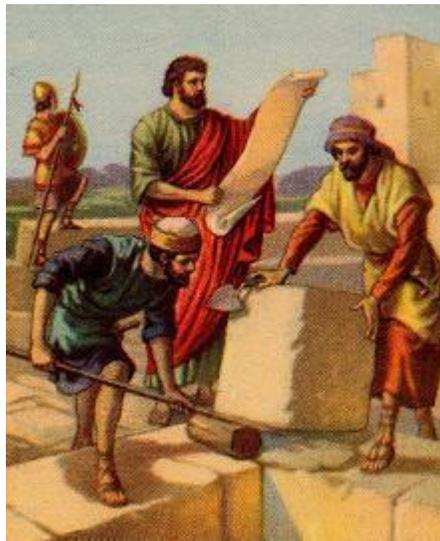


The Portrait *of a* Godly Leader



Nehemiah on Leadership

By Chris Losey

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***Dedicated to those
who want to learn
how to be godly leaders***

Introduction

The world needs good leaders. More importantly, the world needs godly leaders. There have been a number of godly leaders throughout history. Much can be learned from their lives. This study examines the book of Nehemiah in the Old Testament of the Bible and looks at the life of the man Nehemiah in order to find out what it takes to be a godly leader. To begin, let's take a brief quiz to see how much you know about Nehemiah and the insightful book from the Old Testament that carries his name.

Questions

1. What other book in the Old Testament is combined in the Hebrew Bible as one volume with the Book of Nehemiah?
2. What was Nehemiah's profession and what does his name mean?
3. Who was the person God used to oversee the reconstruction of the Jewish temple?
4. What was the name of the scribe/priest who God used to restore the Jewish people?
5. What person did God use to oversee the rebuilding of the wall around Jerusalem?
6. In what empire were Zerubbabel, Ezra, and Nehemiah living before they returned to Judah to do the tasks God called them to do?
7. What was the name of the Babylonian king who conquered Judah and took the Jews into Babylonian captivity for 70 years?
8. What kingdom conquered the Babylonians?
9. Which Persian king put out the decree for the temple in Jerusalem to be rebuilt?
10. In what year did the Persian Empire defeat the Babylonians?
11. What are the names of five kingdoms mentioned in the Bible besides the Jews?

Answers

1. Ezra.
2. He was the cupbearer to the Persian King Artaxerxes. His name means "Yah comforts."
3. Zerubbabel.
4. Ezra.
5. Nehemiah.
6. Babylonian Empire was defeated and became the Persian Empire.
7. Nebuchadnezzar.
8. The Persians.
9. Cyrus.
10. 539 BC.
11. Assyrian, Babylonian, Persian, Greek, and Roman.

Timetable

722 BC - Fall of the Northern Kingdom to Assyria - Jews scattered

605, 597, 586 BC - Nebuchadnezzar's three attacks on Jerusalem

605 BC - Nebuchadnezzar drove Egypt out of Palestine - took Daniel & his friends captive

597 BC - Nebuchadnezzar took the young king & his family & 10,000 Jews into captivity

586 BC - Southern Kingdom completely falls to King Nebuchadnezzar

(70 year captivity prophesied by Jeremiah (Jer 29:10) from first deportation in 605 BC until the rebuilding of the temple foundation by the returning exiles in 536 BC - pg 649, Bible Knowledge Commentary)

539 BC - Capture of Babylon by the Persians (Cyrus I - 559-530 BC) - Daniel 5:30

538 BC - Degree by Cyrus to rebuild the temple - Ezra 1:1-4

538 BC - First Group returns under Sheshbazzar (Persian name for Zerubbabel. There is not total agreement on this. See "The Bible Knowledge Commentary – Old Testament pg 656 for more possible identities of Sheshbazzar) - Ez 1:11

537 BC - Building of altar - Ezra 3:1

536 BC - Work on temple started - Ezra 3:8

536-530 BC - Opposition during Cyrus' reign - Ezra 4:1-5

530-520 BC - Temple work ceased - Ezra 4:24

520 BC - Work on temple renewed under Darius (522-486 BC) - Ez 5:2, Hag 1:14

515 BC - Temple completed - Ezra 6:15

458 BC - Second Group w/ Ezra returns during the 7th year of Artaxerxes (465-424 BC)

458 BC - Apr - Ezra departs from Babylon - Ezra 7:6-9

Aug - Ezra arrives in Jerusalem - Ezra 7:8,9

Dec - People assemble - Ezra 10:9

445 BC - Nehemiah

- Approaches the king (Artaxerxes I - 20th year) Mar-Apr - Neh 1:1-2:1

- Arrives in Jerusalem - Aug? - Neh 2:11

- Completion of the Wall - Oct - Neh 6:15

- Public assembly - Neh 7:73-8:1

- Feast of booths - Neh 8:14

- Fast - Oct - Neh 9:1

Reigns of Kings

Nebuchadnezzar - Babylonian Empire defeated by Persians in 559 BC

Cyrus I - 559-530 BC – Persian

Cambyses - 530-522 BC – Persian

Smerdis - 522 BC – Persian

Darius - 522-486 BC – Persian

Xerxes - 485-465 – Persian

Artaxerxes I - 465-424 BC – Persian

Some key dates in Jewish history

722 BC - the fall of Israel (northern kingdom) to Assyria

605, 597, 586 BC - the fall of the Judah (southern kingdom) to Babylonia

539 BC - the fall of Babylonia to the Persians

538 BC - Decree by Cyrus (Persian King) to rebuild the Jewish temple

538 BC - The first group of exiles return with Zerubbabel

536 BC - Temple work started

515 BC - Temple completed

458 BC - Second group of exiles return to Jerusalem with Ezra

445 BC - Nehemiah returns to Jerusalem and the wall is finished by the end of the year

Three key returns

Referring to the three key returns of the Jews from Babylonian Exile to the Holy Land.

538 BC - Zerubbabel returned to rebuild the temple.

458 BC - Ezra returned to restore the people.

445 BC - Nehemiah returned to rebuild the wall.

Some important things to remember

1. God's will sometimes takes longer than we would like. We must not forget that a thousand years is as a day to Him...
2. God uses a variety of people to accomplish His will. Each person is important, but only one small piece of the puzzle...
3. God's will will be done. By the time the three groups of exiles returned and accomplished their work, the temple, people, and wall were all rebuilt...
4. People can save themselves a lot of trouble if they simply follow God in the first place. The Jews were a hardhearted people throughout their history. God disciplined them, and they missed or had delayed, many blessings God had for them.

SOME QUOTES ON LEADERSHIP

INTEGRITY IN LEADERSHIP - In order to be a leader a man must have followers. And to have followers, he must have their confidence. Hence the supreme quality of a leader is unquestionably integrity. Without it, no real success is possible, no matter whether it is on a section gang, on a football field, in an army, or in an office. If a man's associates find him guilty of phoniness, if they find that he lacks forthright integrity, he will fail. His teachings and actions must square with each other. The first great need, therefore, is integrity and high purpose. *Dwight D. Eisenhower, Bits & Pieces, September 15, 1994, p4.*

QUALITIES OF A LEADER - Peter Drucker offers insightful guidance to the church when he calls leadership a peak performance by one who is "the trumpet that sounds a clear sound of the organizations' goals." His five requirements for this task are amazingly reliable and useful for those who dare to lead churches:

- (1) a leader works;
- (2) a leader sees his assignment as responsibility rather than rank or privilege;
- (3) a leader wants strong, capable, self-assured, independent associates;
- (4) a leader creates human energies and vision;
- (5) a leader develops followers' trust by his own consistency and integrity.

H.B. London, Jr. and Neil B. Wiseman, Pastors at Risk, Victor Books, 1993, pp. 227-228.

WHAT LEADERS MUST BE WILLING TO DO - Myron Rush identifies tough issues facing every Christian leader in *The New Leader*. We are wise to ponder them slowly.

- You must be willing to stand alone.
- You must be willing to go against public opinion in order to promote what you believe.
- You must be willing to risk failure.
- You must become master of your emotions.
- You must strive to remain above reproach.
- You must be willing to make decisions others don't want to make.
- You must be willing to say no at times, even when you'd like to say yes.
- You must sometimes be willing to sacrifice personal interests for the good of the group.
- Never be content with the average; you must always strive for the best.
- People must be more important to you than possessions.
- You will have to work harder to keep your life in balance than those who aren't leaders.

Paul Borthwick, Leading the Way, Navpress, 1989, pp. 177-178.

THE KIND OF LEADERS THAT ARE NEEDED

The world needs leaders...who cannot be bought;
whose word is their promise; who put character above wealth;
who possess opinions and a will; who are larger than their vocations;
who do not hesitate to take chances;
who will not lose their individuality in a crowd;
who will be honest in small things as well as in great things;
who will make no compromise with wrong;
whose ambitions are not confined to their own selfish desires;
who will not say they do it "because everybody else does it";
who are true to their friends through good report and
evil report, in adversity as well as in prosperity;
who do not believe that shrewdness, cunning, and
hardheadedness are the best qualities for winning success;
who are not ashamed or afraid to stand for the truth
when it is unpopular, who can say no with emphasis,
although the rest of the world says yes.

Paul Borthwick, Leading the Way, Navpress, 1989, pp. 19-20.

Leadership Illustration

A traveler in Europe was amazed at the number of famous leaders in history who were from Europe - Napoleon, Alexander the Great, Winston Churchill... In one city as he was walking in an historic park the man noticed an elderly man sitting at a park bench reading the daily paper. The tourist thought that if anyone would know what famous people came from this city, surely the elderly man would know. The tourist got the elderly man's attention and explained that he was a tourist and said, "Sir, I am a student of history. Can you tell me if there were any famous leaders born in your town?" The elderly man thought for a moment and then looked up and said, "No famous leaders born here, only babies."

More Quotes on Leadership

- leaders are made not born.
- lead, follow, or get out of the way.
- a person who would be a good leader must first be a good follower.
- the trouble with being a leader today is that you can't be sure whether people are following you or chasing you.

The Portrait of a Godly Leader

Here are thirty plus things that marked Nehemiah's life. Together they paint what might be called *The Portrait of a Godly Leader*. We would do well to emulate the qualities in our own lives.

Note that AGL is an abbreviation for "A Godly Leader."

1. A godly leader (AGL) looks beyond himself and is concerned about others (Neh 1:1-3) - compassionate

¹ *The words of Nehemiah the son of Hacaliah. Now it happened in the month Chislev, in the twentieth year, while I was in Susa the capitol,* ² *that Hanani, one of my brothers, and some men from Judah came; and I asked them concerning the Jews who had escaped and had survived the captivity, and about Jerusalem.* ³ *And they said to me, "The remnant there in the province who survived the captivity are in great distress and reproach, and the wall of Jerusalem is broken down and its gates are burned with fire."*

Nehemiah was living in Susa. He obviously had great potential because he rose to hold the position of cupbearer to the king of Persia. Cupbearers chose and tasted the king's drink before the king did to be sure it wasn't poisoned. In his position as cupbearer it would have been easy for Nehemiah to be content and not care about other Jews. His job was relatively secure, but Nehemiah was concerned about the Jews who had escaped and survived the captivity, and he was also concerned about the Jews' beloved city, Jerusalem.

Reflection Questions

1. Who are you leading today, and how are they doing?
2. Do you inquire about their situation either by asking them directly or asking others who would know?
3. Would you say that you have a genuine concern for other people? If so, how are you showing it? If not, what do you need to do to change?

2. AGL (A godly leader) feels the hurts of others (Neh 1:4a) - empathetic

4a Now it came about when I heard these words, I sat down and wept and mourned for days...

Nehemiah not only became aware of the plight of the Jews, he empathized with them. When he heard about what the Jews back in Jerusalem were going through, and the condition of the city, he sat down and wept. His weeping wasn't for a moment or even several minutes, but for days. He cared deeply about the Jews and his homeland.

If we are going to lead people we need to care deeply about what affects them. If their plight brings tears to our eyes, it is likely that we care enough to help them.

Reflection Questions

1. Do you know the hurts and challenges of those you serve?
2. What are some of those hurts or challenges?
3. How have you shown empathy for others in recent months?
4. When is the last time you shed a tear for someone else's pain?

3. AGL fasts and prays realizing that God is the One who can ultimately solve people's problems and meet their needs (Neh 1:4b-6) – has spirituality

^{4b} and I was fasting and praying before the God of heaven. ⁵ And I said, "I beseech Thee, O LORD God of heaven, the great and awesome God, who preserves the covenant and lovingkindness for those who love Him and keep His commandments, ⁶ let Thine ear now be attentive and Thine eyes open to hear the prayer of Thy servant which I am praying before Thee now, day and night, on behalf of the sons of Israel Thy servants."

Nehemiah fasted and prayed for his countrymen and country. This again showed the depth of his love and concern for them. Fasting and praying takes time, and by doing so, Nehemiah was making a clear statement to God that he knew God alone could help them. God might choose to work through Nehemiah, but it was still God at work.

When we know of people's needs, it is helpful to picture ourselves in their predicament. This helps us better understand the impact their need is having on them. It is important that we consider whether or not we should fast and pray for them as we lift their needs before God. When God sees us fasting and praying He sees our sincerity and our dependence on Him.

Reflection Questions

1. Do you fast and pray about the needs of others?
2. Do you realize that God is the One who can ultimately help them even if He uses you to do it?
3. Is there anything you know of that you should be fasting and praying about concerning those you serve?

4. AGL (a godly leader) sees himself as a servant (Neh 1:6a) – is humble

⁶ *let Thine ear now be attentive and Thine eyes open to hear the prayer of Thy servant which I am praying before Thee now, day and night, on behalf of the sons of Israel Thy servants...*

Nehemiah saw himself as God's servant. He even called the Jews, God's servants. It was Nehemiah's intent to serve the Jews by helping meet some of their present needs.

So often people in leadership want to be served, but they are actually called to serve those under their care. We serve by helping people in whatever way we can. Whether it is leading our family, a ministry, or business, leaders are called to be servant-leaders. A servant leader does not look for ways that others can serve him, but for ways he can lighten the load of those under his care. In the military I remember this happening many times when Commanders would serve their soldiers in the dining hall on key holidays, or work alongside them for a time in order to boost morale and better understand what each soldier did.

We need to serve those under our care by meeting their needs in creative ways. The Christian life is a life of service.

Reflection Questions

1. Do you see yourself as a servant?
2. Do you think that the people under your care view you as a servant? Why or why not?
3. What have you done to demonstrate that you serve the Lord and others?
4. What could you do in the next few weeks to demonstrate your role as servant?

5. AGL admits his mistakes & confesses his sins (Neh 1:6b-7) – is transparent

⁶ let Thine ear now be attentive and Thine eyes open to hear the prayer of Thy servant which I am praying before Thee now, day and night, on behalf of the sons of Israel Thy servants, confessing the sins of the sons of Israel which we have sinned against Thee; I and my father's house have sinned. ⁷ We have acted very corruptly against Thee and have not kept the commandments, nor the statutes, nor the ordinances which Thou didst command Thy servant Moses.

In his prayer, Nehemiah confessed his sins and the sins of the Jews to God. They had acted corruptly and had not kept His commandments.

A godly leader realizes that he is not perfect. He willingly confesses his sins to God. Both sins of commission; what he has done wrong, and sins of omission, things he should have done but didn't.

Reflection Questions

1. Do you regularly confess your sins to God?

2. When is the last time you did so?

3. Take some time right now to let the Spirit search your heart and bring anything to mind that needs confessing.

6. AGL wrestles spiritually with God (Neh 1:8-10) – is bold

⁸ Remember the word which Thou didst command Thy servant Moses, saying, 'If you are unfaithful I will scatter you among the peoples; ⁹ but if you return to Me and keep My commandments and do them, though those of you who have been scattered were in the most remote part of the heavens, I will gather them from there and will bring them to the place where I have chosen to cause My name to dwell.' ¹⁰ "And they are Thy servants and Thy people whom Thou didst redeem by Thy great power and by Thy strong hand.

Nehemiah wrestled with God by reminding God of His promise not only to scatter disobedient people, but to gather faithful ones. As Nehemiah wrestled, he showed great respect for God by sighting several of God's attributes.

A godly leader is one who wrestles spiritually with God. He wrestles with God on behalf of those under his care. Remember Jacob who wrestled with the angel and would not let go until he received a blessing? It is OK for us to say, "God although we are imperfect we are seeking to serve You now and we want and need Your favor and blessing!

Reflection Questions

1. Do you wrestle with God in prayer concerning those you serve?

2. If so, when is the last time you did? Was there any discernable outcome?

3. What needs has God used you to meet?

7. AGL boldly/humbly makes his desires known to God (1:11) - lives by faith

¹¹ *"O Lord, I beseech Thee, may Thine ear be attentive to the prayer of Thy servant and the prayer of Thy servants who delight to revere Thy name, and make Thy servant successful today, and grant him compassion before this man." Now I was the cupbearer to the king.*

Nehemiah boldly asked God to help the Jews who were in need, and he asked God to guide and direct him as he spoke to the king on their behalf.

Godly leaders ask God for help. They know their limitations and the fact that God is the one who gives ultimate success. Sometimes it seems that our enemies have lots of success. We need to ask God for His success.

Reflection Questions

1. Are you regularly asking God to give you and others success?

2. What success has He given you so far?

3. Right now spend some time praising God and letting Him know the needs of others and your own needs. List those needs in the space provided below.

8. AGL doesn't wear his emotions on his sleeve (Neh 2:1,2) – is self-controlled

¹ *And it came about in the month Nisan, in the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes, that wine was before him, and I took up the wine and gave it to the king. Now I had not been sad in his presence.* ² *So the king said to me, "Why is your face sad though you are not sick? This is nothing but sadness of heart." Then I was very much afraid.*

Nehemiah kept his great sadness about the plight of the Jewish people in check as he poured out his heart to God. He allowed God to be his primary comforter. Nehemiah felt deeply about the predicament of his fellow countrymen, but knew the importance of maintaining a professional countenance before the king of Persia as he served the king as personal cupbearer.

How do we know that Nehemiah maintained a professional demeanor? Verse one of chapter one says that Nehemiah learned about the plight of his fellow Jews in Judah in the month of Chislev. Chislev in the Hebrew calendar corresponds to November-December in our western calendar. When Nehemiah heard the bad news he wept and mourned for days. But we also know it wasn't until the month of Nisan (March-April) that the king noticed Nehemiah's sadness. Up until then Nehemiah had not been sad in the presence of the king. Even though the plight of the Jews weighed heavily on his heart, he dealt with his sadness in ways that did not interfere with his work. But Nehemiah was human. His sadness did finally show, and the king questioned him about it.

It is interesting to note Nehemiah's reaction when the king noticed his sadness. Nehemiah said in verse two of chapter two that he felt very much afraid. Why would Nehemiah be fearful? Because kings in general expected their servants to leave their personal problems at home. An unprofessional countenance or a sloppy work-ethic in the presence of the king could cost a person his life.

Have you ever met a bleeding heart; someone who always lets his emotions show. It is easy to get tired of being around that type of person. Although all of us have emotions, we must work at keeping them under control. People who constantly let their emotions show, usually make poor leaders. People want to follow leaders who have emotions, but who keep them in check. They want leaders who can deal with their hurts without becoming emotional yo-yos. That is not to say Christians are always to hide their pain. Indeed Scripture tells us to bear one another's burdens (Gal 6:2). There are times when it is wise to let your hurts be known and to ask for help. But people who never learn to deal effectively with their own problems become known as high-maintenance people, or people who are emotionally needy. Almost no one wants to follow them. Conversely, people want to follow those they perceive to be emotionally strong and steady.

Reflection Questions

1. Do you wear your emotions on your sleeve or have you learned to take them to God first? (Perhaps He wants you to share with others, or maybe He wants you to keep them to yourself for a time.)
2. Have you asked God for permission to share your need and then followed His prompting in your heart?
3. Do people see you as an emotionally needy or high maintenance person? If you are emotionally needy, have you found that people are reluctant to follow you?

Learn to be strong in the Lord and to keep your emotions under control, and God will bless you.

9. AGL has respect for authority (Neh 2:3a,5) – is respectful

³ Let the king live forever... ⁵ If it please the king, and if your servant has found favor before you...

Not only did Nehemiah have his emotions under control, he had respect for authority. When questioned by the king, Nehemiah first said, “Let the king live forever.” This was a statement of honor. Even though Nehemiah had an important position as the cupbearer of the king, he showed deep respect for the king who was in authority over him.

No matter how powerful a person becomes or to what height he rises, he does well to realize that those in positions of authority are to be respected. Sometimes when people rise to positions of prominence like being cupbearer to the king, it might be easy for them to lose sight of the fact that they, too, are a servant and must show respect for those who are in authority over them.

I am personally offended when I hear people refer to the president by his last name rather than by saying Mr. President. I am troubled when I see a news clip where people are throwing things at policemen and calling them names. God has placed different people in positions of authority and we need to be respectful of them even if we disagree with their decisions. If we want to be effective leaders we need to treat all people with respect. As we do, we will find that we, too, will find that others will be more willing to treat us with respect in our position of leadership.

Reflection Questions

1. Do you show proper respect for those in authority?
2. What are some ways that you show respect? List them below.
3. What could you do better to show respect to others?

10. AGL (A Godly Leader) waits for God's timing (Neh 2:3) – has patience

³ *And I said to the king, "Let the king live forever. Why should my face not be sad when the city, the place of my fathers' tombs, lies desolate and its gates have been consumed by fire?"*

It is obvious, based on Nehemiah's response to the king, that Nehemiah had thought deeply about the plight of his countrymen and how he could help change it. From the beginning Nehemiah probably was looking for an appropriate opening to bring up the matter to the king. He was waiting for God's timing. He wanted to be sure he didn't rush into something before he actually could help. In order to get the help that was needed, Nehemiah may have thought he needed to take his concern to the king. When and how to do it was the question. After all, King Artaxerxes (the king Nehemiah served) was the one who sent the order to Jerusalem to stop the work (Ezra 4:8-21) when it was brought to his attention that completing the work might encourage the Jews once again to rebel and assert their independence.

Even though Nehemiah was not trying to show his emotions before the king, when the king questioned Nehemiah about his sadness, Nehemiah saw it as his opening to share. He then said, "Let the king live forever. Why should my face not be sad when the city, the place of my fathers' tombs, lies desolate and its gates have been consumed by fire?" I imagine as Nehemiah said these words he hoped the king would not take offense, but simply realize how much Nehemiah, a Jew, cared about his fellow Jews and the city of Jerusalem. Indeed the king understood perfectly what Nehemiah said and inquired how he as king might help.

If we want to be effective leaders we need to wait for God's timing. We may want to rush into a particular project to fix something in our sphere of leadership, but we must be sure that we only move forward when God gives us the green light.

Reflection Question

1. How well do you wait for God's timing? How could you improve?

11. AGL surrounds everything he does with prayer (Neh 2:4) – prays

⁴ Then the king said to me, "What would you request?" So I prayed to the God of heaven.

After Nehemiah explained his sadness the king responded in an amazing way. King Artaxerxes said, "What would you request?" As the king offered his help, Nehemiah probably saw another huge opening to share his plan for helping the Jews. Before he shared, however, Nehemiah said that he first prayed to the God of heaven. This is an indication that Nehemiah surrounded everything he did with prayer. Not only did the negative news about the Jews drive Nehemiah to his knees causing him to fast and pray, but even the positive response of the king caused him to pray.

One question arises. What kind of prayer did Nehemiah pray? Did he drop to his knees in front of the king and begin praying to the God of heaven? As many of us do, Nehemiah probably quickly prayed in his mind to God in the presence of Artaxerxes. It is doubtful if Artaxerxes even knew what was going on. Although we don't know for sure, I suspect Nehemiah's prayer was something like, "Thank You, God, for opening up this door of opportunity for me to share with the king. Give me wisdom to say the right thing so the king will hear and respond favorably. AMEN" Such a prayer could be fired up to heaven in just a few seconds.

The point is, if we want to be effective leaders we need to follow Nehemiah's example and surround everything we do in prayer. We need times of extended prayer like in Nehemiah chapter one when Nehemiah got the negative report about the plight of the Jews. We also need bullet prayers throughout the day as we are confronted with various challenges. We are to obey the biblical injunction in 1 Thessalonians 5:17 to pray without ceasing.

Reflection Questions

1. Would you consider yourself a person of prayer? Why?
2. Do you pray first when needs arise or only when you can't fix them?

12. AGL articulates his desires to others (Neh 2:5) – a concise communicator

⁵ *And I said to the king, "If it please the king, and if your servant has found favor before you, send me to Judah, to the city of my fathers' tombs, that I may rebuild it."*

After praying, Nehemiah began to articulate his desires to the king, and he did it with great clarity. Again, showing respect for authority Nehemiah said, "If it please the king, and if your servant has found favor before you, send me to Judah, to the city of my fathers' tombs, that I may rebuild it." Nehemiah's request was bold. It would mean that he would need to take a leave of absence from his duties as cupbearer. He asked to be sent back to Judah in order to help rebuild the city of Jerusalem.

I believe that Nehemiah was able to articulate his desires clearly because he had been working on a plan well in advance. He had already figured out what he wanted to say and was just looking for the opportunity to say it. The opportunity came and Nehemiah stepped to the plate and hit a home run.

If we want to be effective leaders, we too, need to be able to articulate clearly to those who can help us, exactly what needs to be done in order to move things forward in our sphere of leadership.

Reflection Questions

1. Do you consider yourself a clear and effective communicator? Why or why not?
2. How do you think others would rate you in your ability to clearly communicate your desires and instructions?
3. When is the last time you requested help from someone else to get something done? How did it go?

13. AGL sees and plans for the big picture (Neh 2:6-8a) – has vision

⁶ Then the king said to me, the queen sitting beside him, "How long will your journey be, and when will you return?" So it pleased the king to send me, and I gave him a definite time. ⁷ And I said to the king, "If it please the king, let letters be given me for the governors of the provinces beyond the River, that they may allow me to pass through until I come to Judah, ⁸ and a letter to Asaph the keeper of the king's forest, that he may give me timber to make beams for the gates of the fortress which is by the temple, for the wall of the city, and for the house to which I will go.

Not only did Nehemiah articulate his desires clearly but he laid out a detailed general plan of what needed to be done. He had a grasp of the big picture and made plans to meet the overall need. He gave the king a definite amount of time he thought the overall project would take. He requested letters from the king so that the group of people returning to Jerusalem would not be impeded along the way. He asked for letters so he could obtain the lumber that was needed to accomplish the task. Nehemiah wanted to be sure that he communicated all of the needs so the project would succeed.

I thought about this principle of leadership in reference to a church. For the pastoral staff and board to lead a church effectively they must be able to see the big picture and make appropriate plans to keep the ministry moving forward. They can't just focus on one or two ministries to the exclusion of the rest. They must look at all of the church's needs. Sometimes it is difficult to anticipate all of the needs, but leaders must seek to do so anyway.

The same is true in the business world or in any other sphere of leadership. Leaders must see and plan for the big picture. The people underneath them can have the luxury of only focusing on the one or two areas in which they work, but the leader must see across the whole spectrum.

Reflection Question

1. Do you consider yourself a person who sees the big picture? Why?
2. When is the last time you talked about the big picture with your people?

14. AGL recognizes success as God's providence (Neh 2:8b-9) - has perspective

"And the king granted them to me because the good hand of my God was on me. ⁹ Then I came to the governors of the provinces beyond the River and gave them the king's letters. Now the king had sent with me officers of the army and horsemen.

Nehemiah's detailed request met with a favorable response from the king. The king agreed to do what Nehemiah requested and even more. The king sent a group of military personnel and horsemen. This extra security would help ensure Nehemiah's safe arrival to Jerusalem.

It is interesting to see Nehemiah's response to the king's help. Nehemiah states, "And the king granted them to me because the good hand of my God was on me." Nehemiah did not credit his success on his clear articulation, his grasp of the big picture, or his detailed request. Instead he gave credit and thanks to God.

When some people achieve a measure of success, they become prideful and see their success as their own doing. Sometimes it even seems they break their own hand patting themselves on the back. Nehemiah gave godly leaders a great example to follow by giving glory to God. He recognized that it was God's hand of providence that was the reason for his success. As long as he stayed close to God, God would be his advocate.

Reflection Questions

1. Have you achieved a measure of success in your area of leadership? Explain.
2. Who do you give the credit to for your success; yourself or the Lord?
3. When is the last time you publically credited God as the source of your success?

15. AGL understands he will run into opposition (Neh 2:10) - is realistic

¹⁰ *And when Sanballat the Horonite and Tobiah the Ammonite official heard about it, it was very displeasing to them that someone had come to seek the welfare of the sons of Israel.*

Soon after Nehemiah saw the hand of God give him success, opposition to his plan arose. The Scripture states, “And when Sanballat the Horonite and Tobiah the Ammonite official heard about it, it was very displeasing to them that someone had come to seek the welfare of the sons of Israel.” It wouldn’t be long before these men would cause trouble for Nehemiah and the returnees to Jerusalem.

In this case opposition was not an indication that Nehemiah was outside God’s will, but a reminder that when people walk in God’s will there will be those who oppose them. The old saying rings true. “You can please some of the people all the time, and all the people some of the time, but you will never please all the people all the time.”

Whenever a person decides to lead, he needs to know that it may be a bumpy ride. That is why a godly leader must seek to please God first and foremost. If he pleases God he will please the One who really matters, and it will be up to God to give him divine protection.

It has never ceased to amaze me how when people side with God and choose to follow what He says there will be those who strongly oppose them. It happened to Jesus. He only did what His Father wanted. He healed the sick, raised the dead, loved the outcasts... and yet there were those who wanted to kill Him, and did kill Him.

The apostle Paul would go into a city and preach the gospel and many people would respond positively, but there invariably would be those who tried to stir up trouble.

Someone once said, “A man who wants to lead the orchestra must turn his back on the crowd.”

Someone rightly said, “Leadership is dangerous business. It can be lonely at the top.” But the rewards of being a leader are also great; getting to see God work in and through you to accomplish great things. Leadership is not for the timid, but I believe God is looking to show Himself strong on behalf of those whose hearts are truly his (2 Chronicles 16:9).

God is looking for Nehemiahs today. He is looking for them in the home, in school, in the workplace, and in the church. He is looking for men and women who will display the character and wisdom of Nehemiah. Do you want to be one of those people? If so, study the life of Nehemiah and adopt his godly character traits as your own.

Reflection Questions

1. What opposition have you run into in the last year?
2. How did you handle the opposition you received?
3. Did you see the opposition coming or did it blindside you?
4. What did you learn from the opposition you faced?

16. AGL is willing to burn the midnight candle (oil) – 2:12-15 – is hard working

¹² 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 and there was no animal with me except the animal on which I was riding. ¹³ 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. ¹⁴ Then I passed on to the Fountain Gate and the King's Pool, but there was no place for my mount to pass. ¹⁵ So I went up at night by the ravine and inspected the wall. Then I entered the Valley Gate again and returned.

Nehemiah 2:11 states, “So I came to Jerusalem and was there three days.” The first three days Nehemiah was in Jerusalem there is no record of how he spent his time. Undoubtedly some of it was used getting settled in and connecting with Ezra and the rest of the folks who were already there. Nehemiah was the new kid on the block and if he was going to be successful, he had to build a relationship with the movers and the shakers of Jerusalem.

After being in Jerusalem for three days, Nehemiah did a nighttime reconnaissance of the wall around the city. He went at night probably because he wanted to have a look at the wall without drawing attention to himself. Undoubtedly his arrival at Jerusalem caused a bit of a stir. People wanted to know why he was there, and what he was up to.

Because of Nehemiah’s entourage of military officers and horsemen, it was obvious that he was connected with the King of Persia, and people knew that the king had called a halt to the rebuilding efforts around Jerusalem after learning that the Jews were a rebellious people. Had Nehemiah brought military officers and horsemen in order to gather information for the Persian king for the purpose of meting out punishment on rebellious Jews? Was Nehemiah some sort of spy even though he was Jewish?

Another reason Nehemiah went out at night had to do with those who opposed the Jews. Nehemiah did not want to raise their suspicions and cause

them to gather more opposition before he could unveil his plan to rebuild the wall. This might derail his plans before they got off the ground. Better to inspect the wall at night, even though it meant late hours and additional work. In essence, Nehemiah was willing to go the extra mile to ensure his plans succeeded. He was willing to burn the midnight oil.

Good leaders are willing to work extra hours to ensure the success of whatever it is they feel called to do. This may mean spending longer hours at work, or burning the midnight candle at home.

Some people view leadership as an easy task, but it is not. It means more responsibility and longer hours. Robert Frost the famous poet once observed that if a man works faithfully eight hours a day he may eventually get to be a boss and work twelve hours a day. There is a lot of truth in his observation.

Doing anything well takes effort and being a good leader takes extra effort. It is easy enough to slop through teaching a Sunday School class and do the minimal amount necessary to get by. It is quite another to make the class interesting and go the extra mile in preparation so that the students really learn something.

If a person wants to be a good leader, he must realize ahead of time that leadership usually requires more work. If he wants to succeed in leading he must make the conscious decision to be willing to do what it takes to lead.

Reflection Questions

1. In your opinion, are you willing to go the extra mile for those you serve? Is there evidence to support your opinion? Explain.

2. Do your people view you as a person who goes the extra mile to be sure their needs are taken care of? Explain.

17. AGL surrounds himself with godly people – Neh 2:12 – is wise

^{12a} 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 and there was no animal with me except the animal on which I was riding.

Getting back to Nehemiah's arrival in Jerusalem, I bet he didn't spend his first three days visiting the local spa for massages in order to relax from the long journey from Susa. Instead he was undoubtedly meeting people and becoming familiar with the local populace and specifically Jews who had a heart to do God's will. As he met people he probably looked for those in positions of influence who might partner with him in rebuilding the wall.

By the end of the first three days, Nehemiah had a pretty good feel for the local area and its people. He then took a few of these key individuals and went on an important nighttime mission. He alone rode a horse which may indicate that those who went with him were not the military officers from Susa. Whoever went with Nehemiah that night obviously had some level of trust in him or they would not have followed. Even so, it is clear that Nehemiah had not yet revealed exactly what he was up to.

In some ways, Nehemiah was like Jesus. Jesus called people to follow him to become fishers of men, but He did not reveal to them the full extent of His plans until later.

Why is it so important for leaders to surround themselves with good people? For one, leaders need help. Some leaders try to do everything themselves because they feel they can do even the small jobs better than anyone else. This may be true, but if they start doing too many little jobs, they no longer have time to lead. If a leader wants to succeed, he must trust others to take on part of the work.

You may remember the story of Moses and his father-in-law Jethro. Moses was trying to be the one judge for all the Jewish people and it was wearing him out. His father-in-law told him he needed to find others who could help.

Moses needed to find others who could listen to and be judges over everyday matters. This would lighten his load. The more important disputes could still be brought to him. Moses heeded Jethro's advice and eliminated a large part of the stress in his life (Ex 18:14-24).

D.L. Moody said, "It is better to train 10 people, than to do the work of 10 people. But training them is harder."

Another reason to surround yourself with godly people as a leader is because those people can help you with fresh ideas. They can tell you what is working and what isn't. They can give you new perspective on the task at hand.

If you are a leader, with whom do you seek to surround yourself? Sometimes when a person takes on a position of leadership his circle of support is already determined. Other times he can choose those men or women to be on his team. For example, the president of the United States gets to choose his own cabinet of people. He chooses those he trusts and believes will do the job. On the other hand, a person may take over a position of leadership in a company and find that his staff is already in place.

On a more practical level, if you take over a particular ministry in the church you often have the opportunity to recruit a few others to help you. These folks can be a tremendous blessing. In regard to our youth ministry, our youth intern has done a great job recruiting youth workers allowing the ministry to expand.

If you are leading your family as a single parent, you should surround yourself with friends who can help and encourage you. If you are running your own business, you should seek faithful people who can help carry some of the load. This will free you up to plan for the bigger picture and take care of other important things like keeping the company headed in the right direction. If you are leading a particular club in your school, you should find some folks who can help you with all that needs to be done.

18. AGL keeps information secret until the proper time (Neh 2:12b) – is trustworthy

^{12b} I did not tell anyone what my God was putting into my mind to do for Jerusalem and there was no animal with me except the animal on which I was riding.

Keeping a confidence is difficult. Often if something really good or really bad happens to us or to someone else, we want to tell others. But, godly leaders know how to keep a confidence. They know how to guard vital information until the time is right to share it. Sometimes the time is never right.

In the case of Nehemiah, he arrived at Jerusalem with plans to bless the city and its inhabitants by rebuilding the wall. Nehemiah even had the full support of the king, with letters, military officers, horses, and who knows what else.

When Nehemiah arrived in the city he was undoubtedly chomping at the bit to share the great news, but he knew the timing was not yet right. He had the concept to rebuild the wall, and had the king's support, but he had not yet seen for himself the extent of the damage to the city, or come up with a workable plan that would match the available resources to the task at hand. Nehemiah thus took a few days to get a better handle on the situation. In the meantime, he kept his plans to himself.

What might have happened if Nehemiah had told everyone his intentions from Day 1? Opposition may have formed and derailed his plans. Well intentioned supporters may have tried to come up with their own plans thus undermining his. It was thus vital that Nehemiah's overall plans remain a secret until he had a detailed plan worked out.

In WWII when the allied forces led by the US were going to invade Europe to drive back the Germans it was vital that the location of the invasion remain a secret. If the Germans had known exactly where and when the attack was going to be, the invasion would have failed and most of Europe would

undoubtedly be speaking German today. The ability of the allies to keep their plans a secret until the last minute was absolutely key to their success.

If you want to be a godly leader, you must learn to keep certain things confidential. You must put the good of the task over your own desire to spill the beans. When you do so, you protect yourself and the thing you are trying to accomplish.

Reflection Questions

1. Why is confidentiality so important?
2. How do you do with confidential information? Can you keep a secret?
3. Have you ever broken a confidence? What happened?
4. Have you ever shared something confidential with someone else only to find out that the person you shared with broke the confidence,, too, and shared it with another person?

19. AGL gathers sufficient info in the planning process - 2:13-15 – is thorough

¹³ 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. ¹⁴ Then I passed on to the Fountain Gate and the King's Pool, but there was no place for my mount to pass. ¹⁵ So I went up at night by the ravine and inspected the wall. Then I entered the Valley Gate again and returned.

In order to flesh-out his overall plan, it was important for Nehemiah to get a good look at the wall of Jerusalem. He needed to properly assess the damage in order to determine if what he planned to do was even possible. After all, he had given the king a specific time he planned to return. It was important that the wall be finished on time.

What kind of information was Nehemiah gathering? Perhaps he was trying to estimate how much timber it would take to rebuild certain sections of the wall. Perhaps he was trying to get a good handle on the number of men it would take to rebuild each section. Perhaps he wanted to be able to say to the Jews in Jerusalem that he had personally inspected the wall and knew what needed to be done. This would enhance his credibility. Without this personal knowledge of the devastation, the people of Jerusalem might be less likely to buy into Nehemiah's plan. They might feel it just couldn't be done.

Reflection Question

1. When you decide on a new project or ministry do you tend to jump right in, or do you gather pertinent information that could help make the plan a success?

2. Can you give an example of when gathering relevant info helped ensure a project's success?

20. AGL casts vision and gets others to follow (Neh 2:16-18) – has vision

¹⁶ *And 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.* ¹⁷ *Then I said to them, "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."* ¹⁸ *And 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.*

After inspecting the wall, Nehemiah was ready to reveal his plan. The Scripture does not tell us the venue that Nehemiah used. Maybe he called for a meeting of the city's important leaders at one of the city gates. Maybe he had an assembly at the temple. In any event, Nehemiah clearly revealed his plan of rebuilding the wall. Listen to how he did it. He began by giving an accurate assessment of their situation. Nehemiah 2:17,18 states,

"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." ¹⁸ *And 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."*

Someone said, "When you ask people to do something, be sure to also tell them why. It's worth the effort."

Some leaders can cast vision, but it is a rare person who can cast vision to the extent that the majority of people want to follow. Casting vision is like sowing seeds. Rather than scatter physical seeds a leader spreads ideas and concepts. He hopes they will take root in the hearts of his hearers. The seeds may be to move forward to complete a task together, or to make a certain change in an organization. Leaders speak words in order to gather around themselves those who catch their vision for what needs to be done.

Dwight D. Eisenhower said, “Leadership is the art of getting someone else to do something that you want done because he wants to do it.” How does a leader get others to follow? He shows them that his is the best plan. He shows them what can be done and how to do it.

Reflection Questions

1. How well have you done at casting vision for your followers? Did they follow?
2. Are there things you wanted to see done, but without proper vision casting, failed? Explain.
3. What vision needs to be cast in your organization?
4. What specific steps do you need to take regarding the things you mentioned in question 3 above?

21. AGL deals appropriately with opposition (Neh 2:19-20) – is protective

¹⁹ *But when Sanballat the Horonite, and Tobiah the Ammonite official, and Geshem the Arab heard it, they mocked us and despised us and said, "What is this thing you are doing? Are you rebelling against the king?"* ²⁰ *So I answered them and said to them, "The God of heaven will give us success; therefore we His servants will arise and build, but you have no portion, right, or memorial in Jerusalem."*

Nehemiah did not personally attack those who opposed him. Nor did he call them names. He did not lower himself to their level. Instead he simply stated that God would give the Jews success as His servants. They, on the other hand, would have no portion, right or memorial in Jerusalem.

As leaders we need to deal appropriately with opposition. As we do, we need to be sure we don't lower ourselves to their level of personal, mean-spirited attacks.

Reflection Questions

1. How do you respond to opposition in your organization?

2. How should you respond?

22. AGL Knows his people and what they do (Neh 3:1) – is knowledgeable

Chapter three is an accurate recounting of who worked to restore what. Nehemiah knew where everyone was working on the wall. Whether he or someone else gathered the information, we don't know, but it was Nehemiah who ultimately wrote it down in the account known as the book of Nehemiah.

It is impossible to know everything about everyone, but godly leaders should take a personal interest in their people and know where they work and what they do. A great way to do that is by taking time to talk with folks. Asking questions like “Do you like your job? How long have you been involved in it? Do you have any suggestions on what we could do better to help you do your job better?”

Leaders must not isolate themselves from their people in the back office or some ivory tower. Instead they need to be around their people, talking to them and learning more about them so they can serve them better.

Reflection Questions

1. Do you know your people? Do you know what they do in your organization?
2. Do you know what makes them tick?
3. Do you know their hopes and dreams? Do you know anything about their family situation and any difficulties they are having?

23. AGL gives recognition to his workers (Neh 3:1) - shows appreciation

The whole third chapter of Nehemiah is a record of the accomplishments of those who helped rebuild the wall. Even to this day, it stands as a way of recognizing the accomplishments of those who labored in Jerusalem.

It is said that the head cook for the Duke of Wellington finally decided to quit his job. When the Duke asked him why, he said, "When I cook a good meal for the Duke, he says nothing. When I cook a bad meal for the Duke, he says nothing. I can't work any longer for someone who does not recognize the work that I do."

A survey was done and people were asked what they wanted most from their employer besides a good paycheck and benefits. The answer came back that they wanted to be recognized for the work they did and to feel appreciated.

If you are a leader, you should recognize those who serve under you. Notes of recognition, words of recognition, or special gifts are just a few of the ways to recognize people and make them feel appreciated. This must not be done in a plastic or phony way, but from the heart. And the recognition should be on a continual basis. People like and need to be stroked. If gifts are given, they don't have to be expensive.

One of the greatest ways you can recognize someone is to tell others about him. In some cultures people won't compliment a person to their face, but instead tell others about the good thing they did. I think it is appropriate to do both. We should tell people face to face that they did well, and we should tell others as well.

Reflection Questions

1. What have you done to recognize the good work of those in your care?

2. What could you do better to recognize people's good work?

24. AGL keeps accurate records (Neh 3:1-32) – is a good record keeper

¹ Then Eliashib the high priest arose with his brothers the priests and built the Sheep Gate; they consecrated it and hung its doors. They consecrated the wall to the Tower of the Hundred and the Tower of Hananel. ² Next to him the men of Jericho built, and next to them Zaccur the son of Imri built. ³ Now the sons of Hassenaah built the Fish Gate; they laid its beams and hung its doors with its bolts and bars. ⁴ Next to them Meremoth the son of Uriah the son of Hakkoz made repairs. And next to him Meshullam the son of Berechiah the son of Meshezabel made repairs. And next to him Zadok the son of Baana also made repairs. ⁵ Moreover, next to him the Tekoites made repairs, but their nobles did not support the work of their masters....

All of Nehemiah chapter 3 is an accurate record of what happened with the rebuilding of the wall of Jerusalem. Records are helpful in many ways. They capture history by showing who did what when. They are good for giving recognition. Records help accountability in case something breaks later on. In business accurate records are helpful in case a company gets sued. At home accurate records are helpful in case you get audited

In a lot of organizations, after a major event there is an After Actions Report that is turned in by the person who oversaw the event. These reports record the who, what, when, where, cost, and lessons learned of the event. They are an invaluable asset for planning the same or a similar event in the future. These can be kept on file so if a similar event is done in the future the organization doesn't have to reinvent the wheel.

Reflection Questions

1. What kind of records do you keep for your organization? How have they helped you? What records do you need to start keeping?
2. Do you do something like an After Action Report after events in your organization? If so, how have they helped you?

25. AGL works to keep morale high (Neh 4:1-14) – is motivational

¹ Now it came about that when Sanballat heard that we were rebuilding the wall, he became furious and very angry and mocked the Jews. ² He spoke in the presence of his brothers and the wealthy men of Samaria and said, "What are these feeble Jews doing? Are they going to restore it for themselves? Can they offer sacrifices? Can they finish in a day? Can they revive the stones from the dusty rubble even the burned ones?"... ⁶ So we built the wall and the whole wall was joined together to half its height, for the people had a mind to work. ⁷ Now when Sanballat, Tobiah, the Arabs, the Ammonites and the Ashdodites heard that the repair of the walls of Jerusalem went on, and that the breaches began to be closed, they were very angry. ⁸ All of them conspired together to come and fight against Jerusalem and to cause a disturbance in it. ⁹ But we prayed to our God, and because of them we set up a guard against them day and night. ¹⁰ Thus in Judah it was said, "The strength of the burden bearers is failing, Yet there is much rubbish; And we ourselves are unable To rebuild the wall." ¹¹ Our enemies said, "They will not know or see until we come among them, kill them and put a stop to the work."... ¹⁴ When I saw their fear, I rose and spoke to the nobles, the officials and the rest of the people: "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 houses."

Nehemiah was concerned about the morale of the people: It made him upset that those opposing them were demoralizing the workers (4:5). He may have given the Jews intermediate goals like finish half the wall (4:6) in order to raise morale. Finishing half the wall made Nehemiah note that the people had a mind to work. He also prayed against the opposition (4:9). When Nehemiah saw the people's fear, he spoke to them and said not to be afraid (4:14). He reminded them that God is great and awesome...

Leaders must keep their hand on the pulse of morale in their organizations. If workers are happy they will work harder. People can be given all sorts of things to raise morale. Examples are time off, awards, and public recognition.

Reflection Questions

1. How motivated are the people you serve?
2. Is there anything that is demoralizing them?
3. What can you do to raise the morale in the people?

26. AGL listens to and considers what is reported – 4:12,13 – a good listener

¹² *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,"* ¹³ *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.*

The Jews who lived near the opposition heard what they were up to and came and warned Nehemiah. I doubt if the same people came ten times and gave the same report. It likely was ten different reports about the same thing; that Sanballat and the opposition were planning to hurt the Jews.

When this news came to Nehemiah he took action. He listened to the people and helped prevent Sanballat and the rest of the opposition from getting the upper hand.

When workers come to their leader with a concern, the leader would do well to listen carefully and to take appropriate action.

Reflection Questions

1. What negative reports have come to your attention regarding your organization or ministry?

2. Have you taken the threat seriously in order to protect your people?

3. What actions have you taken in the past when you received a report that your people were in danger?

27. AGL adjusts plans to meet new challenges (Neh 4:13-23) – is flexible

¹³ 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. ¹⁴ When I saw their fear, I rose and spoke to the nobles, the officials and the rest of the people: "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 houses." ¹⁵ When our enemies heard that it was known to us, and that God had frustrated their plan, then all of us returned to the wall, each one to his work. ¹⁶ From that day on, half of my servants carried on the work while half of them held the spears, the shields, the bows and the breastplates; and the captains were behind the whole house of Judah. ¹⁷ Those who were rebuilding the wall and those who carried burdens took their load with one hand doing the work and the other holding a weapon. ¹⁸ As for the builders, each wore his sword girded at his side as he built, while the trumpeter stood near me. ¹⁹ I said to the nobles, the officials and the rest of the people, "The work is great and extensive, and we are separated on the wall far from one another. ²⁰ "At whatever place you hear the sound of the trumpet, rally to us there. Our God will fight for us." ²¹ So we carried on the work with half of them holding spears from dawn until the stars appeared. ²² At that time I also said to the people, "Let each man with his servant spend the night within Jerusalem so that they may be a guard for us by night and a laborer by day." ²³ So neither I, my brothers, my servants, nor the men of the guard who followed me, none of us removed our clothes, each took his weapon even to the water.

Nehemiah showed flexibility to help his people in the ever changing situation. We need to be flexible, too.

Reflection Questions

1. What have you done to be flexible to meet new challenges?
2. How did the above work out?
3. Are there any changes you need to make now?

28.AGL provides for people's safety and welfare (Neh 4:13-23) – is protective

¹³ 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. ¹⁴ When I saw their fear, I rose and spoke to the nobles, the officials, and the rest of the people: "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 houses." ¹⁵ And it happened when our enemies heard that it was known to us, and that God had frustrated their plan, then all of us returned to the wall, each one to his work. ¹⁶ And it came about from that day on, that half of my servants carried on the work while half of them held the spears, the shields, the bows, and the breastplates; and the captains were behind the whole house of Judah. ¹⁷ Those who were rebuilding the wall and those who carried burdens took {their} load with one hand doing the work and the other holding a weapon. ¹⁸ As for the builders, each wore his sword girded at his side as he built, while the trumpeter stood near me. ¹⁹ And I said to the nobles, the officials, and the rest of the people, "The work is great and extensive, and we are separated on the wall far from one another. ²⁰ "At whatever place you hear the sound of the trumpet, rally to us there. Our God will fight for us." ²¹ So we carried on the work with half of them holding spears from dawn until the stars appeared. ²² At that time I also said to the people, "Let each man with his servant spend the night within Jerusalem so that they may be a guard for us by night and a laborer by day." ²³ So neither I, my brothers, my servants, nor the men of the guard who followed me, none of us removed our clothes, each took his weapon even to the water.

Everything Nehemiah did not only showed flexibility, it also provided protection for the people. In order to meet the threat of Sanballat, Tobiah, and the Arabs, Nehemiah made some changes. Men were stationed in the lowest parts of the space behind the walls. People were stationed in families with swords, spears, and bows. (4:13). People were pulled off the wall for a time to prepare for a possible attack (4:15). Half of the people worked while the other half watched (4:16). Even those who worked only worked with one hand (4:17). People who lived outside Jerusalem were encouraged to stay in Jerusalem at night so they could be workers by day and guards by night (4:22). People didn't even take off their daytime clothes, but slept in them and kept their weapons with them even when they went to get water (4:23).

Reflection Question

1. What are you doing to keep your people safe? Give examples.

29. AGL seeks justice for his people (Neh 5:1-13) – is just

There was an great outcry of the people against their Jewish brothers. See if you can figure out what the problem was.

¹ Now there was a great outcry of the people and of their wives against their Jewish brothers. ² For there were those who said, "We, our sons and our daughters, are many; therefore let us get grain that we may eat and live." ³ And there were others who said, "We are mortgaging our fields, our vineyards, and our houses that we might get grain because of the famine." ⁴ Also there were those who said, "We have borrowed money for the king's tax {on} our fields and our vineyards. ⁵ "And now our flesh is like the flesh of our brothers, our children like their children. Yet behold, we are forcing our sons and our daughters to be slaves, and some of our daughters are forced into bondage already, and we are helpless because our fields and vineyards belong to others." ⁶ Then I was very angry when I had heard their outcry and these words. ⁷ And I consulted with myself, and contended with the nobles and the rulers and said to them, "You are exacting usury, each from his brother!" Therefore, I held a great assembly against them. ⁸ And I said to them, "We according to our ability have redeemed our Jewish brothers who were sold to the nations; now would you even sell your brothers that they may be sold to us?" Then they were silent and could not find a word {to say.} ⁹ Again I said, "The thing which you are doing is not good; should you not walk in the fear of our God because of the reproach of the nations, our enemies? ¹⁰ "And likewise I, my brothers and my servants, are lending them money and grain. Please, let us leave off this usury. ¹¹ "Please, give back to them this very day their fields, their vineyards, their olive groves, and their houses, also the hundredth part of the money and of the grain, the newwine, and the oil that you are exacting from them."

The problem was usury, exorbitant interest, and Nehemiah confronted the problem head on. It is interesting that Nehemiah showed great leadership here by using his own wealth to solve the problem. He also gave the nobles and the rulers a bigger perspective by explaining what they were doing by

having usury on their own people. When he appealed to the Jews he even said, "Please."

And the people responded well to his leadership. They said, "We will give it back and will require nothing from them; we will do exactly as you say." (Neh 5:12a). Nehemiah helped ensure the success of his plan by having the priests take an oath. He then put on a physical display in which he shook out the front of his garment. Neh 5:12b-13 states.

^{12b} So I called the priests and took an oath from them that they would do according to this promise. ¹³ I also shook out the front of my garment and said, "Thus may God shake out every man from his house and from his possessions who does not fulfill this promise; even thus may he be shaken out and emptied." And all the assembly said, "Amen!" And they praised the LORD. Then the people did according to this promise.

Reflection Questions

1. Give one example of how you have sought justice for your people.

2. Have you ever used your own resources to solve a problem or meet a need in your organization? Explain.

3. Have you ever had to confront someone in your organization who was treating someone else unjustly? What happened?

30. AGL does not lord it over those he leads (Neh 5:14-16) – is humble

¹⁴ Moreover, from the day that I was appointed to be their governor in the land of Judah, from the twentieth year to the thirty-second year of King Artaxerxes, for twelve years, neither I nor my kinsmen have eaten the governor's food allowance. ¹⁵ But the former governors who were before me laid burdens on the people and took from them bread and wine besides forty shekels of silver; even their servants domineered the people. But I did not do so because of the fear of God. ¹⁶ And 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.

When Nehemiah was appointed governor he did not take advantage of his position, and he did not lord it over the people. He did demand the governors food allowance, nor did he seek to acquire land. He even had his own servants work on the wall.

It is easy for leaders to take advantage of their position, but Nehemiah did not do so, and neither should we.

Reflection Questions

1. Would those in your organization say you lord it over them? Why or why not?

2. What steps have you taken to be sure you are not wrongfully using your position of leadership?

31. AGL works alongside those he leads - 5:16 – is a cooperative team player

¹⁶ *And 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.*

Nehemiah personally worked on the wall. He may have travelled from area to area helping a little bit here and a little bit there. He could then personally encourage the workers and be sure they were on track. This is called LBWA Leadership By Walking Around! He spent a good part of his time overseeing and being ready with the trumpeter in case an attack came.

It is important for leaders today to occasionally work alongside their workers when appropriate. Depending on the type of ministry or business a leader leads, this work could take many forms.

Reflection Questions

1. Do you sometimes work alongside the workers in your organization or ministry?

2. If so, how do the workers respond to you being there working with them?

32. AGL has a godly motivation - 5:15-19 – is a God-pleaser

¹⁵ But the former governors who were before me laid burdens on the people and took from them bread and wine besides forty shekels of silver; even their servants domineered the people. But I did not do so because of the fear of God. ¹⁶ And 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. ¹⁷ Moreover, {there were} at my table one hundred and fifty Jews and officials, besides those who came to us from the nations that were around us. ¹⁸ Now that which was prepared for each day was one ox {and} six choice sheep, also birds were prepared for me; and once in ten days all sorts of wine {were furnished} in abundance. Yet for all this I did not demand the governor's food {allowance,} because the servitude was heavy on this people. ¹⁹ Remember me, O my God, for good, according to all that I have done for this people.

Nehemiah did not try to force things on the people because he feared God (v15). He knew that the servitude was heavy on the people (v18). He wanted God to remember the good he did (5:19, 13:14, 13:22, 13:31). In essence he wanted to hear the words, “Well done, good and faithful servant.”

Reflection Question

1. What motivates you to do what you do?

2. What does it mean to have a godly motivation?

3. Is there anything you need to change to have this kind of motivation?

33. AGL keeps his priorities straight and won't be intimidated - 6:1-14 - is steadfast

¹ Now it came about when it was reported to Sanballat, Tobiah, to Geshem the Arab, and to the rest of our enemies that I had rebuilt the wall, and that no breach remained in it, although at that time I had not set up the doors in the gates, ² that Sanballat and Geshem sent a message to me, saying, "Come, let us meet together at Chephirim in the plain of Ono." But they were planning to harm me. ³ So I sent messengers to them, saying, "I am doing a great work and I cannot come down. Why should the work stop while I leave it and come down to you?" ⁴ And they sent messages to me four times in this manner, and I answered them in the same way. ⁵ Then Sanballat sent his servant to me in the same manner a fifth time with an open letter in his hand. ⁶ In it was written, "It is reported among the nations, and Gashmu says, that you and the Jews are planning to rebel; therefore you are rebuilding the wall. And you are to be their king, according to these reports. ⁷ "And you have also appointed prophets to proclaim in Jerusalem concerning you, 'A king is in Judah!' And now it will be reported to the king according to these reports. So come now, let us take counsel together." ⁸ Then I sent a message to him saying, "Such things as you are saying have not been done, but you are inventing them in your own mind." ⁹ For all of them were {trying} to frighten us, thinking, "They will become discouraged with the work and it will not be done." But now, O God, strengthen my hands. ¹⁰ And when I entered the house of Shemaiah the son of Delaiah, son of Mehetabel, who was confined at home, he said, "Let us meet together in the house of God, within the temple, and let us close the doors of the temple, for they are coming to kill you, and they are coming to kill you at night." ¹¹ But I said, "Should a man like me flee? And could one such as I go into the temple to save his life? I will not go in." ¹² Then I perceived that surely God had not sent him, but he uttered his prophecy against me because Tobiah and Sanballat had hired him. ¹³ He was hired for this reason, that I might become frightened and act accordingly and sin, so that they might have an evil report in order that they could reproach me. ¹⁴ Remember, O my God, Tobiah and Sanballat according to these works of theirs, and also Noadiah the prophetess and the rest of the prophets who were {trying} to frighten me.

Nehemiah wouldn't let anything sway him from the work: not the four messages from Sanballat and Geshem (Neh 6:2-5), not the open letter carried by Sanballat's servant (Neh 6:6-9), and not when he entered into the house of Shemaiah (Neh 6:10-14). Nehemiah responded in 6:3 by saying that he had a great work to do. He realized that the enemy was trying to use fear to stop the work: fear of attack, fear of failure, and fear of retribution by the king.

Because Nehemiah did not cave in to fear the wall was finished in 52 days (Neh 6:15)!

It is amazing what can happen when people stand strong in the Lord! As leaders today, we need to do the same.

Reflection Question

1. Have you ever been stalled in your work because of fear? What happened?
2. How have you been able to get beyond your fears?

34. AGL appoints others based on faithfulness and godliness (Neh 7:1,2) – is discerning

¹ Now it came about when the wall was rebuilt and I had set up the doors, and the gatekeepers and the singers and the Levites were appointed, ² that I put Hanani my brother, and Hananiah the commander of the fortress, in charge of Jerusalem, for he was a faithful man and feared God more than many.

Nehemiah appointed Hanani his brother who was also known as Hananiah the commander of the fortress (this is the same person) in charge of Jerusalem not because he was his brother, but because he had proven himself to be faithful and was God-fearing.

Nehemiah appointed Shelemia the priest, Zadok the scribe, and Pedaiah of the Levites. In addition to them was Hanan the son of Zaccur... for they were considered reliable... (Neh 13:13).

Reflection Question

1. Do you appoint people in your organization based on faithfulness and godliness, or on something else?
2. Would people in your organization say there was a lot of cronyism going on?

35. AGL understands the importance of celebrating successes (Neh 8:8-12, 12:27-31) – celebrates success

Neh 8:8-12

⁸ *And they read from the book, from the law of God, translating to give the sense so that they understood the reading.* ⁹ *Then Nehemiah, who was the governor, and Ezra the priest and scribe, and the Levites who taught the people said to all the people, "This day is holy to the LORD your God; do not mourn or weep." For all the people were weeping when they heard the words of the law.* ¹⁰ *Then he said to them, "Go, eat of the fat, drink of the sweet, and send portions to him who has nothing prepared; for this day is holy to our Lord. Do not be grieved, for the joy of the LORD is your strength."* ¹¹ *So the Levites calmed all the people, saying, "Be still, for the day is holy; do not be grieved."* ¹² *And all the people went away to eat, to drink, to send portions and to celebrate a great festival, because they understood the words which had been made known to them....*

Neh 12:27-31

²⁷ *Now at the dedication of the wall of Jerusalem they sought out the Levites from all their places, to bring them to Jerusalem so that they might celebrate the dedication with gladness, with hymns of thanksgiving and with songs to the accompaniment of cymbals, harps, and lyres.* ²⁸ *So the sons of the singers were assembled from the district around Jerusalem, and from the villages of the Netophathites,* ²⁹ *from Beth-gilgal, and from their fields in Geba and Azmaveth, for the singers had built themselves villages around Jerusalem.* ³⁰ *And the priests and the Levites purified themselves; they also purified the people, the gates, and the wall.* ³¹ *Then I had the leaders of Judah come up on top of the wall, and I appointed two great choirs, the first proceeding to the right on top of the wall toward the Refuse Gate....*

All the people assembled as one man (Neh 8:1). There were 42,360 people (7:66), not to mention their servants (7:67). We're not talking about happy hour! Nehemiah and Ezra got all the people together. They read the law and

36. AGL focuses on maintaining godly standards (Neh chapters 8-13) – is Word-centered

The quality of maintaining godly standards is seen in many passages.

- a. Feasts were restored in Nehemiah 8:13-19
- b. Holiness was stressed in Nehemiah 9:1-3. The people gathered to fast, confess their sins and to worship God.
- c. Commitments were encouraged in Nehemiah 10:28-39
- d. The people were purified in Nehemiah. This was a symbol of God's holiness in Nehemiah 12:30.
- e. Foreigners were excluded - Nehemiah 13:3
- f. The priest Eliashib who was related to Tobiah was reprimanded for giving him a room in the house of God - Nehemiah 13:4-9
- g. Tithing and the giving of the Levites portion was restored so that the Levites and the singers would return to the temple - Nehemiah 13:10-13
- h. The purity of the Sabbath was restored - Nehemiah 13:15-22
- i. Foreign marriages were excluded - 13:23-27
- l. The priesthood was purified – Nehemiah 13:30,31

Nehemiah brought back godly standards for the Jews.

We need godly standards in our lives and ministries, too.

Reflection Questions

1. What might be some standards that leaders could institute in their ministries or organizations?

2. What do you see as the benefits of bringing godly standards into an organization or ministry?

3. Are there standards that might be inappropriate?

37. AGL gets things organized -- Neh 13:30,31 – is organized

³⁰ Thus I purified them from everything foreign and appointed duties for the priests and the Levites, each in his task, ³¹ and I arranged for the supply of wood at appointed times and for the first fruits. Remember me, O my God, for good.

Nehemiah not only rebuilt the wall, but he got things organized. He

- appointed people to be in charge of the storehouses - 13:13

- appointed duties for the priests and the Levites - 13:30

- arranged for the supply of wood at appointed times - 13:31

Nearly always for things to run smoothly there has to be a certain level of organization. Systems need to be put in place that streamline services. That is precisely what Nehemiah did, and what we need to do, too.

Reflection Questions

1. Is your organization or ministry organized adequately?

2. If so, how has your organization benefited from being better organized?

3. Are there any areas of your organization that could be better organized?
In your opinion, what would the benefits be of doing this?

I hope these principles will help people be better leaders!

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