

(English mp3) Spiritual Leadership Principles Lesson 3 (Part 1)

Principles from Nehemiah

Welcome to Spiritual Leadership Principles Lesson 3. This will be Part 1 of a 3-part lesson. The reason for this is to keep the length of each recording to 30 minutes or less. In this lesson, we will explore some of the leadership principles from the life of Nehemiah.

This lesson begins on page 14 in your handout.

I will start by reviewing a few introductory thoughts related to leadership and management. Back in the 1990s, a renowned author and professor at Harvard business school, John Kotter, authored a book titled, Leading Change. He developed a simple model that defined the differences between Management and Leadership.

Both management and leadership are needed to run any organization in an environment marked by rapid and continual change. Often effective managers are promoted into positions of leadership because they were effective managers. What John Kotter discovered is that the skills needed to be an effective manager are quite different from those of a leader. Managers and Leaders are both essential to successful organizations, and it is helpful to identify the skill sets for each so as not to hire or promote individuals who may not possess the needed skills.

The primary skill set of effective managers can be remembered using the acronym: **P.O.C.**

“P” stand for **Planning and Budgeting**

“O” stands for **Organizing and Staffing**

“C” stands for **Controlling and Problem Solving**

Managers focus on helping organizations run effectively.

Leaders help organizations grow, evolve, and adapt to changing circumstances.

The acronym for the skill set of leaders can be remembered with these three letters: **S.A.M.**

“S” stands for **Setting Direction and Establishing Vision**

“A” stands for **Aligning Constituents**

“M” stands for **Motivating and Inspiring**

Leaders establish the vision for the organization.

Leaders align constituents or stakeholders to commit to the vision.

And then leaders motivate and inspire the team, the organization to accomplish the vision that has been set forth.

Being a manager does not mean you are less important than the leader. Everyone cannot be a leader. If everyone were a leader, nothing would get done. Every organization, whether it is a church, a business, or a government agency, even in the family, there is a need for leadership and managers. Few people possess all the skills needed. We will see in the life of Nehemiah that he was a great leader who also possessed some of these managerial skills.

Long before John Kotter developed these principles for leadership and management, Nehemiah was living them out, by the grace of God, to accomplish remarkable things for God's glory. Nehemiah was a great leader who also understood the importance of management skills. In this lesson, we will read parts of the Old Testament book of Nehemiah and highlight nine simple principles that can be applied to make any one a more effective leader.

Turn to page 15 as we set the context for this study of Nehemiah. The chart at the top of the page will remind you of where Nehemiah fits into the story of the Old Testament. At the end of the Monarchy period, the Southern Kingdom, known as Judah, was conquered by Babylon and King Nebuchadnezzar. In 586 BC, Jerusalem was destroyed and its population was taken into exile in Babylon for a total of 70 years. In 535 BC, God moved the heart of King Cyrus of Persia to issue a decree allowing the people of Judah to return to their land. The exiles returned in three phases under Zerubbabel, followed by Ezra, and then Nehemiah. God called Nehemiah to rebuild the wall around Jerusalem and repopulate the city.

Follow along as I read the summary paragraph under the chart on page 15.

“Nehemiah continues Ezra's final glimpse of God's people mercifully reestablished in their land after the Babylonian exile and before the long dark intertestamental period of waiting for a greater restoration and revelation of God's deliverance. That period to come was known as the 400 Silent Years. Many have noted this book's lessons on leadership. Wise, prayerful Nehemiah leads a third group of exiles back to Jerusalem and there unites the people amid surrounding opposition to rebuild the city walls and to live as God's people. According to his word, this book also highlights God's faithfulness to his unfaithful people. Nehemiah leads the people towards trust in a strong, trustworthy God. The wall rebuilt under Nehemiah's direction pictures not fearful retreat or isolation, but rather, God's protection of his people whom he has chosen and through whom he will accomplish his redemptive plan for the human race.

This story is about God building his kingdom. Nehemiah was used of God to be a part of fulfilling this plan. If you have not read the book of Nehemiah recently, the chart at the bottom of the page provides a summary of the key events in the book, chapter-by-chapter.

I encourage you to re-read the book of Nehemiah as we work our way through this lesson. Here is the 30,000-foot view of the book of Nehemiah to refresh your memory.

- Chapter 1: The problem is identified. Nehemiah hears God call and responds through prayer, humility, and confession.
- Chapter 2: We see the boldness of Nehemiah before the king. Opposition to the construction of the wall already begins. Nehemiah begins planning, setting direction, and establishing buy-in among those who will do this work.
- Chapter 3: The team is formed to build the wall.
- Chapter 4: More opposition with verbal mocking. Nehemiah continues to pray and act. Threats are presented and Nehemiah prays and acts. Nehemiah demonstrates problem solving skills of a leader and a manager. And he leads by example.

- Chapter 5: Nehemiah demonstrates love and care for the people. He is sensitive to the needs of their needs. He confronts problems directly and brings resolution. He makes great sacrifices as a leader for the people.
- Chapter 6: Opposition continues to rise from the outside and within the people of God. In the face of distraction and deceit, Nehemiah remains focused on integrity and the wall is completed in 52 days.
- Chapter 7: Nehemiah delegates leadership and establishes leadership criteria.
- Chapter 8: Nehemiah, the leader, is motivating, inspiring, and celebrating. They celebrate with joy and thanksgiving the amazing work that God did through the people.
- Chapter 9: This is a time for the people to refocus on the Lord through the Word of God, confession, and humility.
- Chapter 10: After realigning their hearts with the Lord, it is time to renew their commitment to God's covenant.
- Chapters 11 and 12: Jerusalem is repopulated and the wall is dedicated. Everyone is playing a part in this process.
- Chapter 13: Nehemiah returned to Persia and when he comes back, he finds that many of the people have wandered from the vision. The work of the leader is never finished. There is always the need to renew the vision. Reforms were need related to the Sabbath and marriage.

I am sure that you already noticed a few leadership principles as I was doing that high-level review of Nehemiah.

Turn with me to the top of page 16. In this Lesson we will discuss nine leadership principles from the life of Nehemiah that can be applied to any position of leadership.

As we continue with this study, the focus is not just on those called to visible and strategic leadership positions like a pastor, elder, missionary, or even someone in a significant ministry position. Every believer is called by God to lead in some way, it may be in one's marriage and family, in a ministry at church or their primary vocation, or even in the community. The nine principles we will focus on in this lesson are very practical. These are not complex, but they can be difficult to put into practice.

Here are the 9 leadership principles from Nehemiah:

- God's leader responds to a call.
- God's direction and vision are sought by the leader.
- God's leader cares for the people in their situation.
- Prayer is essential to know God's will. So, prayer is a big part of the life of a godly leader.
- God's leader builds a team.
- God's leader motivates and inspires.
- God's leader is not discouraged by adversity. They expect it. They are prepared for it.
- God's leader discovers ways to resolve conflict. They do not run from conflict. They confront conflict, resolve it, and move on.

- And the ninth principle, God's leader has God given convictions and commitments upon which they will not compromise.

These are the nine leadership principles we will discuss over three parts of this lesson.

Let us begin with principle #1: God's leader responds to a call.

Turn with me to Nehemiah 1:1-4.

“The words of Nehemiah, the son of Hekeliah. Now it happened in the month of Chislev in the 20th year, as I was in Susa the citadel, that Hanani, one of my brothers, came with certain men from Judah. I asked them concerning the Jews who escaped, who had survived the exile, and concerning Jerusalem. And they said to me, ‘The remnant there in the province who had survived the exile is in great trouble and shame. The wall of Jerusalem is broken down, and its gates are destroyed by fire.’ As soon as I heard these words, I sat down and wept and mourned for days, and I continued fasting and praying before the God of heaven. “

What observations can we make from these four verses?

- First, there was no amazing appearance of God in this story. Nehemiah's brother comes with some others and shares a report about the condition of Jerusalem and the people of Judah who returned to rebuild the temple.
- Second, there was nothing really all that special about Nehemiah. He was not a priest. He was not a prophet or a king. He was not a person of high standing. He was a servant to the king.
- Third, Nehemiah, received a simple message from his brother. What we should note is how he responded when confronted with this problem in Jerusalem. The Scriptures say that he wept and mourned for days. And he continued fasting and praying before the God of heaven.

When Nehemiah heard this report, it broke his heart.

- God is always speaking. He can speak to us through people. He can speak to us through circumstances. He speaks to us through his Word. God was speaking through Nehemiah's brother in this case. Yet not everyone may have responded as Nehemiah responded. I am sure that not everyone would have wept, mourned, fasted, and prayed for days as Nehemiah did.

This is the nature of God's call in each of our lives. God can work through people, circumstances, and His Word, to present a problem to create a holy discontent within our heart and our soul. It is up to each of us to hear and respond when God calls in this way.

- God's call typically is presented in the form of a problem that needs to be resolved. What we want to stress in this course is that the call from God is not limited to just pastors, missionaries, or people in “full-time” ministry.

God is continually calling each of us. He is presenting opportunities to serve Him and respond to needs in this world for His glory. This first principle of leadership is that God's leader responds to His call.

One way we can tell that God is calling us to help bring correction, deliverance, healing, or hope to a specific problem may be that our heart breaks over what we see and hear. Leaders often see things that others are not able to see. This vision may come through the eyes of our heart as we sense the depth of the need.

The question for each of us to answer is:

What breaks your heart?

What has broken your heart in the past?

What broke your heart to lead you to be serving as you are today?

This is part of understanding God's calling as a leader.

Can you think of examples in your life where you were presented with a problem and it broke your heart, to the point where you were moved to action? You may have prayed, mourned, fasted, just like Nehemiah. And out of that time before the Lord, God started to bring clarity to the scope of the problem. God begins to provide you with a vision that will further define your call.

Every day we are presented with issues. We see things on the internet. We hear things in church. Is God calling us to respond and to lead some kind of initiative to bring glory to God and to demonstrate love to the people of God? And even to see people who do not know Jesus yet and be presented with the love of Jesus?

Notice that in this time of praying, weeping, mourning, and fasting, God's call on Nehemiah brought greater clarity for how he should respond.

Let us continue reading Nehemiah 1:5-11:

And I said, "O LORD of heaven, the great and awesome God who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments, let your ear be attentive and your eyes open, to hear the prayer of your servant that I now pray before you day and night for the people of Israel, your servants, confessing the sins of the people of Israel, which we have sinned against you. Even I and my father's house have sinned. We have acted very corruptly against you and have not kept the commandments, the statutes, and rules that you commanded your servant, Moses. Remember the word that you commanded your servant Moses saying, 'If you are unfaithful, I will scatter you among the peoples, but if you return to me and keep my commandments and do them, though your outcasts are in the uttermost parts of heaven, from there I will gather them and bring them to the place that I have chosen to make my name dwell there.' They are your servants and your people, whom you are redeemed by their great power and by your strength and strong hand. O LORD, let your ear be attentive to the prayer of your servant, and to the prayer of your servants who delight to fear your name, and give success to your servant today and grant him mercy in the sight of this man." Now I was a cupbearer to the king.

That was Nehemiah 1:5-11

What observations do you see in Nehemiah's prayer?

- Through prayer, God's vision is beginning to develop in Nehemiah's heart.
- Nehemiah has a correct perspective of God, a reverence for God.
- He understood that God is worthy of all glory, honor, and praise.
- God made covenant commitment with his people.
- Nehemiah humbles himself and identifies with the people in their sin. Leaders must be humble.
- Nehemiah honors God. He acknowledges God and his character.
- Key point: The clarity of God's call and vision will provide a foundation for the perseverance on the part of a leader when opposition and challenges present themselves.

We can sense a call from God because it may break our heart and God moves us to respond. And then God begins to give us vision and clarity on what the next steps are to lead an initiative. When we are clear on the call and the vision that is from God, we have greater commitment, passion, and zeal to persevere in face of challenges and opposition.

It may be helpful to identify examples in our own life where we have been presented with a problem that broke our heart, and we were then motivated to respond to God's call.

For my wife and I, we heard this call from God clearly in 2020. We sensed that God was calling us to take a step together in a new direction for about one year prior to September 2020. We were not sure what to do though. We continued to pray, serve Him, and wait on Him. We felt God was preparing us for something beyond our local church.

We had 15 years of relationships in Senegal. God was developing within us a heart for the people of Senegal. In September 2020, we took a step of faith to step down from my pastor role and with the support of our Elders, we entered a season of actively seeking the Lord for the next step. He led us to begin serving with Global Training Network.

God gave us a passion to equip and encourage pastors and leaders here in Senegal, and to see the Senegalese reach Senegal for Christ. Jill and I were unified. We had a sense of peace. We did not have tears, but we felt a heavy burden and a clear call and passion that was from God to serve together in Senegal. God provided for our full support within 3-4 months that also affirmed His call. There is a huge need for pastors to be equipped with sound biblical training, especially in the rural communities. 80-90% of pastors and leaders in Africa, Asia and South America have limited to no access to affordable biblical training. This need is great, and we felt that God was calling us to help with this need in a small way.

It is now the end of 2025, and we have been serving with GTN for five years. We faced difficulties along the way, but there is no doubt in our mind that this was a call from God. He gave us a vision. He has provided for us every step of the way.

The clarity of God's call and His vision helped us to persevere through challenges and difficulties. We have been attempting to apply many of these leadership principles from Nehemiah over these last five years.

God's call does not have to be the call to become a pastor or a missionary. God's call may be to help a neighbor. It might be a call to make a difference in the community. It could be a call to help someone with a garden project. Or raise funds for an income project to care for your family and be fully committed to the ministry that God's called you to.

Take time to reflect on different ways God has called you in the past and how he may be calling you now. God's leader responds to a call.

What is breaking your heart?

Have you been moved to weep, fast and pray and seek God's face?

Out of this time alone with God, He will help you discern if He is calling you to respond and lead something for His glory.

This brings us to the second leadership principle on page 17. As God's leader responds to His call through weeping, fasting, praying, and seeking of God, God begins to give direction and vision to the leader. God's leader seeks direction and vision from God.

There is a Japanese proverb that says, *"Vision without action is a daydream. Action without vision is a nightmare."*

If we are going to lead others, it is important for the leader to first have an idea of where you are going, what is the purpose, what is the big picture. Acting upon the call is necessary but vision and direction are needed to guide the action to accomplish remarkable things for God.

There is a second quote on page 17 by John White, who authored the book Excellence in Leadership.

"People do not follow programs but leaders who inspire them. They act when a vision stirs in them a reckless hope of something greater than themselves, hope of fulfillment they never before dared to aspire to. And hope is passed from person to person. Hope bursts into flames when leaders begin to act."

This was true of Nehemiah.

Let us review four key points in support of this principle and then read chapter 2 and make observations to support each point.

1. Godly leaders have an unclouded vision of God's purpose and plan. We will see that God placed this vision on Nehemiah's heart.
2. It is important to plan first and then begin to implement. We will read what Nehemiah did when he first arrived in Jerusalem.
3. You must be skillful in organizing and preparing for the work. This is a mix of management and leadership skills. The vision must be compelling but there must

also be sense of reality with initial first steps that must be taken. The true managers can work on detailed plans, organize and staff to accomplish the vision. But a good leader will do this initial work.

4. God's vision is usually simple. Simple to communicate and easy to understand. In Nehemiah's case, the vision is stated in 2:17, "Let us rebuild the wall of Jerusalem." This was a simple vision to grasp yet it was God-sized which would help to inspire the people.

Visionary leadership is the art of picturing God's preferred future for people in terms that inspire their souls and invigorate their wills.

Follow along as I read Nehemiah 2:1-10 and listen for how Nehemiah's time with God, as he responded to the call, led to God helping him to develop a vision and the formulate the initial steps of his plan.

In the month of Nisan, in the 20th year of King Artaxerxes, when wine was before him, I took up the wine and gave it to the king. Now I have had not been sad in his presence, and the king said to me, "Why is your face sad, seeing you are not sick? This is nothing but sadness of heart." Then I was very much afraid. I said to the king, "Let the king live forever! Why should not my face be sad, when the city, the place of my fathers' grave, lies in ruins, and its gates have been destroyed by fire?" And the king said to me, "What are you requesting?" So I prayed to the God of heaven, and I said to the king, "If it pleases the king, and if your servant has found favor in your sight, that you send me to Judah, to the city of my fathers' graves, that I may rebuild it." The king said to me (the queen sitting beside him), "How long will you be gone, and when will you return?" So, it pleased the king to send me when I had given him a time. And I said to the king, "If it pleases the king, let letters be given me to governors of the provinces Beyond the River, that they may let me pass through until I come to Judah, and a letter to Asaph, the keeper of the king's forest, that he may give me timber to make beams for the gates of the fortress of the temple, and for the wall of the city, and for the house that I shall occupy." The king granted me what I asked, for the good hand of my God was upon me.

Then I came to the governors of the provinces Beyond the River and gave them the king's letters. Now the king had sent with me officers of the army and horsemen. But when Sanballat the Horonite and Tobiah the Ammonite servant heard this, it displeased them greatly that someone had come to seek the welfare of the people of Israel.

This was chapter 2:1-10.

What observations can we make that support this principle of God giving direction and vision to the leader who has responded to His call?

- As Nehemiah was responding to the call through weeping, praying, fasting, mourning, God began to develop the vision for him. It is obvious that Nehemiah was already thinking about how to move forward in response to the call. When the king asked what he needed, Nehemiah was ready with specific, bold, God-sized requests.

He asked for letters of safe passage and letters to acquire needed resources. We see that God even moved the king to provide his army for protection.

- Nehemiah was continually praying. The king asked, what do you need? And Nehemiah prayed, and then he spoke. He prayed, and then he acted.
- Even before the work begins, opposition to God's plan is already present. We will see in the next passage that Nehemiah was not caught off guard. He expected opposition and the clarity of the call and the vision from God gave him the strength to boldly press on.

Let us continue reading 2:11-20 to better understand how God's vision was beginning to take shape in Nehemiah's heart and mind as the leader who was responding to God's call.

So I went to Jerusalem and was there three days. Then I arose in the night, and I and a few men with me. And I told no one what my God had put into my heart to do for Jerusalem. There was no animal with me, but the one on which I rode. I went out by night by the Valley Gate to the Dragon Spring and to the Dung Gate. I inspected the walls of Jerusalem that were broken down and its gates that had been destroyed by fire. Then I went on to the Fountain Gate and the King's Pool, but there was no room for the animal that was under me to pass. Then I went up by night by the valley and inspected the wall, and I turned back and entered by the Valley Gate and so returned. And the officials did not know where I had gone or what I was doing, and had not yet told the Jews, the priests, the nobles, the officials, and the rest who were to do the work.

Then I said to them, "You see the trouble we are in, how Jerusalem lies in ruins with its gates burned. Come, let us build the wall of Jerusalem, that they may no longer suffer a derision. And I told them of the hand of my God that had been upon me for good, and also the words that the king had spoken to me. And they said, "Let us rise and build." So, they strengthened their hands for the good work. But when Sanballat the Horonite, and Tobiah the Ammonite servant, and Geshem the Arab heard of it, they jeered at us and despised us and said, "What is this thing that you are doing? Are you rebelling against the king?" And I replied to them, "The God of heaven will make us prosper, and his servants will arise and build, but you have no portion or right or claim in Jerusalem."

This was 2:11-20.

Once again, what observations can we make related to God providing direction and vision for the leader?

- God gives leaders the ability to see things that others cannot see. Nehemiah heard about the trouble in Jerusalem but now he takes time to assess the scope of the problem for himself. What he sees will help him begin to communicate the vision to others with greater clarity and passion.
- In verse 11 we learn that the vision was not Nehemiah's idea, but that God has placed this vision on his heart.
- Effective leader evaluates the situation before acting. Nehemiah takes three days and nights, with just a few people, as he begins to formulate the initial steps of a plan for rebuilding the wall. Leaders plan before implementation, and leaders are

responsible for helping others understand the scope of the problem and then align them around the vision.

- Why do you think Nehemiah started in such a quiet, humble manner? He had not shared his plans with any of the key officials, priests, or nobles. This time of assessment would help him count the cost before moving ahead. It would help him develop commitment, passion and zeal to then boldly influence others.
- Why do you think he brought just a few others with him at night to assess the scope of the problem instead of announcing it to everyone? I sense God gave him discernment as to who to bring with him. These men would see what Nehemiah saw. There was a shared experience. When Nehemiah presents the problem in verse 17, these few others could affirm what he was communicating. These first three nights were the early steps of aligning the key players and the start to motivating and inspiring the people to a great cause and not just a task.
- In verse 18, Nehemiah remains focused on God and his glory. God is the one who will make this project a success. He let the people know how God had already been working through the king and in his own life as well.
- When the problem is clearly presented from God's perspective and God's vision is shared, a core group of people will respond in faith. Nehemiah says, *"You see the trouble. Come let us rebuild the wall and relieve the suffering of God's people."* And the people shout, *"Let us rise up and build."* And they strengthened their hands for the work. They were now committed.
- Let us make note of a few characteristics of a godly vision:
 - Godly vision depicts an outcome that may seem outrageous given the present reality. This is something that only God could do.
 - Godly vision brings glory to God and draws people to Him.
 - Godly vision seeks outcomes that are not possible without God's input. The vision's fulfillment is not about the elevation of individuals and institutions, but the exaltation of God.
 - Godly vision displays the character and desires of God. Nehemiah remains focused on the power, wisdom, faithfulness, and provision of God. The spotlight is on God, not on himself as the leader.
 - Godly vision becomes contagious. Evidence that a vision truly is from God is that it is adopted by many other faithful people. In chapter 3, we will see that this group of faithful people quickly expands beyond the initial few who traveled with Nehemiah at night.
- One final observation in chapter 2 relates to opposition. As we stated earlier, this external opposition from Sanballat, Tobiah, and Geshum the Arab, had already started before the first shovel hit the dirt. The clarity of God's call and the provision of God's guidance and vision, will strengthen the leader to boldly, persevere in the face of opposition and trials. Nehemiah's response is a model for the people to stay focused on God. His reply to the opposition was, *"The God of heaven will make us prosper and we his servants will arise and build, but you have no portion or right or claim in Jerusalem."*

These first two leadership principles of responding the call (What breaks your heart?) and seeking God for direction and vision are the foundation for the remaining leadership

principles. Before the project had even started, Nehemiah already had a deep concern for the people, he was focused on the Lord through prayer, he would not allow himself to be distracted or discouraged by the enemy, he understood the importance of motivating and inspiring the people by redirecting their hearts and minds on the Lord and not him as a leader.

Part 2 of this Lesson we will continue on page 17 as we discuss a few more leadership principles from Nehemiah.

- Godly leaders have a care and concern for the people.
- Godly leaders understand the importance of prayer.
- Godly leaders build teams as they delegate the work and share responsibility and authority with others.

Thanks for your commitment so far, and I look forward to continuing with Lesson 2 – Part 2.

God bless.