

# **Ten Characteristics of a Godly Leader in a Secular Society**

## **Nehemiah Chapters 1-6**

### **INTRODUCTION**

Recently, the Sis Club (3-6th grade girls) were doing a type of scavenger hunt and one of items to complete their tasks was to ask the STBC elders about their favorite Bible book. And they wanted to know why it was a favorite. Some of the elders chose Genesis, Psalms, the Gospels and Romans. I chose Nehemiah and told them the reason why was because of the title of this sermon. But because they were trying to finish their hunt, they would run off and I couldn't share any more information.

I like history, politics, and leadership. You can see this in my book collection. And I am a bit of a political junkie. The book of Nehemiah includes all 3 of these topics.

So this will be a different type of sermon from verse/verse preaching, like we are doing with 1 John currently. Today we will review **Nehemiah chapters 1-6** and look at:

### **Ten Characteristics of a Godly Leader in a Secular Society**

In the course of reading these chapters we see an outline of :

#### **Three Scenes:**

- 1. The Problem**
- 2. The Proposal**
- 3. The Project**

#### **1. The Problem (1:1-11a):** Jerusalem's walls are in ruins

Consider the history after Babylonian destruction of Jerusalem and captivity

- Secular, but somewhat tolerant society
- Cyrus, first Persian King, allows first return of Jews in 537 BC
  - Prophesied in Isaiah 44:28, 45:1, 150 years before Cyrus
  - Jeremiah's prophesy of 70 years of captivity (Jer. 29:10)
  - Daniel realizes the 70 years, influence on Cyrus, the return starts the great prophesy of Jesus coming (Daniel 9)
- Cyrus' son: Darius

- Temple completed in 515 (story in Ezra, Haggai)
- Cyrus' grandson: Xerxes, famous for battles against Greeks
  - Biblical story of Esther, Queen in 478, between Ezra 6/7
- King in Nehemiah, Xerxes son: Artaxerxes
- Artaxerxes stopped walls in Ezra 4:7-23 (flash forward)  
Story of Nehemiah is 445 BC

2. The Proposal: (1:11b -2:8) Build the wall and get the Persians to pay for it

3. The Project: (2:9-6:15) Build the walls

## **Scene 1: Problem 1:1-11a**

### **1. Personal**

**v. 2-4:** family and others

Nehemiah is personal:

- a) he asked questions
- b) he listened
- c) he shows he cares/emotions

Examples: ministry of Jesus to his disciples, Paul at end of letters

**Application:** Leading in your home: are you personal with your kids?

Leading in the church: are you personal with each other?

How about in your workplace, community?

### **2. Prayerful**

**v. 4-11a**

Great outline for prayer : He focuses on the character of God (His attributes), then He praises Word of God, followed by confession - his own sins and those of the people around him, and finally he makes a very specific request.

God's character and Word are never changing; the rock upon which we can stand.

Confession for self and others - dependence and need of who we are as sinners

Request: His request was specific

Jesus gives us 2 examples of specific requests when Jesus asked what people wanted:

1) Mark 10:35 - disciples request power - this is motivated by pride and personal ambition - God doesn't answer this request

2) Mark 10: 51-52: Blind man asks for sight - asks something he feels called to ask for the glory of God. God answers that request.

**Application:** Check your prayer requests. We should be asking God for what will bring Him honor and glory.

### 3. Perceptive

v. 11: Nehemiah's prayer reveals a "perceptive prayer"

- Nehemiah is already thinking about problem (the wall is in shambles) and how he can be part of the solution

Point - Prayer is not a replacement for thinking; and, more importantly, thinking is not a replacement for prayer. There is nothing wrong with either. Nehemiah does both.

## Scene Two: Proposal 1:11b-2:8

### 4. Positioned

Cupbearer was a very revered position. This was a distinguished individual.

- Back in Genesis 40: Joseph and cupbearer; put in a good word, access
- Archeology from records of Assyrian kings: had the 4<sup>th</sup> highest salary
- Especially important, Artaxerxes' father was assassinated by advisor ( someone close to him).

**Point:** It takes time and experience to get into such a position. The King trusted Nehemiah.

**Illustration:** I recently had a dream that I was appointed as Secretary of Agriculture after these recent national elections. It was the craziest thing! Obviously, this was not reality. I would not be positioned to be the Secretary of Agriculture.

**Application:** Where is God calling you to be positioned? You may need certain experiences or education. I don't know what they are but you do. And you can get to that certain position if you set your sights there.

Nehemiah did not abuse his position

v. 1 He was not sad in the presence of the King, that was not allowed

“very much afraid” in v. 2 when King sees something wrong

v. 2 He speaks honestly with the King

He does not accuse the King despite the King's prior stopping of the building of the wall, Ezra 4:7:23

Side note about another positioned: Is “queen” in v. 6 a reference to Esther?

1. Susa is same place as story of Esther;
2. Xerxes married young Esther in 479, so about 54 years old now
3. Esther referred to as the Queen

## 5. Prepares

v. 4+ King asks and Nehemiah answers with details:

- Nehemiah to lead the effort (v. 5)
- Gave a definite time (v. 6)
- Needs official papers (v. 7)
  - He is the Plenipotentiary – a term used in the 1848 Mexico Treaty - it means having the full, official authority from the government
- Needs resources (v. 8)

**Illustration:** I once had a mentor at work. He was one of the most respected lawyers in Arizona. When I was dealing with a unique situation that I knew he had dealt with before I approached him for advice, knowing he had already been through this same situation. And

his response? “Did you read the rule yet? Come back after you read it.” In other words, he was asking me if I was prepared to have this discussion with him. Had I done my research?

**6. Perspective (v. 4b and 8b) - we see this in two aspects**

**v. 4b:** Nehemiah praying reveals his perspective that God in heaven is in control.

**v. 8b:** King grants his request because God in control.

**Application:** When you are successful, when something goes right in your life - whether in ministry, your family, in life, in work, in whatever - do you have the right perspective that ultimately it is from God? Nehemiah did.

**Scene 3: Project 2:9-6:15**

**7. Plans (2:11-16)**

Nehemiah plans before he acts. He inspected the situation first hand before announcing the plan. He wants to know what is going on. He doesn't just come in and announce to the people what he is going to do. First, he comes up with a plan.

**8. Participated (v.17-18)**

**v. 17** “let us” build the wall;

Also: a) **4:19-23:** “We” are working;

b) **5:14-19:** He did not profit

Nehemiah participated in all of his proposed work. Again, he is personal. He is right there during a difficult time - right there on the wall.

**9. Perseveres**

**a. First challenge 2:19-20**

Troublemakers from surrounding lands were mocking them and Nehemiah perseveres knowing:

1) Who is the source of the success: God

2) Who needs to do the hard work: “we” the servants of God

**Application:** Any work, any ministry is going to face hardship. If there isn't, you are probably not working hard enough.

**b. Second challenge 4:1-9**

Response: Prays (v. 9) - he really believes Who he is praying to!

Proclaims dependence on God (v. 14a)

He protects which leads us to the last characteristic (v. 14b)

**10. Protects**

**c. The people from the outsiders (most of Chapter 4)**

- Armed v. 13: swords, spears, and bows
- Strategy: stationed in key places, on and off duty, trumpets

**d. The people from insiders**

Chapter 5: 1-13 - Usury; charging excessive interest on each other.  
They were taking advantage of each other.

**e. Self - Chapter 6:1-14**

- 1) From physical threat: Enemies sought to kill Nehemiah v. 2
- 2) His reputation: False accusation v. 4-7  
Defends reputation v. 8
- 3) From disqualification v. 10  
He was invited to enter the temple (not a priest) to protect life.  
But he refuses to sin v. 11-14

We are going to end with verse **6:15**.

The wall was built in 52 days.

**CONCLUSION**

This was such an exciting time. I wish I could time travel to go back there and be part of that. That was just the first six chapters of the book of Nehemiah. After the problem, the proposal and the project, there is paperwork (Ch.7), praises (Ch.8 & 9) and then politics (Ch. 10-14).

Nehemiah is another person on my list to meet in heaven.

**He was a godly leader in the context of a secular society**

**Application:**

We must look at Nehemiah's example and ask ourselves, are we:

1. Personal
2. Prayerful
3. Perceptive
4. Positioned
5. Prepared
6. Perspective
7. Plan
8. Participate
9. Persevere
10. Protect

Despite living in secular society, let's pray we would be that type of godly leader in our homes, church, and community.