godly, swift, and decisive.



#### Quotable

*A wrong  
will never be  
resolved until  
we openly  
admit that it's  
a wrong.*

—Charles R. Swindoll



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Then, Nehemiah faced a *financial fiasco* (Nehemiah 13:10–14). Nehemiah didn't have to look very long before he came across financial waywardness (13:10). The Law of Moses instructed the Levites to minister in and around the temple and commanded the people to support them financially. But because no one distributed the tithes, the Levites had to go back to their farms to make a living. Nehemiah confronted a difficult problem with decisive action by appointing reliable accountants to make sure the finances flowed properly (13:11–14).

Third, he dealt with a *secularized Sabbath* (13:15–22). According to the Jewish calendar, the Sabbath was to be a day of rest following God's example when He rested after creating the world. This people committed to keeping the Sabbath when they signed the covenant in Nehemiah 10:31. How quickly they had returned to conducting business as usual (13:15–16)! But Nehemiah hadn't forgotten the people's promise, and he refused to let them forget it. He reminded them of the consequences their forefathers had endured because of their failure to follow through on their commitments to the Lord (13:17–18). And then Nehemiah set up obstacles and incentives to hold the people to their word (13:19–22).

Finally, Nehemiah confronted a *domestic disobedience* (13:23–31). Many Jews had intermarried with the pagan people around them, resulting in mixing blood, languages, and beliefs (13:23–24). Israel was rearing a generation of children who could not speak or understand the language of the Scriptures. This problem threatened to wipe out Israel's ability to hear the voice of the Lord. For Nehemiah, the greater the problem, the greater was the intensity of his response: "So I contended with them and cursed them and struck some of them and pulled out their hair" (13:25). Nehemiah erupted in righteous anger when he discovered Israel's seemingly irreversible error. Israel had experienced judgment for similar offenses in the past, and to avoid God's wrath on the recently restored nation, Nehemiah fired the offenders and showed no partiality or regard for their person or position (13:28).

## 2. Analyzing Nehemiah's Solutions

Nehemiah followed four basic steps as he dealt with Israel's problems. First, *he faced the sin head-on*. Second, *he condemned it severely*. Third, *he worked toward a permanent correction*. Fourth, *he followed up the situation with prayer*. And though most of the specific problems in Nehemiah's day are unlikely to affect us in our own realms of leadership, the steps he took in addressing problems can be applied to many common issues today.



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#### A CLOSER LOOK

##### *A Decisive Stand for God*

After Nehemiah's leave of absence from Jerusalem to attend to his Persian duties, he returned to the holy city to discover major problems. Despite the fact that the resident Jews had made a commitment to remain faithful to God, they had compromised in the areas of maintaining financial integrity, obeying the Sabbath, and preserving domestic priorities. Nehemiah refused to be passive; he took the problems by the throat. But he also modeled the timeless truth that courageous conviction must be tempered with deep devotion. This is where many well-meaning Christians miss it. It is significant that the final verse in Nehemiah's book shows him on his knees in prayer. He had fought hard for the right, but he had kept his heart soft before the Lord. What a magnificent model he was! He was a man of honesty, conviction, and devotion. We should follow his example.



#### LET'S LIVE IT

Let's take a moment to consider three principles from this message that will guide us as we seek to follow Nehemiah's example of leadership.

First, *dealing with problems begins with honest observation*. You cannot solve a problem that you haven't identified. We must force ourselves to face the truth of our own compromising alliances, areas of selfishness, or failure to keep our word, no matter how painful the truth. Once we have removed the sin from our own lives, we will be able to clearly identify the problems in our realms of leadership.

Second, *correcting what is honestly observed demands fearless conviction*. Many fears keep us from confronting problems—the fear of what others will think or say, the fear of upsetting the status quo, the fear of being misunderstood. Yet once we have honestly surfaced the problem, we must take a firm stand and do what's right.

Third, *honest observation and fearless conviction must be tempered by consistent devotion*. Nehemiah addressed major problems by focusing on God and the standards of conduct he knew God had commanded in the Law of Moses. Prayer was not a cop-out for Nehemiah, but a vital part of his decisive action. Even when he condemned people with the harshest terms, his anger was tempered by a prayer (Nehemiah 13:29).

**What is the most complicated problem you're facing today that affects your realm of leadership? Why is it so difficult? What specific course of action will you take to address this problem?**



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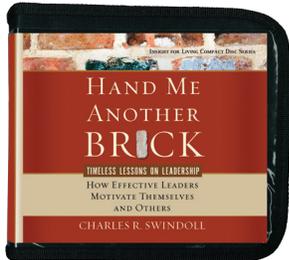
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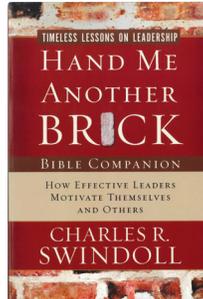
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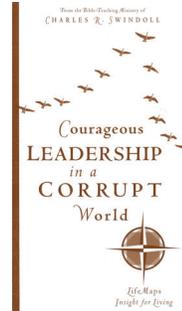
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