

THE CHARACTERISTICS OF A SPIRITUAL LEADER

(Based On the Book of Nehemiah)

by

Dr. Rod Rogers

A SPIRITUAL LEADER...

I. HAS A PASSION FOR GOD'S WORK (1:1-4).

A. Nehemiah had a passion for God's work.

1. 1:1-3, Nehemiah learns about the conditions of God's special city, Jerusalem.

2. 1:4, We see Nehemiah's passionate concern for God's work and God's people in Jerusalem (he wept, mourned, fasted and prayed for days!)

B. I'm convinced that most great works for God begin with a passion for a specific work in the heart of a child of God.

ILLUSTRATION: "The most persuasive person in the world is the man who has a fanatical belief in an idea, a product or a service. The one common denominator of all great men in history is that they believed in what they were doing." (John Maxwell, Leadership Materials Notebook, p. VIII-9)

ILLUSTRATION: "People are persuaded more by the depth of your conviction than by the height of your logic—more by your own enthusiasm than any proof you can offer." (John Maxwell, Leadership Materials, p. VIII-8)

ILLUSTRATION: If you want to be successful as a leader it is this simple:
Know what you are doing
Love what you are doing
Believe what you are doing

II. SETS CLEAR GOALS FOR GOD'S WORK (2:5,17).

A. Nehemiah had a clear goal: to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem (2:5,17)

B. Effective leaders set clear goals.

ILLUSTRATION: J.C. Penny expressed it beautifully when he said, "Give me a stock clerk with a goal and I will give you a man who will make history. Give me a man without a goal, and I will give you a stock clerk." (John Maxwell, Leadership Materials, p. III-4)

ILLUSTRATION: "Authority and leadership are not determined by our outer position, but by our inner purpose and direction." (A Vice President of IBM)

III. PRAYS EARNESTLY FOR GOD'S WORK (1:4-11; 2:4; 4:4,5,9; 6:9,14).

A. Nehemiah's example of earnest prayer is powerful throughout the entire book.

1. 1:4, He prayed earnestly (wept, mourned, fasted), because he was genuinely heart broken over the need of God's people and the reproach to the glory of God due to the condition of Jerusalem.

2. 1: 5-11, He prayed with great feeling, humility, and with a focus on the character of God, for God to grant him compassion before the king.

3. 2:4, He sent a "prayer-gram" to God when the king asked for Nehemiah's request.

4. 4:4,5, He prayed for God to punish his enemies.

5. 4:9, He prayed when he heard about a plan by his enemies to attack Jerusalem.

6. 6:9, He prayed for strength when his enemies were trying to frighten him with a slanderous letter to the king.

7. 6:14, He prayed for God to remember the evil men who were trying to frighten him.

B. Prayer was a major part of Nehemiah's ministry life. He was constantly praying about everything and in every kind of circumstance. No ministry leader can ever be or do all that God wants him to unless he is a man devoted to prayer!

IV. TAKES THE INITIATIVE TO DO GOD'S WORK (1:11b; 2:1-5,17,18).

A. Nehemiah was a man of great personal initiative.

1. 1:11b, In his prayer he prayed for success with the king. It is obvious that he was already getting ready to act on his passion.

2. 2:1-5, He then took the initiative to ask the king for permission to go to Jerusalem to rebuild the walls.

3. 2:17,18, When he arrived in Jerusalem, he initiated the building of the walls.

B. Nehemiah's passion was God-given, and his prayer was earnest, but if he hadn't taken the initiative, if he hadn't been a self-starter, he would never have accomplished anything. A leader must be a self-starter.

ILLUSTRATION: “There are three kinds of people in the world—those who don’t know what’s happening, those who watch what’s happening, and those who make things happen.” (Nicholas Murray Butler, former president of Columbia University, The Making of a Christian Leader, Ted Engstrom, p. 20)

ILLUSTRATION: Will Rogers said, "Even if you're on the right track, you'll get run over if you just sit there."

V. TAKES RISKS FOR GOD'S WORK (2:1-3; 4:8-23; 6:1-14).

A. Nehemiah took many great risks to achieve his dream of rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem.

1. 2:1-3, It was against the law to appear sad in the king's presence. Yet Nehemiah deliberately chose to let his anguish and grief over Jerusalem show to the king in order to gain an opportunity to request permission to go to Jerusalem.

2. 4:8-23, Nehemiah’s life was in constant danger from the threat of enemy attack on Jerusalem.

3. 6:1-4, His life was in danger from a conspiracy to kill him.

4. 6:5-14, His life was in danger from a slanderous letter sent to the king.

B. Nehemiah risked his life over and over again in the pursuit of his passion! He was willing to die in his attempt to do a great work for God!

C. Although we may not often be called upon to risk our lives, in order to make a great impact for God, any Christian leader will have to take risks. Every leader will always face the risk of criticism, rejection and failure.

ILLUSTRATION: Zig Ziglar has pointed out that "To get the fruit of life you have to go out on a limb, because the fruit is always out on a limb!" There's no achievement without risk!

ILLUSTRATION: Several years ago I came up with a thought that I teach to others and that I frequently repeat to encourage myself to take risks: *“It is better to do the right thing imperfectly, than not to do the right thing at all.”* For example, it is better to imperfectly confront someone caught in sin, than not to confront them at all. It is better to witness imperfectly, than not to witness at all. It is better to teach your children God’s word imperfectly, than not to try to teach them at all. It is better to lead a small group imperfectly, than not to lead a small group at all.

VI. MAKES PLANS TO ACCOMPLISH GOD'S WORK (2:4-16; 3:1-32).

A. Nehemiah was a planner.

1. 2:4-9, Nehemiah obviously had been forming a plan as he prayed for the city of Jerusalem. When the king asked him what he wanted, he pulled out his list!

2. 2:1-16, When he got to Jerusalem, he took his time to inspect the situation and make a plan before he announced his intentions to the leaders.

3. Chapter 3 records in detail the way the work of rebuilding the walls was organized as a result of Nehemiah's planning.

B. One reason Nehemiah was successful as a leader is that he made plans to accomplish God's work.

C. It is never enough to have a passion, to pray, to take the initiative and to take a risk unless you also make a plan!

ILLUSTRATION: Proper prior planning prevents pitifully poor performance.

ILLUSTRATION: For years one of my leadership mottoes has been, "God blesses good strategy."

ILLUSTRATION: Mike Murdock observed rightly, "Failure to prepare is preparing to fail."

VII. MOTIVATES OTHERS TO HELP ACCOMPLISH GOD'S WORK (2:17-18).

A. 2:17,18, Having made his plans, Nehemiah inspired the troops to help him with the work.

B. We know he motivated the people well because we read in 2:18b, "Then they said, 'Let us arise and build.' So they put their hands to the good work."

C. From Nehemiah's example I find...

Four key steps in motivating people for God's work:

1. Describe the need (2:17).

Nehemiah defined the need: Jerusalem was desolate, its gates were burned by fire and the people were a reproach.

2. Issue a challenge (2:17).

Nehemiah was willing to stand up and announce his willingness to rebuild the walls. And he didn't say, "You need to build." He said, "Let's build!" He issued a challenge to the people to join him in rebuilding the walls.

ILLUSTRATION: The boss says, "Go"--the leader says, "Let's go."

3. Specify the reward (2:17).

a. Nehemiah specified the reward of rebuilding the walls--no more reproach!

b. People tend to get and stay motivated when they see the value to them of the things they are asked to do.

c. People don't do anything unless they want to! So you have to show them the benefit they will receive by helping you.

4. Stimulate their faith (2:18a).

a. Nehemiah told the people how God had already been providing for the work so as to stimulate their faith in God.

b. A leader's success is largely determined by his ability to motivate others. If he can't recruit others to help him with his work for God, a man will never become an effective leader for God!

VIII. OVERCOMES OPPOSITION TO GOD'S WORK (2:10,19,20; 4:1-5,7-23; 5:1-13).

Nehemiah faced all kinds of opposition to his God-given mission.

1. Disapproval (2:10).

Sanballat and Tobiah were very displeased. Anytime a leader sets out to do anything for God someone will disapprove.

Nehemiah's Response: He Ignored it.

2. Criticism (2:19,20; 4:1-5).

Nehemiah's enemies mocked and despised him and his fellow workers and accused them of rebelling against the king.

Nehemiah's Response: He answered his critics firmly and trusted in God.

3. Physical Threats (4:7-23).

His enemies threatened to physically attack Jerusalem.

Nehemiah's Response: He prayed and prepared a defense.

ILLUSTRATION: Oliver Cromwell, "Trust in God and keep your [gun] powder dry."

4. Internal sin and strife (5:1-13).

Some of the Jewish people were taking advantage of their poorer countrymen by charging them high interest on loans and taking them as slaves.

Nehemiah's Response: He confronted the sin directly and firmly.

a. A leader cannot allow people in a church, or in a ministry in the church, to fight each other and sin against one another without taking direct action to bring repentance. An effective ministry leader expects opposition, doesn't worry about it, but solves the problems as they arise.

ILLUSTRATION: Harold Stephens wrote, "There is a great difference between worry and concern. A worried person sees a problem, and a concerned person solves a problem."

b. Any leader who attempts to do anything for God will face opposition. To be successful he must be willing to face and overcome all opposition. And he must be willing to persist until he succeeds.

ILLUSTRATION: "Napoleon Hill, author of Think and Grow Rich, studied the lives of more than 500 of the most successful men in America and got to know many of them personally. He found that one indispensable ingredient, the common element in their success, was that it was only won by people who overcame incredible obstacles and great discouragement." (John Maxwell, Leadership Materials, p. 1-16)

ILLUSTRATION: Winston Churchill once gave a speech in which all he said was, "Never give up. Never give up. Never give up."

IX. TRUSTS GOD FOR SUCCESS IN GOD'S WORK (2:12,20; 4:14).

A. Nehemiah believed two key things:

1. That God was leading him (2:12).

He knew God was putting his dream of rebuilding the wall into his heart. He had faith that God was giving him the ideas he had.

2. That God would make him successful (2:20; 4:14).

2:20, He had faith that God would give him success.

4:14, He trusted in the greatness and awesome nature of his God.

B. To be an impact-player for God you must believe two things:

1. God is leading you.

Make sure you are hearing from God in your passion and your dreams. Trust Him not to mislead you. Don't make a move until you are sure you are hearing from God. You must believe that you have a calling from God.

2. God will give you success.

An effective leader must trust God to bless him and make him successful in the venture God has put on his heart. This trust will give him courage and energy to overcome obstacles and opposition.

X. IS WILLING TO SACRIFICE TO ACCOMPLISH GOD'S WORK (2:1,2; 4:23; 5:14-19).

A. Nehemiah made several great sacrifices in pursuing his dream.

1. 2:1,2, He gave up his comfortable task of serving the king as cup bearer.

2. 4:23, He slept in his clothes while helping build and guard Jerusalem.

3. 5:14-19, He did not take advantage of the governor's food allowance and fed many of his leaders at his own cost.

B. To be successful in the ministry to which God has called you, you must be willing to pay the price of success.

ILLUSTRATION: "Every new level of growth requires a new level of sacrifice" (John Maxwell).

ILLUSTRATION: "The real qualities of leadership are to be found in those who are willing to suffer for the sake of objectives great enough to demand their wholehearted obedience." (J. Oswald Sanders, Spiritual Leadership, p. 17)

XI. HAS A SERVANT'S HEART IN DOING GOD'S WORK (5:10,14-19).

A. Nehemiah was a classic servant-leader.

1. 5:10, He lent the poor people money and grain.

2. 5:14-19, He didn't take advantage of his rights as governor because of his concern for the burdens the people were living under.

B. Nehemiah was not in leadership for what he could get out of it, but for what he could give through it.

XII. ENCOURAGES HIS PEOPLE AS THEY ACCOMPLISH GOD'S WORK (4:14,20; 8:9,10).

A. Nehemiah frequently encouraged his people.

1. 4:14, When he saw their fear of their enemies because of the threat of attack, he encouraged the people not to be afraid, but to trust in God who would fight for them.

2. 4:20, When preparing the people to fight if attacked, Nehemiah encouraged them with the words, "Our God will fight for us."

3. 8:9,10, When the people were mourning and weeping over their sin, he encouraged them to rejoice in the Lord.

B. A great leader encourages his people when they become frightened, unduly depressed or otherwise discouraged. I believe a great leader will also constantly be encouraging his people to prevent them from getting discouraged!

C. Praise increases energy.

ILLUSTRATION: "Dr. Henry Goddard of New Jersey tested school children with a device that measures fatigue. When a child was told, 'You're doing fine, John' his energy ratings shot up." (Maxwell, Leadership Materials, p. II-6)

ILLUSTRATION: "'There are high spots in all of our lives,' wrote George Matthew Adams, and most of them have come about through encouragement from someone else. I don't care how great, how famous or successful a man or woman may be, each hungers for applause." (Maxwell, Leadership Materials, p. II-7)

ILLUSTRATION: "Encouragement is oxygen to the soul. Good work can never be expected from a worker without encouragement. No one ever lived without it." (Maxwell, Leadership Materials, p. II-7)

XIII. TEACHES PEOPLE GOD'S WORD AS HE DOES GOD'S WORK (8:1-18; 9:1-3; 13:1-3).

A. With Ezra's help Nehemiah taught the people God's law.

1. 8:1-18, Ezra read the law to the people.
2. 9:1-3, The leaders read God's law to the people.
3. 13:1-3, Once again the leaders read God's word to the people.

B. Because Nehemiah made sure the people were taught the word of God, he was able to lead them into spiritual revival and to conform their lives to God's word.

C. Any truly powerful spiritual leader must base his ministry on the teaching of God's word.

XIV. CONFRONTS SIN WHICH IS HINDERING GOD'S WORK (5:6-13; 13:4-31).

A. Nehemiah was very aggressive in confronting sin in the lives of his people!

1. 5:6-13, He became very angry and "contended" (5:7) with the nobles because of their usury and because they had enslaved their fellow Jews.

2. 13:4-31, He "reprimanded" (13:11) the officials for forsaking God's house, "admonished" (13:15) the people not to sell food on the Sabbath day, "reprimanded" (13:17) the nobles of Judah for profaning the Sabbath day, and "contended with, cursed, struck, and pulled out the hair" (13:25) of the people who had married foreign women!

B. Many Christian leaders are far too reluctant to confront their followers and fellow leaders over sin in their lives. Nehemiah shows us that a righteous anger over sin and a direct confrontation is a godly response when God's commands are violated.

XV. LOOKS TO GOD FOR HIS REWARD FOR DOING GOD'S WORK (5:19; 13:14,31).

A. Three times in his book Nehemiah asks God to reward him for his leadership of God's people.

1. 5:19, After describing his sacrificial and generous service to God's burdened people in Jerusalem Nehemiah recorded this prayer, "Remember me, O my God, for good, according to all that I have done for this people."

2. 13:14, After cleansing the temple and restoring its worship Nehemiah prayed, "Remember me for this, O my God, and do not blot out my loyal deeds which I have performed for the house of my God and its services."

3. 13:31, After recording how he had brought about reforms with regard to keeping the Sabbath day and mixed marriages Nehemiah concludes his book with this prayer, "Remember me, O my God, for good."

B. A true spiritual leader will never receive the full reward for his faithful service from the people he leads. But Nehemiah teaches us to ask God to remember our sacrifice and service and to look forward to receiving from Him all that we have earned.

XVI. RECOGNIZES AND ACKNOWLEDGES GOD AS THE SOURCE OF HIS SUCCESS IN GOD'S WORK (2:8; 6:15,16).

A. Twice Nehemiah stated that he was successful in his pursuit of God's will because of God's blessing.

1. 2:8, After recording how the king gave him all that he had requested for the trip to Jerusalem, Nehemiah concluded, "And the king granted them to me because the good hand of my God was on me."

2. 6:15,16, After Nehemiah and the people had achieved the incredible goal of rebuilding the walls in fifty-two days, he wrote that their enemies "recognized that this work had been accomplished with the help of our God."

B. A true spiritual leader, after accomplishing great things for God, will always recognize and publicly acknowledge that his success was due to God's good hand.

XVII. CELEBRATES VICTORIES WHEN SUCCESSFUL IN GOD'S WORK (12:27-43).

A. In organizing the dedication of the walls Nehemiah led the people in a joyful celebration of all that God had accomplished through them (12:27-43).

B. I believe a great leader understands the need for people to celebrate their successes and to spend time thanking and praising God for His blessing on their endeavors.

XVIII. IS SELF-CONFIDENT IN DOING GOD'S WORK (The entire book of Nehemiah).

A. While Nehemiah recognized and expressed his dependence on God for success, He clearly did not suffer from an inferiority complex or apologize for using his

authority. Everywhere you turn in Nehemiah's story you see a strong, confident, take charge kind of man moving assertively, even aggressively, to accomplish his mission.

B. Nehemiah obviously believed in his ability to make the trip to Jerusalem, motivate the people, direct the building of the walls and govern the Jews. I am impressed with his boldness in confronting the Jewish leaders when they were in sin. Nehemiah wasn't looking to other people for his sense of worth. He didn't need people to like him. He obviously knew his own strengths, understood what God had called him to do, and believed that, with God's blessing, he could do great things for God.

C. You must have and project self-confidence in order to be an effective leader.

ILLUSTRATION: "Morale is faith in the man at the top." (Eugene Bertin, Leadership Materials, Maxwell, p. II-3)

ILLUSTRATION: "Leadership only functions on the basis of confidence. People are not about to follow anyone in whom they do not have confidence." (Maxwell, Leadership Materials, p. II-3)

D. For the Christian, self-confidence is Christ-confidence.

1. Romans 12:3, "For through the grace given to me I say to every man among you not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think; but to think so as to have sound judgment, as God has allotted to each a measure of faith."
2. Philippians 4:13; "I can do all things through Him who strengthens me."

ILLUSTRATION: "...people love to be led by one who knows where he is going and who inspires confidence. They follow almost without question the man who shows himself wise and strong, who adheres to what he believes." (J. Oswald Sanders, Spiritual Leadership, p. 16)

ILLUSTRATION: "You cannot consistently perform in a manner that is inconsistent with the way you see yourself...Self-confidence is the first great requisite to great undertakings." (Maxwell, Leadership Materials, p. II-1)

ILLUSTRATION: "No one on the face of this earth can make you feel inferior without your permission." (Maxwell, Leadership Materials, p. II-2)

E. Even when you don't feel confident, for the sake of your people and your leadership, fake it!!

F. The best way to build self-confidence is to keep on doing the things that you feel inadequate to do. A series of successful experiences will build your self-confidence.

G. Confidence comes from practice:

For lack of training
 They lack knowledge,
For lack of knowledge
 They lack confidence,
For lack of confidence
 They lack victory.

--Julius Caesar (Maxwell, Leadership Materials, p. 11-2)

H. An effective leader refuses to let his fears paralyze him from taking necessary action.

II Timothy 1:6,7, "And for this reason I remind you to kindle afresh the gift of God which is in you through the laying on of my hands. For God has not given us a spirit of timidity [cowardice], but of power and love and discipline [sound mind]."

XIX. LEADS BY EXAMPLE AS HE DOES GOD'S WORK (The entire book of Nehemiah).

A. Nehemiah is a wonderful example of what it looks like to lead by example!

He modeled commitment to his vision by giving up his role with the king in Susa and taking on the risky job of traveling to Jerusalem to rebuild its walls. In all the risks he took while they were building, he modeled courage and faith in God. He led the people to build the walls by getting his own hands dirty in the building project. He was an example of compassion and self-sacrifice in his financial loans to the poor and the non-use of his rights to material income as governor. In every aspect of his life and ministry, Nehemiah was the living personification of his vision.

B. The principle is simple and powerful: you can't lead others to do what you are unwilling to do yourself. A truly great leader will never ask his followers to do something he himself is not doing.

XX. AN EFFECTIVE LEADER IS WILLING TO MAKE DECISIONS (The entire book of Nehemiah).

Throughout his book Nehemiah showed a willingness and ability to make decisions.

ILLUSTRATION: "When all the facts are in, swift and clear decision is a mark of true leadership. Leaders will resist the temptation to procrastinate in reaching a decision, and they will not vacillate after it has been made." (The Making of a Christian Leader, Ted Engstrom, p. 20)

ILLUSTRATION: “Prayer is not a substitute for action which flows from decision.” (Tom Wolfe, quoted in The Making of a Christian Leader, Ted Engstrom, p. 20)

ILLUSTRATION: “In most decisions the difficult part is not in knowing what we ought to do; it is in being willing to pay the price involved.” (Spiritual Leadership, J. Oswald Sanders, p. 54)

ILLUSTRATION: “Over and over again I have discovered that the impossible situation is really a difficult decision waiting to be made.” (Robert Schuller)

About Rod Rogers

I am a former pastor with over 30 years' experience. Currently I serve the Lord and His church as a stewardship consultant. I help pastors lead their churches into obedient stewardship and biblical giving.

I have led church capital campaigns as a pastor and consultant since the mid-nineties, serving churches nationwide. I am also the creator of an annual giving program used by over 3,000 churches in twenty-five countries with weekly giving increases from 20 to over 100 percent.

My first experience with church capital campaigns came in the early nineties when, as a pastor, I hired a capital campaign consultant to help me lead my church in three back-to-back, three-year capital campaigns. *These campaigns transformed my church spiritually and financially and opened my eyes to the power of biblical stewardship teaching for making disciples.*

Abundant Giving Church Capital Campaign: <https://abundantgiving.com/>

Annual Stewardship Program and Resources:

<https://www.annualstewardship.com/>

I am the author of several Christian books including:

Pastor Driven Stewardship: 10 Steps to Lead Your Church to Biblical Giving

<https://www.annualstewardship.com/ebook/>

Giving That Pleases God: 36 Stewardship Devotions.

<http://www.amazon.com/dp/B09D8WWZBR>

Pray With Faith: Charles Spurgeon's Encouraging Insights on Prayer

<http://www.amazon.com/dp/B012EJ3HX6>

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