

## Leadership

The concept of leadership comes up from time to time. I think the most common place to hear this term is in professional sports. Perhaps someone considered a super-star athlete stops to help another get off of the floor. Or maybe a professional ball player religiously shows up for every game an hour earlier than his teammates and stays later. This athlete is considered to be showing leadership by example – by showing that he will do anything it takes to be just a little better than the rest.

Another place we hear about leadership is in politics. However, this is not a good place to go to define this. Most often one side will say a politician is showing leadership when he or she goes against his party or popular will. The other side will call the same politician weak or capitulating. Being able to gauge political leadership requires time, much more time than our modern day news cycle allows. An elected leader's decisions need to have time to set in, often many years, before the outcomes can be known and we can see whether they were right, wrong, or just lucky.

One of the best places to see examples of leadership, both good and bad, is the Bible. Today, I want to explore a couple of places where we can learn from the WORD what it means to be a leader. The first place to look is Nehemiah 4. The Jews, those of Israel who came out of Babylon to rebuild Jerusalem, have started the work of rebuilding the wall around the city. In the modern western world, we do not appreciate walled cities at all. But in those days, it was the first thing they had to do to rebuild. They had to establish a security barrier from both their enemies and from wild beasts which would free up the bulk of the people to work on rebuilding houses, businesses, the greater infrastructure (because Jerusalem did have some plumbing) and the temple. Until the wall went up, they were incredibly vulnerable to attack.

Now it came about that when Sanballat heard that we were rebuilding the wall, he became furious and very angry and mocked the Jews. He spoke in the presence of his brothers and the wealthy men of Samaria and said, "What are these feeble Jews doing? Are they going to restore it for themselves? Can they offer sacrifices? Can they finish in a day? Can they revive the stones from the dusty rubble even the burned ones?" Now Tobiah the Ammonite was near him and he said, "Even what they are building--if a fox should jump on it, he would break their stone wall down!" Neh 4:1-3

Keep in mind that Israel and Judah were tasked to destroy their neighbors and were a warring people prior to their exile and first destruction. While we read their plight and feel sorry, their neighbors, whom the Israelites, routinely put to the sword were glad to see Israel and Judah destroyed. We're going to hear what King David did to the Ammonites later, so this mocking had a whole lot of history to it.

After asking God to curse those who mock the rebuilding, the following verse is written:

Neh 4:6 So we built the wall and the whole wall was joined together to half its height, for the people had a mind to work.

The mocking had the opposite effect. The people were not demoralized but were motivated. There are a lot of motivating factors at work here. The people did not want to return to Babylon so they had no place to go. They realized they were very vulnerable as well. They likely wanted a barrier between them and their detractors. They also knew their mission was ordained from the Most High, so they likely had incredible confidence in the face of adversity.

Now when Sanballat, Tobiah, the Arabs, the Ammonites and the Ashdodites heard that the repair of the walls of Jerusalem went on, and that the breaches began to be closed, they were very angry. All of them conspired together to come and fight against Jerusalem and to cause a disturbance in it. But we prayed to our God, and because of them we set

up a guard against them day and night. Thus in Judah it was said, "The strength of the burden bearers is failing, Yet there is much rubbish; And we ourselves are unable To rebuild the wall." Our enemies said, "They will not know or see until we come among them, kill them and put a stop to the work." When the Jews who lived near them came and told us ten times, "They will come up against us from every place where you may turn," then I stationed men in the lowest parts of the space behind the wall, the exposed places, and I stationed the people in families with their swords, spears and bows. When I saw their fear, I rose and spoke to the nobles, the officials and the rest of the people: "Do not be afraid of them; remember the Lord who is great and awesome, and fight for your brothers, your sons, your daughters, your wives and your houses." Neh 4:7-14

Nehemiah makes some common sense decisions. They didn't have enough people to muster an army AND rebuild the wall. They had to provide their security while rebuilding, so further down it says that they all worked with one hand while holding the spear in the other and that the dedicated builders worked with their sword on their hips. This is a difficult situation. Imagine having to build a wall with stones while wearing a three foot long sword weighing around five pounds. That would be a drag! Imagine having to carry the stones for the wall with one hand while carrying a spear in the other! But the best decision here comes in verse 20

Neh 4:20 "At whatever place you hear the sound of the trumpet, rally to us there. Our God will fight for us."

He tells them that even though they are spread thin, they are not alone. He KNOWS they aren't alone. So he gives them the confidence that the entire nation of refugees will converge wherever the trumpet is sounded. If there is an attack, they will "circle the wagons" so to speak and fight together because there is strength in numbers. And he adds in the God is on their side because He surely is!

Chapter four is a lesson in how Nehemiah handles foreign policy and defense. Israel was the sworn enemy of everybody in that region and they had a long history of pummeling their neighbors. There was no sense in negotiating with their neighbors and their only choice was to build that wall and be united in the case of an attack. In chapter five we see how Nehemiah handles domestic policy.

Now there was a great outcry of the people and of their wives against their Jewish brothers. For there were those who said, "We, our sons and our daughters are many; therefore let us get grain that we may eat and live." There were others who said, "We are mortgaging our fields, our vineyards and our houses that we might get grain because of the famine." Also there were those who said, "We have borrowed money for the king's tax on our fields and our vineyards. "Now our flesh is like the flesh of our brothers, our children like their children. Yet behold, we are forcing our sons and our daughters to be slaves, and some of our daughters are forced into bondage already, and we are helpless because our fields and vineyards belong to others." Neh 5:1-5

The people are struggling and it is understandable. They have to put all their own affairs on hold in order to build the wall. The common defense has to come before personal gain or even attending to the health and well-being of their children. Consequently, there are wolves in their midst. There are men who left Babylon with some wealth and they are taking advantage of the situation by charging interest to their brethren. They are making their brethren mortgage their land before they even have a chance to plow their land. These people, hardly educated in our modern sense of the word, already know that being in debt is being a slave – even being in debt to their own countrymen. What does Nehemiah say?

Neh 5:6 Then I was very angry when I had heard their outcry and these words.

He's angry. Very angry. You see, it is OK to get mad or outraged. It's not supposed to happen a lot, but when there is iniquity in the assembly, it is completely acceptable and perhaps even required. The people need to see dark lines and know when they cross it, they have done a bad thing.

I consulted with myself and contended with the nobles and the rulers and said to them, "You are exacting usury, each from his brother!" Therefore, I held a great assembly against them. I said to them, "We according to our ability have redeemed our Jewish brothers who were sold to the nations; now would you even sell your brothers that they may be sold to us?" Then they were silent and could not find a word to say. Again I said, "The thing which you are doing is not good; should you not walk in the fear of our God because of the reproach of the nations, our enemies? "And likewise I, my brothers and my servants are lending them money and grain. Please, let us leave off this usury. "Please, give back to them this very day their fields, their vineyards, their olive groves and their houses, also the hundredth part of the money and of the grain, the new wine and the oil that you are exacting from them." Then they said, "We will give it back and will require nothing from them; we will do exactly as you say." So I called the priests and took an oath from them that they would do according to this promise. I also shook out the front of my garment and said, "Thus may God shake out every man from his house and from his possessions who does not fulfill this promise; even thus may he be shaken out and emptied." And all the assembly said, "Amen!" And they praised the LORD. Then the people did according to this promise. Neh 5:7-13

Nehemiah consults with the noblemen and they ask those who have charged the interest to give everything back plus one percent. He shames those who took advantage of the situation and even points out that he and his colleagues are lending money and grain to those who need it without interest. He makes the offenders swear an oath and then finishes off with a curse on those who do not follow the agreement.

These actions show great leadership because Nehemiah had to face down those with wealth. After the wall is built and the city gets down to normal business, these men of means might decide to turn their power against Nehemiah and depose him. But Nehemiah sees the larger picture, that charging your brother interest is wrong and will demoralize the builders, so he makes the correct decision without regard for future consequences.

The end of Nehemiah is one of the all time best examples of leadership in history. Nehemiah is the governor of this region, appointed to this office by the king of Babylon. As such, he and his council were afforded much in the way of luxury. They were well within their rights to live an easy life as overseers and not get their hands dirty at all. Instead, Nehemiah used the “all hands on deck” approach. Nehemiah himself worked on that wall. So did his servants and his council. And they did not eat “the governor’s allowance” but had just enough to keep them strong to work. This is how it should be. People who are in high political office who are to serve the people need to live like the people especially in hard times. The famous quote attributed to Marie Antoinette “let them eat cake” illustrates the opposite of this principle. When told that her people were starving, Marie Antoinette supposedly said “then let them eat cake”. She was a princess who was so removed from the actual plight of her people that she had no clue what life was like outside the palace. Nehemiah, however, lived outside the palace. He worked alongside the people. He championed the overall welfare of the people and knew how they were getting along because he refused the finer things of life until the people were secure in their own places. He would have fought right alongside them in battle had they been attacked. This is leadership by example and likely served to build immense confidence among the people

Now we will take a look at an example of very bad leadership and it comes from King David.

2Sa 11:1 Then it happened in the spring, at the time when kings go out to battle, that David sent Joab and his servants with him and all Israel, and they destroyed the sons of Ammon and besieged Rabbah. But David stayed at Jerusalem.

Remember how I mentioned the Ammonites earlier? Well, here is why those people hated Israel. God commanded the Israelites to destroy specific people and they did so. So, when they came back from the exile, the Ammonites knew exactly who they were and there were likely not happy at all to see them rebuilding that city.

The king is supposed to go out to war with the troops. The verse even says so. In the spring when kings go out to battle... but David stayed behind. That was a very bad move.

Now when evening came David arose from his bed and walked around on the roof of the king's house, and from the roof he saw a woman bathing; and the woman was very beautiful in appearance. So David sent and inquired about the woman. And one said, "Is this not Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite?" 2 Samuel 11:2-3

All the able bodied men were off to war, David stayed behind, and this lead to temptation. David had very little to do with the men off fighting and he was supposed to be with them. So he goes onto the roof of his house and engages in some voyeurism that he should not have. David even had a ridiculous amount of wives and concubines he could have used to satiate his desires but he decided to window shop. And his servants tell him the truth, this lady is married. David ignores this, sends for the woman, commits adultery with her, and then she gets pregnant. It is very interesting, too, that she observed the law about purification after having sex out of marriage. Talk about putting lipstick on a pig. But she gets pregnant and David is now officially busted. He's caught. The men are off at war, ALL of them, and

everybody knows he sent for this gal to come to his house and now she is pregnant. How does he decide to fix it? More treachery:

Then David sent to Joab, saying, "Send me Uriah the Hittite." So Joab sent Uriah to David. When Uriah came to him, David asked concerning the welfare of Joab and the people and the state of the war. Then David said to Uriah, "Go down to your house, and wash your feet." And Uriah went out of the king's house, and a present from the king was sent out after him. Uriah slept at the door of the king's house with all the servants of his lord, and did not go down to his house. Now when they told David, saying, "Uriah did not go down to his house," David said to Uriah, "Have you not come from a journey? Why did you not go down to your house?" Uriah said to David, "The ark and Israel and Judah are staying in temporary shelters, and my lord Joab and the servants of my lord are camping in the open field. Shall I then go to my house to eat and to drink and to lie with my wife? By your life and the life of your soul, I will not do this thing." 2 Sam 11:6-11

David tries to cover it up by recalling Uriah from the battle. David commands Uriah to go take it easy and have a night in his home with his wife, hoping that the two will have relations and then the treachery can be covered up. But Uriah was an upright man who refused to sleep in his own home while his comrades were sleeping in the field. This must have burned David to the core. Uriah was far more righteous than David and his actions illustrated that David was home snug in the palace while the troops were in danger separated from their wives and children. Uriah swore in the name of the king that he would not specifically lie with his wife. David must have been furious. He's caught and there is nothing he can do about it. So, he takes the next step in treachery, he gets Uriah drunk and forces him to eat a feast and then sends him to his home. But Uriah, even in a drunken state, would not betray his brethren. David then moves the ante up to 1<sup>st</sup> degree murder and even orders his commander to perform the deed:

Now in the morning David wrote a letter to Joab and sent it by the hand of Uriah. He had written in the letter, saying, "Place Uriah in the front line of the fiercest battle and withdraw from him, so that he may be struck down and die." 2 Sam 11:14-15

David sends Uriah back to the battle holding the very letter in his hand that seals his death. This is as low as it gets. David doesn't go to the battle but sends the men of war, he sleeps with this guy's wife, and when the guy refuses the comforts of home, David kills him with an order. He even knew that Uriah was a righteous man because he wouldn't read the letter on the journey back. This is really, really, bad.

When Joab sends word back to David that the deed is done and that it didn't just cost Uriah his life but others as well, David replies:

2Sa 11:25 Then David said to the messenger, "Thus you shall say to Joab, 'Do not let this thing displease you, for the sword devours one as well as another; make your battle against the city stronger and overthrow it'; and so encourage him."

David actually told the messenger to tell Joab that life is cheap and one more death is really insignificant in the grander scheme. This is just horrible. David showed incredibly bad leadership repeatedly in this story. He did not go to battle with the troops and allowed himself the opportunity to be tempted. He gave in to the temptation and then tried to hide his treachery through even more sin. Uriah was a great example of leadership. He refused the comforts of home because his friends were still in harm's way. Uriah's wife, she did not show leadership at all. There is nothing here to indicate she refused the king's advances at all. One can even speculate why she was bathing in broad daylight like that. Her husband was ready to die rather than enjoy creature comforts but she slept with the king. Lovely. It's just a bad exchange all around and illustrates the difficulties that a life of privilege can have.

Of course, the greatest leader of all time is Yeshua. The Son of God left heaven and came down here to live among us and be tempted in all

ways. He did not get tempted at all. He bore our iniquities. He dined with sinners and was chided for it by those who were of privilege. He healed the sick, blind, and lame when the religious leaders of the day would not even notice those people. And His reward for His faithfulness was to be given power over everything by His Father. Yeshua is our ultimate good example. So, as we conduct our lives in this world, let us keep in mind how to be a good leader and how not to be a bad leader.