

WEDNESDAY BIBLE FELLOWSHIP

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STUDY NOTES ON NEHEMIAH

Chapter 2: The Process of Preparation

Introduction

If you want to be a leader, if you want to make great things happen in your life and make a difference in the world you live in, you must spend some time in preparation -- not just learning what you need to learn, but also preparing yourself emotionally for the challenges ahead. Leadership isn't easy. It's rewarding. It's ultimately satisfying. But it's not easy. It requires a lot of hard work -- work that no one ever sees. It's work done out of the spotlight. It's preparation.

And so today, as you think about where you lead, and all the possibilities that exist there, I want you to consider four ways in which you need to prepare. Four things you need to get ready for. These are part of the preparation process. First of all...

1. Get Ready To Wait.

Last week, we saw how Nehemiah became inspired with the idea of traveling to Jerusalem to help rebuild the broken down walls of Jerusalem. This happened, he says in chapter one, verse one: *"In the month of Kislev, in the twentieth year."* Kislev coincides with late November, early December. Chapter 2 begins...

(v. 1) In the month of Nisan in the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes...

Nisan coincides with late April, early May. So there was about a 5 or 6 month stretch in between the time that Nehemiah heard about the problem and the time that Nehemiah had the chance to do something about it. Six months he spent waiting. Now, as we'll see, he didn't spend that time doing nothing, but there was a period of several months when Nehemiah's heart was on fire to do something about this problem -- and he was able to do nothing but wait.

Do you know what I've noticed? There's a waiting room where our dreams go between inception and realization. God allows this period of waiting to see if we will stoke the fire of our dream, or if we'll let the spark die out. I can't count the number of people over the years who have told me in a fit of emotion that they will become a missionary, or a pastor, or they will start a ministry to street people, or young people, or old people, or single people, or poor people -- and they're completely enthusiastic about the idea ... for about three days. Then they forget about it.

When God gives you a dream, he will give that dream the opportunity to incubate in your heart for a while. He'll give it time to grow. You can expect to spend some time waiting.

However, while you're waiting, you don't want to waste your time. You want to make the most of it, just like Nehemiah did. This brings us to the second thing I want you to see.

2. Get Ready for the Open Door.

In the 5-6 months that Nehemiah had been waiting, he had been getting ready for the opportunity to share his dream with the king. He knew eventually the day would come when the king would say...

(v. 4) "What is it that you want?"

When it happened, Nehemiah was ready. He said, "Send me to Jerusalem so that I can rebuild the city." The king asked how long it would take, and Nehemiah was ready with an answer. And then Nehemiah said, "Plus, I will need letters of safe passage for the governors of surrounding territories, and I'll need a line a credit to buy timber for the temple and the gates and the house that I will be staying in." Clearly, Nehemiah had thought this through. Clearly, he had done his homework. When the door opened, he was ready. And the king gave Nehemiah everything he asked for.

The third part of the preparation process I want you to see is...

3. Get Ready to Spend Time in Prayer.

When the king asked Nehemiah, "What is it you want?" Nehemiah wrote...

(v.4-5) Then I prayed to the God of heaven, and I answered the king...

In other words, he prayed one of those "bullet" prayers -- the type of prayer you pray real fast before you do something important. This is a good habit to get into. As you go through your day, and situations and problems and opportunities pop up, practice saying a quick prayer before you proceed: "God, help me with this presentation. God, help me say the right thing. God, help me control my emotions. God, help me do what I'm supposed to do." I encourage you to do this until it becomes routine -- when your immediate response to every situation is to call on God. That's where you want to be.

But I want you to realize that this isn't the only time Nehemiah prayed. In fact, the 13 chapters of the book of Nehemiah records nine prayers. From day one -- as we see in chapter one -- this project was a matter of prayer for Nehemiah. He was constantly calling God for help, for comfort, for forgiveness, for direction, for resources, for protection, for thanksgiving, for praise, and on and on. Project Wall was bathed in prayer from start to finish. This is why, whenever something went Nehemiah's way, he was quick to give the credit to God. In verse 8 Nehemiah wrote, "And because the gracious hand of my God was upon me, the king granted my requests." It was second nature for Nehemiah to give credit to God, because it was Nehemiah's first nature to make everything a matter of prayer.

The fourth part of the preparation process that I want you to see is ...

4. Get Ready for Some Opposition.

(v. 10) When Sanballat the Horonite and Tobiah the Ammonite official heard about this, they were very much disturbed that someone had come to promote the welfare of the Israelites.

(v. 19) But when Sanballat the Horonite, Tobiah the Ammonite official, and Geshem the Arab heard about it, they mocked and ridiculed us. "What is this you are doing?" they asked. "Are you rebelling against the king?"

One unfortunate side effect of leadership is that others -- usually non-leaders -- will criticize you. The same thing happened to David on the day of his battle with Goliath. His brother, Eliab -- who himself didn't have the courage to face Goliath -- ridiculed and insulted David, telling him to get back to tending sheep.

I'm sure it was the same for Nehemiah. His critics no doubt said, "Who does this man think he is? He is just a slave with visions of grandeur. Does he really think he can rebuild the walls of Jerusalem?" And notice their allegation: "Are you rebelling against the king?"

No leader is immune to criticism; no leader serves without opposition. We all face it. But it nearly always comes from the uninvolved. They will ridicule, they will mock, and they will make allegations. Your job, as a leader, is to keep moving forward. Listen to Nehemiah's response.

(v. 20) I answered them by saying, "The God of heaven will give us success. We his servants will start rebuilding, but as for you, you have no share in Jerusalem or any of historic right to it."

Nehemiah didn't argue with his critics. He didn't present them with his business plan or assure them the king was on his side or try to convince them that his strategy would work. He just said, "This is God's project and he will give us success. This doesn't involve you at all... so keep your nose out of it." In a few weeks we'll look more closely at the subject of opposition, but for now, suffice it to say that if you have to respond your critics, Nehemiah shows us how to do it: with as few words as possible. The important thing is to keep focused on what God is calling you to do, not what your opponents are saying.

Conclusion

The preparation process leads to what we read in Nehemiah 2:18. After Nehemiah had challenged the people of Jerusalem to join him in this task...

(v. 18) They replied, "Let us start rebuilding." So they began this good work.

Next week we'll look at how Nehemiah got the project started. **Today**, I want you to realize that Nehemiah wasn't an overnight success. He spent time preparing for the work God called him to do.

He did his homework; he was able to answer the right questions. When the door of opportunity opened, he was ready to go through. He spent time in prayer, he put in the late nights, he faced criticism and opposition. Why? Because he knew that the gracious hand of his God was upon him. Because he knew that the God of heaven would give him success.

Preparation can be difficult. It can be long and it can be lonely. But when you prepare God can use you. He *will* use you. He's given you a dream of making a difference -- at work, at home, in your community, in the ministry of this church. As you prepare your heart and life, he will take you to the place he has called you to be.