

HAND ME ANOTHER BRICK

Timeless Lessons on Leadership

STUDY EIGHT

How to Handle a Promotion

Nehemiah 5:14–19

As soon as Nehemiah accepted that appointment as governor, he was hit with the same four major areas of testing that come with every promotion: privileges, policies, projects, and—as always—people. What was the key to his success in surviving this onslaught? In one word: integrity.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

YOU'RE climbing the vertical face of a rocky mountainside. Slowly, you ascend, one careful move at a time. As you firmly set your feet and push yourself up, your hands clutch onto newly discovered crevices in the stone. Looking up toward the sun, you take a deep breath. Then you reset your feet and repeat . . . again and again.

After some time, you look down to find that the once massive trees now appear small. The sensation of accomplishment floods your heart. Fresh adrenaline pumps through your veins and propels with fresh energy. *What a thrill!*

Yet, with each move, sweat makes your fingertips grow slicker, and fatigue makes your legs feel shakier. The ever-increasing tug of gravity pulls harder and harder. You realize the higher you go, the easier it is to fall . . . and the *harder* you'll hit the ground if you do.



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The journey of a rock climber is much like that of a leader. The ascent into leadership is *thrilling*. Yet as a leader's influence increases, so do the temptations that can result in moral, personal, or organizational failure. And when a leader slips, the consequences of that hard fall can damage not only the life of the leader but also the lives of everyone he or she touches.

The best climbers spend countless hours training and preparing to avoid the fall so they can stand tall and unscathed at the mountain's summit. Leaders should prepare well too. This *Searching the Scriptures* study acts as a part of your training regimen to prepare you to keep moving even when the weight of responsibilities feels too heavy to bear.



PREPARE YOUR HEART

Even the most noble leaders will find their grip slipping when they face the temptations that come with the perks of increased influence, such as fame, wealth, and power. Yet only those whose hearts are aligned with God's will be able to use their influence as a force for good. Say this prayer to draw close to Him before you open His Word today:

Father, I have seen countless men and women fall to the temptations that come with leadership. Yet I want to live a life that glorifies you—regardless of the scope of my influence. Through my study of the Scriptures today, cultivate in me a heart of integrity so I can serve You and others well. In Jesus' name, amen.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

Nehemiah 5 is a study in contrast:

- Good people skills vs. poor people skills
- Generous money management vs. greedy money management
- Strong leadership vs. weak leadership



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Nehemiah 5:14–19

Read *Nehemiah 5:1–5* and summarize what made Nehemiah’s builders so upset. How did the wealthy and powerful Jews misuse their influence?

The clout of leadership proved too great for these affluent Israelites, and the temptation to abuse their privileges caused them to fall and subjected them to Nehemiah’s firm rebuke.

In *5:14–19*, Nehemiah’s actions support his words. When this chief builder was promoted to governor of Jerusalem, he displayed how a leader can resist the temptation of increased influence and so use the benefits of leadership to serve others.



Observation: Nehemiah’s Promotion

Pastor Chuck Swindoll always begins his study of Scripture with observation. He reads a passage slowly and repeatedly until he can identify every detail of the passage. Read *Nehemiah 5:14–19* in this way. As you read, ask yourself one central question: “What does this passage say?”¹

What promotion did Nehemiah receive in *5:14a*?



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SEARCHING
THE
SCRIPTURES

STUDY

How to Handle a Promotion

Nehemiah 5:14–19

According to [Nehemiah 5:14b](#), what perk did someone in Nehemiah's position generally receive? What did Nehemiah do with this benefit?

According to [5:15](#), how did the previous people who held Nehemiah's position act?

According to [5:16–17](#), how did Nehemiah's behavior differ from that of his predecessors?



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Nehemiah 5:14–19

At two points in this passage, Nehemiah identified *why* he acted the way he did in light of his promotion. What reasons did he offer in *Nehemiah 5:15* and *5:18*?

Nowhere does Nehemiah's heart reveal itself more beautifully than in the midst of his promotion. His relationship to the Lord was so unshaken that, when temptation arrived, Nehemiah said, "How could I do that? My walk with God will be affected. I dare not yield."
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Interpretation: The Threat of Influence

What specific kinds of temptations assaulted Nehemiah as soon as he received his promotion to governor? How have these kinds of temptations historically affected leaders or those of great influence?



How to Handle a Promotion

Nehemiah 5:14–19

Why did Nehemiah prefer to feed his Jewish brothers and sisters using food from his own stores rather than the food stipend offered by the Persian government? What does this behavior reveal about his faith in God? For some help wrestling with these questions, look at [Constable's Notes](#) available online for free at [netbible.org](#).

Using the following template, write two or three timeless truths based on this passage: *A godly leader handles increased influence well by . . . because*

The promotion of every child of God occurs because of the Lord's goodness. Promotion doesn't come because a person is in the right place at the right time. Promotion doesn't come because a person is gifted or educated or experienced or well-traveled or well-trained. Promotion comes primarily because God in His goodness says to you, "I wish to exalt you at this time." —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



How to Handle a Promotion

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Correlation: Humble Exaltation

When it came to topics of leadership and influence, Jesus' teaching contradicted the common "wisdom" of the world. According to [Matthew 20:25](#), how do the rulers of the world tend to use their influence?

Conversely, how are citizens of the kingdom of heaven to use their influence, according to [20:26–27](#)? Why does this behavior seem counterintuitive? Why is it ultimately better?

How did the Jewish leaders of Nehemiah's day act like the rulers of the world Jesus described? By contrast, how did Nehemiah exemplify the values of the kingdom of heaven?



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Reflecting on the life of Jesus, the apostle Paul wrote in *Philippians 2:6–8*:

*Though he was God,
he did not think of equality with God
as something to cling to.
Instead, he gave up his divine privileges;
he took the humble position of a slave
and was born as a human being.
When he appeared in human form,
he humbled himself in obedience to God
and died a criminal's death on a cross.*

Jesus had all the influence imaginable, yet He forsook the privileges and humbled Himself. As a result, “God elevated him to the place of highest honor” (*Philippians 2:9*). And God will so exalt us when we use what He has given us to humbly serve others.

Application: The Products of Promotion

Based on his study of *Nehemiah 5:14–19*, Pastor Chuck identified four areas in which a leader or a person of great influence might be tempted to act in a self-serving manner rather than in a selfless, God-honoring way. Nehemiah showed integrity in his handling of each of these four realms of leadership.

1. Privileges. *Don't abuse them.*
2. Policies. *Don't neglect them.*
3. Projects. *Don't ignore them.*
4. People. *Don't forget them.*

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Nehemiah 5:14–19

Have you ever received a major promotion or some other kind of personal exaltation? In what ways did you see God working to offer this gift to you? And in what ways did you use your expanded influence to serve Him and His purposes?

In what ways do leaders in your cultural context tend to compromise their integrity and abuse the perks of their position? Have you ever felt tempted to misuse your influence in this way? What gospel-centered truth can you recall to yourself to help you resist such temptation?

Certain elements of leadership are simply unavoidable. A leader must work within the systems of his or her organization. A leader must stay on top of the role's responsibilities. A leader must maintain healthy relationships with every member of the team. Which areas of leadership do you tend to avoid? What would it look like for you to face these elements of your role in a Christlike manner?



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Nehemiah 5:14–19

Do you find yourself suspended on the mountain of influence today? Is the weight of temptation so great that you feel your fingers slipping? Don't let the fear of falling cause you to lose sight of God! By focusing your eyes on Him, your faith will bind a rope of integrity around your waist that will always hold you up.



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, I admit that the temptation to use the privileges of my influence to serve myself over others is great. During these moments, help me be like Nehemiah. Give me strength to use my influence as a force for good. Wrap the cord of integrity around me and never let it go. I pray these things in Jesus' name. 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](#)."

