

**Let Us Arise and Build
Studies in Nehemiah**

“In the Crosshairs”—Protecting leaders (Neh. 6:1-19)

Intro: Chuck Swindoll in his book “Hand me Another Brick” tells a funny story about quarterback Sonny Jurgenson of the Washington Redskins. A new coach had come to town and the Redskins started winning; but as time went on, they went through a slump and began to lose regularly. Of course a lot of the blame fell on the quarterback Jurgenson. One of the local sports writers was interviewing him and asked him if all the criticism was getting to him and if he just wanted to quit. This was Jurgenson’s response, “No, not really. I don't want to quit. I've been in this game long enough to know that every quarterback, every week of the season, spends his time either in the penthouse or in the outhouse.” Swindoll, Charles R. (1998-10-16). Hand Me Another Brick (p. 112). Thomas Nelson. Kindle Edition.

Probably every leader can relate at least to the idea that as a leader you will live on the yo-yo of public opinion and that you may be on top of the world one minute or about as low you can get the next. Certainly you’re going to have to deal with criticism and the verbal jabs of those who don’t like you.

In our morning lesson we saw that among the weapons in Satan’s arsenal is the power to attack those who lead. We saw that Satan used four means of attack against Nehemiah in order to try to bring God’s work to a halt.

He threaten him with personal harm

He sought to intimidate him with intimidation and threats

He sought to discredit him before loyal followers

He sought to erode his security through his brethren’s friendship with the enemies

As we look at this chapter, we can see some important applications for God’s leaders and followers today. These principles can also be applied to many other similar relationships where leadership is important—in our homes, in our businesses, and in our government. And especially this week, it might be good to think about the kind of leader that Nehemiah was when we choose the kind of people we want to lead our government.

Some important lessons about the cause of God

Strong leadership is an important feature of a successful congregation. We can see that appointing leaders was a priority for the early church.

“And when they had appointed elders for them in every church, having prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed.” (Acts 14:23)

And this was the pattern for churches that scriptural leadership be appointed. It was important to God.

And it is important in these other relationships of life.

One of the essential features of a growing church is a strong bond between leaders and their people.

You can sense in the Nehemiah narrative that the people of Israel had a great admiration and appreciation for Nehemiah as a leader. They responded to his appeals to rebuild the wall; and they worked steadily at his behest.

So today people need to believe in their leaders (in their commitment to them, their love for them, their common support of their values, their vision for the future of the church).

“But we request of you, brethren, that you appreciate those who diligently labor among you, and have charge over you in the Lord and give you instruction, and that you esteem them very highly in love because of their work. Live in peace with one another.” (1 Thessalonians 5:12–13)

When people lose faith in their leaders and leaders lose faith in their people, the church suffers greatly and the work of the Lord comes to a halt. So we need to stay united with mutual love, appreciation, and respect.

Important lessons for those who lead

Leaders should always conduct themselves with integrity so that the opponent can say nothing bad about them.

Leaders are chosen with the qualification that they must men “above reproach.” They need to keep it that way.

“namely, if any man be above reproach, the husband of one wife, having children who believe, not accused of dissipation or rebellion.” (Titus 1:6)

...nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock. (1 Peter 5:3)

Yet in spite of this leaders must be prepared to be unfairly attacked.

Jesus sought to prepare his apostles for opposition:

““A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a slave above his master. “It is enough for the disciple that he become as his teacher, and the slave as his master. If they have called the head of the house Beelzebul, how much more the members of his household!” (Matthew 10:24–25)

Much of the criticism you’ll receive will not necessarily be fair. I liked this word of advice I read many years ago. Every if you feel that the criticism is unfair, find the kernel of truth in it and benefit from it.

Leaders need the courage and determination to face these things without giving up.

Consider Jesus’ contrast between a loving shepherd and self-serving hireling:

I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep. He who is a hireling, and not a shepherd, who is not the owner of the sheep, beholds the wolf coming, and leaves the sheep, and flees, and the wolf snatches them, and scatters them.” (John 10:11–12)

Leaders need that courage that Jesus taught his disciples:
And do not fear those who kill the body, but are unable to kill the soul; but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell."
(Matthew 10:28)

People have often quoted a part of Winston Churchill's famous speech at Harrow School in 1941 as if it were the total speech. But consider these words he spoke that day:

"Never give in, never give in, never, never, never, never-in nothing, great or small, large or petty - never give in except to convictions of honour and good sense. Never yield to force; never yield to the apparently overwhelming might of the enemy.

Leaders must learn not to return evil for evil or resort to the tactics used against them.

When attacked, Nehemiah didn't resort to "mudslinging" when others were smearing him. He did not resort to the political games and the dishonorable tactics of his opponents, even though he could have probably used them to his advantage. He defended his integrity, stated his purposes, and trusted in God to give him victory.

This is what God expects of all Christians in the treatment of those who wrong them:

"Never pay back evil for evil to anyone. Respect what is right in the sight of all men. If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men. Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, "VENGEANCE IS MINE, I WILL REPAY," says the Lord. BUT IF YOUR ENEMY IS HUNGRY, FEED HIM, AND IF HE IS THIRSTY, GIVE HIM A DRINK; FOR IN SO DOING YOU WILL HEAP BURNING COALS UPON HIS HEAD." Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good." (Romans 12:17–21)

Important lessons for followers

Followers need to remember that leaders are people too who can be hurt by unfair criticism or bad treatment.

Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching. (1 Timothy 5:17)

Giving someone a position of leadership or paying someone to serve does not come with the right to misuse them. Instead Paul urges us to honor them:

Followers should realize how important it is to support good leaders and not be manipulated by those who would injure them.

"Obey your leaders, and submit to them; for they keep watch over your souls, as those who will give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you." (Hebrews 13:17)

Mark often mentions this verse in his prayers.

Followers should seek to protect leaders from unfair charges and criticisms.

“Do not receive an accusation against an elder except on the basis of two or three witnesses.” (1 Timothy 5:19)

Stay out of the rumor mill. It only takes a few carefully chosen criticisms to completely undermine and destroy a person of influence in the church. We should be careful to appreciate and honor those who lead us rather than criticize and withhold support.

Conclusion: When God’s people choose good leaders, when those leaders lead with integrity and courage, and when those who follow appreciate and respect them, God’s people will do great things in a short time.