

# How to Stay Little in Leadership

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**Text:** Nehemiah 5:14-19

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**Series:** Nehemiah

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**Introduction:** Tonight we are beginning a study on "How to Stay Little in Leadership" from Nehemiah 5:14-19.

**Adversity** is an unbending teacher. The rug gets pulled out from under you. Deep in your heart you ask God "Why?" God's answer is: "Trust!" **Proverbs 3:5**, "Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding." Look back at the hard sad days in your life. You'll find that spiritually, those were also the best days of drawing near to God. Adversity is a teacher to draw us near to God.

But there's another fire that we all walk through from time to time that is more difficult than **adversity**, and that is **advancement**. Very few people can live in luxury and maintain an earnest, passionate spiritual hunger. That is why Jesus said in **Mark 10:25**, "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God."

It is ironic, but most of us can survive a demotion with our integrity better than we can a promotion. In promotion and blessing of any sort, we tend to become self-reliant and proud as if we had brought success to ourselves. God will often give you **adversity** to form Christ in you, but sometimes He will also test you with **advancement**.

Asaph was a Psalmist in Israel who was one of the few believers who by the grace of God knew how to handle advancement. He wrote in **Psalm 75:5-8**, "Lift not up your horn on high; speak *not with* a stiff neck. 6 For promotion *cometh* neither from the east, nor from the west, nor from the south. 7 But God *is* the judge: he putteth down one, and setteth up another."

Asaph was saying: "*Why would you toot your own horn? Why would you ever be stuck up with pride? Your success didn't just come out of nowhere and happen by chance. Behind every promotion is the sovereign hand of God! You are the recipient of His undeserved blessing!*"

Unbelievers of course will never see it this way. To them, promotion comes from being at the right place at the right time. They will call it "being lucky".

This is not at all right. Promotion and demotion all come from God.

- God lifted Joseph from an Egyptian dungeon to be prime minister.
- God gave Job everything to Job and then took it all away to try him. Then God promoted Job beyond what he ever had in the first place
- Almost overnight, God took Daniel from slavery to being the Nebuchadnezzar's right hand man.

- Also overnight God turned Nebuchadnezzar from being a King, to eating grass like an ox
- God promoted Amos from being a faithful fig picking farmer to being the highest prophet in the land.
- And **God, in Nehemiah 5, promotes Nehemiah to governor.**

Nehemiah writes in **verse 14**, "Moreover from the time that I was appointed to be their governor in the land of Judah, from the twentieth year even unto the two and thirtieth year of Artaxerxes the king, that is, twelve years..."

- I. To be used of God ***we must accept responsibility for the mission God has called us to.*** Governor was the highest position in the land of Israel at this time. Many believers are afraid to take on any additional responsibilities outside of their jobs and families. The church is not short on qualified believers. What we are short on people who will take on the hard responsibilities.

You may be here tonight in the contentment of obscurity. Perhaps you don't want to take on any ministry in the church. We all have good reasons:

- We don't want to mess anything up!
- We don't really like being stretched or having extra things to juggle.

Nehemiah first had a burden to serve his fellow believers, and then God gave him a strategic role of leadership and responsibility as governor over them.

Do you see an area in our church that has a need? Then that is your call from God! Step forward and fill it! There ought not to be need of recruitment. If you see a need, then serve! But especially if you are asked to do something, you should accept responsibility!

To be used of God ***we must accept responsibility for the mission God has called us to.***

- II. ***Promotion brings privileges that we may need to sacrifice.*** When my personal comfort and God's mission collide, at which time we must ***serve the greater good at our own personal expense.***

Nehemiah testifies that he sacrificed some privileges that he could have legitimately partaken of. All the time Nehemiah was governor of Judah, he says, "I and my brethren have not eaten the bread of the governor", and this ended up being 12 years. As governor Nehemiah had a very generous food allowance. He chose to sacrifice for his people. These were times of hardship and poverty for the people, and he chose not to live above the living standard of his own people.

***Illustration:*** Remember what we learned last Sunday evening. Paul said in **1 Corinthians 9:22**, "To the weak became I as weak, that I might gain the weak: I am made all things to all men, that I might by all means save some." Paul, though he was reared as an aristocrat was willing to become "weak" and work with his hands as a tentmaker. He was willing to sacrifice all things for the Gospel's sake.

### ***A. What kind of personal sacrifice are you called to give?***

1. Let's apply it to ***marriage.*** If you are a single person looking to be married one day, you need to understand that God's goal of harmony and Christian unity in

your marriage means that you are going to have to sacrifice your desires and what you think might be best for you.

- If God has given you children, God's mission for you of raising and nurturing these children for Christ will conflict with your own personal comfort. At 4 in the morning when your personal desire is to be sleeping, your son or daughter begins throwing up, and you are called to serve them in Christian love.
2. It is the same in **ministry**. A pastor is to see the needs of his people above his own needs. He is to do what is in the best interest of all the people, not just what is in his own self interest. We are all called to sacrifice our self interest for our brothers and sisters in Christ.
  3. In your **work place**, you are not there to serve yourself, but to do what is in the best interest of your fellow co-workers and your boss. ***You as a Christian are a servant, and you are to serve the greater good at your own personal expense. You are to put the needs of others above your own needs.***

B. Understand that **great temptations come with privileges**. Many before Nehemiah had taken their privileges for granted. With every bit of authority, there is the temptation to abuse the authority.

- As a **Sunday School teacher**, it is easy some weeks to take for granted that you are NOT simply teaching a class, but you are preparing the hearts of children that need Christ, or forming Christian children's hearts into the image of Christ.
- As a **mother or father with children**, it's easy to forget what a joy and privilege it is to be a dad or mom. Many cannot have children. It is easy to abuse our authority and speak wrongly to our children, or to think they are here to serve us, instead of us setting the example of service to them.
- God may have prospered you with **financial security**, and you may take it for granted and not give according to your increase. Listen, just as God gave it to you, he can take it away. Paul tells us in **1 Corinthians 16:2**, "Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him".

III. **Promotion sometimes threaten policies that need to be changed**. Look at **verse 15**, "But the former governors that had been before me were chargeable unto the people, and had taken of them bread and wine, beside forty shekels of silver; yea, even their servants bare rule over the people: but so did not I, because of the fear of God."

Any time you are put into a position of leadership, you can expect to be compared to how people have done things before you.

In Nehemiah's case, there were bad policies that he had to change. There was over taxation, extortion, and favoritism. These policies made the former governors very financially secure. The people even expected it. We need to be willing to stand by that which we cannot compromise, and we need to change that which needs to be changed without wavering.

A. **We need to be willing to stand by that which we cannot compromise**. You may be in a job that requires you to lie about taxes. You need to refuse to hide your

income. That may mean you lose your job. It's ok. Your employer is not your ultimate boss. The CEO of the universe is your Maker and Saviour Jesus Christ.

B. ***We need to be willing to step out of our comfort zone and change things that need to be changed back to a biblical standard.*** Every generation has to evaluate this. It is easy to stay in our comfort zone. Nehemiah was willing to make unpopular changes. He didn't benefit from collecting less taxes. He made a change.

IV. ***Promotion sometimes blinds us to what is right.*** It blinded many of Nehemiah's predecessors. But Nehemiah refused to be blinded by promotion. He was able to stay small in his own eyes as a leader. How? Look at Nehemiah's anchor that kept his ego always in check in **verse 15b**, "because of the fear of God." Every one else was doing it. They had always done it this way! Nehemiah said, "I had to make a change". Why? "because of the fear of God." "I'm not that important". I fear God. This is an awesome responsibility.

It is easy to be popular with people, but do you fear God more than men? It is easy to allow promotion to blind us to who we really are! We were children of hell before God saved us. The Almighty has picked us up and cleaned us off. You did not clean yourself. It took the wrath of God on Christ to clean you. Now that God promotes you, what do you have to boast about. Don't ever let success blind you to who gives you all that you have.

V. ***God promotes us in order to serve His mission, not to serve ourselves.*** Nehemiah did not accept the responsibility of governor so that he could benefit himself. As Governor of Judah, he stayed at the task of building the wall. Look at **verse 16**, "Yea, also I continued in the work of this wall, neither bought we any land: and all my servants were gathered thither unto the work." The mission for Nehemiah was to build the wall. Everyone was gathered there for God's purpose. They were working so that God's people could worship without fear.

Look at **verses 16-17**. Nehemiah used his power and success not for himself, but for the people. Moreover there were at my table an hundred and fifty of the Jews and rulers, beside those that came unto us from among the heathen that are about us. <sup>18</sup> Now that which was prepared for me daily was one ox and six choice sheep; also fowls were prepared for me, and once in ten days store of all sorts of wine: yet for all this required not I the bread of the governor, because the bondage was heavy upon this people."

The fire in the kitchen never went out. Nehemiah had to feed thousands of people every month. High ranking officials from other countries were his dinner guests. He never let his stomach blind his vision.

It is easy to think we are on this earth for the purpose of our own comfort, but it is not the case. This world teaches us that our goal is success and promotion. The goal of a Christian is NOT promotion!! Our goal

Paul had a similar attitude in **Philippians 3:8**, "Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ".

We have to understand, God did not make us for the things of this world—He made us to serve Him. He will use possessions and promotions in this world as a tool for His work, but we must never the GIFTS and PROSPERITY in place of the GIVER!!

**Conclusion:** Are you able to stay little in the leadership that God has graciously given to you? Are you using your job, your church, and your family to promote Christ and serve others?

We all need to ask God to search us. Nehemiah did. Look at **verse 19**, "Think upon me, my God, for good, according to all that I have done for this people."

Wow, Nehemiah had integrity. He called on God to look upon him and think upon him. He had a clear conscience. Are you using your gifts and promotion and success for God's glory. It is easier to keep your integrity in adversity than advancement. Let us ask God for grace to handle promotion!