

Prayer, Planning, and the Good Hand of God

Nehemiah 2

After hearing the discouraging news about the condition of Jerusalem and her people (1:3), Nehemiah spends four months in prayer and planning. When given the opportunity, Nehemiah asks King Artaxerxes for permission to go to Jerusalem to help rebuild the city.

Nehemiah demonstrates that prayer and planning complement each other in working out God's will. While we depend on God's power and sovereign rule, we also carefully organize plans that can further his purposes. We pray, plan, and prepare while we wait.

Nehemiah presents his request to the king (1-10)

Chapter 2 takes place four months after the events of chapter 1 (1:1; 2:1).

The king noticed something different about Nehemiah's countenance (1, 2). Culturally, it was inappropriate for a servant to show negative emotions in front of the king as it might communicate dissatisfaction with the king.

While not mentioning Jerusalem specifically, Nehemiah appeals to the king's sense of honor in describing the condition of Nehemiah's ancestral home (3).

Nehemiah demonstrates his close walk with God by his spontaneous prayer in response to the king's question (4).

Nehemiah petitions the king for three specific requests. Permission to rebuild the city (5). Permission to travel (7). Sufficient supplies to do the job (8a).

While Nehemiah was grateful to the king, he recognized it was God's hand of blessing that brought a favorable response (8b).

Susa to Judah was at least a two-month journey. Artaxerxes sent a military escort to accompany Nehemiah (9).

When you are doing something for God, expect a visit from the cold-water-committee (10).

Nehemiah reveals his plan (11-20)

After resting from the journey (11), Nehemiah secretly gathered firsthand information about the condition of the walls (12-16).

Nehemiah stated the problem and created a need in his hearers (17a).

Nehemiah challenged them to join him in the work (17b).

Nehemiah encouraged them by telling of what God had already done and provided (18a).

The people responded positively and committed themselves to the task (18b).

Critics and criticism are occupational hazards of leadership (19).

Nehemiah continued the policy started by Zerubbabel of not allowing the people of the land to help rebuild Jerusalem (20).

Principles to Practice

Changing a heart is God's specialty.

Praying, planning, and waiting go hand in hand.

Faith is not a synonym for disorder or a substitute for careful planning.

Opposition is to be expected when God's will is carried out.

Principles of leadership

Donald Campbell (*Nehemiah: Man in Charge*, p.23) identified 21 principles of effective leadership that Nehemiah demonstrated in chapter 2:

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| [1] He established a reasonable and attainable goal. | [13] He informed others only after he knew the size of the problem. |
| [2] He had a sense of mission. | [14] He identified himself as one with the people. |
| [3] He was willing to get involved. | [15] He set before them a reasonable and attainable goal. |
| [4] He rearranged his priorities in order to accomplish his goal. | [16] He assured them God was in the project. |
| [5] He patiently waited for God's timing. | [17] He displayed self-confidence in facing obstacles. |
| [6] He showed respect to his superior. | [18] He displayed God's confidence in facing obstacles. |
| [7] He prayed at crucial times. | [19] He did not argue with opponents. |
| [8] He made his request with tact and graciousness. | [20] He was not discouraged by opposition. |
| [9] He was well prepared and thought of his needs in advance. | [21] He courageously used the authority of his position. |
| [10] He went through proper channels. | |
| [11] He took time (three days) to rest, pray, and plan. | |
| [12] He investigated the situation firsthand. | |