

## Lessons from Nehemiah

### *Prayer*

Today I would like to speak with you about Nehemiah. Nehemiah was a tremendous Spiritual leader. Now before you start thinking either: wow this is great church leadership training, that's for me! or wow church leadership training. That has nothing to do with me! Let's examine this concept just a bit.

First of all let's read a couple of scriptures about who you are in Christ...

1 Peter 2:9 NIV

*But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.*

Revelations 1:5 CEV

*May kindness and peace be yours from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness. Jesus was the first to conquer death, and he is the ruler of all earthly kings. Christ loves us, and by his blood he set us free from our sins. He lets us rule as kings and serve God his Father as priests*

Revelations 5:10 CEV

*Then they sang a new song, "You are worthy to receive the scroll and open its seals, because you were killed. And with your own blood you bought for God people from every tribe, language, nation, and race. You let them become kings and serve God as priests, and they will rule on earth*

Ephesians 4:11-13 HCSB

*And He personally gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, for the training of the saints in the work of ministry, to build up the body of Christ, until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of God's Son, growing into a mature man with a stature measured by Christ's fullness.*

So whether you are in the five-fold ministry, helps, administration or simply a light to the world, you are called to be a leader and a disciple of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

That clearly established, let's delve into a few points of what we can learn from Nehemiah.

## **Nehemiah's Burden**

*In the month of Kislev in the twentieth year, while I was in the citadel of Susa, 2 Hanani, one of my brothers, came from Judah with some other men, and I questioned them about the Jewish remnant that had survived the exile, and also about Jerusalem.*

*They said to me, "Those who survived the exile and are back in the province are in great trouble and disgrace. The wall of Jerusalem is broken down, and its gates have been burned with fire."*

*When I heard these things, I sat down and wept. For some days I mourned and fasted and prayed before the God of heaven. Then I said:*

*"Lord, the God of heaven, the great and awesome God, who keeps his covenant of love with those who love him and keep his commandments, let your ear be attentive and your eyes open to hear the prayer your servant is praying before you day and night for your servants, the people of Israel. I confess the sins we Israelites, including myself and my father's family, have committed against you. We have acted very wickedly toward you. We have not obeyed the commands, decrees and laws you gave your servant Moses.*

*"Remember the instruction you gave your servant Moses, saying, 'If you are unfaithful, I will scatter you among the nations, but if you return to me and obey my commands, then even if your exiled people are at the farthest horizon, I will gather them from there and bring them to the place I have chosen as a dwelling for my Name.'*

*"They are your servants and your people, whom you redeemed by your great strength and your mighty hand. Lord, let your ear be attentive to the prayer of this your servant and to the prayer of your servants who delight in revering your name. Give your servant success today by granting him favor in the presence of this man."*

## **With Maturity comes Leadership and Responsibility**

We as a church are growing into maturity in Christ Jesus. To be effective spiritual leaders that are able to motivate new Christians and inspire others to accept Jesus as Lord, we do have homework. Yes, I know it is our job to love, the Holy Spirit's job to draw and convict and God's job to judge. This does not alleviate us of our responsibilities as Christians and by that very definition our identity as leaders of our responsibilities before God.

Real leaders should not be doing the Holy Spirit's job, yet a real leader will have knowledge and skill in how to build a fire in a person's spirit with carefully chosen words. They will know to lead with their hearts; they will be real and able to establish relationships with people. In short, there is a skill that needs to be

developed through the empowerment of the Holy Spirit by which discernment comes into play and people are skillfully motivated. Not to be confused with manipulated... motivation is about getting others to do what is good for them. Manipulation is getting others to do what is good for you.

### **How does this happen?**

As kings and priests before God we need to come aside a while in peace and be still. We need to not just say, but to know that he is God. In the quiet times and place where you intentionally put aside time to be with God, when you listen to what God is saying, you will receive direction, peace and joy.

Why joy? Because... You can't do it yourself. You need the Joy of the Lord. His Joy is your strength to endure.

Why peace? Because, when you do the work of the Lord you can expect opposition.

Why direction? Because the leader needs to see God's vision before they can ever be a part of seeing it come to pass.

Okay why look at Nehemiah many Christians I have talked to over the years don't even know who he is and yet, he has much to offer us.

### **Let's start with distilling what we read and adding some basic context on Nehemiah.**

In 445 BC there was a man named Nehemiah, he was the Royal Cup-Bearer. In short, he delivered the wine to the King. At this time the king of Persian was Artaxerxes. We take up the narrative in the 20<sup>th</sup> year of his reign.

Now Nehemiah heard that the walls of Jerusalem were broken down and as a Jew this disturbed him greatly. He had a burden on his heart. Because of this he asked the King for permission to return to Judah as the governor of the province and rebuild the walls.

This was not so popular with the Samaritans the Ammonites, the Arabs and the Philistines. They tried to trick him in violating Jewish law, they tried repeated tried to derail the project.

### ***The Lessons!***

#### **Lesson one... Start by finding out what God wants**

When Nehemiah started his rebuilding project, he didn't just jump in. He spent three days resting, setting up the running of his house, planning and praying.

Nehemiah chapter 2 and verse 11 ASV tells us this his passion was lit in the quiet places with God.

“So I came to Jerusalem, and was there three days. And I arose in the night, I and some few men with me; neither told I any man what my God put into my heart to do for Jerusalem; neither was there any beast with me, save the beast that I rode upon.”

Notice passion here - not complacency, God put this on his heart. So many confuse peace with complacency. Peace is not the absence of difficult; it is confidence and assuredness in Christ in the difficulty. Remember what Paul says in prison in Philippians 4:11?

He says: *“Not that I speak in respect of want: for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content”*

Day three he goes for a night looksee and checked out the city. He literally took the lay of the land. He studied his surroundings to understand how it was put together. He assessed the strengths and weaknesses of the city.

Notice he didn't say its God's plan let him do it. NO! He took the burden that was placed on his heart and did what was necessary to make it a reality. In my opinion he co-labored with God on the rebuilding of Jerusalem's walls.

### **Lesson two... Nehemiah creates a vision with the people.**

The next morning Nehemiah calls a town meeting where he describes the wreckage. He instilled motivation in their hearts by pointing out that their neighbors held no respect for the Jews or their God.

He didn't call them to the vision through simple pride but rather in his words he casts them a vision of God's provision for their restoration. In verses 17 and 18 we see that the people jumped to their feet with cries to rebuild the city.

A progressive and restorative vision had been established through prayer, obedience, good stewardship, passion and skill.

### **Lesson three... Execution by leadership not control**

Nehemiah had an order from the king for the restoration of the walls of Jerusalem. He was in charge as governor; he could have opened himself up to control but instead of using force and manipulation. Instead of guilt tripping and cries to national obligation, he inspired them.

His words spoke life to them. The man is the message. The bible tells us in Luke 6:45 that out of the abundance of our hearts the mouth speaks. In the spirit, when someone speaks from the heart it lights a flame, it kindles passion. Two completely

different individuals can speak the same pretty words, and yet crowds will rally to one and not the other. Why? I believe it is because you and I can tell when something is just empty promises and flowery words and when a person is speaking from the heart. Something just resonates in your spirit.

The bible tells us in proverbs 29:18, that without a progressive vision the people dwell aimlessly. When people see Gods vision for their lives, they don't stop attending church, they don't stop fellowshiping with each other and they don't fall away, because the vision ignites their heart.

Does the vision of the Holy Spirit for this church ignite your heart today?

### **Lesson four... Relationship**

Nehemiah did not stand over top and lord over the construction as governor. He knew who he was and that was enough. He got down with them in the trenches, he identified with them. He included himself in their number. He could have delegated damage reports and assessments, but he took ownership and went to establish the vision in himself.

Nehemiah reaches the people by personally being involved with them.

Nehemiah 2:17-18

*Then I said to them, "You see the trouble we are in: Jerusalem lies in ruins, and its gates have been burned with fire. Come, let us rebuild the wall of Jerusalem, and we will no longer be in disgrace." I also told them about the gracious hand of my God on me and what the king had said to me.*

*They replied, "Let us start rebuilding." So they began this good work.*

People are not motivated by complacent leaders but by those who will get into the trenches. Noticed how he used "WE" and "US" he declares that he is on the journey with them. He built relationship through their shared vision.

### **Motivation Strategy**

Over the years the church has used various motivation strategies, extrinsic motivation was the initial method of the modern church and intrinsic is the current and more effective approach. Let me explain the difference.

**Extrinsic Motivation** – If you do this you will receive X - The reward is external to obtain an outcome.

For example:

If you do this, you won't burn in Hell

If you do this you, will receive eternal life

If you do this God, will bless you

If you do this the wall will be rebuilt

**Intrinsic Motivation** – The reward is intangible but significant in the individual.

For example:

This will be interesting

This will be enjoyable

There will be a sense of accomplishment

They will not mock our people

The will not mock our God

### **Lesson Five... When you are doing something good expect adversity**

Nehemiah 2:19-20

*But when Sanballat the Horonite, Tobiah the Ammonite official and Geshem the Arab heard about it, they mocked and ridiculed us. "What is this you are doing?" they asked. "Are you rebelling against the king?"*

*I answered them by saying, "The God of heaven will give us success. We his servants will start rebuilding, but as for you, you have no share in Jerusalem or any claim or historic right to it."*

Right off the bat motivations are questioned. As soon as the people set out to fulfill the vision they are hit with insults, plots, threats and innuendoes.

Why didn't this persecution stop the vision from going forward?

It is because God's servant had equipped them to go forward...

### **Summary**

Great narrative in overcoming adversity and sticking to vision - eh?

Before we wrap up let's dig just a bit deeper...

In Ephesians 4 we find the Apostle Paul building on the concept of the Church as the Body of Christ. He discussed the role of leaders in the missional culture of the church. According the apostle the role of the church leaders is "...for the perfecting of the saints, unto the work of ministering, unto the building up of the body of Christ" Paul talks about the different parts of the body as a metaphor to clearly illustrate that a body cannot function effectively without all its parts. Each person is a member of that body. The church leads the charge.

So often we mistake the role of Pastors and Deacons and other church leaders. If you get one thing out of today here this...

Most leaders love to do the ministry, love the people and love the Lord, that's why they are in ministry, but the calling on the church leadership is not to do all of the work, but to grow and develop the skills of the body for effective ministry. God's people are supposed to work to build up the church.

The pastor and leaders are supposed to build up and motivate the people in the body. They are to instill the vision and to equip the body for the great work of Jesus commission.

I find it telling that Jesus didn't say to his Apostles. Okay now go and do this for my people... We see what he said in Matthew 28:16-20

*...And Jesus came to them and spake unto them, saying, All authority hath been given unto me in heaven and on earth.*

*Go ye therefore, and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I commanded you: and lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world*

He said make disciples and teach them...

Today, you are a royal priesthood, a holy nation. Jesus has set us a great task and every joint supplies. We all have a purpose and we all need to work together to be an effective body. Will you take up the challenge with me today? Can we come into unity and agreement to worship God together, to Love every person who comes in those doors and to embrace those who need Jesus. Will you join together this morning and embrace the vision?

If you are on fire with the vision of this church, can I humbly suggest that this week you spend some time with the Lord, be still and know that he is God and listen to his direction in your heart? Nehemiah gives us a good example, let's us press forward toward the mark of the high calling that we all have in Christ Jesus.

*Prayer*