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Title: A Leader's Duty – Winning Friends & Inspiring People

Text: Nehemiah 3:1-32

We're in the third week of a six-part series from the book of Nehemiah called "Where You Lead." This is about you and the challenge for you to be a leader. I'd like to think that all of us are leaders, or at the very least, leaders-in-training. Whether your area of leadership is at home with your family, or at work, or in your ministry here at church, you have the potential to influence others to participate in accomplishing something worthwhile.

Tom Landry, the legendary football coach of the Dallas Cowboys, said, "The job of a coach is to make men do what they don't want to do, in order to achieve what they've always wanted to be." Leaders work at doing that. They strive to motivate and inspire others to be more than they already are...even though the steps to getting there may involve doing things that aren't necessarily a barrel of fun.

A key word for leaders is INFLUENCE. That's what leadership is: taking others from Point A to Point B. It's been said that if you think you're leading but you have no one following you, you're not leading – you're just taking a walk. Leaders not only motivate themselves, they motivate others. We see this is the story of Nehemiah. After months of preparation – praying about it, doing his homework, talking to the right people, making a long journey, planning the project – Nehemiah finally gets his project underway. His project was to rebuild the wall around the city of Jerusalem. Jerusalem was the home of Nehemiah's forefathers; he considered it his spiritual home. The walls had been destroyed more than a century before, and though the city had begun to be restored, the walls remained a pile of rubble. This left the city vulnerable to enemy attack. It was also a reflection – not a particularly good one – on the city.

In chapter one, Nehemiah gave birth to the dream of rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem and restoring its honor. This was huge! It was way more than Nehemiah could ever do on his own. He needed the cooperation and the participation of thousands of people in order to get the job done. So he traveled to the city, he sketched a plan, and then at last the moment came when he would speak to the people of Jerusalem. Let me ruin the story for you. I suppose you already know how the story ends: the people of Jerusalem rose to the occasion and the wall was rebuilt, THANKS TO NEHEMIAH.

Today we are going to look at the leadership principles Nehemiah used to inspire participation from the people of Jerusalem. These principles should be helpful to just about everyone who would desire to motivate others to get involved in your area of leadership.

- 1. He gave everyone a reason to participate.** *"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 in disgrace.' I also told them about the gracious hand of my God upon me and what the king had said to me"* (Nehemiah 2:17). We're looking primarily at chapter 3 today, but it's chapter 2 where Nehemiah speaks to the officials of Jerusalem and the others who would be doing the work. I want you to notice the four elements contained in this very simple appeal. **He identifies the problem.** He says, "Jerusalem lies in ruins." He doesn't spend a lot of time here telling them what they already know, he simply reminds them of the situation. **He invites them to get involved.** *"Come, let us rebuild the wall of Jerusalem."* Most leaders – especially effective leaders – don't wait for people to volunteer. Nehemiah takes the initiative and asks people to join in and then he tells the people specifically what he wants them to do. **He inspires them with the big picture.** *"...and we will no longer be in disgrace."* Nehemiah's project wasn't JUST about building a wall. It was about RESTORING THE DIGNITY of Jerusalem. That was the BIG picture. LEADERS, when you invite people to join you, you're not just asking them to pour Kool-Aid into paper cups or to pass out the pretzels at Children's Church. You're asking them to participate in a work that will help build a foundation in the lives of young people that will sustain them for decades to come. Do you know how I know? Because Sunday School and Children's Church and Vacation Bible School and Kids' Crusades laid a foundation in my spiritual life. The lessons I learned here some 50 years ago have continued to influence me. That might not have been possible without Kool-Aid and pretzels! Leaders, you're not just asking someone to strum a few chords on a guitar or a keyboard, you're asking them to participate in leading people into the presence of God, to worship Him in His beauty and holiness. Do you see it? Do you see the BIG PICTURE of your area of leadership? What is it that you are REALLY doing? What are you REALLY trying to accomplish? That's the vision you need to cast; that's what inspires people. I've fallen short in this area. We didn't move the youth next door here so they wouldn't have to leave the building they were meeting in to go to the restroom – although that certainly is a plus. We've done that with the hope that we can

minister more effectively and reach more of our community's youth. Really EVERYTHING we do here is about transforming lives for generations to come. Nehemiah identifies the problem. He invites people to participate. He inspires them with the Big Picture, but that's not all. **He includes the most important details.** He said, *"I also told them about the gracious hand of my God upon me and what the king had said to me."* Nehemiah wasn't a snake oil salesman; he wasn't just pumping the crowd up with a great motivational speech. He told them what they needed to know in order to be sure his plan would work. He didn't go on and on about the problem or the work involved. Instead, he laid his argument for credibility: God is behind me on this project and so is the king. Nehemiah was an effective leader because he made the right kind of appeal. This appeal was enough to get the people involved and get them enthusiastic about the project.

2. **He gave everyone a piece of ownership.** Pretty much, the whole of chapter 3 speaks to this. Nehemiah's strategy for rebuilding the wall was simple. He divided the people of Jerusalem into groups – some by FAMILY, some by OCCUPATION, some by NEIGHBORHOOD. Each group took responsibility for their section, and the wall went up, section by section, pretty much all at once. As we'll see later in our study, the entire project (once started) lasted less than two months. Nehemiah divided the people of Jerusalem into groups that could work together. He had most of them building the section of wall closest to their home. Each group of people developed a sense of ownership in their piece of the wall. They knew for generations to come, this section would be remembered as the one they built. They wanted their work to reflect their commitment and character. Nehemiah knew that one hundred, two hundred, three hundred years down the line, a father would stand before the wall with his son and say, "Do you see this section of the wall here? It was built by your great-great-great grandfather and his brothers long, long ago. This part of the wall belongs to our people." Nehemiah divided the people of Jerusalem into teams. He gave each team a section of wall to complete, and that enabled everyone to feel a sense of ownership about their part of the project. ILLUSTRATION: I read recently about the owner of a publishing company who was fond of saying, "Everyone here has the same job description: everyone does everything." That was about the size of it. Every employee was a salesman. Every employee gave technical support. Every employee stuffed envelopes. Every employee packed boxes. EVERYONE is EVERYTHING, and it was reportedly a disorganized mess. When the owner hired a new manager to take day-to-day operation, the new manager immediately assigned everyone an area of responsibility: "You work in shipping. You work in technical support. You cover the phones." And so on. Almost overnight, the atmosphere in the workplace changed. People got excited about THEIR area of responsibility. People began to take ownership in their work. When there was a problem in shipping, for example, they could no longer point fingers at one another and say, "Shouldn't you have handled this?" They knew who was responsible because now everyone had an area of ownership. Ownership instills pride and encourages the pursuit of excellence. That's why effective leaders encourage those whom they lead to get vested in the project.
3. **It appears that He gave everyone the recognition they deserved.** Nehemiah specifically mentions 74 people by name in chapter three. He takes time to describe what each person or each group did. ³*"The Fish Gate was rebuilt by the sons of Hassenah. They laid its beams and put its doors and bolts and bars in place. ⁴Meremoth son of Uriah, the son of Hakkoz, repaired the next section. Next to him, Meshullam son of Berekiah, the son of Meshezabel, made repairs..."* And on and on he goes through the entire chapter. Verse 20 – *Next to him, Baruch son of Zabbai zealously repaired another section, from the angle to the entrance of the house of Eliashib the High Priest.* Notice the word "zealously." I think that's the only adjective in the entire chapter, but Nehemiah wants to make sure that we know that Baruch did his job especially well. When people excel in their work, don't hesitate to let them know. Encouragement is something we all could use a little more of. According to a 2003 USA Today survey, the number one reason people leave their job is lack of appreciation – NOT lack of money, but LACK OF APPRECIATION. Nehemiah took the time to recognize those who did their job well. He took the time to write about it. To do it, he first had to notice what everyone was actually doing. He paid attention to what was going on around him; he kept track of who was doing what. Have you ever worked somewhere, or volunteered some place, where you thought, "Nothing that I do will make a difference. If I do my job well or if I do it poorly, no one will notice." Probably most of us have. Don't be that kind of leader. Make it a point to recognize and honor those who are faithful to their task. This means that leaders, for the most part, need to let go of their own need for recognition. Sometimes we let our ego get involved, and we want it to appear that we're doing everything ourselves. We want to get all the credit. I've worked with those who wanted all the credit and sometimes they were even guilty of taking credit that didn't belong to them. A

good leader will let go of that idea. It's not about you! IT'S ABOUT THE WORK GOD HAS CALLED YOU TO PURSUE. ILLUSTRATION: Jack Benny understood this leadership principle. In his radio and TV programs that ran throughout the 40's, 50's, and 60's, he surrounded himself with talented performers, and he wasn't afraid to let them shine. When he was considering adding Wayne Newton to his show, he was warned, "Be careful. That kid is too talented. He'll steal the show." Benny said, "He better. If he can't steal the show, I don't want him." Great leaders aren't afraid to let others "steal the show." They're not afraid to SHARE the spotlight. They don't hesitate to give credit where credit is due. This is what Nehemiah did. It's one of the things that made him an effective leader. As a result – He got the job done. THEY got the job done!

- 4. Conclusion.** Leadership is about getting people on board with your mission, and getting them to do what they need to do in order for you – TOGETHER – to accomplish the dream that God has given you. For that dream to come true, you need to empower others. When God inspires you with a dream, He inspires you to inspire others. An effective leader is one who wins friends and inspires people. If God has given you a dream, it will involve recruiting others to work with you, and it will involve keeping them encouraged and motivated for the duration. Think about how you recruit others, how you make your appeal. Don't wait for others to come to you. Go to them. Invite them to participate in something great for the glory of God. Give them a piece of ownership in the work, and give them the recognition they deserve. This is what leaders do. It's how they get projects from Point A to Point B. It's how they get the job done.