

## **SPIRITUAL LEADERSHIP SERIES (3)**

*To aspire to leadership is an honorable ambition*

*1 Timothy 3:1 (NEB)*

### **LEADERSHIP PRINCIPLES FROM NEHEMIAH (PT 1)**

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#### **A. INTRODUCTION & BACKGROUND**

In 586BC, Babylon's King Nebuchadnezzar invaded Jerusalem and took the people captive. This began the Babylonian captivity. The Biblical account is 2 Chron 36:18-19 records the end of Judah's history and the start of the Babylonian captivity.

The burned God's temple and broke down the protective wall around the city of Jerusalem. All the fortified buildings were burned, as were the valuable articles in the temple.

So, under the rule of Nebuchadnezzar and his wicked son, the Jews lived as they did centuries ago in Egypt, as slaves to a foreign power.

From 2 Chron 36:22-23, we learn that God used an unbelieving king, Cyrus to initiate a return of the Jews back to their own land.

#### **The Jews returned from Babylonian captivity in 3 different groups:**

- 1<sup>st</sup> group under Zerubbabel in 536BC (Ezra 1-6)
- 2<sup>nd</sup> group under Ezra in 457BC (Ezra 7-10)
- 3<sup>rd</sup> group under Nehemiah in 444BC (Neh 1-2)

#### **God raised up 2 people to lead the restoration of His people**

- Ezra – Restored worship and the Word

- Nehemiah – Restored the broken down walls of Jerusalem

The book of Nehemiah begins 15 years after the Book of Ezra ends; about 100 years after the first group of exiles returned to the Promised Land; and about 150 years after the City of Jerusalem was destroyed. After such a long time, the walls of the city of Jerusalem were still in rubble.

As the story of Nehemiah unfolds, we see him serving and leading 3 successive roles. Early in the book, he served as the King's cupbearer. Midway through the story, he is the builder of the walls. In the third part of the story, he becomes the Governor of the city and the surrounding sections of Jerusalem.

- a. The Cupbearer
- b. The Builder
- c. The Governor

It's interesting to note that Nehemiah wasn't from the religious establishment. He wasn't a priest, a prophet, or a "professional, full-time preacher".

He was actually an ordinary layperson, with a "secular" job, when his "ordinary" life was "interrupted" by a call from God to be involved in Kingdom advancement business.

Nehemiah = "Comfort of Jehovah"

Thus, he is a type of the ministry of the Holy Spirit who comforts, renews, and restores God's people who have experienced some sort of brokenness in their lives.

## B. LEADERSHIP PRINCIPLES FROM NEHEMIAH

### 1. Neh 1:1-3 – He asks the right questions

Many people mistakenly think that the leader's job is to always have the right answers to questions asked or a ready solution to every problem that is raised.

I think one of the leader's main job is to ask the relevant questions that will lead to the discovery of the right answers.

- Prov 25:2 (HCSB)

*<sup>2</sup> It is the glory of God to conceal a matter and the glory of kings to investigate a matter.*

We learn that the Jewish and the Jesus way of teaching, learning and discovering truth is through the asking of questions, which will help point people to the direction where truth is found and revelation can be received - Matt 16:13-16 (TNIV)

*<sup>13</sup> When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do people say the Son of Man is?"*

*<sup>14</sup> They replied, "Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets."*

*<sup>15</sup> "But what about you?" he asked. "Who do you say I am?"*

*<sup>16</sup> Simon Peter answered, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God."*

In Nehemiah 1:2, Nehemiah questions focuses on the welfare and condition of the Jewish exiles, as well as that of the city of Jerusalem.

In chapter 1:3, we see that in response to his questions, Nehemiah received a clear answer, which described the condition of the Jewish exiles and city of Jerusalem.

- The exiles were in “great trouble and disgrace”
  - “Great trouble” – means misery and calamity; under reproach, contempt and scorn
- The wall of Jerusalem was broken down and its gates were burned with fire.
  - There was no protection for those living there and were therefore vulnerable to their enemies. There was no safety and security.

### **\*Application Prompter\***

Ask the Holy Spirit to help us cultivate the art of asking good questions that will help sharpen our spiritual life, as well as our leadership potential

## **2. Neh 1:4 – He received God’s burden and vision**

The report which Nehemiah received began to affect him deeply. In a defining moment, he “captured” God’s specific burden and vision for his life. He could no longer remain an ordinary cupbearer for the King, living a comfortable life in the palace and minding his own business. Nehemiah couldn’t just sit down and do nothing; he was “arrested” and apprehended by a burden from God’s heart and a heavenly mandate.

All ministry in God’s kingdom begins with a specific burden and vision of some sort, which the Holy Spirit will stir our hearts only. Obviously, no one person can possibly carry every kind of burden for kingdom advancement. God raises different kinds of ministries and churches with specific and varied assignments. No one person or ministry can possibly carry the wide

range of ministry burdens on God's heart. We all carry a small piece of what's really on God's heart.

### **Examples**

- Different kinds of churches to meet different human needs
- Ministries to specific needs – elderly, foreign workers, drug addicts, abused children & women, gays and lesbians, prostitutes etc
- Kingdom Entrepreneurs and Financiers
- Educational – missions to specific countries; specific kinds of missions work
- Spiritual leadership development

### **Biblical Examples**

- Paul – Apostle to the Gentiles     } 2 Cor 11:28
- Peter – Apostles to the Jews        }

*<sup>28</sup> Then, besides all this, I have the daily burden of my concern for all the churches.*

- Daniel & Joseph – Politics and kingdom finances
- Jeremiah – Weeping and warning prophet
- Noah – Build an ark
- Ananias – Ministry to Saul of Tarsus when he just got saved

So before God did anything through him, He had to do something in Nehemiah first. He sat down & wept, mourned, fasted and prayed for a few days.

### **\*Application Prompter\***

Open our hearts for the Holy Spirit to put in us His particular burdens and visions, and hence directing us in our service for God

### **3. Neh 1:4-11 – He processed God's burdens and clarified vision through prayer**

- a. v5 – Notice how Nehemiah started his prayer – it's very instructive for us, as it teaches us how we approach God.
  - It focuses on who God is. It's not faith-building to start praying, by focusing on the bigness of our problems.
    - Lord, the God of heaven
    - The Great and Awesome God
    - He is a covenant-keeping God
- b. v6 – Notice Nehemiah's humility – never demanded anything from God. He came as God's servant
  - Nehemiah identified with Israel's sins, as though they were his own. He used the word "we", instead of "them".
- c. v7 – Nehemiah knew that the starting place of approaching God effectively is through repentance and confession of sins
- d. v8 – 10 – Nehemiah reminded God of His covenant promises concerning His people, in times past
- e. v11 – Nehemiah asked specifically for God's favour and success on the assignment at hand
  - The purpose was so that God's Name may be respected and glorified

➔ Nehemiah chapter 1 is a blend of prayer and action. All leaders must place a high priority on prayer. Let me suggest 3 simple and short reasons why prayer is especially vital in leadership.

- Prayer clarifies God’s vision
- Prayer calms my heart
- Prayer catalyses my faith

➔ The other simple, but profoundly important lesson we learn from Nehemiah is: One of the responsibilities of a leader is to intercede for the people whom God has given to our charge.

➔ A man of God once said “the job of God’s servant is not only to talk to the people about God, but to talk to God about the people”.

- Col 4:12 (TNIV) – Epaphras

*<sup>12</sup> Epaphras, who is one of you and a servant of Christ Jesus, sends greetings. He is always wrestling in prayer for you, that you may stand firm in all the will of God, mature and fully assured.*

- 1 Sam 12:23 (TNIV)

*<sup>23</sup> As for me, far be it from me that I should sin against the LORD by failing to pray for you. And I will teach you the way that is good and right.*

- Study the Apostle Paul’s prayer which accompanied nearly every epistle he wrote

### **\*Application Prompter\***

Cultivate a deeper level of prayerfulness – more length, more breadth, more height and more depth of prayer

#### 4. **Neh 2:1-4 – He was sensitive to wait for God’s timing**

It has been rightly said by many that “Timing is everything”. If we do the right thing, but at the wrong or inappropriate time, it becomes the wrong action.

Ecclesiastes 3:1-8 (TNIV) teaches us that there is a time and season that governs everything in life.

*3 There is a time for everything,  
and a season for every activity under the heavens:*

*2 a time to be born and a time to die,  
a time to plant and a time to uproot,  
3 a time to kill and a time to heal,  
a time to tear down and a time to build,  
4 a time to weep and a time to laugh,  
a time to mourn and a time to dance,  
5 a time to scatter stones and a time to gather them,  
a time to embrace and a time to refrain,  
6 a time to search and a time to give up,  
a time to keep and a time to throw away,  
7 a time to tear and a time to mend,  
a time to be silent and a time to speak,  
8 a time to love and a time to hate,  
a time for war and a time for peace.*

In Matthew 16:1-3 (NLT), Jesus rebuked the Pharisees and Sadducees for lacking spiritual discernment and being unable to understand spiritual times and seasons.

*16 One day the Pharisees and Sadducees came to test Jesus, demanding that he show them a miraculous sign from heaven to prove his authority.*

*2 He replied, “You know the saying, ‘Red sky at night means fair weather tomorrow; 3 red sky in the morning means foul weather all day.’ You know how to interpret the weather signs in the sky, but you don’t know how to interpret the signs of the times!”*



Nehemiah chapter 1 starts with the month of Chislev (December). Chapter 2 began with the month of Nisan (April). It took 4 months of waiting for Nehemiah before he saw any sign of God's answer to his prayer.

So, one of the traits of God's leader is the ability to be sensitive to God's timing, to wait patiently, until there is some indication of God's movement in a particular situation.

- ➔ (v1) One of Nehemiah's responsibilities as the King's cupbearer was to serve wine to the king, after tasting it himself first.
  - Cupbearers have been known to be executed for expressing visible sadness before the king.
  
- ➔ (v2) The king noticed that Nehemiah was clearly troubled, as his face had a sad expression.
  - "I was very much afraid..." – shows the human side of Nehemiah
  - "Courage isn't the absence of fear; it's deciding to move forward in spite of one's fears. Courage is fear that has said its prayers".
  
- ➔ (v3) When the king showed genuine concern for Nehemiah and enquired as to the reason for his sadness, Nehemiah began to explain to him the miserable situation in the city of Jerusalem.
  
- ➔ (v4) When the king asked Nehemiah - "what is it you want?", he saw the Lord opening up a window of opportunity.
  
- ➔ Before he answered the king, Nehemiah breathed a quick prayer to the God of Heaven.
  - The phrase Nehemiah used – "The God of Heaven" is very revealing. It indicates quite clearly his faith in a sovereign and big God who has everything in the universe under His control.

→ As we do our best to serve God and lead His people, we must realize that there are some things that are really beyond our control. We can choose to trust and believe God, we can choose to obey Him and sow the seeds He calls us to sow, but we have very little control over how people respond to His Word and the choices that people make in their lives.

Many times we have to faithfully sow, plant and water the seeds we have sown in people's lives, but have to patiently and prayerfully wait for God to give the increase and bless the works of our hands.

- 1 Cor 3:5-8 (NLT)

*<sup>5</sup>After all, who is Apollos? Who is Paul? We are only God's servants through whom you believed the Good News. Each of us did the work the Lord gave us. <sup>6</sup>I planted the seed in your hearts, and Apollos watered it, but it was God who made it grow. <sup>7</sup>It's not important who does the planting, or who does the watering. What's important is that God makes the seed grow. <sup>8</sup>The one who plants and the one who waters work together with the same purpose. And both will be rewarded for their own hard work.*

- John 4:35-38 (NLT)

*<sup>35</sup>You know the saying, 'Four months between planting and harvest.' But I say, wake up and look around. The fields are already ripe<sup>[a]</sup> for harvest. <sup>36</sup>The harvesters are paid good wages, and the fruit they harvest is people brought to eternal life. What joy awaits both the planter and the harvester alike! <sup>37</sup>You know the saying, 'One plants and another harvests.' And it's true. <sup>38</sup>I sent you to harvest where you didn't plant; others had already done the work, and now you will get to gather the harvest."*

Let's look at some scriptures on waiting:

- Psa 27:13-14 (NKJV)

*13 I would have lost heart, unless I had believed  
That I would see the goodness of the LORD  
In the land of the living.*

*14 Wait on the LORD;  
Be of good courage,  
And He shall strengthen your heart;  
Wait, I say, on the LORD!*

- Psa 130:5 (NKJV)

*5 I wait for the LORD, my soul waits,  
And in His word I do hope.*

- Isa 40:31 (NKJV)

*31 But those who wait on the LORD  
Shall renew their strength;  
They shall mount up with wings like eagles,  
They shall run and not be weary,  
They shall walk and not faint.*

### **\*Application Prompters\***

- Pray for greater sensitivity to the Holy Spirit
- Learn to wait and be more patient:
  - With others
  - With God
  - With ourselves