

# HAND ME ANOTHER BRICK

## Timeless Lessons on Leadership

### STUDY TWO

## A Leader—From the Knees Up!

*Nehemiah 1:1–11*

*What's your first response when a need comes to your attention? Nehemiah didn't look to his own strength. When he heard the problem, he fell to his knees and said, "Lord, this is too big for anyone on this earth. I bring it before You."*

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

**O**N any journey, the first steps are most important. They set the pace for the whole expedition, and they establish the direction of travel.

If you lose your way later in the journey, you usually can get back on track with relative ease. If, however, you take a wrong step at the trip's outset, you can set yourself on an entirely wrong trajectory. Follow that path long enough, and you will likely wind up totally lost.

Few want to find themselves in a situation like that. And *no one* wants to be the one responsible for bringing others down the wrong path.

Sadly, this exact scenario happens with leaders all over the world every day. They step foot into a new project or a new role, prepared to drive the expedition with brilliant creativity, contagious enthusiasm, and unshakeable ambition. Even though they use these essential attributes as a map, they still find themselves—and their followers—lost at some point on the journey, with no sense of direction and without any destination in sight. Why does this happen so often?



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Because these leaders missed a crucial first step.

This *Searching the Scriptures* study will walk with Nehemiah on the first steps of his leadership journey in order to discern how every leader should begin any expedition. This essential step set Nehemiah and the people of Israel on the right trajectory—toward God and His purpose.



### **PREPARE YOUR HEART**

For Nehemiah, prayer wasn't just essential at the outset of his journey. Rather, he communed with God every step of the way. As you prepare to step into Nehemiah's sandals, say this prayer.

*Father, I want to be faithful to You in every aspect of my life: my relationships, my work, my church. Help me keep on the path following You, and by Your grace, use me to lead others on the same path. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.*



### **TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES**

For seven decades, the people of Israel lived in foreign lands under the rule of pagan kingdoms. Because they lived as exiles from the land of promise, many assumed God had given up on His people. Yet God is not as fickle as His children. He always keeps His promises, and He pledged He would rescue His people from their oppressors.

God fulfilled this promise through the leadership of three great men of prayer: Zerubbabel, Ezra, and Nehemiah. God softened the heart of the Persian kings who allowed each to lead one company of Israelites back to Jerusalem. Each leader had a particular purpose:

- Zerubbabel: To rebuild the temple (*Ezra 1–6*)
- Ezra: To reestablish the law (*Ezra 7–10*)
- Nehemiah: To rebuild the wall (*Nehemiah 1–7*)

Rebuilding a city's wall is no small task, but Nehemiah achieved his goal by taking one step at a time. In *Nehemiah 1:1–11*, we witness how he began.



## **A Leader—From the Knees Up!**

*Nehemiah 1:1–11*



### **Observation: Nehemiah's First Step**

Studying a passage of Scripture is like constructing a wall. If you neglect to follow the blueprint, the wall will fail to stand the test of time. Pastor Chuck Swindoll's *Searching the Scriptures* method is like a blueprint for Bible study. If you prayerfully follow each step, you will build theological truths and practical applications that always remain valuable for followers of Jesus.<sup>1</sup>

The first step is observation. As you read *Nehemiah 1:1–11*, resist the urge to inquire about the text's meaning or application. For now, simply read the passage and ask yourself, "What do the words say?"

Nehemiah's story begins with him serving in the fortress of Susa as King Artaxerxes' cupbearer (*Nehemiah 1:11*). One day, his brother Hanani arrived to share news about what was happening with the exiles who had already returned to Jerusalem. According to *1:3*, what report did Hanani share with Nehemiah?

According to *1:4*, how did Nehemiah react to this news?



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### STUDY TWO

SEARCHING  
THE  
SCRIPTURES

STUDY

## A Leader—From the Knees Up!

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Nehemiah was concerned for both the walls of Jerusalem and the people within the walls. And the first thing he did was *pray*. According to *Nehemiah 1:6–7*, how does Nehemiah begin his prayer? What stands out to you about Nehemiah's words?

*I want you to notice within verses 6 and 7 the words “we” and “I.” The confession was not because someone else had failed. The confession had to do with Nehemiah's part in the problem. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll*

In *1:8*, Nehemiah reveals why he began his prayer the way he did. What did the people of Israel do that caused them to end up in exile? According to *1:9*, what is the solution to this problem?

Finally, in *1:11*, Nehemiah concludes with His request. In what way did Nehemiah boldly expect God to intervene in this circumstance?



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S02  
4

## **A Leader—From the Knees Up!**

*Nehemiah 1:1–11*

Nehemiah was preparing himself to lead his people back to Jerusalem, but He recognized that He ultimately was a follower of the one true God. Before he did *anything*, he wanted to make sure he was in lockstep with the King of Creation.



### **Interpretation: Start with Prayer**

Observation is the foundation of Bible study upon which interpretation stands. In this phase, we move from asking what the text *says* to considering what it *means*. An essential goal of interpretation is to develop timeless theological truths based on the meaning of the passage.

The very last line of this passage may seem out of place: “In those days I was the king’s cup-bearer” (*Nehemiah 1:11*). But this isn’t a throwaway detail. In fact, serving as a cupbearer was a high honor. Use your Bible study tools to learn more about this prestigious position. For a free online resource, look at [Constable’s Notes](#) available at [netbible.com](#).

What kind of influence did a cupbearer have in an ancient empire? How could Nehemiah have misused this influence to try to take control of his circumstances? What does Nehemiah’s choice to go to God first reveal about his character?

Using the following template, write two or three timeless truths based on this passage: *A godly leader always starts with prayer because . . .*



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*Nehemiah 1:1–11*

*Nehemiah went first to God with the need. It says that he prayed. Not only did he recognize the need clearly, not only did he become involved in the problem personally, but he also brought it before God in prayer. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll*



### **Correlation: Praying along the Way**

Correlation buttresses interpretation by comparing the main passage with other portions of Scripture that discuss similar themes.

As the apostle Paul reached the end of his life, he passed the torch of ministry to his protégé Timothy, and every generation of Christian leaders is wise to heed Paul's word about the centrality of prayer. According to [1 Timothy 2:1](#), for whom are Christian leaders to pray? And how should they pray for them?

According to [2:3–6](#), why is prayer so essential for a Christian leader? How is Paul's concern instructive to Christian leaders today?



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Every lesson from Paul on Christian living is demonstrated in the life of Jesus. And for Jesus, prayer was essential. What does [Luke 5:16](#) reveal about Jesus' prayer life? How often did He pray? Where did He pray? What can Christians today glean from Jesus' example?

For Jesus and Paul alike, prayer was the fuel that propelled their ministry. It kept their focus on God and kept them moving toward His purpose of bringing the good news of salvation to a desperate world. And it will do the same for Christian leaders today.

### **Application: The Prayer Compass**

In the last step of Pastor Chuck's Bible-study method, you build personal and practical applications based on the timeless truths from interpretation. *It's the finishing touch!*

Good leaders will know intuitively when they have taken a wrong step at some point in the journey. They usually can just *feel* that something isn't right. Pastor Chuck applies [Nehemiah 1:1–11](#) by showing how prayer, like a compass, will point wayward leaders back in the right direction:

- Are you feeling lost? *Prayer clears our vision for God's purpose.*
- Are you feeling anxious? *Prayer quiets our hearts for clear direction.*
- Are you feeling impatient? *Prayer makes us wait for God's timing.*
- Are you feeling hesitant? *Prayer activates our faith for decisive action.*

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## Timeless Lessons on Leadership

### STUDY TWO

SEARCHING  
THE  
SCRIPTURES

STUDY

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Do you sense any of these feelings drawing your eyes away from God and His purpose? You might even feel like you're too far gone to get back on track. But with God, it's never too late. How can prayer act as your personal compass and reorient you toward God?

Nehemiah recognized that he didn't just *have* problems, but he was *part* of the problem too. Has your heart been hardened toward the Holy Spirit's gently guiding hand? What would it look like for you to follow Him as you simultaneously lead others?

As Nehemiah prepared for His leadership journey, he saw a rocky road ahead. Broken walls, sinful hearts, stubborn people, and a mighty king stood in his path. Yet these hindrances didn't cause Nehemiah to try to take command or turn back. Instead, he followed God and moved forward on his knees—not only for that first step but for every step of the way.

So don't lose sight of God. Don't leave the path. Don't grasp for control. Take that first step of faith and *pray*.



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S02  
8



# HAND ME ANOTHER BRICK

## Timeless Lessons on Leadership

### STUDY TWO

SEARCHING  
THE  
SCRIPTURES

STUDY

## A Leader—From the Knees Up!

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### A FINAL PRAYER

As you conclude your study, write your own prayer. Are you preparing to start a new journey? A new job, a new project, a new school, a new relationship, a new home? Give it over to God, and ask Him to lead you, step-by-step.

#### ENDNOTE

1. To learn about Pastor Chuck Swindoll's *Searching the Scriptures* method of Bible study, go to the web page, "[How to Study the Bible for Yourself](#)."



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S02  
9