

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

Principles from Nehemiah

Welcome back to Spiritual Leadership Principles, Lesson 3, Part 3. We will continue on page 19. We will be discussing the final three principles from the life of Nehemiah.

Turn your attention to Principle #7: God's leader is not discouraged by adversity.

After the Israelites had begun rebuilding the wall of Jerusalem, opposition arose from other occupants within the Palestine area. Nehemiah remained steadfast and courageous and rallied his people to continue the work.

There are two chapters in the book of Nehemiah that provide numerous examples of how Nehemiah persevered in the face of opposition. These are chapter 4 and 6. As we begin, turn in your Bible to Nehemiah chapter four.

I will ask you to read the entire chapter looking for examples of where Nehemiah and his team faced intense opposition. These were times when Nehemiah could have been discouraged, distracted, and deceived into abandoning God's call to rebuild the wall around Jerusalem.

In addition, I will also ask you to identify how Nehemiah responded in the face of adversity and opposition from his enemies. Reflect on what he did to avoid discouragement and retreat. What enabled him to persevere and inspire the people to continue the work.

Pause the recording now, read and reflect on the questions I have presented to you. Only after you have outlined the chapter by stating the forms of opposition and the tactics that Nehemiah, will you then restart the recording as we continue to discussion.

Pause the recording now.

Before we outline this passage, take note of the 4 points listed under Principle #7.

- Godly leaders are determined to persevere.
- They exhibit courage in the face of danger.
- Leaders refuse to throw in the towel or drop out of the race.
- Leaders view opposition as part of the leadership challenge.

As we discuss the various forms of attack in chapter 4 intended to discourage Nehemiah and the workers to stop the work, look for how Nehemiah demonstrates the qualities listed above. I see at least 4 waves of opposition and in each case, Nehemiah refused to allow adversity to discourage him and distract him from fulfilling God's calling and vision.

Opposition #1: (4:1-3)

The enemy begins with the less aggressive tactics of mocking and jeering. They attempt to discourage Nehemiah and the builders by demeaning the quality of their work.

Nehemiah's response: (4:4-5)

Nehemiah turns to God in prayer as his first line of defense.

"Hear, O our God, for we are despised, turn back their taunt on their own heads and give them up to be plunder in the land where they are captives. Do not cover their guilt and let not their sin be blotted out from your sight, for they have provoked you to anger in the presence of the builders."

Nehemiah avoided discouragement in the face of adversity through his trust in God. Many an Old Testament prophet cried out to God and God told them to only stand and watch how He would fight for His people. Nehemiah's prayer was in public just as the mocking from the enemy was heard by all. As Nehemiah modeled trust, this instilled strength and trust among the builders. The result is seen in verse 6, as the wall was built to half its height and the builders worked with all their heart.

Opposition #2 (4:7-8)

The enemy does not stop! We observe the next attack in verses 7 and 8. The aggression is more intense. They are prepared to fight and harm the builders physically.

Nehemiah's response: (4:9)

Once again, Nehemiah prays and then acts. He placed guards in strategic positions to protect the workers day and night. Nehemiah seemed to continually pray and then act. After praying, he did not just sit back and wait to see how God would respond. He said, we will pray and we will use the gifts, wisdom, and abilities that God has given us to do our part as he strengthens us for the work.

Opposition #3 (4:10-12)

Beginning in verse 10, we observe a third wave of opposition. This may have been an internal attack. In Judah it was said that the strength of the people was failing, there was too much rubble and by themselves, the wall could not be rebuilt. This sounds like fear and doubt was being spread within the community.

Then the external enemy takes advantage of this crack in the armor and increases its attack. They say that they will sneak in among the workers when they least expect it and kill them.

Nehemiah's response: (4:13-14)

Nehemiah armed the workers in their neighborhoods with swords, spears and bows and positioned them in strategic locations for protection. The Nehemiah exhorted the people to focus on the power of God. He said, "Do not be afraid of them. Remember the Lord, who is great and awesome, and fight for your brothers, your sons, your daughters, your wives, and

your homes.” Nehemiah was with the people. He continued to remind the people not to look at the circumstances around them but instead, keep their eyes on the LORD. Together, they will have a united front against the enemy.

Opposition #4 (4:15-23)

In this section, there was the ongoing awareness that the enemy was not going to retreat. This could have been overwhelming for people mentally and emotionally.

Nehemiah’s response: (4:15-23)

Nehemiah ensured that the work continued because God had called them to this great task. They worked with shovel in one hand and spear in the other. This just meant that the people were watchful, sober-minded and alert. As believers, we are to always live this way in defense against Satan’s schemes. In verse 21, Nehemiah wrote, “So we labored at the work, and half of them held the spear from the break of dawn until the stars came out.”

Nehemiah also provided other instructions that would instill confidence in the people. He said to the people, “Let every man and his servant pass the night within Jerusalem, that they may be a guard for us by night and may labor by day.”

Nehemiah was there working and protecting the people. He wrote that neither he nor his brothers, nor his servants, nor the men of the guard who followed him, none of them took off their clothes. Each kept their weapon at their right hand. This is another example of how Nehemiah led well. He led by example. He was not a distant leader. He was in there with the people, rolling up his sleeves, doing the work. This surely motivated the people to continue the work and not get discouraged.

Nehemiah must have remained focused on the calling and the vision that God had given him. This provided for zeal, commitment, and strength to persevere in the face of continually growing opposition.

In summary, opposition can be internal and external. It usually will come with increasing intensity. In this case, it moved from just words, to distractions, to emotional warfare to stir up fear and doubt, and in the extreme, even threats of physical harm and death.

Disciples who are leaders know that whether they finish the journey of leadership well depends on how effectively they cope with the crushing emotions that can beset them in the effort to do good. They are careful to take the deliberate and repeated steps required to keep rising above these painful pressures so they may complete their mission.

Nehemiah faced opposition internally from leaders, from nobles, and from people. He dealt with external opposition from Sanballat, from Tobiah, and from Geshem. They started with ridicule and mocking then it grew to threat of physical attack. It is human nature to get discouraged in the face of ongoing adversity.

How can we resist discouragement when faced with adversity as we lead? We can follow the example of Nehemiah.

- Turn to God first and continually in prayer. Nehemiah modeled that in Nehemiah chapter 4.
- Allow your furnace of affliction to become a crucible for refining. Begin to view trials as part of God's refining process. Stop asking "why is this happening to me" and begin asking "What does God want me to learn through this trial".
- Eliminate enemies by making them friends. Sometimes we make our enemies bigger than life. Jesus said, pray for your enemies, love your enemies. If possible, find common ground with the opposition. Take time to understand their motivations and needs so you can pray for them and even meet their real needs. As we demonstrate the love of Christ in this way, this may take the wind out of their sails and minimize or redirect their opposition and even eliminate it.
- You can refuse to be undone by untruths. When people attack your character with lies, stay grounded in your identity in Christ. Continue to walk in holiness and be above reproach. Do not listen to the deceit. Take every thought captive. Guard your time in Bible, pray continually, and replace untruths with the truth of God's Word.
- Do not return evil with evil. Just because someone is acting against you in an evil way, the scriptures say, return evil with good.
- In the face of opposition, like Nehemiah, continue to press on with the vision that God has given you, and God will provide the strength.
- Lead by example. Allow the people you are leading to see your trust and hope in God. Allow them to see you standing with them in the face of opposition. They will witness that your sacrifice and love for them is not just with words but with action. This will encourage them to persevere as well.

Endurance is not just the ability to bear a hard thing, but to turn it into glory.

Growth comes through adversity. We are strengthened by God through trials, and in the end, our character will be further developed as we more mature, and God gets the glory for all of it.

This is what we see in Romans 5:1-5

Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we boast in the hope of the glory of God. Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us.

Let us transition to Leadership Principle #8: God's leader discovers ways to resolve conflict.

This begins at the top of page 18 in your handout. Chapters 5 and 13 provide real-life examples of how Nehemiah confronted conflict and resolved it.

Leaders care for the whole organization and leaders confront issues immediately and biblically.

Turn once again to Nehemiah 5:1-13. We looked at this passage when we talked about how godly leaders care for the people and their situations. We will now look at this passage again with an eye toward a few principles for confronting and resolving conflict.

Here are a few helpful principles for resolving conflict:

1. Take the problem seriously. In verses 1-5, Nehemiah summarizes the problem and what was happening to the people. People had to give up the land, their children were being enslaved, and they were being charged excessive interest. They were being abused by the wealthy in their own community. Nehemiah could have overlooked the problem and continued to drive the project plan to rebuild the wall. Instead, he took the problem seriously. If team unity is threatened, it will have a negative impact on any project or mission. It must be addressed. And depending on the source of the problem or conflict, it may be appropriate for a leader to respond with emotion. In verse 6 we read that Nehemiah was very angry. Righteous anger may be an appropriate response, especially if sin, and repeated sin, is involved.
2. The next step is to Pause, Pray, and Ponder. In verse 7, Nehemiah says that he took counsel with himself. This means that he did not immediately respond to the problem. He first took time to pray and reflect on how best to respond. This is an application of James 1:19-20 to be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry. Because man's anger does not produce the righteous life that God requires. Nehemiah did not need to respond with worldly wisdom but rather with heavenly wisdom described in James 3:17. This wisdom is pure, peaceable, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy, impartial and sincere. Taking time to Pause, Pray and Ponder allows the leader to align their heart to God's will and discern God's wisdom to address the conflict. The goal of the leader is to promote peace and reconciliation within the team so that the mission can continue in way that is unified and honoring to God.
3. The next step is to present the problem and propose a solution. We see this in 5:7 also. Nehemiah brought charges against the nobles and officials. He confronted the source of the problem directly and privately with that group. In the verses that follow, Nehemiah framed the problem in the context of God's Word and how the Nobles and officials were violating the clear teaching of Scripture regarding love for their brothers and sisters, a proper reverence for God, and charging interest for loans. When we remove our personal opinions and emotion from the presentation of the problem and frame it in the context of God's Word, leaders provide the opportunity for the Holy Spirit to convict others of sin and move them to confess, repent and be reconciled.

Nehemiah's solution was for the Nobles and officials to give back all the lands they had acquired and to stop charging interest on loans. Who could object to this solution once the problem has been presented in the context of what will bring the most glory to God and peace within the community?

4. If needed, depending on the scope of the problem, and how many people are impacted, the leader may need to deal with the problem in a more public way. Nehemiah did this in verse 7 when he called a great assembly to ensure that all the people knew that Nehemiah understood the problem and that he was confronting the source of the problem. This would grow trust among the community as everyone would hear the response of the Nobles and officials together. This also took courage on the part of Nehemiah because he was confronting the people who may also have been helping to fund the project to rebuild the wall.

The response from the Nobles in verse 12 was that they would restore everything to its original ownership and stop charging interest. The Priests were also engaged to ensure that things were implemented as promised.

In verse 13, Nehemiah also made it clear that anyone who did not follow through would be cut off from the community.

5. Following this simple process helped to bring resolution to a major conflict. Following this process would also help to motivate and inspire the people to continue the work with all their heart knowing that their leader has represented them with integrity.

When leaders can set an example for the people to observe, this enhances conflict resolution. In this case, Nehemiah was addressing the self-centeredness of the Nobles and officials.

In verse 10, Nehemiah let them know that he and his brothers were not charging interest but instead were loaning money and grain to those in need so they could provide for their families.

In chapter 4 we already saw that Nehemiah worked hard among the people. He showed that he was not superior to them but worked with them to get the job done. He took steps to protect the people from attack. He demonstrated his trust and hope in God as he led the people.

In chapter 5:14-19, we read that Nehemiah did not keep the governor's allotment of food and supplies for himself. He did not place a heavy burden on the people. He did not acquire land to make himself wealthy. He was not greedy for financial gain through his leadership position. Notice how these qualities are like that of the elder in 1 Timothy 3. Nehemiah was also hospitable and invited 150 Jews, officials, and people from other nations to eat at his table on a regular basis.

Most conflicts revolve around selfish desires and unmet expectations. If you can live out these qualities, you will be in a better position to help others resolve conflicts that so often have pride and selfishness as the root cause. Others can not question your character or your motives, and you work to be a peacemaker for God's glory.

**This brings us to the final leadership principle from the life of Nehemiah, #9:
God's leader has God-given convictions and commitments that he will not compromise.**

We will review chapter 13 to reinforce this principle.

As we begin, let us emphasize a few points.

- Integrity triumphs over expediency.
The end does not justify the means. You cannot walk all over people and say at the end of the project, look, we were successful. You need to maintain your integrity while accomplishing what God has called you to.
- Scripture triumphs over culture.
Culture is very powerful. We must be able to discern that which honors the culture while aligning with God's Word. Those things in the culture that are contradictory to Scripture must be set aside.
- Biblical conviction triumphs over popular opinion.
If 51% or even 99% of the group says this is what we are going to do, and it is contrary to God's word, then it is still wrong. Leadership is not a popularity contest. We need to know what we believe and why we believe it.

In the context of chapter 13, Nehemiah returned to Persia for a period after the wall had been completed, leaders were put in place, and Jerusalem was repopulated. Upon his return, it became clear to Nehemiah that there were major issues that needed to be addressed. Nehemiah could have chosen to just turn a blind eye to these issues and lived with the satisfaction of a job well done regarding the wall. As a godly leader though, he had to remain true to his biblical convictions.

As soon as one project is completed, there are new projects to launch. The foundational values within the community though should not change. The vision and values though may need to be reinforced. Here is a leadership truth: Vision leaks over time. People may forget the vision and/or may not be making all decisions through the lens for the organization's vision and core values. When leaders are guided by sound doctrine, this guards against drifting and compromise.

Look at the issues that needed to be confronted from a biblical perspective in chapter 13.

1. Live set apart lives (13:4-7)
The biblical principle was to live set apart lives for God's glory. Eliashib, a priest, gave Tobiah, one of the enemies, a room in the God's house. This is an example of being unequally yoked. In verse 8, Nehemiah demonstrated righteous anger and had Tobiah removed and the room cleansed to glorify God.

2. Tithe faithfully (13:10-14)

The biblical principles was to honor God as the creator and provider of all things and to tithe faithfully demonstrating dependence on God and provide for the Priests and Levites. The people were not contributing their tithes as commanded in Leviticus 27, Numbers 18, and Deuteronomy 14. The tithe was supposed to provide for the Priests and Levites so that they could serve full time in the ministry of the Temple. Instead, the Levites had to go back to working in the fields. In verse 11, Nehemiah confronted the officials, reinstituted the biblical tithe, and saw that the Levites were properly provided for in their service to the LORD.

3. Keep the Sabbath holy (13:15-22)

The fourth commandment in Exodus 20 was to keep holy the Sabbath. Nehemiah saw that people were not properly observing the Sabbath. In verse 17, Nehemiah confronted the nobles and asked, "What is this evil that you are doing, profaning the Sabbath day?" He reminded them that it was these kinds of sins in the past that were the source of God's judgment and led to the exile of the nation. In verses 19-23, steps were taken to restore the proper focus on the Sabbath.

4. Purity in Marriage (13:23-31)

God's people were to honor marriage between one man and one woman for life. Marriage was to be within the Israelite community. Nehemiah observed that many people were once again marrying women outside of Israel. He explained how this sin turned Solomon's heart from God, and he cleansed the community of this sin.

The leader's work is never done. There is always the need to refresh and restore the vision and core values. To do this, the leader must have strong, personal biblical convictions as well. Notice that each of the issues listed in chapter 13 had a biblical foundation. To discern if things are out of order, one must first know what godly order looks like based on the truth of God's Word.

- What are a few examples in your church and in your context where biblical convictions related to godly character and the functioning of the church are most often compromised today?
- When you see these examples of compromise, how do you resolve the issues?
- What are some of the things on your personal convictions list upon which you will never compromise?
Do the people you are leading know what these are?
Do they also hold similar convictions?

On page 21 there is a closing activity for Lesson 3. We discussed 9 practical leadership principles from the life of Nehemiah.

1. God's leader responds to a call.
2. God's direction and vision are sought by the leader.
3. God's leader cares for the people in their situation.
4. Prayer is essential to know God's will.
5. God's leader builds a team.
6. God's leader motivates and inspires.
7. God's leader is not discouraged by adversity.
8. God's leader discovers ways to resolve conflict.
9. God's leader has God given convictions and commitments upon which they will not compromise.

I came across another list that summarizes these leadership principles in a similar way. These 15 principles are listed in chronological order, chapter-by-chapter. You can review that list on your own and make comparisons between the two lists. I think you will find that the lists are complementary.

As we close this lesson, take time to answer the questions on page 21.

- Which leadership principles are most evident in your leadership approach?
- Which leadership principles would you like to develop?
- What are a few specific next steps you plan to take to grow as a leader?

We will conclude Lesson 3 of Spiritual Leadership Principles. There is one more lesson and that will conclude the audio portion of this course.