

HAND ME ANOTHER BRICK

Timeless Lessons on Leadership

STUDY SIXTEEN

Taking Problems by the Throat

Nehemiah 13

My Christian friend, there may be convictions God has given you today. And if God has given you conviction in certain areas, you had best carry them out. You had best have the gristle that's necessary to say, "No, I will not do this!" or, "Yes, I will continue to do that!" There will always be individuals who will want to change your standard to fit theirs. I'm saying to you—the answer is to take the problem by the throat.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

THE book of Nehemiah is a masterclass on leadership. The book's main character demonstrates leadership skills at every turn of his journey: strategic foresight, relational savviness, financial integrity, bold determination.

Yet, more importantly, Nehemiah reveals the essential character qualities a godly leader must possess. Pastor Chuck Swindoll summarizes well these characteristics in the conclusion of his book on Nehemiah's leadership:

I think it is significant that the final scene in Nehemiah's book portrays him on his knees asking God for grace. He had fought hard for the right, but he had kept his heart soft before the Lord. What a magnificent model of leadership. He was a man of honesty, conviction, and devotion.¹



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Honesty. Conviction. Devotion. These are the kinds of qualities that will allow a Christian leader to make an impact—an *eternal* impact—for the good of others and for the glory of God. In the final pages of his namesake book, Nehemiah demonstrated these three attributes as he prayerfully confronted the most pervasive and sinister problem humanity has ever faced.

Sin.



PREPARE YOUR HEART

Say this prayer as you prepare to engage God through His Word today:

Father, I want to make a difference in this sin-saturated world. As I study the life of Nehemiah today, cultivate in my soul honesty, conviction, and devotion so I can serve You and others with all I am and all I have. In Jesus' name, amen.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

Prior to the events recorded in Nehemiah, this great leader of Israel served in Persia as a cupbearer to King Artaxerxes. When Nehemiah heard about the destroyed walls in Jerusalem, he felt God tugging on his heart, urging him to go to the land of his ancestors to help his people.

So Nehemiah received permission from the Persian king to depart for Jerusalem. During his time in the Promised Land, Nehemiah successfully reconstructed the walls of Jerusalem and reinstructed the people in the law of Moses. Because of the effort led by Nehemiah, both the city and the people within its walls were rededicated to God.

Now that Nehemiah's job was done, he returned to Persia to serve again under Artaxerxes (*Nehemiah 13:6*). Yet a few years later, when he returned to the city he once helped revive, he discovered that the people had torn down so much of what he had worked so hard to build up.



Observation: Confronting Jerusalem

During his return to Jerusalem, Nehemiah learned that the people had strayed off the course of obedience to God. In *Nehemiah 13*, the skilled leader confronted four issues in order to set the people's sights back on God. As you read this chapter, take note of the problems Nehemiah addressed. In the interpretation phase, we will consider why these actions were so detestable.²



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A Compromising Companionship—Nehemiah 13:4–9

According to *Nehemiah 13:4–5*, what did Eliashib the priest allow Tobiah to do?

According to *13:8–9*, how did Nehemiah respond to these circumstances?

A Financial Fiasco—Nehemiah 13:10–14

According to *Nehemiah 13:10*, in what ways were the people of Jerusalem mistreating the Levites?



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According to *Nehemiah 13:11–12*, how did Nehemiah respond to these circumstances?

A Secularized Sabbath—Nehemiah 13:15–22

According to *Nehemiah 13:15–16*, in what kinds of activities were the people of Jerusalem engaging on the Sabbath?

According to *13:17–22*, how did Nehemiah respond to these circumstances?



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A Domestic Disobedience—Nehemiah 13:23–31

According to *Nehemiah 13:23–24*, what did Nehemiah realize about the people of Judah and their children?

According to *13:25–29*, how did Nehemiah respond to these circumstances?

The book of Nehemiah concludes with the central figure saying, “Remember this in my favor, O my God” (*Nehemiah 13:31*). In fact, three other times in this chapter, Nehemiah requests God to “remember” these moments (*13:14, 22, 29*). Through these words, Nehemiah demonstrated his detestation of sin, his personal faithfulness to God, and his trust in God’s sovereign power.



Interpretation: Confronting Sin

You might read this passage and think, *Isn't Nehemiah overreacting?* These actions of the people of Jerusalem may seem insignificant, but they ultimately reveal a lack of faith in God.



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Using a Bible commentary, dig into the details of this passage until you unearth the reason Nehemiah reacted so intensely to each of these four problems, and state specifically why each action was sinful. Feel free to use *Constable's Notes*, which is available at netbible.org.

Using the following template, write two or three timeless truths based on this passage: *A godly leader should deal with sin in the community by . . . because . . .*

Nehemiah faced the sin in his community head-on. He dealt with sin severely. Yet he also worked toward permanent correction. And he always followed it up with prayer.
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Correlation: Confronting Hypocrisy

Like Nehemiah, Jesus cares deeply about the condition of the heart of His brothers and sisters. He wants them to face sin in the community head-on, but He wants people to assess their own actions before confronting the sin of others.



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What command did Jesus give in *Matthew 7:1*? What rationale did He offer for this command in *7:1–2*?

In *7:3–5*, Jesus further explained His previous command. What images did He use in His explanation? In your own words, summarize Jesus' point in these verses.

Sometimes, it feels difficult to identify the speck of wood—those small, subtle sins—in our own eyes. Thankfully, God has given the Holy Spirit to convict us of our sin. According to *2 Timothy 3:16*, what is the primary means the Holy Spirit uses to convict us of our sin?

It's remarkable that we don't always know what to get mad about! We get mad at the other guy. But we ought to get mad at ourselves—at our own sin. When we get angry at the sin of others, God says, "Wait a minute! Take that up with Me. Let's look at this thing from My viewpoint." —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



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Application: Confronting Problems with Grace and Truth

No community—non-Christian or Christian—will ever be totally free from combative friction caused by sin-driven selfishness. Thankfully, Nehemiah demonstrated three principles for how a Christian leader can serve a community fraught with this problem:

1. *Dealing with sin demands honest observation.* You can't solve a problem you can't define.
2. *Honest observation must be matched with fearless conviction.* The people of God must maintain a steady confidence in what they believe.
3. *Fearless conviction must be tempered with deep devotion.* Jesus came from the Father full of truth and grace (*John 1:14*).

Jesus taught us to correct our own sin before confronting the actions of others. Is there a selfish sin that you've allowed to fester in recent weeks? If so, develop an action plan based on the principles above that you can use to repair what's been damaged and to return to the right path.

As you prayerfully consider the communities to which you belong—your home, your neighborhood, your church, your workplace—are there any sins you sense the Holy Spirit is leading you to confront? What would it look like for you to address these concerns with grace and truth, with gentleness and courage, and with honesty and conviction?



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Nehemiah was a great leader—an *exemplary* leader. Yet he was still an imperfect human. When he left Jerusalem, the people returned to their sinful ways. Even after his fierce confrontation, Israel continued in its sinful way of life until the long-awaited Messiah finally arrived.

No human leader—no matter how skilled—can fully and decisively remedy the sin that controls each human heart. Only Jesus Christ can do that. So look to Jesus today as you trust Him to deal with the problem of sin—both in the present and in eternity. He is our Savior, our Lord, and our leader whom we follow on this journey from earth to heaven.



A FINAL PRAYER

Say this prayer from Pastor Chuck to close your time in God's Word today:

Father, amid the struggles and obstacles and anxieties of life, remind us that we cannot handle this on our own. This is Your work. So we turn to You, like Nehemiah did, and ask for courage, for conviction, for guts to address sin and then—by Your grace—to turn from it. Grant us victory we've not known before. We claim this today, and we trust You for the outcome. In the name of our Savior, Jesus, our Lord. Amen.

ENDNOTE

1. Charles R. Swindoll, *Hand Me Another Brick: Timeless Lessons on Leadership* (Nashville: W Publishing Group, 2006), 232.
2. 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](#)."

