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Tower of Strength

**“The name of the Lord is a strong tower
The righteous runs into it and is safe.”**

—Proverbs 18:10

Leadership Tips From Nehemiah (part two)

In last week's bulletin, we saw how Nehemiah got news of the desolation of God's city, and started the process of rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem. He acted boldly on a need, he prayed to God for success, and he gathered the necessary materials. We continue.

4.) He Made Plans Before Starting

When Nehemiah finished the arduous journey through the wilderness and arrived in Jerusalem, he didn't let anyone know of his presence.

I came to Jerusalem and was there three days. And I arose in the night, I and a few men with me. I did not tell anyone what my God was putting into my mind to do for Jerusalem... So I went out at night by the Valley Gate in the direction of the Dragon's Well and on to the Refuse Gate, inspecting the walls of Jerusalem which were broken down and its gates which were consumed by fire. Then I passed on to the

Fountain Gate and the King's Pool, but there was no place for my mount to pass. So I went up at night by the ravine and inspected the wall. Then I entered the Valley Gate again and returned. The officials did not know where I had gone or what I had done, nor had I as yet told the Jews, the priests, the nobles, the officials, or the rest who did the work (2:11–16).

Why the secrecy? Nehemiah didn't want to discuss the task until he had a good idea of what was involved, until he knew what would be required to accomplish it from start to finish. He didn't just stumble blindly into his task. For three whole days he inspected and surveyed and labored in secret to develop the plan as to how he would carry it out. When a pile of rubble blocked his path, he tried again the next day from a different angle. Thus, when the time would come to speak, and the people would bring up questions, Nehemiah had armed himself with answers. When the people would voice doubts, he had preempted them with solutions. For every "but what about?..." he was ready with an "I've thought of that, and this is how."

Advance planning is necessary in any worthy task, especially those tasks that matter as much as works done in the Lord's name. Is the church going to organize a gospel meeting? Rather than pick a random week and hire the first available man who happens to possess a mouth, good leaders will think about the reason for the meeting. Is the goal to preach to the community and save the lost? Who is the best speaker for that topic? What is the best week to reach out to the community—a week that isn't already blocked by a town fair, opening day of baseball season, or a holiday weekend? How will the meeting be effectively advertised to the community? How will they get here? How will they be best made to feel welcome?

The same planning should be done for every big task, from appointing elders to hosting VBS programs to starting a ladies' class to calling a work day. Good planning allows leaders to anticipate as many problems as possible, and to maximize the chances for success. Obviously, many big projects should enter the planning phase months early!

5.) He Inspired Others.

Finally, in 2:17, Nehemiah addressed the people. He said,

“You see the bad situation we are in, that Jerusalem is desolate and its gates burned by fire. Come, let us rebuild the wall of Jerusalem that we may no longer be a reproach.” I told them how the hand of my God had been favorable to me and also about the king’s words which he had spoken to me. Then they said, “Let us arise and build!” So they put their hands to the good work.

The odd part about this is that Nehemiah was an outsider for all intents and purposes. It’s a sad commentary that all these others who *lived* there did not get busy and do this work. But it shows how necessary it is to have a leader to inspire the people to do the things they ought to be doing. We don’t get many details of Nehemiah’s speech, but he communicated his vision for bringing glory to God, and the people responded by rising up and building.

One will also notice that Nehemiah didn’t try to do it all himself. Work doesn’t get done that way. Good leaders have to pass the vision along to other people. Nehemiah inspired *everyone* to work, not just a few. Chapter three lists all the families and all of the parts of the wall they worked on to join it all together. Over forty separate groups are listed there, each responsible for a gate or a section of wall. They include the high priest (3:1) the priests (3:28) and the Levites (3:17), people living outside the walls in the valley (3:22) and people from other towns (3:2), and even people from professions not normally associated with heavy labor, such as jewelers and perfumers (3:8), merchants (3:32) government officials (3:9) and daughters (3:12). It of course included Nehemiah and his men (5:16) who refused to accept payment for any of their efforts. Later, in 9:38, Nehemiah is not afraid to secure a written commitment that the people would do their duty—now that’s what I call inspiration!

Rosalynn Carter said that a good leader will take people where they don’t want to go but ought to be. Thank God for Nehemiahs!

6.) He Dealt with the Opposition.

With any project, there will be nay-sayers. As if inspiring workers is not hard enough, some will throw stones of discouragement. The sad truth is that there will always be someone willing to sit back and criticize while others are bearing the heavy loads.

It started right from the beginning for Nehemiah. Two men, Sanballat and Tobiah, mocked his work and suggested it was tantamount to rebellion (2:19–20). And they continued to laugh at and harass his work through the rest of the project—Sanballat took a bunch of his wealthy friends on a tour of the work and laughed, “what are these feeble Jews doing?” (4:2). Tobiah chimed in, “what they are building, if a fox should jump on it, he would break their stone wall down!” (4:3). Nehemiah had to boost the morale of the workers and remind them that they worked for the approval of God, not man.

Sanballat and Tobiah tried to sow seeds of fear and threatened to attack the workers (4:8). Nehemiah, like any good leader, was ready to deal with these threats. Even though it required extra manpower, he posted guards (4:16) and required the workers to carry a weapon at all times, even on water breaks (4:17–23).

Sanballat and Tobiah attacked Nehemiah’s character, telling lies, and forcing him to respond with political savvy (6:5–9). They even went so low as to try to ambush Nehemiah and kill him (6:2)! But Nehemiah would not be distracted nor dissuaded from completing the work God had sent him to do.

A good leader knows how to let these criticisms slide off like water off a duck’s back, and press doggedly on. He may be disappointed, but he will not be surprised or discouraged. He will be prepared to deal with them in a positive way, so that the church’s work is not derailed by those who would rather complain than contribute. —*John Guzzetta*

Quote of the Week:

“What I do today is extremely important, because I am exchanging a day of life for it.”

—*Hugh Mulligan*