

Let Us Arise and Build The Call to Action—Providing Great Leadership

Introduction: There are three kinds of people in the world:

People who make things happen.

People who watch what's happening, and

People who ask, "What happened?"

In which category would you put Nehemiah? He is one of the most inspiring characters of the Bible. He is a living testimony to what ordinary people can do when they love enough to care, care enough to cry, cry enough to pray, and pray enough to act. When that happens, people and God become partners to do great things.

God provided Nehemiah everything he needed to accomplish the work of rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem including permission to take leave of his position at the palace, a royal escort to the city of Jerusalem and access to the king's forests for building materials. And now in chapter 2 we see him arriving in Jerusalem to get the work underway. But it was a critical time. Nehemiah was only one man; but this work required the help and cooperation of the whole remnant remaining in Jerusalem. How would Nehemiah broach the issue to the people? How would they respond? It was a time for skillful leadership to bring about this great task.

Our next section of the book of Nehemiah shows us how Nehemiah handled these delicate matters. (2:11-20)

"So I came to Jerusalem and was there three days. And I arose in the night, I and a few men with me. I did not tell anyone what my God was putting into my mind to do for Jerusalem and there was no animal with me except the animal on which I was riding. So I went out at night by the Valley Gate in the direction of the Dragon's Well and on to the Refuse Gate, inspecting the walls of Jerusalem which were broken down and its gates which were consumed by fire. Then I passed on to the Fountain Gate and the King's Pool, but there was no place for my mount to pass. So I went up at night by the ravine and inspected the wall. Then I entered the Valley Gate again and returned. And the officials did not know where I had gone or what I had done; nor had I as yet told the Jews, the priests, the nobles, the officials, or the rest who did the work. Then I said to them, "You see the bad situation we are in, that Jerusalem is desolate and its gates burned by fire. Come, let us rebuild the wall of Jerusalem that we may no longer be a reproach." And I told them how the hand of my God had been favorable to me, and also about the king's words which he had spoken to me. Then they said, "Let us arise and build." So they put their hands to the good work. But when Sanballat the Horonite, and Tobiah the Ammonite official, and Geshem the Arab heard it, they mocked us and despised us and said, "What is this thing you are doing? Are you rebelling against the king?" So I answered them and said to them, "The God of heaven will give us success; therefore we His servants will arise and

build, but you have no portion, right, or memorial in Jerusalem.’” (Nehemiah 2:11–20, NASB)

In this section, we see the power that leadership has to get God’s work done. Nehemiah proved himself to be a great leader; and he models the principles of great leadership. Today the challenge is for all of us to understand these principles and use them in our own spheres of leadership today.

Great leaders prepare themselves personally to do God’s work.

One can surely imagine that the journey to Jerusalem was a long and arduous one. I can hardly imagine Nehemiah arriving in the city without the need for rest and renewal. There were certain personal matters that needed attention.

And in keeping with Nehemiah’s pattern, there was a need for time to once again pray for God’s blessing upon the effort that was about to take place. Perhaps all of that is implied in the first expression: “So I came to Jerusalem and was there three days”.

We’ll not belabor the point; but great leaders have to organize their own lives before they can lead others. If we can’t lead ourselves, then how can we lead others?

Great leaders do their homework (conduct research).

Nehemiah didn’t rush into action or merely resort to talk. He took the time to inspect the walls. The record seems to suggest that Nehemiah made his way around at least half the perimeter of the city, having to finally turn back because of the amount of debris and rubble. This freed him from the charge that as a newcomer he didn’t know anything about the enormity of the task or how to go about restoration. Nehemiah saw more at night than the residents saw in the daylight (Wiersbe).

It takes time to know how to succeed in doing God’s work. We need to know what works with people. We need to ask questions, study successful efforts, and learn what principles lead to spiritual and numerical growth. We don’t need a flurry of “off the wall” ideas; but a mature and studied approach to how people in our society respond to various efforts and how we can engage them in scriptural evangelism.

Great leaders look to God for direction and seek His glory!

One of the more subtle nuances in Nehemiah’s language is his humble description of the task he is about to undertake. He is not the author of grandiose and self-serving schemes that would call attention to his skill as a leader or lead to self-glorification. Instead he expressed his intention in terms of what God’s will was; and thus attributes the work he proposes as that which “God was putting into His mind to do for Jerusalem.” And this teaches us two things about all our plans:

All of our dreams should grow out of a studied view of God's will for His people! No vision that alters the will of God for His people is acceptable, no matter how many people it brings in!
All of our dreams should lead to the glory of God and not human pride and glory! Sometimes people are carried away with varying outreaches that end up glorifying the church rather than the Lord. Everyone is saying, "Look at what we're doing!" rather than "Look at what God is doing!"

Great leaders are "dreamers" of big dreams.

A great leader is never satisfied with "status quo."

"Sometimes it takes a stranger to see sharply what has been softened by familiarity." (Kidner).

A great leader causes us to take a fresh look at ourselves and what is possible. He sees what others cannot see. He sees as possible what other may see as impossible.

Swindoll wrote, "Vision is essential for survival. It is spawned by faith, sustained by hope, sparked by imagination, and strengthened by enthusiasm. It is greater than sight, deeper than a dream, broader than an idea. Vision encompasses vast vistas outside the realm of the predictable, the safe, the expected. No wonder we perish without it!"

And if on the one hand we must be resistant to change that alters the patterns of God's word, then we must be equally resistant to the temptation to resign ourselves to "business as usual." Never was a time when God's people needed more to "dream" again.

Great leaders build community or unity.

It is not just vision casting that is important; but bringing others to own the vision that is cast—to make it their own goal.

One of the things that has really bothered me about some leaders or influencers in the church is their propensity to empower themselves by dividing others.

Watch out for the leader that talks about others when with you! Because such a leader may be talking about you when with someone else! This is a common and worldly way to build power, by the divide and conquer mentality.

We are easily susceptible to be manipulated by flattery and by the confidence of shared "concerns" about others. But in reality what is happening is that we are being drawn into loyalty to one person while being made disloyal to another. One person's influence rises at the loss of someone else's. This isn't leadership; it's church politics.

Nehemiah shows us a different attitude. His influence does not diminish others. Instead he works to be inclusive and unifying. Good leadership seeks to bring people together, not divide them against one another.

Great leaders speak with realism and honesty.

Nehemiah motivated the people with an honest appraisal of where the people were—“You see the bad situation we are in, that Jerusalem is desolate and its gates burned by fire”.

Great leaders ask for help and cooperation.

A great leader has faith in people. He cannot fear them, dislike them, or hold them in contempt, and then lead them. He has to believe in them and let them know that he believes in them!

Nehemiah gave them a specific challenge to rebuild. “Come, let us rebuild the wall of Jerusalem”. Notice he didn’t say, “You need to build the wall!” Instead, “let us!” A boss says, “Go!” A leader says, “Let’s go.”

Notice how Nehemiah identifies with the people and encourages them to join him in the task; he invites them rather than commands them.

Nehemiah used his official charge from the king to overcome the opposition of Israel’s enemies, but he didn’t use his authority as a means to force people into submission to his purposes. Instead he called them together and asked for their help.

Do we expect others to accept our leadership based on position rather than upon well-thought out and informed proposals?

Great leaders provide motivation to work.

Nehemiah motivated them by showing them how things would be different after they accept the task of rebuilding—“that we may no longer be a reproach.”

He encouraged them with expressions of optimism based on God’s help and the king’s approval. He showed them that the evidences of God’s will were already available to encourage their faith.

Great leaders take a stand against those who hinder the work of God.

Already we have seen that two men who ruled in the area were displeased that someone had come to seek the welfare of Israel. Their power was about to diminish and they did not like it (v. 10).

Now we see that whatever inward resentments they had held found expression in discrediting Nehemiah’s efforts. They judged his motives, implying that he was seeking to rebel against the king (v. 20). This would not be the end of their tactics and studying them will give us insight into some of the challenges God’s people will have to overcome to build.

Nehemiah’s answer reveals two things about him:

His great confidence in God!

His unwillingness to compromise truth in order to succeed.

In this case, these three were worshippers of false gods and there was nothing to be gained by inviting these men to join in the project. They could only corrupt the people through their idolatry and involvement.

Conclusions: The people’s response says everything, “Let us arise and build”. Here is the proof of great leadership, when we can bring people together to

willingly do God's work. Nehemiah brought people to a new level of commitment and growth and in a way that glorified God. We can do the same when we lead like Nehemiah led.