

MANual Lessons from Nehemiah

The book of Nehemiah is full of examples in leadership. In this next lesson from The MANual, we will see how one person can accomplish great things when they talk and walk with God. Nehemiah saw a problem and was distressed by what he heard. But instead of complaining, he took action and God used him to accomplish one of the Bible's seemingly impossible tasks: rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem.

About the Book of Nehemiah

Nehemiah is the last of the historical books of the Old Testament (along with Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1 & 2 Samuel, 1 & 2 Kings, 1 & 2 Chronicles, and Ezra). Each book reminds us about trusting in God's promises and recommitting ourselves to right living.

The likely author is Nehemiah since much of the book is written in the first person. However, another source, my New Living Translation Study Bible, says that Ezra, the educated scribe and priest, probably served as editor. It was written approximately 445-432 B.C. during the return of the third group of exiles to Jerusalem. As we learned in the MANual Lessons from Ezra, Zerubbabel led the first group to return in 538 B.C., followed by Ezra with the second wave 70 years later in 458 B.C. Now, Nehemiah returns thirteen years later with a third group that will rebuild the walls of the city (chapters 1-7). Once done, Nehemiah calls on Ezra to renew the faith of the people (chapters 8-13).

Concerns for Jerusalem

Chapter 1 opens with Nehemiah hearing from fellow Jews that the walls and gates of Jerusalem were in disrepair; leaving the city and its people defenseless and vulnerable. It was disturbing news that became Nehemiah's burden. He broke down and wept. He mourned and fasted. Nehemiah prayed for days. He

was concerned about the fate of Jerusalem. He confessed to God that he had sinned and that his people had stopped obeying His commands, decrees, and regulations. After his long lamentation and deep prayer, Nehemiah needed to return to Jerusalem.



Men of God: Nehemiah

Nehemiah was a common man in a unique position with little power but great influence. He was secure and successful as the Persian king Artaxerxes' cup-bearer since he ensured the safety and quality of the king's food and drink. On one hand, Nehemiah enjoyed the perks of his position and tasted the finest beverages in the land. On the other hand, his next drink could be his last if someone poisoned the wine to kill the king.

Nothing is known about Nehemiah's youth or background but we know he was a man of God with high character and prayed often. He was a brilliant planner, organizer, and motivator. He was persistent and also knew his limitations but did not let those stop him. Nehemiah knew he could accomplish great things with God's help. He led people on a near-impossible mission and produced unbelievable results by building a world-class wall within an extremely tight deadline.

- What responsibility and perks do you have as a cup-bearer to those you serve?
- Are you a good planner and well-organized? Or do your limitations (or lack of trust in God) cause you to procrastinate? Be honest.

Rebuilding the City Wall

Seeing his sadness, Artaxerxes grants Nehemiah's request for letters to the governors of the regions to ensure his safe travels. Nehemiah also asked for a letter to Asaph, the manager of the king's forest, instructing him to provide timber for the city's new gates.

Nehemiah arrived in Jerusalem quietly at night and spent several days carefully inspecting and assessing the damage to the city. Following thoughtful prayer and observation, he confidently presented his plan to the leaders. Nehemiah had a vision and shared it with enthusiasm, which inspired Jerusalem's people to rebuild the walls.

Chapter 3 describes the assignment for each section, gate, or tower on the wall, and who would work to rebuild each. There was early opposition from Sanballat, the governor of Samaria to the north, and Tobiah, the Ammonite governing an area east of the Jordan River, who hoped to take over the city. Nehemiah prayed for protection from these mockers and the work continued.

Chapter 5 explains how Nehemiah defends the oppressed working Jews, who suffered at the hands of the rich countrymen. He told the rich to take care of the poor since it was essential to following God's commands.

Later in chapter 6, Geshem, the Arab from the region south of Judah, join Sanballat and Tobiah with additional ploys to disrupt the rebuilding project. They attacked Nehemiah's character using false reports (verses 5–6); deceived him with prophets (verses 7–13). Despite the threats, the workers took just 52 days to complete the wall (verse 15).

Conflict

The more important the task, the greater the conflict you may face. Nehemiah discovered this firsthand as he tried to rebuild Jerusalem. Follow his lead to pray hard and pray often when facing opposition. Keep your focus on the task at hand. Don't be swayed by people who slander or taunt you. Obey God and give everything you have to the project.

- What "wall" in your life needs rebuilding? What keeps you from tackling this daunting task?
- How will you minimize conflicts in that rebuilding project?

In chapter 7, Nehemiah assigns each family the task of protecting the section next to their home and registers the people (which follows the pattern of earlier books since the genealogical records were critical to proving they were descendants of Abraham).

Reforming the People

Chapter 8 opens as Nehemiah, now the governor, instructs his religious leader, Ezra to read from the book of Moses. Ezra taught God's laws at the Water Gate on October 8 and the people wept openly because they realized how far they had strayed from God's commands. But Ezra told them to be filled with joy on that sacred day. They were to celebrate throughout the Feast of Shelters that started October 9. The people openly confessed and publicly worshipped the Lord. on October 31 (Yes, the Bible is that specific on dates! These dates survived in Persian records and relate accurately to our modern calendar and the Hebrew calendar).

Chapter 9 concludes with a long summary of Israel's history to remind the people of their great heritage and of God's promises to deliver them. In chapter 10, the people make a "solemn promise" and put in writing to not marry non-Jewish neighbors, to not buy goods on the Sabbath day, and to let their land rest every seventh year. They also promised to pay a tax for the care of the Temple, supply wood for burnt offerings, and give from their best grains, fruits, wine, and oils.



Joy and Strength

Hearing or reading God's Word can be convicting –like a double-edged sword that cuts to the bone to expose our sin. It may cause us to feel guilty or even sadness for having turned away from God, just like the people in Jerusalem. Remorse can be good though because it leads to repentance. Just don't let it lead to regrets or despair about your failures. God wants you to come back to Him by remembering all His blessings upon your life. He will fill you with joy and lift your heart so you have strength for the long haul.

- Read Nehemiah 8:10. Name a time when you noticed that "the joy of the Lord is your strength."
 - Reflect on the ways God cared for you, protected you, and blessed you.
 - In what ways do you find joy in the big tasks without feeling overwhelmed?
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The People Occupy Jerusalem

Chapter 11 is an account of Nehemiah's actions to repopulate Jerusalem. After Ezra renews the covenant by reading to the people, Nehemiah establishes policies for occupying Jerusalem. The city wall was rebuilt so Nehemiah drafted families to move there, including some priests, Levites, temple servants, and the descendants of Solomon's servants who lived in the towns around Judah.

The latter part of Chapter 12 tells the story of the dedication of the wall of Jerusalem which was postponed until the city was repopulated. The city is now beautiful and filled with people. It was time to celebrate with joy, praise, and singing.

Chapter 13 outlines Nehemiah's final reforms. He prayed that God would remember him and not blot out what Nehemiah did so faithfully during those years rebuilding the city. Nehemiah knew these actions were important to restore the people. He only wanted to please God.



God Buddy Focus

Nehemiah accomplished a huge task against incredible odds and opposition. The accusations against him were empty and false. Yet, Nehemiah's life story provides us many examples of effective leadership:

1. have a clear purpose and keep evaluating it in light of God's will.
2. be straightforward and honest about what you need.
3. live above reproach.

Nehemiah prayed constantly and derived power and wisdom from

his relationship with God. Everything he did glorified God. His leadership skills show us how we can overcome opposition to build great things.

This week in a group:

1. Review the MANual Lessons from Joshua, Judges, Ruth, Samuel, Kings, Chronicles, Ezra, and this one from Nehemiah. Which lesson most resonates with you?
2. What spiritual practices help you live with joy in the Lord?
3. What does it mean to “live above reproach” as a leader?

Next, we learn about beauty, brains and bravery from the book of Esther.