

Connection to Nehemiah 1:1-4:23

The early chapters of the Book of Nehemiah contain the genesis of Nehemiah's awareness of the deplorable conditions in Jerusalem, his heartfelt compassion towards the people there, and his request of King Artaxerxes to return home to Jerusalem to rebuild the walls. In chapters 1-4 you see Nehemiah's closeness to God; his knowledge of God's Word; his willingness to be used by God to help the people; and his leadership skills, which enabled him to think, plan, and prepare to lead a group of people on the long journey to Israel. He truly was a godly, savvy leader.

Introduction/Opening

When was the last time you prepared a can of condensed soup? You remember the instructions: "Empty contents into saucepan. Add one full can of water. Stir occasionally. Heat. Serve." For many adults today, that's just too much preparation. They are opting for the single serving "Nuke and Go" variety of soups that come in microwavable containers. Stick those in the microwave, wait 60 seconds, and you can be on your way to enjoying a steaming bowl of soup.

Our culture's time crunch (sociologists say we are living "time-compressed" lives) and demand for minimal preparation can spill over into our spiritual lives as well. If we can't already do what God wants or learn it in a one-hour training session, we just won't bother. Who has time for that, anyway? But stepping up to serve the Lord often requires a precious commodity in our society – time and patient preparation. When we learn to prepare for service, we've taken a big step.

We must look for opportunities to serve God, and to invest the necessary time and energy into becoming the kinds of servants He would be proud of.

Outline

1. Be sensitive to the needs of others (Nehemiah 2:1-2a)
2. Overcome your fear (Nehemiah 2:2b-3)
3. Be ready to act (Nehemiah 2:4-5)
4. Count the cost (Nehemiah 2:6-8)
5. Experience God's grace (Nehemiah 2:9)

Conclusion

Nehemiah stepped up to the leadership plate at the very moment his people needed him the most. For months he has prayed about the plight of Jerusalem and its inhabitants, and determined in his heart that he was the one who could make a difference by going back to the city of his ancestors and leading the rebuilding efforts.

Nehemiah was sensitive to the needs of others, yet he overcame his fears in order to serve them and help them. His sad countenance before his king could have ended his life, but he did not let his own fears keep him from speaking up. Today, many of us need to overcome our fears in order to more fully serve the Lord and meet the needs of people both inside and outside the church. A fear of public speaking, the fear of failing, or some other legitimate fear may be keeping you from serving God, but it doesn't have to. Nehemiah overcame his fear, and so can you.

Wise leaders know it takes time and preparation to lead – there simply are no shortcuts. Leaders are forged in the day-to-day struggles of life. It took time for Nehemiah to consider his options, pray, and come up with a plan so that at the right moment, he could present it to his king for approval. Leadership is usually a “crockpot” issue, not a microwave one. It takes time to be developed into the leader we can be. Joseph is a good example of this. He was cast away by his brothers at age 17, sold into slavery, but did not rise to a position of leadership in Egypt until age 30. God prepared him to lead for 13 years! David also was prepared by God to lead people as Israel's king, having served as a shepherd for years, caring for sheep first. How has God been preparing you to serve Him?