

Nehemiah: A Leader from the Knees up! (Knee-high-mia)

Nehemiah 1:1-11

Like most people in leadership positions, Nehemiah continually faced impossible circumstances. You will remember that he was 800 miles from the concern on his heart: His people who lived in the midst of destruction in Jerusalem. To live 15 or 20 miles from where you work is one thing but N was faced with a 1600 mile round trip! And who had ever heard of 70 mph? To further complicate matters, N answered to an unbeliever - King Artaxerxas. Before N could leave his responsible post and go to Jerusalem to build the Wall, something had to be done in the mind of Artaxerxas. His mind needed changing. When N received Gods orders, he did not rush into the Kings presence and give him an ultimatum: "3 years leave of absence or I'll quit." Instead, He went before God in prayer and trusted Him to open the doors and change the heart of His Boss. Most likely, N authored his book himself. He described himself simply as the son of Hacaliah, a man whose name does not appear elsewhere in scripture. N gave his occupation as Cupbearer to the King (v2). These were his earthly credentials: ***But spiritually he was: A cupbearer with a heart for God!*** The cupbearer meant he was the wine and food taster. He served as the screen between the public and the King. It was a position of intimacy and trust. The story opens in winter time (month of Chislev) December in the 20th year of the king's reign. N lived in Susa the capital of the Mede/Persian Empire - a place recognised by the Jews as the capital of the known world. It was a hub of activity, a place of ultimate decision making, often late-breaking news of the empire came to the King via his cupbearer. N was the Kings right hand man! Hanani (N's brother) comes to Jerusalem. N asks of Jerusalem and the Jews - a true Jew never forgets Jerusalem - he wanted to know about the condition of his people and beloved city. The answer was that they were a remnant in great distress and reproach (misery/calamity/vulnerable). They were being

criticised and slandered by enemies of the faith. N was broken hearted and he reacts (v4-11) and the rest of the chapter documents that reaction. From this point we see his leadership unfold. ***The description of the people of Jerusalem is not far removed from the description of the Church in Europe: we need a Nehemiah figure to lead us out of this spiritual morass.***

Marks of a Competent Leader.

N was touched by the need of his people "sat down and wept and mourned and I was fasting and praying before the God of heaven" (v4). Four significant factors are revealed here which I believe we need to see as characteristic of competent Spiritual Leaders: such leadership is sorely needed in the Body of Christ today. Lets me share them as they occurred in N's experience:

1. A Leader has a clear recognition of the Needs. "When I heard these things" (v4). N was not preoccupied; he did not live in a dream world opposed to reality. He asked the question: what's the condition? They replied: it's grim! He heard what they said. You may think that recognising needs is an elementary concept, especially for leaders. But I have met many people in responsible leadership positions who never seem to see the problems they ought to be solving. (David Murphy - missed need to build his marriage (concentrated on ministry) - the result was a broken marriage, broken man, broken ministry.) Are you aware of needs around you? How about the needs in your own family? Are you sensitive as a parent or as a husband/wife? Maybe you live alone? Do you know what is on your parents or your children's hearts, where the scales tip?

2. A Leader is personally concerned with the Need. N went a step beyond recognition of the problem. He not only heard those matters but he also sat down and identified with them. You never lighten the load unless first you feel the pressure in your own soul. You are never used of God to bring blessing until God has opened your eyes and made you see things as they are.

There is no better preparation for Christian service than that. N was called to build the Walls but first He wept over the ruins. "The Walls are down. Oh God! How can these Walls be down and these people continue in safety?" instead of the normal response of life: "Oh the Walls are down! Who messed up? Who blew it?" or "They've been back there all these years and nobody has built those Walls? Send me their names. I'll deal with them!" These reactions are wrong. A leader must have compassion.

E.g. Eli/Samuel: 1 Samuel 3 (about a Father who refused to hear a specific family need). Samuel, Samuel - 3 times (Twice: go back to sleep, it's not me. Last: listen its God your hearing!) Why in the world did God wake him so often? What was the Lord trying to tell him? V11/12 a prophecy is given to Samuel about judgment on Eli's home. Don't tell me God isn't concerned about a leaders home. Here was Eli, a spiritual leader in Israel, and God's concern over his home (read v13). Underline I told him in your Bible and he failed to restrain them. Are there times when you know something wrong is going on at your house, but you refuse to be involved in correcting it. We carelessly pull the shades on reason and say: well somehow it's going to work out. Listen God has appointed a Father to one of the most difficult leadership positions in all the world: to lead his home. He motivates, sets the pace, gives guidance and encouragement, and handles discipline. Eli knew all this but he would not rebuke his sons when they disobeyed God. Maybe he figured that the leaders at the Temple would straighten out his kids (responsibility is for Home not Church). The Church can seldom resurrect what the home puts to death.

Back to N as a model of leadership: realise that we are not just talking about N and some ancient city at the dawn of history.

We are talking about today!

Fasting & Praying (v4) mourned, fasted and prayed before the God of Heaven: Fasting is missing a meal for one major purpose: zeroing in on your walk with God (some fast weekly or

monthly, some for a specific purpose). Scripture mentions it frequently (*God's Chosen fast: Arthur Wallis*). When our motive is right it is amazing what we can accomplish with the Lord when we occasionally save the time fixing, eating, and clearing after a meal and invest it on our knees. The more responsibility we shoulder in our lives, the more time we need for contemplation and waiting before our Father at the Throne of Grace.

3. A Serious Leader goes first to God with the problem. "O Lord God of heaven, the great and awesome God..."(v5). What is your first response when a need comes to your attention? (Fallen Human nature: how can I work this out? What did so-and-so do wrong to make this happen?) Your people problem, whatever it may be will not be completely solved until you take it to God in prayer. Someday you and I will look back at those things we did rationally in the flesh, and hate the day we did them. Prayer, I repeat, is absolutely essential in the life of a leader. How did N behave? **He praised God v5**. Not coming to another man but the God of Heaven! For whom did N work? The King. Was this King great and mighty on earth? The mightiest! But compared to God. King Artaxerxas was nothing. And so it stands to reason that when we go to God in prayer, we put things into proper perspective. If you are having difficulty loving or relating to an individual, take him to God. Bother the Lord with this person. Don't you be bothered with him - leave him at the Throne. **He confessed his part in the problem v6/7**. 'We' 'I' the confession was not on behalf of someone else's failure. The confession had to do with N's part in the problem. What do we do when we are in conflict with another person? We usually blame the other person - we can usually think of 6/7 ways they have manifested their stubbornness and unwillingness to change, but we seldom consider our part in the problem. But it works both ways. So the very first thing N did was to say in effect "Lord I am culpable. I am not only wanting to be part of the answer, I am

confessing myself to be part of the problem." I plead with you - as you go before God in prayer concerning any unresolved personality conflicts, have the attitude reflected in these words: Lord I bring before you these areas where I have caused an irritation. This is my realm of responsibility. I can't change this person. But God I can tell you this is my part in it; forgive me". **He claimed the promise.** When he went to God in prayer, he praised the Father, confessed his part in the wrong, and claimed the promise God had given. What was he doing? (v8). He was quoting a verse of scripture to God. He quoted not only from Levt. 26 but also Deut 30. He knew the Book. "Lord I open the book before you. I bring you the very words you spoke, the promise you made. And I'm claiming it Lord, right now." What was the promise? It was twofold. If Israel disobeyed they would go into a foreign Land. That had come to pass. The second part as that when the time of captivity was ended, God would bring the Jews back to Jerusalem and protect them. That part was unfulfilled. So N was saying, "Lord you have done part one - we have disobeyed and we have been in captivity. But Lord, you made a promise to bring us back to the city and protect us and that has not come to pass yet! I am claiming that it will." God does not lightly give out His promises. He says: "I promise you that if you will give me your burden, I will bear it. If you will seek first my kingdom, I will add all these other things to you. If you will make your heart right before me, I will lead you into a path of stability and prosperity." That doesn't mean He will fill your wallet. It does mean He will give you peace - like the world is not able to know. "I will promote you to a place of my level of significance and you will be satisfied." N said: Lord you have promised that your people will be protected in that city and I'm claiming it right now! **He brought his petition before God.** His petition was a bold one: v11. Have you ever prayed this? "Lord make me successful. Make me find that place in the centre of your will where heavenly prosperity rests, in whatever level it may be.

May I reach the maximum so that I am, in your eyes, prosperous. And Lord grant me favour with those in authority over me." That's bold petitioning.

4. A Leader is available to meet the need himself. "Make me successful. Grant me compassion in his eyes." N recognised the need clearly. He got involved in it. He took it to God. Now he was available to meet the need, if that was what God desired.

Benefits of Prayer

So Neh1 is a blend of prayer and action. All who lead must place a high priority on prayer. Why is prayer so important: **Prayer makes me wait** cannot prayer and work at the same time. I have to wait to act till I finish praying. Prayer forces me to leave the situation with God.

Prayer clears my vision Does the situation seem a little foggy? Prayer will 'burn through' the fog (as the sun does). Your vision will clear as you see thro' God eyes.

Prayer quietens my heart I cannot worry and pray at the same time! I am doing one or the other. Prayer makes me quiet. It replaces anxiety with a calm spirit. Knees don't knock when we kneel with them!

Prayer activates my Faith after praying I am more prone to trust God and how petty and negative and critical I am when I don't pray! Prayer sets faith on fire!

So don't just fill the margins of your Bible with words/thoughts about the ways a leader prays. **Do it!** Don't stop with a sterile theology of prayer, **Pray!** Prayer was the first major step N took in his journey into effective leadership. Got any rivers you think are uncrossable? Got any mountains you can't tunnel through? God specialises in things thought impossible. He does the things others cannot do. The Lord is the specialist we need for the uncrossable and impossible experiences. He delights in accomplishing what we cannot pull off. But he awaits our cry. He listens for our request. N was quick to call for help. His favourite position

when faced problems was the kneeling position. How about you? A genuine leader is marked by diligent faithfulness in the midst of a task. And that faithfulness is more than passive inclination. It is demonstrated by being available and personally involved in meeting needs. There is not much benefit in leadership by proxy. The captain needs to be with his company, the Squad leader with his squad. In the heat of the battle they must be present and involved. Leaders in God's work would do well to remember that principle.

Prayer is primary, but not theoretical prayer. Prayer that gets the job done includes the conviction: "I'm available Lord - ready and willing."

Read Isaiah 49:15/16

Pastor David

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