

The precious gift of godly leadership
Building for the Glory of God
Nehemiah 2:1-10
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Intrdocution

Venn diagrams. Many of us will be familiar with them. They're designed to show the similarities and differences between 2 (or three) things. Take apples and oranges. They have quite a lot in common, the same size, both are fruit and both are spherical.

But there are differences too. Apples have a thin skin while oranges have a thick rind. Apples are crunchy while oranges are juicy and so on.

Nehemiah chapter 2, verses 1-10 teaches us about godly leadership - Nehemiah is going to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem.

And what we must notice is that while godly leadership and worldly leadership share many things in common — all leaders must manage, do research and plan for example - there are vital differences between godly leaders and their worldly counterparts.

This sermon applies to everyone because

- ...one day the Lord may call you to lead
- ...one day you may need to identify godly leadership
- ...and are you sure you do not have *some* sphere of responsibility, small though it be? In the home, in the family at work?
- ...and surely we must all lead ourselves? Whether we're 13 or 93?

Nehemiah 2 is for everyone! If you are already a leader - Nehemiah's example will equip you to lead better. Perhaps you wonder if you have that gift, this morning you may discover if you possess the gift of leadership. And for all of us, there's something the Lord wants to teach us.

The Story

Remember the story? God's people had been taken away from the Promised Land, around 150 years before Nehemiah, to what was Babylon back then but now was Persia, because of their wickedness and sin. God had threatened his people that if they walked out on him, he would expel them from the Promised Land but he promised that if they repented he would bring them back.

Well, by Nehemiah's time, some of God's people had repented and returned, and they had even rebuilt the temple. A wonderful start to the renewal!

But Nehemiah was still in exile. He had most likely been born in Persia and had never seen the land of Judah, though he would have heard all about, his fellow Jews.

Somehow he had risen to become a senior civil servant, all the way up to one of the King's cupbearers. He tasted all the wine the king drank to see if it was poisoned. A trusted office which gave him unparalleled access to king Artaxerxes. And one day, while he was going about his business, some Jews came from Jerusalem and Nehemiah asked them how things were going: *"Those who survived the exile and are back in the province are in great trouble and disgrace. The wall of Jerusalem is broken down, and its gates have been burned with fire."*

When Nehemiah heard that news he was so upset he wept, prayed, mourned and fasted for days. His heart burned with a passionate zeal to help God's people. He was determined to rebuild the walls. He knew God had given him a unique relationship with the king so he decided to ask the king for help but he knew that unless God softened the king's heart he'd get nowhere. So he prayed that wonderful prayer in chapter 1 which ended with *"Give your servant success today by granting him favour in the presence of this man."* (1:11) Lord, soften the king's heart, make him amenable to my petition.

From the very moment Nehemiah heard the news from his homeland he began to plan and to pray and pray and plan. Let's watch this godly leader at work. Five lessons in godly leadership! The first two are found in every leader - remember the Venn diagram? - but the last three are found only in godly leaders.

1. Godly leaders do their research

Nehemiah was going to ask the king for help, but he better know what he is talking about before he speaks to the king: he's only going to get one shot at this, he can't mess up.

Nehemiah did research on the history of Jerusalem and he discovered that King Artaxerxes, in the past had commanded that the rebuilding of Jerusalem had to stop! Back in Ezra chapter 4 some enemies of God's people had written to him: *"The king should know that the Jews who came up to us from you have gone to Jerusalem and are rebuilding that rebellious and wicked city. They are restoring the walls and repairing the foundations."* (Ezra 4:12)

King Artaxerxes wrote back: *"Issue an order to these men so that this city will not be rebuilt until I so order."* (4:21) The very king Nehemiah was going to ask help from had put a stop to rebuilding some years ago!

That word "Jerusalem" may spark emotions and possibly anger in the king, so Nehemiah decides he won't mention the word when the time comes - he will just call it "the city in Judah" or "the city where my fathers are buried."

Nehemiah did research on the attitudes of people in the East towards the dead. He learned that eastern people revere their ancestors highly and so he decides that when he gets the chance, he is going to make his request personal "the city where my fathers are buried lies in ruins." In other words, "my ancestors are being dishonoured."

He's not going to say, "I want to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem" that could have raised red flags to king Artaxerxes; instead he's going to make the request personal, he's going to pull on the heart strings of an eastern king who revered the dead, "the city (no name) where my fathers are buried lies in ruins."

Nehemiah did research on what supplies he is going to need. When the opportunity come what is he going to ask for? The king isn't going to be impressed with airy fairy timewasters. What supplies will he need? Nehemiah has worked out that he will need lots of wood. Perhaps he's discovered that there's not a lot of forests around Jerusalem, so he's going to ask the king for a letter to the keeper of the king's

forest, to give him all the timber he requires!

Nehemiah finds out if the journey will be safe. And discovers that during the 1000 mile trip he could encounter hostile governors. So he will ask the king, when that special moment comes, for letters “*so that they will provide me with safe-conduct until I arrive in Judah.*” (verse 7)

Nehemiah has done research on how long it would take to get to Jerusalem and has even estimated how long it will take to build the walls! If the king asks how long he will be away, he needs to have his numbers ready.

If you watch Dragon's Den you will know that one of the most common errors entrepreneurs make when they come into the presence of these multimillionaires is a lack of preparation! They've got just a moment to impress, and if they haven't done their research they forfeit their opportunity. Nehemiah's so aware that when the moment comes he must be ready to take it, so he does his homework.

All leaders - godly and worldly - do their research. And once they've done their research they make plans!

2. Godly leaders make plans

Nehemiah decides that four things will need doing:

1. The walls will need rebuilding (he does not tell the king this one, no doubt because he does not want to spark suspicion or alarm)
2. The gates need refitting (that's where the wood comes in)
3. The citadel, which guarded the temple and the city (more wood)
4. He needs a house to live in (even more wood)

Nehemiah thinks ahead, he makes plans. In 1947 two missionaries, Len Moules and Jac Dyck who wanted to reach the people who lived in three valleys of the Himalayas with the Gospel undertook a 500 mile reconnoitring trek to investigate the need. Here a summary of their research: Milam Valley: Population 15000, Nitti Valley: Population 10,000, Mana Valley: population 1000. Then they made a plan: they would need 12 missionaries: 2 for the Milam valley, 2 for the Nitti and Mana valleys, 2 for HQ base , 4

missionaries for Gospel trips, 2 to take into account sickness and furlough

God has given us minds to think ahead, to plan, always humbly submitting our plans to the Lord in prayer.

Brothers and sisters, are you with me? Godly leaders do their research and godly leaders make plans—just as worldly leaders do. But the next three characteristics of a godly leader have no counterpoint in the world.

3. Godly leaders wait patiently for God's timing

Every day Nehemiah asks "Is this the day God wants me to ask the king?" Over 100 days come and go as he patiently waits. It was the winter 446BC when Nehemiah first heard of the need of Jerusalem and began making plans. But not until the spring of the next year does the opportunity come. Godly leaders wait for God's timing.

The Lord may put a holy desire in our hearts, a godly passion, but the time may not be yet. We must wait patiently. At the age of 40 Moses jumped the starting gun, and had to wait 40 years before he was ready.

The timing in Nehemiah's story is amazing! One day he was sad in the presence of the king. It was against the rules for any courtier to be sad in the presence of the mighty king! Artaxerxes wanted to be surrounded by happy faces! Was this on purpose, or was Nehemiah just overwhelmed with sorrow at the thought of his people, we're not told; all we know it had never happened before.

The king noticed his sorrow: *"Why does your face look so sad when you are not ill? This can be nothing but sadness of heart?"*

The moment Nehemiah has been patiently waiting for has finally come! All his research and planning is just about to pay off, *"I was very much afraid, but I said to the king, 'May the king live forever! Why should my face not look sad when the city where my fathers are buried lies in ruins and its gates burned with fire?'"*

The king said "What is it you want? Then I prayed to the God of heaven and I answered the king, "If it pleases the king and if your servant has found favour in his

sight, let him send me to the city in Judah when my fathers are buried so that I can rebuild it. Then the king, with the queen sitting beside him (Why are we told that? Well, many a king's heart has been softened by a queen, and perhaps the king will be more liberal to show off to his queen?) asked me, "How long will your journey take and when will you get back? (research pays off here!) It pleased the king to send me so I set a time.

Emboldened by the king's willingness, Nehemiah asks for more! *"I also said to him, "If it pleases the king, may I have letters to the governors of Trans-Euphrates so that they will provide me with safe-conduct until I arrive in Judah (he only asked that question because he'd done his research) And may I have a letter to Asaph, keeper of the kings forest so he will give me timber to make (1) the beams for the gates of the citadel by the temple, (2) and for the city wall, and (3) for the residence I will occupy."*

The king was so impressed with Nehemiah's courage and diligence that he even gave him an armed escort! Godly leaders must wait patiently for God's timing. Are you waiting for something? Perhaps a prayer not yet been answered?

I waited *patiently* for the Lord;
 he turned to me and heard my cry.
 2 He lifted me out of the slimy pit,
 out of the mud and mire;
 he set my feet on a rock
 and gave me a firm place to stand.
 3 He put a new song in my mouth,
 a hymn of praise to our God.
 Many will see and fear the Lord
 and put their trust in him. (Psalm 40)

4. Godly leaders trust God

The fourth characteristic of godly leaders is they trust God. There was much about the future that Nehemiah did not know! Would he find enough willing builders? Would he be able to find enough stone to rebuild the walls? Would the enemies of God's people oppose him?

A thousand unknowns! But Nehemiah steps out in faith knowing that “The Lord, the God of heaven, the great and awesome God” will provide all the future needs.

Did someone notice how many missionaries were on the last picture? Only 7, they needed 12. They held the first conference trusting God for future supplies!

Godly leaders and wise believers don’t need every future “i” dotted, every unfolding “t” crossed. God will provide:

*I do not know what lies ahead,
the way I cannot see;
yet one stands near to be my guide;
he'll show the way to me.
I know who holds the future,
and he'll guide me with his hand.
With God things don't just happen;
everything by him is planned.
So as I face tomorrow
with its problems large and small,
I'll trust the God of miracles,
give to him my all.*

And finally,

5. Godly leaders pray

Did you notice the arrow prayer Nehemiah shot up when the king asked him “what is it you want?” “*Then I prayed to the God of heaven and I answered the king.*” Eight times in this little book we find Nehemiah shooting up these kinds of arrow prayers. Godly leaders pray.

Billy Graham the great American evangelist was once asked, “how often do you pray?” He wasn’t showing off when he replied, “I’m praying right now that God would help me answer your question!”

Do you know why we must pray without ceasing? Because everything in the kingdom of God is accomplished by God's almighty power, not by human effort!

Out there in the world, men build multi-million dollar businesses by their *own schemes*, spacecraft fly successfully by the ingenuity of human minds. Not a prayer is said.

But in the kingdom of God everything, EVERYTHING is accomplished by God's power! That's why we need to pray! (see verse 8c.)

We can only bring up our children if we have God's wisdom! We will only be a bright witness in our places of work, our neighbourhoods and families if God helps us. We will see conversions only through the influence of the Holy Spirit. Preaching and teaching across the church will only be effective if God changes the heart. Kingdom work from first to last is supernatural! That's why we must pray!

Are you and I praying about everything in our lives? All your plans, all our dreams, all our hopes and all our fears?

Summary

Godly leaders and wise followers of Jesus:

- Do their research
- Make plans
- Wait for God's timing
- Trust God to provide for the future
- And pray without ceasing...

...because the Great Actor in this chapter is God. God filled Nehemiah's heart with passion. God gave Nehemiah the mind to do his research and make his plans and God gave to Nehemiah the faith to believe in miracles. And God changed the king's heart.

Gospel Call

Perhaps little of what I have said today has made sense to you because God does not really figure in your life and you feel a zillion miles from him! The all-powerful God of Nehemiah is able to change your heart and bring you from darkness into the light and love of Jesus Christ, his Son.

Talk to him today! Ask him to perform the miracle of new birth in your soul. Ask him to give you the gifts of repentance and faith. If you ask sincerely he will hear your prayer and change your heart, fill your life with hope and your destiny with heaven.