

Features of a Great Leaders

Intro: Some time ago Christianity Today Online featured an article by a prominent evangelist of a mega-church here in the States. The article was called “Five Features of a Great Leader”. The article suggested that great leaders do these five things:

- 1. Cast a God-honoring vision*
- 2. Gather and align people for the achievement of the vision*
- 3. Motivate their co-workers*
- 4. Sense the need for positive change and then constructively bring it about*
- 5. Create a leadership culture in their organization*

By those standards there is a man in the Scripture who could certainly be called a great leader—Nehemiah. In the first six chapters of his spiritual autobiography, Nehemiah gives us a play-by-play account of his efforts to rebuild Jerusalem’s broken walls. His story is an inspiration to all who appreciate good leadership; and if we want to exercise leadership, to influence others, we would do well to consider the characteristics of this godly man’s efforts. Let’s talk about the features of a great leader. Great leaders:

Care deeply about the Lord’s work

Nehemiah’s brother came back to Jerusalem with a report about the condition of the Israelites in Jerusalem.

And they said to me, “The remnant there in the province who survived the captivity are in great distress and reproach, and the wall of Jerusalem is broken down and its gates are burned with fire.” (Nehemiah 1:3)

Nehemiah’s reaction demonstrated his deep love for God, His people, and His city.

Now it came about when I heard these words, I sat down and wept and mourned for days (Neh. 1:4)

This is where great leadership begins. Great leaders love enough to care and care enough to cry.

Pray fervently about the Lord’s work

Nehemiah’s broken heart for the people of God took him to his knees.

Now it came about when I heard these words, I sat down and wept and mourned for days; and I was fasting and praying before the God of heaven. (Nehemiah 1:4)

The remainder of Nehemiah one records the culmination of what were many prayers uttered to God in behalf of His work. Nehemiah’s prayer was fervent in spirit, reverent in tone, honest in content, faithful in approach, obedient in expression and hopeful in outlook.

Great leaders not only carry a burden for the work of God; they pray fervently about the work of God and they look to God to provide a way to get the work done!

Take responsibility for the Lord's work

Maybe at first Nehemiah's prayers were more general as He asked God to help His people with the monumental task; but, before he was through, he began to understand that he was the one who should take responsibility for the work to be done! If he began his prayers, "Somebody needs to do something about this!", they ended, "I need to do something about this!" Nehemiah's great disappointments became the occasion for one of God's greatest appointments!

And so Nehemiah boldly requested of his boss King Artaxerxes that he be given a leave of absence to rebuild those walls.

And I said to the king, "If it please the king, and if your servant has found favor before you, send me to Judah, to the city of my fathers' tombs, that I may rebuild it." (Nehemiah 2:5)

That request took considerable courage. There was risk that the king would be displeased or say, "no". That request involved considerable sacrifice. Nehemiah would have to leave a comfortable job and travel hundreds of miles, making significant investments of time and effort.

But that's what great leaders do—they take responsibility and commit sacrificially to see that the Lord's work is done.

Plan intelligently to do the Lord's work

So I went out at night by the Valley Gate in the direction of the Dragon's Well and on to the Refuse Gate, inspecting the walls of Jerusalem which were broken down and its gates which were consumed by fire. (Nehemiah 2:13)

As we read about Nehemiah's action we see a man who takes the time to prepare himself, to do his homework in order that he can cast a vision of what needs to be done and how it can get done! While everyone else is sleeping, he is on his animal inspecting the situation and accessing the needs and solutions to the city's desolation. From these efforts, Nehemiah comes away with a vision of what could be!

That's what great leaders do! They are vision casters! They help us see what is possible.

Swindoll wrote, "Vision is essential for survival. It is spawned by faith, sustained by hope, sparked by imagination, and strengthened by enthusiasm. It is greater than sight, deeper than a dream, broader than an idea. Vision encompasses vast vistas outside the realm of the predictable, the safe, and the expected. No wonder we perish without it! "

Build community in doing the Lord's work

Nehemiah didn't come to Jerusalem with a "Here I come to save the day" mentality. Instead he wanted to get the people to think about and join together in taking on a task far too great for any one man! And so Nehemiah approached the people with this in mind. His approach was:

Honest and realistic

*Then I said to them, "You see the bad situation we are in, that Jerusalem is desolate and its gates burned by fire. (Neh. 2:17a)
Challenging and unifying
Come, let us rebuild the wall of Jerusalem that we may no longer be a reproach." (Nehemiah 2:17)
Motivating and optimistic
And I told them how the hand of my God had been favorable to me, and also about the king's words which he had spoken to me. (Neh. 2:18a)*

Ultimately this is what leadership is all about. It's not about superstar performances by one person; it's about involving others to work together to accomplish the greater good.

Glorify God in the accomplishment of His work

In the end, Nehemiah's leadership was successful because it ultimately pointed to God as the one to be honored and glorified. This is seen in many ways:

Nehemiah attributes the idea of restoration to God.

I did not tell anyone what my God was putting into my mind to do for Jerusalem... (Nehemiah 2:12)

Nehemiah attributes the success of restoration to God.

So I answered them and said to them, "The God of heaven will give us success; therefore we His servants will arise and build, but you have no portion, right, or memorial in Jerusalem." (Nehemiah 2:20)

It was not power, personal praise, prestige or any other self-serving purpose that brought Nehemiah to Jerusalem. Only this, that he might by doing good please God and receive His reward!

"Remember me, Oh my God, for good!"

If we lead for any other reason, we are leading for the wrong reason!

Conclusion: What happens when good leadership takes place?

Then they said, "Let us arise and build." So they put their hands to the good work. (Nehemiah 2:18)

In every generation, there is a great need for leaders like Nehemiah. Of course, we need elders and deacons and preachers and Bible class teachers like this. But the truth is, each of us has the potential to exercise leadership in the lives of others; and Nehemiah's example will show us how to do that regardless of what your leadership style might be.