



Lake Wales
Church of Christ
463 N. Buck Moore Rd.
Lake Wales, FL 33898
www.lakewalescoc.com
(863) 676-4114

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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 three)

In last week’s bulletin, we saw how Nehemiah inspired the people to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem. He acted boldly on a need, he prayed to God for success, he made plans, and he dealt with nay-sayers. With this bulletin we conclude.

7.) He Listened to Advice.

While we just learned that good leaders ignore empty and mean-spirited criticism, they also appreciate and pay attention to good advice.

In Nehemiah’s case, he first found out about the enemies’ threats through the warnings and advice of other people.

It came about when the Jews who lived near them came and told us ten times, “They will come up against us from every place where you may turn,” then I stationed men in the lowest parts of the space behind the wall, the exposed places, and I stationed the people in families with their swords, spears, and bows (4:12–13).

Perhaps Nehemiah resisted their warnings and their suggestions because he was oblivious to the danger, and did not think it worth taking man-hours away from the actual rebuilding efforts. But the Jews who lived near these enemies had heard the plans being made, and repeated their concerns until they convinced Nehemiah to take them seriously. He did not dismiss them, but acted. Likely, this prevented their progress on the wall from being destroyed by these enemies!

A wise leader knows the truth of Proverbs 11:14, “where there is no guidance, the people fall, but in abundance of counselors there is victory.” Also Proverbs 12:15, “the way of the fool is right in his own eyes, but a wise man is he who listens to counsel.” Surely Nehemiah realized and appreciated what help was provided by these people who were looking at things from a different perspective, and were not afraid to bring up their concerns.

8.) He Delegated Effectively.

Again, let us remember, building the wall was not about Nehemiah’s skill with mortar and trowel, but all about his skill as a leader. Nehemiah found others who could do the work, as he directed it to completion.

As his time in Jerusalem continued, he appointed men to fill various city functions (7:1), put Hananiah in charge of overseeing them, “for he was a faithful man and feared God more than many” (7:2), and then devoted himself other works, such recruiting more settlers and building more houses (7:4) and eventually to the spiritual restoration of the people of the city (8:9).

No one can accomplish such a great project alone; he must convince others to join in. As businessmen build their businesses by finding good workers and delegating to them, shepherds build strong congregations by entrusting the work of the church to capable and faithful individuals who are motivated to expand God’s kingdom. Sadly, church members will mill around blissfully unless a leader gives them a job, shows them how to do the job, and convinces them that their job is important. Good leadership is the ingredient missing in a lot of lukewarm churches.

9.) He Expected Impressive Results.

Perhaps the most astonishing figure we see in the book of Nehemiah is the duration. The workers toiled so hard that they completed the task in just fifty-two days (6:15–16). That’s considerably less than two months!

In an era when it can take a government road crew two months to replace a manhole cover or adjust a road sign, it is utterly astonishing that the Jewish remnant rebuilt their entire wall in such a short period of time. Obviously, that required diligence and focus.

Surely that was a result of Nehemiah’s godly leadership. A lot of big jobs get off to a great start but soon lose the head of steam. People slack off, lose the vision, hit unforeseen obstacles, or get distracted with other things. But the inhabitants of Jerusalem bought in fully to the project and became as dedicated to it as Nehemiah was. He probably had to keep the gentle pressure on from time to time, reminding them and urging them forward to complete the great accomplishment they had started. We know that he was there in the thick of the work and led by example, from the front, for 5:16 says, “I also applied myself to the work on this wall; we did not buy any land, and all my servants were gathered there for the work.”

And when it was done, God was glorified, and their enemies surrounding them “lost their confidence”; a phrase which literally means “fell exceedingly in their own eyes.” They hadn’t thought it possible, but God’s man Nehemiah had made it happen!

10.) He Reevaluated Frequently.

This final section may represent the most overlooked part of leadership—taking time to reevaluate and repair things that have gotten off to a good start.

Nothing in nature persists without decay. Spin a top, and it will soon wobble, topple over, and come to rest. Plant a beautiful garden, and it will soon wilt without water, become overgrown with weeds, and fail to produce a crop. Organize a closet, and it will soon get cluttered, dusty, and crammed full once again. There is hardly anything in the world that

a person can establish with satisfaction, and then turn his back on, and expect it to continue functioning without his occasional maintenance.

Even with the strong leadership of Nehemiah, even with the tremendous results, even with a completed wall, he had to check back on the people of Jerusalem from time to time. In 13:6–13, we learn that after a lengthy period as governor, Nehemiah had returned to Persia and reported back for his work as the king’s cupbearer. But he didn’t stay away forever. After a bit, he returned to Jerusalem.

Was everything the way he’d left it? No way! He had to reprimand some officials for being lax (13:11). He had to have Tobiah evicted from his apartment in the temple grounds (13:7–9, yes, the same Tobiah who had mocked the work). He had to remind the people to support the Levites, who had gone hungry and abandoned their worship duties and returned to their own fields to grow food (13:10). He had to appoint new supervisors (13:13) to oversee extra work that he hadn’t foreseen. He had to remind the people to observe the Sabbath (13:15–17). He even physically assaulted some who were behaving immorally, and removed them from the priesthood (13:23–29).

It would be nice if things would run on autopilot—kids’ classes, worship services, deacons’ duties, evangelistic efforts, people’s devotion to God. But they never do. Any leader will have to check back from time to time and see if the programs set up are still meeting the needs of the people, or if they must be updated, changed, or scuttled. And any leader will have to re-inspire the people to faithful work.

Conclusion. Nehemiah was a great leader for the ten reasons we’ve studied. But ultimately, he was guided by and motivated by God. Three times he asked God to reward His work. “Remember me, O my God, for good” (13:31, *cf.* 5:19, 13:14). Let our leadership be driven by the same heavenly goal.

—*John Guzzetta*

Quote of the Week:

“Opportunities are usually disguised as hard work, which is why many people don’t recognize them.”

—*Ann Landers*