

Leadership Principles

As Taught By Nehemiah

E-Book



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Introduction

Leadership is like beauty, it is hard to describe, however you will know it if you see it.

Some leadership's have been characterized as good and have been used as challenges for others to emulate.

This description however raises an obvious question: upon what criteria were these leadership's characterized to be described as good?

It is certain that some leaders, whose leadership does not fall within this category, have good qualities that others can emulate.

For this reason, it is important not only to know that a leadership has been characterized as good but also to know the characteristics that qualifies it as good.

According to Anthony D'souza, leadership involves an inter-relationship between three elements:

- (1) The quality, skills and needs of the followers
- (2) The need and expectations of the group
- (3) The demands or requirements of the situation.¹

It can be observed from what D'souza has said that the first element deals with the personality of the leader;

the second, his followers and the third, the task to be accomplished.

On the basis of what has been said the characteristics of good leadership will be identified under the following headings:-

- The personal characteristics of the leader
- The characteristics of the followers
- The leader's task or mission.

(1) The Personal Characteristics of the Leader

It can be observed from scriptures that God was very selective in choosing leaders for specific tasks. God specifically chose:

- Nehemiah to spearhead the rebuilding of the Jerusalem wall;
- Moses to bring the Israelites out of bondage in Egypt;
- Paul, to pioneer apostolic work to the Gentiles
- David, whose kinship would have a lasting dynasty, to replace Saul.

These men certainly had qualities that were essential for good leadership. God recognized these qualities in them as potentials when He chose them.

In this introduction some of the qualities of leaders mentioned above will be discussed in a more general way. The goal is to show that it has been recognized that the good personal qualities of leaders, when applied to leadership are characteristics of good leadership.

Nehemiah

In reflecting on the book of Nehemiah, John White said that "the book of Nehemiah serves primarily to unfold for us part of God's on-going plan for his people. But always it is the man, his character and his leadership that holds my interest".²

Two important things stand out from John White's evaluative statement about Nehemiah's leadership that are characteristic of good leadership.

The first is the character and conduct of Nehemiah himself as a leader and the second, is his leadership ability.

White further commended that probably one of the reasons why Nehemiah was chosen as a cupbearer was because of a well-trained personal quality like that of a stable character.

Such a well-trained stable character was not just the effort of Nehemiah alone.

This can be seen in the following statement - "God used Nehemiah's active prayer life to mold him into a godly leader".³

As a godly leader, Nehemiah was dependent upon God from whom he received his personal support and encouragement, which motivated him enough to succeed.

Nehemiah achieved his ministry goal and his leadership has been characterized as good. His good character and conduct and his demonstration of leadership abilities were personal characteristics of his leadership, which made him succeed.

Moses

Moses' childhood training as an adopted son of Pharaoh's daughter was tailored towards leadership. The incidence, which led to his escape from Egypt, revealed that he recognized his leadership qualities before God called him to leadership.

However, it took 40 years from the time of his escape from Egypt, before God called him to leadership. Joyce Peel observed that Moses learns how to be a shepherd. Long years of looking after sheep taught him the patience he was to need as leader of the cantankerous children of Israel.⁴

This observation by Joyce Peel shows that the personal quality of patience in Moses' life was a characteristic of his good leadership. This quality was made evident in the life of Moses through the great challenges he faced as a leader over Israel.

One example was when he came down from Mount Sinai and found the people worshipping the golden calf. He smashed the tablet inscribed with God's commandment, and, with a rousing cry, 'who is on the Lord's side?', summons the faithful Levites to a massacre.⁵ The next day he reproaches the people and then brokenhearted, goes back up the mountain to plead for their forgiveness.⁶

Patience was not the only personal quality that Moses had. But it has been used to show that good personal qualities, when applied to leadership, bring about positive results. Therefore, good personal qualities are characteristics of good leadership.

Paul

Paul made great achievements in the ministry God called him to. Achievements should however be seen as pointers to personal abilities or qualities that a leader has that made him to succeed. What then were those qualities in Paul that made him to succeed?

First it would be important to look at some of the achievements that Paul made. He made remarkable impact in his apostolic work and also in his writing.

John Stott observed that thirteen letters ascribed to Paul in our New Testament form almost exactly one quarter of the whole New Testament. It was the rediscovery of the theology of Paul which led to the reformation of the sixteenth century, that theological revolution which prompted an upheaval within the Roman Catholic Church and led to the birth of all the present day Protestant Churches.⁷

Paul's educational background gave him this advantage. It should not go unnoticed that this great apostle used all that he had personally achieved in his formative years in his leadership role. Making use of his personal qualities in bringing about positive results in his leadership was a characteristic of Paul's good leadership.

David

According to Ted W. Engstrom, David the second king of Israel was a striking contrast to Saul, the first king.⁸ This was because of his noble, generous and admirable qualities he demonstrated in his leadership. This comparison indicates that David's leadership was not only better than Saul's but his leadership can be characterized as good.

John C. Maxwell also compared the two leaders. In answer to a question, which he posed - 'Why did Saul fail as Israel's king while David, who appeared to be weaker succeed?' he said that it was because of David's attitude. Unlike Saul, David tried to become a better leader.⁹

It is clear from these two authors that David's personal qualities, especially that of his attitude to always be a better leader were characteristics of his good leadership. Having the qualification or qualities is one thing, but applying them in one's leadership role is quite another. David applied his leadership qualities in leading and made an impact as a leader.

(2)The Characteristics of the Followers

Some of the characteristics of good leadership can be identified with the followers. Before identifying these characteristics, it would be helpful to examine some definitions of leadership, to be reminded of the relationship between leaders and followers.

According to **Oswald Sanders**, leadership is influence. It is the ability of one person to influence others to follow his or her lead.

Ted W. Enngstrom defines leadership with just two words - 'leaders lead'.

Myron Rush also gave a definition of leadership and his definition of leadership is 'the leader reproducing himself in the followers'.

These definitions point to the relationship between leaders and followers but most significantly, what they considered to be the goal of the relationship.

Oswald Sanders and Engstrom focus on the aspect of following. This focus identifies one of the characteristics of a good leadership - willing followers.

If one gives consideration to D'souza's point cited in the introduction, that one of the elements of leadership is 'the needs and expectations of the group', it follows that one reason why people will willingly follow their leader is because their needs and expectations are met.

Another characteristic can be identified from Myron Rush's definition - making leaders out of followers, there is a guarantee of the continuity of that ministry.

The four leaders, Nehemiah, Moses, Paul and David, whose leaderships have been classified as good, **will now be used as a test case to identify the two characteristics.**

Nehemiah

When Nehemiah returned to Jerusalem from Susa, he first personally assessed the situation of Jerusalem's

destruction. Afterwards he called the people and shared his vision. The Bible stated that the people responded to Nehemiah (see Neh. 2:8).

This shows clearly that from the start of his mission Nehemiah had willing followers. They were willing to follow because they realize that the vision was good and that some of their needs as a community will be met.

Maxwell noted that the wall of Jerusalem was rebuilt because of Nehemiah's ability to work with people and lead them where they need to go.¹⁰ This shows that Nehemiah had willing followers.

In addition Nehemiah gave recognition to subordinate leaders as he delegated responsibilities to them. This, as he said, opens the leadership potentials for others.¹¹ **Therefore one can rightly say that Nehemiah not only had willing followers but also leaders were reproduced under his ministry.**

Moses

When Moses returned to Egypt to set the Israelites free, they were at first excited. But when Moses made their situation worse they were no longer excited about freedom. However, by the end of the ninth plague they had realized that Moses was God's servant sent to deliver them.

They followed Moses' instructions in observing the Passover and then willingly followed him as he led them out of Egypt.

There is also scriptural evidence that leaders were produced under Moses' leadership. One example is that of Joshua, who replaced him. Joshua who had been the personal assistant of Moses was mentored by Moses to become a leader.

Moses' leadership therefore had the characteristics of willing followers and that of reproducing leaders.

Paul

Even when he was "Paul the aged", he remained the model and leader of a group of dynamic young men. The affection he kindled in his followers' heart was mirrored in the tears that flowed when he told them they would see him no more (Acts 20: 36-38).¹²

Sanders revealed in the passage cited above that the apostle Paul's leadership had the characteristics of willing followers.

His ministry had great impact in the lives of many, who were also not willing to exchange his leadership for another.

Like the Lord Jesus, Paul invested his life on a few people because he expected much from them. These

were the people he took on his missionary journeys. Two of the people, Timothy and Titus became leaders of local Churches.

Therefore, like Nehemiah and Moses, Paul's leadership had the characteristics of willing followers and that of producing leaders.

David

David rose to fame when he killed Goliath, the Philistine giant. Eugene H. Merrill, commenting on David's victory reserved that with his rising popularity among the people came a deterioration of his relationship with Saul, for the king became insanely jealous of Israel's new hero.¹³

It is obvious that David had a large following. People followed him because of the potential they saw in him. They recognized him as a great leader, even before official recognition was given to him.

David ruled Israel for approximately 40 years and by the time he was stepping down as king, Solomon, his son had already been groomed for that position.

So, like Nehemiah, Moses and Paul, David's leadership was characterized by willing followers and the producing of leaders.

(3) The leader's task or commission

It can be observed from scripture that God always give a specific task or mission to every person he calls to leadership. Some of the characteristics of good leadership can be identified in the way the leaders set out to accomplish their task or mission.

There are two things that are of primary importance to how a leader accomplishes his task. **These are his vision and his style of leadership.** A leader's vision and style of leadership can be characteristics of both good and bad leadership. However, in this presentation the purpose is to show how these two characteristics can be characteristics of good leadership.

According to John Haggai, a vision is important because it is a key factor in successful leadership.¹⁴ A leader can have a good vision and yet his vision does not contribute in any way to make his leadership good. Haggai points out what a leader needs to do to make his vision a contributing characteristic to good leadership.

First, he says that both leaders and followers must grasp the vision. It is the leader's responsibility to help the followers understand the vision and accept it.

Second, both leader and followers must commit themselves to act on the vision. This action involves designing a goal program to fulfill the vision.

In this way both the leader and followers are prepared to face difficulties and eliminate obstacles. It is in this

way that a vision can be a characteristic of good leadership.¹⁵

The other aspects mentioned that can be a characteristic of a good leadership is the style of leadership. Leadership styles have been given different classification by authors.

Anthony D'souza classified leadership styles in a continuum in which one end is described as **task-oriented** and the other as **relationship-oriented**.¹⁶

Myron Rush also agreed with D'souza that leadership styles can be seen in a continuum, but **he used different descriptive terms for the different styles** within the continuum.¹⁷

The four styles used within Rush's continuum are:

- Dictatorial
- Authoritative
- Consultative
- Participative

These authors argument about styles was not to point out the best but rather to show the importance of all of them. **The point that they were making was that a good leadership had the characteristics of the different leadership styles.**

The leader must be flexible to the changing situations.

When he is able to adjust his leadership styles to changing situations, then his leadership styles... become characteristics of good leadership. Myron Rush gave examples of situations where particular leadership styles are appropriate.

- The Dictatorial leadership style is appropriate in an emergency or when people's lives, are at stake.
- The Consultative style in conducting on-going planning for the department or organization.
- The Authoritative style when employees constantly misuse authority.
- The Participative style as people become competent in performing their routine responsibilities.¹⁸

The four leaders mentioned, whose leaderships have been classified as good, will now be used as test cases to determine whether the points mentioned here are characteristics of their leaderships.

Nehemiah

Joyce Peel, commenting on Nehemiah's task of rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem said that a dispirited nation needs an inspired leader who can unite and galvanize his people into action. Such a man was

Nehemiah.¹⁹ These words not only revealed that Nehemiah had a clear vision of his task but also was able to make his followers understand the vision and commit themselves to act on it.

This was just one reason why they were able to rebuild the walls in fifty-two days. Many Jews lamented over the ruins of Jerusalem city wall, but it took the vision of one man, who united the people and gave them hope to change the situation.

Engstrom also pointed to the fact that the people caught Nehemiah's vision and acted upon it, when he noted: "One has only to read the Book of Nehemiah to discover the importance of people at work. The leaders in building the temple and city walls never lost sight of the total goal and overall picture.

They were able to keep this focus by using all the people as well as experts who were trained to do specific work".²⁰ Nehemiah's leadership had the characteristic of a clear vision which was actively pursued by himself and his followers.

It can be observed from the book of Nehemiah, that Nehemiah used the **consultative style of leadership when he got to Jerusalem to begin the work.**

However in the last few chapters of the book, **when things were going wrong, his style of leadership changed to an authoritative one.**

Therefore it can be said that Nehemiah's leadership had the characteristics of a vision and a changing style of leadership.

Moses

Moses has a clear vision when he returned to Egypt to lead the children of Israel out of bondage. The Israelites wanted to be free, but they doubted the possibility of Moses setting them free. However, when they became certain that Moses was God's servant who will set them free from bondage, they obeyed his instructions and later walked out of Egypt following him.

The biblical records also show that **Moses varied his leadership styles**. Before Jethro came to visit him, he carried a heavy load of work all by himself.

Myron Rush pointed out that it **was an authoritative style of leadership** because Moses had to make every decision.²¹ After his encounter with Jethro his style of leadership changed to **more of a consultative one**.

Paul

Paul's vision was not only clear to him but also to his followers. Since his Damascus road experience, he knew he has been called by God to be an apostle.

Sanders observed that Paul was an apostolic trail-blazer, leaving behind him a string of new Churches. It is a

significant fact that the greatest missionary advances of the last fifty years have followed the rediscovery or re-emphasis of Paul's apostolic principles.²² It is because Paul's vision and principle of accomplishing that vision was so clear that long after he has gone people still followed his steps.

It can also be seen from the Acts narrative that **Paul varied his leadership styles**. For example, in the contention between himself and Barnabas over John Mark, Paul displayed an **authoritative style of leadership**. Most times he is also authoritative when dealing with issues in the Church.

At other times he demonstrated a consultative style of leadership - in the issue that led to the Jerusalem council.

It can be seen that Paul's leadership was characteristic of a clear vision and changing leadership styles.

David

Two things are very clear in scripture about David. The first is his vision for Israel and the second his vision for God. David was a king of war and he led his army in battle against Israel's enemies and took the land God gave to them. He also lived his life in devotion to God. He had a vision to build a dwelling place for the Lord. Although God denied him this privilege, he made great

preparations for this temple, which was later built by his son Solomon.

It is evident in scripture that **David changed his leadership styles** in accordance with changing situations.

He **displayed an authoritative leadership style** when he led his men in battle. For example in the situation when Nabal refused to reward him and his men with food supply for protecting his servants and sheep in the fields.

At other times he demonstrated a **consultative style of leadership**.

When the biblical records are examined, one could clearly see that David's leadership show characteristics of a clear vision and a changing style of leadership.

Conclusion

In this session some of the characteristics of good leadership have been identified. This was done under the following headings:

- (a) The personal characteristics of the leader,
- (b) The characteristics of the followers
- (c) The leader's task or commission.

These divisions were based on the findings of Anthony D'souza, which revealed that leadership involves an inter-relationship between three elements - the leader, the followers and the task to be accomplished.

Six characteristics of good leadership were identified and they are as follows:

- The personal qualities of the leader, which give him his leadership ability.
- The leaders conduct or character which is formed by the godly life he is living.
- The willingness of the people to follow without coercing.
- The reproducing of leaders from the followers.
- The clear vision of the leader, which eventually becomes the people's vision and focus in the ministry.
- The variations in the style of leadership to meet different leadership situations.

Four leaders, whose leaderships have been characterized as good, were used as test cases to see whether the qualities mentioned can be found in their leadership. It was proved that these characteristics

were evident in each of their leadership. There are many more qualifications of good leadership, but it is of importance to have a balance in the three major areas identified.

An individual can have all the good qualities of leadership and yet his leadership may not be good because of his style of leadership.

Also, the people may not follow the leader because his vision is not clear to them.

Good leadership does not only depend on the leader or on the follower or the style of leadership but on all three of these qualities.

When there is a balance in these three areas, leadership becomes exceptional and that was the kind of leadership Nehemiah, Moses, Paul and David portrayed.

Learning Leadership from Nehemiah

When it comes to the subject of leadership in action, one of my favorite Old Testament characters is Nehemiah. In his book we see every facet of leadership lived out.

- I admire the depth of his prayer life,

- I admire His love for God,
- I admire his sterling character.
- I admire his courage in the face of crises,
- I admire his willingness to make tough decisions,
- I admire his perseverance to stand for what is right,
- I admire his candor in dealing with people.
- A man of prayer,
- A man of faith,
- A man of vision,
- A man of courage and
- A man of action.

We find him:

- Praying,
- Watching,
- Working
- Warring.

He's my kind of leader.

I have studied my way through Nehemiah several times, and each time was insightful and challenging. It is a book rich in leadership principles. As to lessons we learn from Nehemiah, J. Sidlow Baxter says, "There is no winning without working, no opportunity without

opposition, no triumph without trouble, no victory without vigilance."

In the first chapter, we find him receiving a vision from God. From that point on, we watch him as he casts the vision, recruits to the vision and works tirelessly to insure that the vision happens. I can't think of a single aspect of exemplary leadership that is not lived out in this man and recorded in this book.

What I would like to do is focus on some leadership principles from the book. We will not do an expository study on the book of Nehemiah, or a character study on his life. I will purposely avoid historical information that might be interesting, but not germane to my objective of sharing leadership principles that I have found instructive. I will also offer some questions to stimulate your thinking as you consider your leadership role in light of these principles.

Principle One

Christian leaders are deeply concerned about the fulfillment of God's plan and purpose. In dependence on Him, they do something about it.

As the curtain goes up in chapter one, we find Nehemiah who was taken captive and is now serving the king of Persia as his cupbearer. He asks someone a question about the state of Jerusalem and the Jewish people living there who had escaped captivity. Upon hearing the bad news, his first response was not to draw up a strategic plan, nor begin enlisting people for the cause. Rather, he began by weeping, mourning, fasting and praying for many days. He confessed sin, reminded God of His promises and sensed a call.

Leadership always begins with God; the fact that He's up to something and wants me to be a part of it. True spiritual leadership is getting on my heart what God has on His. I want to know where God is at work and where and how I can join Him in that work.

It was Robert Kennedy who said, "Some people see what is and ask why? Others see what could be and ask why not?"

After reading about Nehemiah and his response to the news, I wrote this in my journal.

"Lord, break my heart with the things that break Your heart. Do I mourn, weep and seek You over the state of the church and the Great Commission. Am I deeply concerned with what concerns You, or am I passively asleep in the light?"

I am challenged by his humility, his getting with God before getting into action, and his starting with God's character and promises.

Some questions to ponder:

- What impresses you about Nehemiah's response to the report he received?
- What does it mean to have on your heart what God has on his?
- What prevents you from being dependent on God?

Principle Two

Leaders have Big Dreams. They have God-sized divine desires birthed from divine dissatisfaction with what is

Nothing significant starts happening until somebody starts dreaming. Every accomplishment started off first as an idea in somebody's mind. It started off as a dream. It started off as a vision, a goal. Therefore, the first task of leadership is to hear from God and have a vision. If you don't set the vision, you're not the leader. Whoever is establishing the vision and goals in your church or group is the leader. A church, group, or organization will never outgrow its vision and the vision of a group people will never outgrow the vision of its leader. (Adapted from a Web article by Rick Warren, pastor of Saddleback Valley Church).

In chapter one of this marvelous book, we see Nehemiah receiving some bad news, which sends him to his knees in confession, prayer and brokenness. Rising from his knees he seems to be (from that moment on) a man of destiny. He has a strong sense of calling to do something about what he has just heard. What seems to characterize visionary leaders is a deep unhappiness with the way things are. There is a burden,

a sense of call to see something different. The leader has a deep desire to see something change. He wants to be a part of building a new and different future. I see this in Nehemiah.

In chapter two, verses 1-8 he presents his BEHAG (Big Hairy Audacious Goals). He articulates his faith-filled requests to the King with a trembling but confident heart and gets what he requests. It was William Carey who said, "Attempt great things for God. Expect great things from God." Nehemiah did exactly that.

In the account of Joseph, when he was young, he had a dream that his Father and brothers were bowing down to him. It did not sit well with them and in chapter 37 verses 19 and 20, his brothers say, "Here comes that dreamer...we'll see what becomes of all his dreams." At this point they sold him into slavery in Egypt and thought they were through with him. Imagine years later the dream, much to their shock, comes true; they saw first hand what became of his dream.

In Chapter 42 verse 9 we read, "Joseph remembered the dreams he had had many years before"- NLT. Perhaps this was an "ah ha moment" for Joseph when he connected the dots of God's handiwork in his life. Many of us have had (at one time or another) crazy ideas and

wild dreams. Some of them occurred while we were in the shower. The difference is huge for the leader who steps out of the shower and does something about it. In Joseph's case it was God who never let the dream die, as it was his idea to start with. God uses all the seemingly unfortunate circumstances in Joseph's life and the dream is fulfilled.

This, coupled with the account of Nehemiah's vision of what God wanted to do, gives me renewed hope. I am reassessing some of my earlier dreams and desires to see if they are from God and if He still wants to see them come true. Andy Stanley, who pastors in Atlanta, says, "What God originates, He orchestrates." If God gave the dream, he will see it through to fruition. He will work out all the details.

After reading Nehemiah 2, I wrote in my journal. "Lord, don't let me dream and think too small. I want to be a change agent and see what could be, not what already is."

Some questions to ponder

- Did you once have some dreams about what you wanted to see the Lord do through you? Have you thought about them recently? Is it time to

resurrect them and begin to believe the Lord once again?

- Does your church, organization, or group have a vision and dream that adds excitement and joy to the daily work?
- As you think about your dream(s), what can you do to begin casting that vision and bringing others on board to travel with you?
- If you don't have any dream, vision for your group or church, do you need to get away and seek the Lord and see what He has for you and your future?

Principle Three

Leaders have clarity about what they want to see happen

We are learning from Nehemiah. He has a burden from the Lord. He receives a vision about what he is to do. He casts the vision. He carries out the vision. It all begins with God in chapter one. For the Christian leader, it must begin with God, be carried out in dependence on God, and be seen through to the finish by the God who birthed it.

Eugene Peterson in *The Message* renders Philippians 1:6 as follows: "There has never been the slightest doubt in my mind that the God who started this great work in you would keep at it and bring it to a *flourishing finish* on the very day Christ Jesus appears." God will bring our salvation to a flourishing finish and also desires to bring the vision he births in us to a flourishing finish!

I believe that a leader needs to have clarity about where he or she wants to go. Generally, followers are not motivated to sign up for ambiguity! Experience has taught me that there are three things that attract people to a leader: Character, Compassion, and Clarity

In verse four of chapter two, the king asked Nehemiah, "What is it you want?" I would paraphrase that as: what do you have in mind? What is it you intend to do? What exactly is it you want to accomplish?" Nehemiah was prepared with a clear response. From the first information he received in chapter one until the question from the king was asked in chapter two, four months had passed. Nehemiah had time to think, envision, and pray. He was ready. Verse 4, "en I prayed to the God of heaven, and I answered the king, `If it please the king and if your servant has found favor in his sight, let him send me to the city of Judah where my fathers are buried so that I can rebuild it." Exactly what he wanted to accomplish was clear from the start. Nehemiah didn't have all the details down, but the end product was solidly planted by God in his mind and heart--to see the city of Jerusalem rebuilt, starting with the wall. Later in chapter two when he cast the vision, he was equally clear and precise as to what he wanted to do. In verse 17 of chapter two we read,

"Then I said to them, `you see the trouble we are in; Jerusalem lies in ruins and its gates have been burned with fire. Come, let us rebuild the wall of Jerusalem and we will no longer be a disgrace."

As I work with leaders and churches I am constantly asking questions concerning their vision. Who are you? What are you all about? What has God birthed in your heart regarding the future? Many don't have any answers. A leader's ability to move forward and have others join him on the journey will be proportionate to a clear sense of where he is headed and what, with God's help, he wants to see happen.

Someone has observed that what gets measured gets done. When a vision is clear, you have a way of measuring progress. You can determine if you are accomplishing it or not. When a vision is clear, it is a powerful motivator and a significant morale lifter among those banding together with a leader(s). When a company, a group, a team, or a church is casting vision, it needs to be as specific as possible. When a sports team begins a season, the coach will often declare exactly what the goal is for the year the people on the team know specifically what they are shooting for. It might be to be national champions; it could be to have a winning season. It might be to make it to the play-offs.

In the movie, "Miracle on Ice." the U.S. hockey team coach had his vision clear from the beginning. It was to beat the Soviet Union, something that hadn't happened in 20 years. There was no doubt among the team

members; every man knew exactly what they were all about. The vision needed to be a stretch, a challenge, but not a total impossibility. We will see, as we continue with Nehemiah, that the vision before them would challenge them to the max, but was doable with God's help.

Leader! Vision Caster! Dreamer of dreams! What exactly are you all about? What has God called you to accomplish? What is it that burns in your heart? If you don't know where you're going, you'll probably end up somewhere else!

Here are a few questions to get your "engine" warmed up

- How can a leader obtain clarity regarding a vision?
- What are some disadvantages of having a general vision with little clarity or specificity?
- What is the difference between desire, hope, and vision?

Principle Four

Leaders inspire and motivate followers to action in order to achieve a God-given vision

We come to chapter two in the odyssey of this man of God. He has prayed, and received a God-given, God-size vision from the Lord. He has solicited permission from the king to make the journey back to Jerusalem to begin rebuilding the wall. In chapter two he surveys the situation at night with a few choice men and in verses 17 and 18 of chapter two we read: "en I said to them, `You see the trouble we are in: Jerusalem lies in ruins and its gates have been burned with fire. Come, let us rebuild the wall of Jerusalem and we will not longer be in disgrace.' I also told them about the gracious hand of my God upon me and what the king had said to me. They replied, `Let us start rebuilding.' So they began this good work."

In Harvard professor John Kotter's excellent book, LEADING CHANGE, he mentions an eight-fold process for a change agent (which Nehemiah is).

1. Establishing a Sense of Urgency
2. Creating the Guiding Coalition

3. Developing a Vision and Strategy
4. Communicating the Change Vision
5. Empowering Broad-Based Action
6. Generating Short-Term Wins
7. Consolidating Gains and Producing More Change
8. Anchoring New Approaches in the Culture

Now, Nehemiah never went to Harvard, knew John Kotter, or read any of his books; but he carries out this process in full. Here in chapter two he *establishes a sense of urgency* by saying, "You see the trouble we are in..." He shares both the problem and the solution. A problem without a solution is just a complaint. It is so easy to see the problem and complain. Woe are we. Isn't it awful? Whatever are we going to do?

A leader is a person who has a vision from God, firmly believes in that vision, and doesn't move toward its fulfillment by himself. The real leader possess the ability to get others motivated about this new idea. They know the problem, but they also have a solution in mind. A leader is a person who is dissatisfied with the ways things are. He has a burden, a vision, and a call to see something different. He wants to see something change, to build a new future. He then begins to

communicate what he thinks, and where he wants to go. Nehemiah gives a "vision talk" to the troops. When he finishes they are ready for battle. He is able to motivate and enlist them by sharing that the fingerprints of God are all over this vision evidenced by the great answers to prayer and in the generous offer of the king.

I believe that there are three aspects to leading:

- Who the leader is: IDENTITY
- Where the leader is headed: INSPIRATION
- How the leader brings others along:
INVESTMENT

The first has to do with character traits such as genuine concern for people and the highest degree of integrity. The second has to do with an inspirational vision. The third has to do with the gifts and ability of the leader to invest in others by motivating, equipping and delegating responsibilities in order to facilitate reaching the desired destination. We will see all these aspects of leading unfold as the story continues.

I'm getting enthused just writing about this and seeing how what this leader did is so appropriate to my situation and, hopefully, to yours.

After reading this chapter, I wrote in my journal, "Lord, give me a positive, uplifting spirit, and the ability to inspire and motivate those I work with in Seattle. Keep my vision clear and my motivation high."

Here are three questions on which you can reflect

- Is the ability to inspire and motivate a gift, an ability that can be learned, or is it a personality trait that you either have or don't have?
- What is a leader to do if he or she is aware of all the problems and tends to focus on the difficulty of achieving the vision?
- What kinds of things can a leader do in order to keep inspiration and motivation high and ongoing among "the troops...the team?"

Principle Number Five

Christian leaders understand to whom they belong, whom they serve and who gives lasting success

Nehemiah has just motivated his band of warriors (Nehemiah 2:18) and the response is unanimous: "Let us start rebuilding. So they began this good work."

As is the case with any true work of God, it will be criticized and Nehemiah was no exception. We read in verse 19 of Chapter 2, "But when Sanballat the Horonite, Tobiah the Ammonite official and Geshem the Arab heard about it, they mocked and ridiculed us. "What is this you are doing? Are you rebelling against the king?"

I just love Nehemiah's response to this attack. He didn't cower. Fear didn't take over. He didn't hem and haw. He frankly and boldly declared, "The God of heaven will give us success. We His servants will start rebuilding."

It was very clear to Nehemiah that his leadership skills would not carry the day. He understood at a profound and deep level that God was sovereign over the visions He gives. He understood that he and those on his team

were, first and foremost, servants of the Lord. It was crystal clear to him that because of who the Lord was and their identity in him, they would succeed. "Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the Lord Almighty" (Zechariah 4:6 NIV).

Paul expresses a truth similar to that of Nehemiah, "Last night an angel of the God *whose I am and whom I serve* stood beside me and said, 'Do not be afraid, Paul. You must stand trial before Caesar, and God has graciously given you the lives of all who sail with you (Acts 27:23 NIV).' "Paul boldly declares that he belongs to God and serves God who is all-powerful!

David also shares such an understanding. "And David realized that *the Lord had made him king* over Israel and had made his kingdom great for the sake of His people Israel (2 Samuel 5:12 NLT)." God put him on the throne and He did it, not for David's sake, but for the people's sake. We see David grasping this truth early in his life as he encounters bears, lions and Goliath. God has done it; God will accomplish it; God will deliver you into my hands. (is this quite a contrast to Saul who built a monument to himself.)

One of my favorite verses regarding David's God-glorifying and God-dependent attitude is in this same

5th chapter, verse 20, "So David went to Baal-Perazim and defeated the Philistines there. *'The Lord has done it'*, David exclaimed, 'He burst through my enemies like a raging flood!' So David named that place Baal-Perazim, which means 'the Lord who bursts through.'" (NLT)

"Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto thy name give glory, for thy mercy and for thy truth's sake." Psalm 115:1 KJV

I was a proud young man at that point in my life. It was all about me, what I was doing, what I was accomplishing. God used a spiritual father to cut through my pride and self-centeredness.

Nehemiah has an important lesson for us. The God of Heaven will give us success. It's all about Him, about His glory, His purpose, His honor. I am His servant. He is not my servant to help me carry out my plans, my desires, my agenda in order to build my ministry with my people. It is fundamentally all about Him!

"So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who makes things grow." 1 Cor. 3:7 NIV

Points to Ponder

- Where can you identify pride and self-aggrandizement in your ministry?
- How have you defined success in what you do?
- How is the Lord getting glory for the success you experience?
- Honestly now, as people watch you operate, does it lead to praising God, or to praising you for being so clever and gifted?

Principle Number Six

Leaders should expect opposition in various forms

Years ago I heard a speaker make a statement that instantly jarred me into reality. "If you are a leader, expect to be misunderstood." I was young and idealistic. I thought my goals and dreams were so right that surely no one would falter or stumble in following along with me. Wow, was I ever wrong.

The "expect to be misunderstood" has expanded through the years to, expect to be: criticized, judged, called an ungodly leader, no leader at all, not a Christian, having no love for people, and the list goes on. Anyone who has had a leadership role for any length of time knows that being judged, condemned, or having one's motives questioned goes with the territory. If opposition comes only from perceived enemies of what you are trying to accomplish, that would be one thing. But in many cases it comes from some of your key people and that's especially hard to take. Enemy or close friend, having someone criticize you or your ideas is always difficult to receive and respond to. Once again, Nehemiah is a model for us.

In chapter two, Nehemiah is just getting under way with his vision and is immediately slammed in verse 19. "But when Sanballat the Horonite, Tobiah the Ammonite official, and Geshem the Arab heard of it, they laughed at us and despised us, and said, 'What is this thing that you are doing? Will you rebel against the king?'"

Nehemiah was:

- Laughed at
- Despised
- Accused

In verse 20 we have his response, which we dealt with in the last issue. Let's look at the opposition he is now facing.

"If you can't stand the heat, get out of the kitchen." Suffice it to say, when you are in the kitchen of leadership it can heat up. If everybody likes everything you're doing, you are probably not doing anything of significant value. Leaders don't lead and make decisions in order to be popular or appreciated. In Luke 6:26, we read,

"There's trouble ahead when you live only for the approval of others, saying what flatters them, doing

what indulges them. Popularity contests are not truth contests...your task is to be true, not popular." The Message

If Nehemiah wanted to be liked or well-received by people in the area, he would never have decided to do what he did in the first place. He undertook the responsibility because he believed it was the right thing to do. It was the thing God wanted done. It was the thing that would be based on the promises of God. It was the thing that would bring honor to God. Leaders need to ask, if it's right, before asking if it's popular or even possible. Nehemiah is immediately criticized, has his motives judged and is ridiculed. Is this just the beginning of opposition against him. We will see more of it later in the book.

In his book, "Well-intentioned Dragons," Marshall Shelly delineates some of the people types who will oppose your leadership and your decisions. Be on the look out for them:

- **The Wet Blanket**-No matter what the idea or decision on the table, Wet Blanket has a quiver full of reasons why it has never worked, will never work, and should not work because it is not the will of God.

- **The Fickle Financier-** If you do this or that, I will never give another dime to this ministry. Without my support and the support of my friends (who feel the same way I do) your ministry and leadership is dead in the water
- **The Sniper** - Never seems to talk directly with a leader in a healthy manner voicing concerns, but rather stays at a safe distance and takes indirect pot shots in private conversations that paint the leader in a bad light
- **The Legalist-** Has a list of absolutes that run from how much the leader paid for his house to how many verses should be sung from a particular song
- **The Merchant of Muck-** the group gossip who disguises everything behind the mask of prayer requests and concerns

Do you recognize any people described here who are currently opposing what you and your leadership team are doing or dreaming of doing?

Take courage from Nehemiah's response to the barrage of opposition "The God-of-heaven will make sure we succeed. We're His servants and we're going to work, rebuilding." The Message

Principle Number Seven

Leaders artfully combine the spiritual and the human in getting the job done

In chapter four we find Nehemiah continuing to deal with opposition that began in chapter two. In verse eight plans are being laid to physically attack the people doing the work on the wall. Nehemiah could have called a halt to the work and transitioned into an all-day, all-night prayer meeting, asking the Lord for protection. Or, he could have redoubled his efforts and done everything within his power to fight the opposition. He didn't fall into the trap of "either or" but did "both and." He combined the spiritual and the human, for we read in verse nine, "We prayed to our God and guarded the city day and night to protect ourselves." He prayed and guarded, not prayed or guarded.

I am reminded of two young girls who found themselves to be a bit late as they walked to school. One said, "We'll be late, let's stop and pray and ask the Lord to help us get there on time." "No," responded the other. "Let's run and pray that the Lord will help us get there on time." It seems to me that in most leadership issues it is always a matter of combining what God can do with

what I can do. I can err on either side. Trying (with human energy and gifting) to accomplish what only God can do or trusting God to do what He is asking me to do.

Sometimes in leadership issues and decisions, it is easy to over-spiritualize things and think that we just need to pray more. This can be a cop-out. Of course, we need to pray and trust; but does that eliminate the God-given responsibility to work hard, think well and use all the gifts, strength and wisdom that God supplies? A pastor once said that when he prayed, he prayed like it was all up to God and when he preached he preached like it was all up to him. that's the spirit we need to capture. For me, it is sometimes fear of failure and rejection that keeps me from moving out and giving my best effort. Fear causes me to spend an inordinate amount of time seeking God and asking Him what I should do. In many cases I don't need more information to know the will of God, but more courage to do the will of God. Good leaders have a bias for action and don't unnecessarily wait, out of fear masked as spirituality.

I have been in more leadership meetings than I can count where an issue was on the table and a decision clearly needed to be made. Fear won out and the leader went down the road of, "We need to pray more about this and trust God," as if trusting God meant we could

not move ahead and make a decision. Sometimes waiting is the godly and wise thing to do and at other times it is the fear-filled and cowardly thing to do. We need wisdom to tell the difference. The best leaders are those who carefully and prayerfully combine the best of trusting and working, of waiting and moving out.

Once again, here are a few questions to ponder

- What are some ways a leader could be overly spiritual in dealing with tough issues and decisions?
- How can a leader be totally dependent and totally proactive at the same time?
- When would "Waiting and trusting" be a cowardly act? A wise act? How would you determine if "faith" or "fear" is motivating your leadership actions and decisions?

Principle Number Eight

Good Leaders Are Willing to Confront People When Necessary

One of the responsibilities of a leader is to deal with conflict. The wise leaders confront people and issues head on by considering various solutions and then acting prayerfully and decisively. Every good leader I have known and worked with has been willing to deal with issues and people and not run from them. The hardest types of issues are those that arise within the ranks of your followers, especially when they are in conflict with each other. Internal conflicts are rampant in leadership teams and among church members. Many leaders would rather move on than deal with such problems, especially when it involves your leadership team; not Nehemiah.

In chapter five of the book of Nehemiah, we see a major brouhaha developing. In verses 1-5 Nehemiah hears that some of his leaders are charging interest to their poorer fellow countrymen and women and confiscating property when it can't be paid, thereby sending them to the poor house. He listens carefully to various reports of what is going on and in verses 6 and 7 we read,

"When I heard their outcry, and these charges, I was very angry. I pondered them in my mind and then accused the nobles and officials...I called together a large meeting to deal with them." NIV

He then laid the issue on the table, spoke honestly with them saying, in verse 9,

"What you are doing is not right...let the exacting of usury stop. Give back to them immediately their fields, vineyards, olive groves and houses and also the usury you are charging them...We will give it back they said...We will do as you say. Then I summoned the priests and made the nobles and officials take an oath to do as they promised" NIV

WOW! That is impressive! I see a process here:

- He received information and facts
- He had an emotional response to what he knew was wrong and had to stop
- He gave some thought and pondered (perhaps thinking of the appropriate response)
- He acted by confronting the guilty people and calling a meeting to deal with it openly

- He pushed it through and got a firm commitment for action

I believe that while he was thinking about what he heard and what needed to be done, he was also praying. You can't help but admire and respect such a leader. He had moral courage to confront what was not right and deal with people in a timely and thorough fashion. To be quite honest, I find this refreshing and very rare in leadership circles. Many leaders are devout cowards when it comes to confronting people, especially other leaders. Leaders are dropping out today because of sin that nobody is willing to confront.

I have known and worked with leaders who would rather quit and move on rather than confront people. I recall a pastor I once worked with that was ready to leave the church because one elder was giving him a hard time. Rather than sit down and confront this elder, the pastor was doing everything he could (behind the scenes) to force the guy out; and, if that didn't work, to leave himself. To confront this elder was something he just couldn't bring himself to do. I wonder when a leader "receives another call" how often it is due to the unwillingness to confront what needs to be confronted in the lives of people. I am working with some other

leaders in my home church to craft a statement regarding essential attributes of a small group leader.

One of the attributes is: "He is able to both challenge and encourage others." Many are up to encouraging, but how many are up to challenging, warning? Whatever happened to, "But exhort one another daily while it is called today, lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin?" Heb. 3:13 NKJ

The word exhort means to warn, admonish, urge as well as encourage. But we can always hide behind, "Judge not lest you be judged" which is the scriptural cop-out for those not wishing to confront sin in people, especially leaders. I would love to read a book on "The Lost Art of Confrontation." Maybe we already have one; the book of Nehemiah!

Here are a few questions to ponder

- How would you rate yourself on confronting people when it is clear you need to do it?
- Is there an issue in the life of a particular person or leader that needs to be dealt with? What are you waiting for?

- In what way can Nehemiah's example give you courage to do what you know needs to be done?

Principle Number Nine

Leaders facilitate respect, understanding and a genuine heart response to God's Word

In spite of all the hassles, setbacks, opposition and hard work, team-Nehemiah finishes the project and realizes the vision God gave from the get-go in chapter one. In chapter six, verses fifteen and sixteen we read:

"So the wall was completed on the twenty-fifth of Elul, in fifty-two days...this work had been done with the help of God."

Chapter seven is, for the most part, a cataloguing of various people who had a part in this amazing feat, along with a statistical accounting. In this session, we focus on what takes place in chapter eight.

Chapter eight is one of my favorite chapters of the entire book. One theme that runs through the book is Nehemiah's God-dependence and his clinging to the promises of God, which are recorded in chapter one. He seems to be a man of the Book.

In chapter eight, Nehemiah's co-worker, Ezra, takes center stage to expose the people to the clear teaching of the Word of God. The chapter is insightfully instructive on how the Word of God can and should be presented to people and the effect it can have on people. Let's take a closer look at this wonderful chapter!

It seems to me that there are three phases to what we find in this chapter as it relates to the Word of God:

INFORMATION, UNDERSTANDING, APPLICATION

Verse 1-6: We see the people getting information from the Word of God

In verse one, they actually request to have the Word read to them. It was a team effort, as we see in verse four. I always appreciate a plurality of leaders rather than one-man bands. In verse five, we notice the people standing, possibly showing their respect for the scriptures.

Verses 7-15: We see people understanding the Word of God

The team helps people understand, as they are instructed. The people grasp the meaning and weep as the truth sinks in. The second day scripture is again read, rapt attention is given and a clear opportunity to respond to the truth is presented.

In verses 16-18: We see people applying the Word of God

Obedience takes place, as people understand what God's will is for them. Read the chapter through for yourself and you can see a clear progression from: What does the scripture say, to what does the scripture mean, to what will we do with the scripture?

Here are some basic conclusions I have drawn from this old, but very new, chapter on attitudes and application of the Scriptures.

- As people read or are taught God's Word, they need to travel from information to understanding to application.
- Spiritual transformation occurs at the application level, not the information or understanding level (See John 13:17) the Spirit of God changes people not because of what they

"know" but because of what they "do" (with God's help) with what they know.

- Application should come as a result of prayer, thinking and dialogue with others.
- When God's Word is given and understanding is achieved, a response should be expected and asked for.
- Helping people understand and apply God's word is best achieved in the context of teamwork, (teachers, mentors, small group leaders, friends, and accountability partners.)

Wow, what a chapter! Ancient, but *en pointe* and applicable.

I close with a quote from Randy Pope (pages 197,198) in his excellent book, *The Prevailing Church*. What follows is very pertinent to Nehemiah eight.

"To aim at a Bible passage as one preaches, periodically making applications to personal life, will leave the believing community convinced they have been taught by God's man. But to aim at a personal life while preaching, bringing God's truth to bear upon its need,

will leave the believing community convinced they have been taught by God's Spirit. Life-changing preaching does not talk to people about the Bible. Instead it talks to people about themselves. The basic principle in preaching is to give as much biblical information as the people need to understand the passage, and no more. Then move on to your application. I am discouraged to see how often intellectual stimulation is more desired than spiritual vitalization."

Here are a few questions to stimulate your thinking

- As you consider everything in this article and reflect on your ministry, what can you do to better help your people move from information to understanding and then to life-transforming application?
- Why does today's Christian teaching seem to spend so much time on information and so little time on application?
- Personally, can you think of specific application you have made from hearing, reading, and studying God's Word, or are you falling into the trap of spending more time on information and

understanding without allowing the truth in
God's Word to transform you?

Principle Number Ten

Leaders regularly rehearse organizational history and victories, so as to remind people of God's power, promises, character and faithfulness

The project has been completed, Nehemiah is delighted, the obstacles have been overcome and Scriptures have been shared. Proverbs 13:19 reminds us that "A longing fulfilled is sweet to the soul." There is sweetness all around. We are now at chapter 9 and we have a "history lesson" before us. The entire chapter is one long prayer that reviews God's dealing with the people of Israel, ending with a commitment to stay tight with God.

What a great lesson in leadership. People need to see the hand of God in their midst, in the organization's or group's history. Our people need to be encouraged when they look back at some of the amazing things God has done. Sometimes we have short memories. We tend to focus on the negatives, the problems, the impossibilities. We (leaders and followers) easily forget that God is awesome, powerful and good for His word. It is good for leadership to often review what has been happening...the victories, the accomplishments as well

as the difficulties. In order for people to have hope for the future, they need to sense that their past and present contains bright moments with God.

When I am leading a meeting, small group or a leadership team, one of my favorite things to communicate is that I am *expecting God to act*. I base this on Psalm 42:11 (The Living Bible): "But O my soul, don't be discouraged. Don't be upset. Expect God to act! For I know that I shall again have plenty of reason to praise Him for all that He will do. He is my help! He is my God!" One of the main reasons I expect Him to act now, and in the future, is because I regularly review what He has done in the past; which is what we have in Nehemiah chapter 9.

People need hope, they need to know and experience that "Jesus is the same yesterday today and forever." (Hebrews 13:8). Nehemiah 9 is the "yesterday" of God's dealings with the people of Israel that is being reviewed here.

He is simply reviewing the history of God's dealings with him, as it occurs here in chapter nine of Nehemiah as well as in chapter two verse 18, "I also told them about the gracious hand of my God upon me and what the king had said to me." People get encouraged by

reviewing the history of God's gracious activities in our midst.

As a leader, let me encourage you to regularly take time to allow people to see the fingerprints of God on things...in the last week, month or quarter.

Questions to think about:

- How would reviewing what God has done affect your people?
- What are 1-3 awe-inspiring things the Lord has done in your group or organization in the last few months?
- How could you or will you share this with your people to encourage them?

Principle Number Eleven

Leaders help and facilitate followers in establishing and maintaining commitments to God

Well, we're almost finished with our study of this amazing and multifaceted leader. In this session we see him raising the bar and motivating the troops to stay on the high road of obedience; not compromising God's standard.

In the last verse of chapter nine we read, "And because of all of this, we make a sure covenant and write it. Our leaders, our Levites and our priests seal it." is verse follows a lengthy review of God's dealings with the Jewish people over many years of history. It details how the Lord had given them promises, acted on their behalf and guided them through thick and thin. As the curtain rises on chapter nine, we see a list of people who sign on the dotted line to reach for the high standard of God's desires and commands for them, individually and corporately.

Nehemiah is well aware of what is at stake if disobedience to God's clear teaching is left unchallenged. He tells the people what God wants, gets

them to sign on and keeps the bar high. I see two issues raised in this 10th chapter.

SEPARATION AND STEWARDSHIP

SEPARATION (verses 28-31) The Jewish people are reminded that they are unique. They should have different values and perspectives than the people around them. They were told over and over again throughout the Old Testament not to intermarry or adopt the practices of the people among whom they lived--especially not to worship their worthless gods.

STEWARDSHIP (Verses 32-39) -The Jewish people are reminded to give the best and the first to the Lord, both the firstborn and the firstfruit. This is another thread that winds its way through the Old Testament: honoring God by giving Him their best.

The application for leaders is unmistakable. Whether we are thinking of a sports leader, a business leader or a spiritual leader, we are always at our best when we are calling followers to their best, not letting them get away with sloppy standards and slopping living. A leader should not be afraid to remind people what the organization or group values are and then hold followers accountable for those values. Nehemiah does

this over and over. I think it is a principle that you get what you ask for. If you ask for a small commitment, you will get a small commitment. If you ask for a big commitment, you will get a big commitment. Author Le Roy Eims was fond of saying, "If you play a man's game, men will come to play." You will get the best that people have to offer when you expect the best from them. I believe this is with all my heart. People want a cause bigger than themselves to live for and to die for, if necessary.

Michael Feiner, the former Pepsi Co executive, that personifies keeping the bar high was often quoted in the news papers. Here is one such quotation.

"A slender man with disciplined posture, Feiner has a sternness that tells people 'approach cautiously.'

Yet for many of those who worked for him during his 20 years at PepsiCo, where he headed the personnel office, or who took his tough but popular management class at Columbia Business School, he's the boss they want to emulate: fair, straightforward, ethical, demanding yet compassionate.

"Feiner's protégés have gone on to head the HR departments at Dell, Microsoft and Sears. Harvard

Business Review has published his advice. His new book, 'The Feiner Points of Leadership' has landed on suggested reading lists for CEOs.

"Great bosses not only inspire and encourage, they hold employees as well as themselves accountable for meeting their expectations. Without measuring performance, the other leadership principles are toothless."

Perhaps Nehemiah was the Michael Feiner of his day. Not letting people get by with less than their best. Holding people to a high standard.

Questions to think about:

- Do you have clear and compelling values and standards for yourself and those you lead?
- What are you doing that motivates and encourages your people to keep the bar high in their personal and professional life?
- Is there something you need to start doing that you are not currently doing?

Principle Number Twelve

Leaders encourage their people by celebrating and making a big deal out of victories, creating joy, enthusiasm and high morale

Well, this is the end of our journey with Nehemiah. With this session we wrap things up. I trust you have profited as much from these sessions as I have enjoyed revisiting what I've learned and tried to apply.

This time, let's focus on verse 27 of chapter 12:

"Now at the dedication of the wall of Jerusalem they sought out the Levites in all their places, to bring them to Jerusalem to CELEBRATE the dedication with gladness, both with thanksgiving and singing with cymbals and stringed instruments and harps."

I would loved to have been there on this day. They celebrated with gladness and thanksgiving, singing and playing musical instruments. I'll bet you could heard the joyful noise for miles. They had good reason to "party" with and for the Lord. Through ups and downs, through trials and tribulation, through tough decisions and

precarious moments, they finished what, with God's help, they had set out to do.

One of the things good leaders do is make a big deal out of victories regardless of the size. Successful companies and churches that I have read about have a value regarding celebration and enjoy letting people know how much what they have done and accomplished is appreciated.

In an article titled "Vision Leaks," Pastor Andy Stanley from Atlanta has this to say about celebrating:

"Many churches never stop to celebrate and they're missing a great, fun opportunity to reinforce the vision. Celebration is what puts skin on the vision. Nothing gives definition to vision like celebrating victories. Almost every Sunday we find a way to celebrate, hoot and holler, yell and scream. Once a year isn't enough. Spontaneously isn't enough. You must intentionally celebrate the vision over and over."

And I would add to Stanley's thoughts by saying it is imperative to celebrate all the good things that are happening all the time. I have worked for leaders who seldom have a word of thanks, appreciation or celebration cross their lips. Perhaps the mindset is that

people are only doing their jobs, what is expected of them, so why do they need to have praise and thanks heaped on them. Some take a negative step and add: it might even make them lazy and not work as hard or they might then expect a reward every time they turn around. Celebration is woven into the DNA of Old and New Testaments. Every Jewish holiday is celebrating some great event in their history. They celebrate so they don't forget. Communion is a celebration.

I haven't seen many Christian leaders do a very good job of "celebrating." We would do well to have "party money" in the budget to make a big deal over anything and everything. One of my verses on this is 1 Peter 3:9 in The Message, "Instead bless! That's your job, to bless. You'll be a blessing and also get a blessing." I have discovered that one way I can bless people is to celebrate with them every chance that is offered to me.

People are starving for encouragement and affirmation. Followers are hungry for leaders to express appreciation and affirmation, but seldom hear it. Employees need it from their employers, kids need it from their parents, spouses need it from each other; but many don't hear enough celebratory words. We hear words when we mess up or don't come through as we should have or could have, but words of celebration and affirmation

are strangely missing when we do something well. A sincere "thank you, I appreciated that" goes a long way. We can do better as leaders, we must do better as leaders!

With this no-celebration-no appreciation attitude in mind, one of the saddest movies I ever saw was "The Rookie." It's a story about Jimmy Morris (played by Dennis Quaid) who had a really rough relationship with a dad who was in the military. They moved all the time and his dad cared nothing for his son's deep interest in playing professional baseball. Jimmy later tried to make it to the majors, but he seriously hurt his shoulder and had to drop out.

In the film we find him coaching a high school baseball team and teaching chemistry in a small Texas town. The team made a deal with him that if they won district he would try again to make the majors. Deal struck. They won and he tried out. As a pitcher, he was able, quite to everyone's surprise, to throw a ball 98 miles an hour. To his amazement, (he was appreciably older than most major league players) he made it to the farm league and eventually to the majors.

When he was looking for affirmation from his dad (something he never got growing up), he heard: "Your

grandfather used to say, "It's okay to think about what you want to do until it's time to start doing what you were meant to do." Even at the end of the movie, after Jimmy had succeeded with his dream, his dad still could not bring himself to "celebrate" with Jimmy. You could see the pain written all over Jimmy's face when they had a last meeting. His dad just stood there, seemingly unable to say "I love you, great job, I'm proud of you, I was wrong, I'm sorry, I rejoice with you over your accomplishments," or anything of any substance. As I watched the movie I felt like screaming at his dad: "Do something, say something, celebrate, get happy, rejoice with your son. He is desperate for your approval and love." But, nothing!

Questions to Ponder

- What are some small victories that you could celebrate in your family, ministry, work, small group?
- What are some creative and unconventional ways to call attention to personal and corporate victories that would build morale and vision and that would simply encourage people?

- Beyond Nehemiah, what other scriptural examples come to mind of celebration?

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