

HAND ME ANOTHER BRICK

Timeless Lessons on Leadership

STUDY FOUR

Getting off Dead Center

Nehemiah 2:11–20

You know, you can have your eyes in various places in the Christian life. You can have your eyes on some person or on yourself or on your circumstances. And it will not be long before you're disillusioned because people always fail. Or you can simply put your eyes on the Director. Though you have what you might call an insignificant part, you'll play in tune. You'll never miss your cue.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

LIKE a lake without water or a meal without food or a book without words, a leader without a following really is no leader at all.

Leadership is *always* relational. A leader's success is often measured based on how well he or she relates to others, serves others, influences others, and *motivates* others. Motivation fuels any team in its endeavors because no leader can accomplish anything of significance alone—be it balancing budgets, developing new ideas, exploring new opportunities . . . or building a wall.

Nehemiah set out to accomplish a mountain-sized task: to rebuild Jerusalem's walls. He knew he couldn't scale the mountain alone. He needed the help of his brothers and sisters—and they needed *motivation*.

How he motivated them in their godly work provides vital instructions for you as you seek to motivate those in your circle of influence. This *Searching the Scriptures* study identifies one simple action that, when carried out, will make all the difference in your leadership pursuits.



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PREPARE YOUR HEART

Yes, your relationship with God should be your top priority. Yes, you should always feel motivated to grow closer to Him. But, no, it doesn't always feel that way, nor is it always easy. Yet we choose to follow Jesus even when it isn't easy.

God makes Himself present through His Word. He's with you now. He's listening. Say this prayer before you turn to Nehemiah:

Father, I want to glorify You in everything I do. That is my true motivation. Through my study of Your Word today, shape me into the God-honoring person You created me to be, and use me to motivate others in their walk with You. In Jesus' name, amen.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

If you listen carefully to the book of Nehemiah, it will sound much like a symphonic concerto in three distinct movements, each representing one of Nehemiah's three distinct roles:

1. Nehemiah the cupbearer (*Nehemiah 1:1–2:10*)
2. Nehemiah the builder (*2:11–6:19*)
3. Nehemiah the governor (*7:1–13:31*)

Of a concerto's three movements, the second is often the most passionate and impressive. The same is true of Nehemiah. In *Nehemiah 2:11–20*, his passion for God and his impressive leadership skills sing, stirring the hearts of the people of Jerusalem to join the effort of rebuilding the city's walls.



Observation: Nehemiah Motivates the People

Begin your study by reading *Nehemiah 2:11–20*—slowly, carefully, deliberately. For now, the goal is simply to see what the text says.¹ As you work through these verses, pay careful attention to how Nehemiah, as a leader, relates to others—both friends and foes.



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Private Investigation of the Scene—Nehemiah 2:11–16

After receiving King Artaxerxes' permission to leave Persia, Nehemiah arrived in Jerusalem, trading his cup for a builder's plumb line and square (*Nehemiah 2:11*). According to *Nehemiah 2:13–15*, what was the first thing Nehemiah did when he arrived in Jerusalem? Take note of what time of the day he did this.

According to *2:12, 16*, who knew about what Nehemiah was doing? Or, more importantly, who *didn't* know?

In the time of quietness, when there was no activity, God was putting into his heart what Nehemiah should be receiving. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Open Discussion of the Need—Nehemiah 2:17–18

After Nehemiah's time alone, he was ready to face the public. According to *Nehemiah 2:17*, what observation did the builder make and what *request* did he ask?

Observation: _____

Request: _____



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Nehemiah didn't let the request ring out in hollow silence. Instead, he played a tune of persuasion for the people. What reason did he offer in *Nehemiah 2:18a* for why the people should heed his request? According to *2:18b*, how did the people respond to Nehemiah's plea?

Direct Criticism of the Plan—Nehemiah 2:19–20

According to *Nehemiah 2:19*, how did Sanballat the Horonite, Tobiah the Ammonite official, and Geshem the Arab react when they heard about Nehemiah's plans? What did they assume was Nehemiah's motivation?

How did Nehemiah respond in *2:20* to this discordant criticism? What did his response reveal to be his *true* motivation?



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You see, when you cast blame and criticism, you squelch motivation. When you identify with the problem, you encourage motivation! —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Interpretation: The Makings of Motivation

When he entered Jerusalem, Nehemiah didn't go straight to the town square and shout a pep talk. Rather, his approach was slower and more measured. Why is it significant that Nehemiah began this process alone? How did this time alone prepare him to motivate his people and to endure criticism from his detractors?

Nehemiah didn't have to offer any kind of *external* incentive or reward to motivate the people to join him in the wall-rebuilding efforts. Why, then, did the people want to join Nehemiah? In other words, what motivated them *internally*? How did Nehemiah cultivate this internal motivation?



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Using the following template, write two or three timeless truths based on this passage: *A godly leader motivates others by . . . because . . .*

Nehemiah simply says, “Do you see the ruins? We’re in a terrible strait. Let’s rebuild this wall.” And the remarkable thing is, they said, “Let’s build.” Why? Because under God, Nehemiah, uniquely gifted as a leader, was able to appeal to the intrinsic part of their zeal. He was able to push the button that said, “Let’s Go!” —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Correlation: Gospel-Centered Motivation

The church in Philippi desperately needed some motivation. The apostle Paul, their beloved friend, was locked in prison, and they were afraid he would die . . . and with him, the powerful spreading of the good news of Jesus. So Paul wrote a letter to encourage the Philippians that God would continue to use them, even if Paul died. In other words, he wrote to motivate them!

Read in *Philippians 1:3–7* how Paul began his letter. In what ways did Paul motivate the Philippian believers through these words? How did Paul cultivate internal motivation rather than simply offering external rewards?



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Jesus offered wise advice for Christians like the Philippians who struggled with discouragement. According to Jesus' words in *John 15:18–21*, how should Christians react when they face opposition from the world? What does this opposition reveal about those who receive the attacks? How does this information offer motivation?

Both internal and external factors can deflate a group's motivation. So how can a godly leader boost his or her team's morale? Nehemiah modeled one simple solution.

Application: The True Source of Motivation

Whether you're alone, in public, or under attack, following this principle will foster motivation within yourself and others:

Keep your eyes on God.

Pastor Chuck Swindoll identifies three consequences of letting your eye drift away from God and His purpose:

- Take your eyes off God when you're alone, and you'll feel lonely or afraid.
- Take your eyes off God when you're in public, and you'll fall into pride or discouragement.
- Take your eyes off God when you're under attack, and you'll want to give up or bite back.



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Are you having any of these feelings today? How will keeping your focus on God allow you to find true motivation to serve Him and His purpose?

For Nehemiah, the process of motivation began with a time in deliberate solitude. He carefully surveyed his circumstances and purposefully planned his response. How can God use your time alone to prepare you to motivate and lead others? Write down some practical steps you can take.

Who in your life needs some motivation today? A fellow employee? A member of your church? A close friend? A dear family member? How can you offer motivation to this person—*true* motivation that encourages the person from within?



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A skilled archer always maintains locked-in focus. If his eyes stray from dead-center—even the slightest bit—his aim will drift, and he *will* miss the shot. Nehemiah fixed his gaze on God and never looked away, and his example motivated others to do the same. Together, they found great success because they partnered with God in what He was already doing.

And is there really any motivation better than working with God to bless the world?



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, I don't want to lose sight of You and Your purpose—not only for me but for the whole world. Help me stay focused on what really matters. When I'm alone, give me integrity. When I'm in public, give me humility. When I'm under attack, give me endurance. As I grow in Christlikeness, help me motivate others by my example. In Jesus' name I pray, amen.

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](#)."

