LESSON 8

CORNERSTONECONNECTIONS

NOVEMBER23 2024

Scripture Story: Nehemiah 2–4.
Commentary: *Prophets and Kings*, chapter 53.

risky witness



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flashlight

"Nehemiah's whole soul was in the enterprise he had undertaken. His hope, his energy, his enthusiasm, his determination, were contagious, inspiring others with the same high courage and lofty purpose. Each man became a Nehemiah in his turn and helped to make stronger the heart and hand of his neighbor" (*Prophets and Kings*, p. 638).

keytext

"The God of heaven Himself will prosper us; therefore we His servants will arise and build."

(Nehemiah 2:20, NKJV)

what do you think?

Some leaders are "visionaries" and some leaders are "doers" but a rare few have to some degree the capacity to do both. Choose the approach to which you tend to ascribe and why you think it might be good. Discuss the strengths and weaknesses of both.

- "Work hard at what you know is right and God will accompany your efforts."

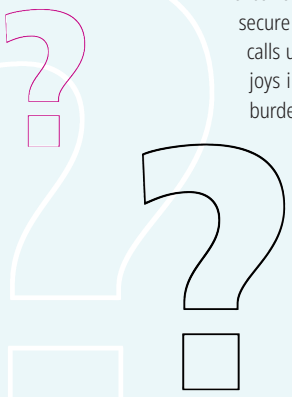
OR

- "Pray first and wait for God to guide you in what you should do."

did you know?

Everyone put on your happy face!" Did you know that in ancient times you could be executed for appearing depressed in the presence of the king? Monarchs must appear to inspire joy and happiness in their subjects, no matter what! Or else!

Fortunately, our King is secure in Himself and, thus, calls us to bring not only our joys into His presence but our burdens and sorrows as well!



INTO THE STORY

"I was cupbearer to the king."

"In the month of Nisan in the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes, when wine was brought for him, I took the wine and gave it to the king. I had not been sad in his presence before, so the king asked me, 'Why does your face look so sad when you are not ill? This can be nothing but sadness of heart.'

"I was very much afraid, but I said to the king, 'May the king live forever! Why should my face not look sad when the city where my ancestors are buried lies in ruins, and its gates have been destroyed by fire?'

"The king said to me, 'What is it you want?'

"Then I prayed to the God of heaven, and I answered the king, 'If it pleases the king and if your servant has found favor in his sight, let him send me to the city in Judah where my ancestors are buried so that I can rebuild it.'

"Then the king, with the queen sitting beside him, asked me, 'How long will your journey take, and when will you get back?' It pleased the king to send me; so I set a time.

"I also said to him, 'If it pleases the king, may I have letters to the governors of Trans-Euphrates, so that they will provide me safe-conduct until I arrive in Judah? And may I have a letter to Asaph, keeper of the royal park, so he will give me timber to make beams for the gates of the citadel by the temple and for the city wall and for the residence I will occupy?' And because the gracious hand of my God was on me, the king granted my requests. So I went to the governors of Trans-Euphrates and gave them the king's letters. The king had also sent army officers and cavalry with me.

"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.

"I went to Jerusalem, and after staying there three days I set out during the night with a few others. I had not told anyone what my God had put in my heart to do for Jerusalem. There were no mounts with me except the one I was riding on."

(Nehemiah 1:11; 2:1-12, NIV)

OUT OF THE STORY

Read the story and *underline* the key words and phrases in the passage, and share why you think they are important.

Circle the people mentioned in this passage and try to identify who they are and their contribution to the story.

Read the text again carefully and note the personality and character qualities about Nehemiah that emerge in this story.

How does the interaction between the king and Nehemiah portray the relationship between kings and servants? To what do you attribute the goodwill or support of the king?

What passages indicate how passionate Nehemiah is about this rebuilding project? Why is this so important to Nehemiah? Why does it seem like he begins this journey alone?

What is the message God has for you in this story?

What leadership qualities do you see in Nehemiah?

What wise steps does Nehemiah follow as he undertakes this project?

punch lines

"Lead me, LORD, in your righteousness because of my enemies—make your way straight before me" **(Psalm 5:8, NIV).**

"Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like someone who looks at his face in a mirror and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like" **(James 1:22-24, NIV).**

"Guide me in your truth and teach me, for you are God my Savior, and my hope is in you all day long" **(Psalm 25:5, NIV).**

"I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you with my loving eye on you" **(Psalm 32:8, NIV).**

"Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight" **(Proverbs 3:5, 6, NIV).**

further insight

"Amidst great discouragement, Nehemiah made God his trust, his sure defense. And He who was the support of His servant then has been the dependence of His people in every age."—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, p. 645

"In every crisis His people may confidently declare, 'If God be for us, who can be against us?'"—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, p. 645

Sabbath

Read 1 Peter 1:13.

We are all equal in Christ, who by one Spirit has bonded us into one fellowship with Him and with one another; we are to serve and be served without partiality or reservation. Through the revelation of Jesus Christ in the Scriptures we share the same faith and hope, and reach out in one witness to all" (Fundamental Belief 14, Unity in the Body of Christ).

As you respond to the *What Do You Think?* section of this week's lesson, consider what Peter says in his letter to the church: "Therefore, with minds that are alert and fully sober, set your hope on the grace to be brought to you when Jesus Christ is revealed at his coming" (1 Peter 1:13, NIV). How does this passage capture Nehemiah's ability to *see* what needs to be done and find the right way to *do* the work God has set before him?

Sunday

Read Nehemiah 1:2-6.

Read the passage in the *Into the Story* section of the student lesson and respond to the study questions provided. Take time to imagine the scenes and sounds of the king's courtroom. How important do you think Nehemiah was to the king and what characteristics did he have that the king might have valued? What do you think is the message God has for you in this story? Is there a particular area of your life in which you need to be like Nehemiah and take prayerful action?

Monday

Read Nehemiah 2:20.

Consider the message in the *Key Text* in this week's lesson. Where do you think Nehemiah found the courage and authority to declare these words to his opponents? Was it the letters from the king that gave him a sense of authority, or was it his relationship with God? Who we are is not always what we do or who we are related to, but there are times when our role has influence. In what sphere of influence do you have the power to make a difference today?

Tuesday

Read Nehemiah 2:11, 12.

In this week's *Flashlight* quote from *Prophets and Kings*, Ellen White draws attention to the single-minded passion of Nehemiah. Clearly, Nehemiah became committed to a cause that inspired others to embrace it with enthusiasm. This leadership skill is born out of a genuine conviction and goes well beyond just a good idea. Nehemiah was willing to risk his life for this cause. What cause do you believe in so much that you might be willing to risk your life for it?

Wednesday

Read Proverbs 3:5, 6.

Read the *Punch Lines* in this week's lesson and identify the one passage that is speaking to you today. Why do you think this Scripture pricks your heart now and how does it speak to your life? Is there a particular verse in the *Punch Lines* that you want to share with a friend?

Thursday

Read Colossians 1:3, 4.

Whom do you know that has seen a cause through to fruition? Take time to write a note of affirmation and encouragement to someone in your church or community who has worked hard to see an idea through to reality. Share with them how they are like Nehemiah and what a contribution this makes to others and say a prayer that the same spirit will grow in you.

Friday

Read Proverbs 11:14.

As you reflect on this part of Nehemiah's story, what fears or questions do you have about your own abilities that inhibit your willingness to take risks for God? How do the stories of all the believers who have gone before you that took risks for God's cause give you courage? What would a similar course in your own journey look like?

this week's reading*

Prophets and Kings, chapter 53.

**Royalty and Ruin* is a special adaptation of *Prophets and Kings*, created for you by the Ellen G. White Estate and Pacific Press®. Get more information about it by going to www.cornerstoneconnections.net and clicking on "Conflict of the Ages series." By following the weekly reading plan, you will read at least one book of the Conflict of the Ages series each year.