



THE CHARACTER OF A LEADER • Leadership

What Do I Need to Know About the Passage?

Nehemiah 5:1-19

The Situation

The text says that there was a “great outcry” against the Jewish leaders. The people were being overtaxed and their poverty was causing them to have to borrow money (which was apparently lent at very high interest), or sell their children into slavery. The problem was probably not a new one, but the financial strain and stress of the building project caused it to surface violently.

Nehemiah's Response

How Nehemiah responds to adversity is a marvel. Through obstacles, he reflexively prays. Here, rather than responding in anger, the text says that he “pondered [the obstacles] in [his] mind.” Things are getting out of control and rather than react, he presses the pause button and thinks things over before responding. If there were only one way to recognize mature leadership, the wisdom to “ponder” instead of react would be it.

Nehemiah Confronts

Nehemiah comes to the conclusion that the people are, in fact, right – they are being exploited. Here we begin to see Nehemiah's integrity. He is not a respecter of persons, but of God and the truth. Nehemiah takes his complaint to the offending parties and confronts them. Leaders must not only model integrity – they must confront others who don't.

Often when leadership is confronted with misdoings, they rationalize or somehow try to “spin” public opinion in order to save their reputation. You typically get “image management” and not remorse or repentance. It's rather admirable that these leaders are willing to openly repent and make restitution for what they'd done. Yet, we must not miss Nehemiah's role in bringing about this change. It's quite easy to imagine that very little would have changed had Nehemiah not confronted the guilty parties.

Nehemiah's Example

Nehemiah makes clear that he himself was never guilty of taking advantage of the poor. His conscience was clear, as he had served the people with the utmost integrity. It's quite possible, perhaps even likely, that Nehemiah was unjustly accused with the rest of the Jewish leaders. Here he shows more concern for defending the poor, than defending his name. Not only are his actions blameless, but so are his motives. The passage says, “that out of reverence for God [he] did not act like that” and in 5:19 it says, “Remember me with favor, O my God, for all I have done for these people.” He was motivated out of a love

What's the Big Idea?

This study deals with the moral character of a leader. In the face of great stress and opposition, a leader must maintain integrity and avoid the appearance of evil.

What's the Problem?

Several are addressed:

We have a tendency to run from God and hide our sin. Spiritual leadership extracts sin through loving confrontation.

In a fallen world where people can only judge by appearances and do so rather fallibly, we must avoid even the appearance of evil.

We are all vulnerable to the corruption of money and power.



for God and others, not for personal gain or reputation. Can you imagine being able to say this about a political leader – any political leader – in today’s world?

Not Even the Appearance of Evil

Leaders must live out their lives under tighter scrutiny than others. The press and the public are always watching, always reporting. Because leadership positions have high visibility, one must avoid the appearance of evil, and not just the evil itself. This must be done not out of a concern for personal reputation but to avoid injuring the conscience of others. Nehemiah does not even take the food that was rightly allotted him, leaving no room for anyone to make an accusation against him.

Character

In looking at the traits of leaders, we looked at “dynamic determination,” “intellectual flexibility,” and “emotional well being.” The last trait common to great leaders is “character.” By character, we (me and my laptop) mean the qualities of integrity and trustworthiness. These are the virtues that encourage us to trust a leader. Without character, a leader loses credibility, and with it, the ability to lead. While there have been successful secular leaders who have failed in this area, it is usually their failure on this front that has been the undoing of their leadership. If character is critical for a secular leader, multiply it times five for a spiritual leader. In this passage, we see it’s Nehemiah’s integrity that navigates him through the murky waters of financial mismanagement and corruption and rescues the building project from certain bankruptcy.

What’s Our Response?

In positions of spiritual leadership our lives are on display. You want the group to see the responsibility inherent in this: we must avoid even the appearance of evil and carry our responsibilities with the highest degree of integrity.

Leadership also demands a willingness to confront the lack of integrity in others.

That said, no one is without deficiencies in their character and so in calling your group to spiritual leadership, you want to call them to “living in the light.” It is important for them to be open and honest about their sin with others, with themselves and with God and always vigilant about sin and Satan getting a foothold in their lives.

What Are the Questions?

Nehemiah 5:1-19

LAUNCH

Do you think it's right to hold leaders to a higher standard of character? Why do popular leaders often seem to have less character? Is this an illusion or is it really true?

EXPLORE

1. Read Nehemiah 5:1-13 and describe the situation Nehemiah is facing.
 2. How a leader handles money is often a reflection of their heart. What else provides a reliable gauge of leader's heart?
 3. The tax situation in Judah was oppressive to the poor. Which of the country's financial/economic procedures would you say are godly? Which would you say are not?
 4. While Nehemiah faced attack from the enemy, he also had to deal with corruption among his friends. Have you ever been in this situation?
 5. In verse 6 and 7, it says that Nehemiah was angry, yet took time to "ponder" the issue. What have you experienced and learned from your anger? How do you handle it, and how do you react to things?
 6. How would you define integrity?
 7. When have you been affected by the lack of integrity of a friend, relative or leader? Who would you say is a model of integrity?
 8. While Nehemiah was innocent, he was probably unjustly accused alongside the rest of the leadership. As Christians how are we to react to unjust and unfair accusations? Can you think of a verse that addresses this?
 9. As Nehemiah uncovers the corruption among the nobility, he confronts them. Have you either been confronted or confronted some one else? About what?
 10. What would you say is a godly way to confront someone? How do you know when confrontation is necessary?
 11. When leaders are caught in wrongdoing, do you think they should make a public confession?
- Read Nehemiah 5:14-19
12. What is Nehemiah's motivation for maintaining honesty and integrity? Why is this significant?
 13. What does Nehemiah do to avoid the appearance of impropriety? Is there anything in your life that might give the appearance of sin to others?
 14. Why should other people's misguided judgments be our responsibility?
 15. Do you agree that what leaders do in their private lives doesn't effect their professional lives? Can you think of any exceptions?

APPLY

16. If no one is without some character flaws, what distinguishes a godly leader?
17. Leadership magnifies our inconsistencies. What area of your life wouldn't look so good magnified?
18. Through this study of Nehemiah, how has God been speaking to you concerning your leadership?
19. Explain the following statement: "We do not lead for Jesus rather we allow Jesus to lead through us?" How do we "allow" Him to do this and what's our role?

What Are the Answers?

1. There's a great outcry among the poor for being exploited by the rich.
2. Sex and relationships.
3. Discuss. You just want people to make biblical connections to the culture they live in.
4. Leaders often find themselves dealing with conflict on multiple fronts. Discuss
5. Allow the group to discuss.
6. You consistently live out what you profess. The opposite of hypocrisy. Consistent moral character.
7. Allow the group to discuss.
8. We are to entrust our reputation to God and not retaliate. 1 Peter 2:23; 1 Peter 3:16; 1 Peter 4:14
9. Allow the group to discuss.
10. With gentleness. Not retaliating when the person gets defensive. Praying even as you are speaking.
11. The scope of confession should generally be those affected by the sin. For a leader that could be many people.
12. Nehemiah 5:15 says, "that out of reverence for God, (he) did not act like that."
13. He does not even take the food that is rightly his share.
14. Out of a desire not to be a stumbling block to either believers or unbelievers.
15. Lives can not be so neatly dichotomized. If a person is not trustworthy in their personal lives, there is good reason to suspect they will not be in their professional lives.
16. They "live in the light" by being open and honest about their sin and weakness with others, with themselves and with God and they are always vigilant about sin and Satan getting a foothold in their lives.
17. Allow the group to discuss.
18. Allow the group to discuss.
19. Constant prayer. Constant reliance. Being fully yielded and available. Honest, open and confessing all known sin. Intimate abiding, moment by moment, with Christ.

Memorize

Review with the group some of the qualities of leadership from the past four weeks.