



PART 1

PAUL IN CHAINS: LEADERSHIP IN ACTION

Chapter Two

TAKING THE INITIATIVE

When Paul's long journey to Rome got under way again after that brief stop in Sidon, the ship encountered what would be the bane of the whole trip: contrary winds. Luke wrote:

Acts 27:4-5 (NASB)

⁴“From there we put out to sea [from Sidon], and sailed under the shelter of Cyprus because the winds were contrary.

⁵When we had sailed through the sea along the coast of Cilicia and Pamphylia, we landed at Myra in Lycia.”

THE GOING GETS TOUGH

This is a second foundational principle of true leadership: *A leader takes the initiative.*

LEADERSHIP PRINCIPLE #2

A LEADER TAKES THE INITIATIVE

This ship was loaded with powerful men. There was the captain, his pilot, and other ranking sailors. There were a centurion and other Roman soldiers from an imperial regiment. All of them would have undoubtedly had strong opinions about whether or not to leave Fair Havens. They were no doubt all dissatisfied with the delay and eager to get moving toward their destination. They had surely discussed all the possibilities. They were aware that the trip would be dangerous, and that the danger increased the longer they waited.

All of them had a formal right to speak, and to render an opinion about the advisability of the journey. Much was at stake for all of them. The soldiers who had Paul in custody obviously wanted to get to Rome as fast as they could.



The ship's owners and crew wanted to get their cargo to Italy as rapidly as they could, because it meant money to them. Almost everyone had good reason to want to keep moving.

But it was Paul who seized the initiative and spoke out. He recognized the danger and pointed it out clearly. He **had no** rank. He **had no** particular right. He **had no** title. He **had no** authority. But he realized there was a problem, so he took the initiative and tried to bring clarity to the situation. **That's leadership. Leaders rise in times of crisis by taking the initiative.**

THE TOUGH GET GOING

Paul's instincts and his judgment were correct; as subsequent events would show. As Luke recounts the story, it seems that while everyone else was still analyzing the situation, **Paul already had it sized up.** So he spoke out.

That is a vital mark of true leadership. A leader never says, "We might have a problem over here. Somebody ought to do something about it." The leader says, "**Here is the problem, and here's how to solve it.**"

Another classic biblical example of a leader who took the initiative was **Nehemiah**. Almost five hundred years before Paul, while the nation of Israel was just emerging from a long time of captivity in a foreign land, Nehemiah single-handedly united the people of Jerusalem and rebuilt the walls of that city in fifty-two days' time. It was one of the most remarkable displays of strategic initiative and courageous leadership ever recorded in history. Though it takes us from the New Testament to the Old Testament, **Nehemiah's example is worth our attention, because he provides us with a rich and vivid case study that highlights this core feature of leadership.**

Nehemiah was no-body very special as far as the people of Jerusalem were concerned. He was a servant in the palace of the king of Persia. The captivity had been over for some eighty years, but Nehemiah had remained in Persia as a servant. He had never even visited his homeland.

He first learned of the ruined condition of Jerusalem from his brother, who returned from a visit to Jerusalem and reported what he had seen:

Nehemiah 1:3 (NASB)

³"They said to me, "The remnant there in the province who survived the captivity are in great distress and reproach, and the wall of Jerusalem is broken down and its gates are burned with fire."

That sparked something in Nehemiah that unleashed his leadership ability. He decided on the spot that he was going to take the initiative and rebuild those walls.



It would have been easy for Nehemiah to ignore the problem. After all, he lived more than 750 miles from Jerusalem. He might have simply basked in the comforts of the king's palace, feeling sorry about the state of his homeland and wishing someone would organize a plan to remedy the situation.

But that's not what leaders do. They take the initiative. They rise up and build.

A WISE MASTER BUILDER

The way Nehemiah took up his calling makes a superb study in how true leaders take the initiative. This will be almost as much of a detour as the route the apostle Paul's ship took on his journey to Rome, but there is much to learn from the digression. So let's leave Paul and his companions at Fair Havens for the moment, and recall how Nehemiah led the efforts to rebuild Jerusalem's walls:

First, He Identified the Problem

From the moment Nehemiah learned that Jerusalem was still in ruins, he saw precisely what it meant, and he prayerfully rehearsed the situation in prayer before the throne of God. He wrote, “

Nehemiah 1:4 (NASB)

⁴“When I heard these words, I sat down and wept and mourned for days; and I was fasting and praying before the God of heaven.”

The problem was not that God was unfaithful; but rather that His people had been unfaithful. They had broken the covenant. Nehemiah began his prayer by acknowledging God's faithfulness:

Nehemiah 1:5 (NASB)

⁵“I said, “I beseech You, O LORD God of heaven, the great and awesome God, who preserves the covenant and lovingkindness for those who love Him and keep His commandments.”

And then he identified the real problem:

Nehemiah 1:6-7 (NASB)

⁶“Let Your ear now be attentive and Your eyes open to hear the prayer of Your servant which I am praying before You now, day and night, on behalf of the sons of Israel Your servants, confessing the sins of the sons of Israel which we have sinned against You; I and my father's house have sinned. ⁷We have acted very corruptly against You and have not kept the commandments, nor the statutes, nor the ordinances which You commanded Your servant Moses.”

He then rehearsed God's promise of forgiveness and restoration, and begged God to use him to bring about the restoration of Jerusalem.

Then He Came Up with a Solution

It is obvious from Nehemiah's prayer and his subsequent actions that he was already formulating a plan. At the end of his prayer in Nehemiah 1:11, he prayed, "Let Your servant prosper this day, I pray, and grant him mercy in the sight of this man."

Nehemiah 1:11 (NASB)

¹¹ "O Lord, I beseech You, may Your ear be attentive to the prayer of Your servant and the prayer of Your servants who delight to revere Your name, **and make Your servant successful today and grant him compassion before this man.**" Now I was the cupbearer to the king."

"**This man**" is a reference to the king of Persia, Artaxerxes. Nehemiah had decided to petition the king—at the risk of his own life—for permission to return to Jerusalem and organize the rebuilding of the walls.

The extent of Nehemiah's planning became obvious when he sought the king's assistance. The king's only questions to Nehemiah were:

Nehemiah 2:6 (NASB)

⁶ "Then the king said to me, the queen sitting beside him, "**How long will your journey be, and when will you return?**" **So it pleased the king to send me, and I gave him a definite time.**"

Furthermore, Nehemiah had other specific requests:

Nehemiah 2:7-8 (NASB)

⁷ "And I said to the king, "If it please the king, let letters be given me for the governors of the provinces beyond the River, that they may allow me to pass through until I come to Judah,

⁸ and a letter to Asaph the keeper of the king's forest, that he may give me timber to make beams for the gates of the fortress which is by the temple, for the wall of the city and for the house to which I will go." And the king granted *them* to me because the good hand of my God *was* on me."

He had done careful calculations. He knew how much lumber he would need for beams and scaffolds and housing. He anticipated the problems he might face, and therefore he asked for letters of conveyance. He already had a strategy in place.

This was all the more remarkable when we remember that Nehemiah was no stonemason. He wasn't a building contractor. He was a domestic servant—a butler to the king. He had no particular occupational skills that would have qualified him to oversee a project on such an immense scale as the rebuilding of a city's walls.

But he knew how to identify and solve problems. He was a careful planner. He thought through the whole venture, anticipated the difficulties, and worked out solutions in advance. He wasn't winging it. He wasn't making things up on the fly as he went along. He had carefully counted the cost. He had a well-formulated plan, and he stuck to it. All this flowed from his willingness to take the initiative.

CH-110 LEADERSHIP 1

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Lecture # 7



The genius of Nehemiah's plan became evident as the work on the walls got under way. [Nehemiah 3](#) is a chronicle of the names of all the people who worked on the wall. And Nehemiah's skill as an organizer shines through that chapter. He divided the entire city wall into small, manageable portions and put key people in charge of each section. Everyone shared in the work, and everyone had a well-defined, achievable task. That is how Nehemiah managed to finish the task in such a remarkably short time.

Furthermore, Nehemiah illustrates that effective initiative is not short-lived. It runs to the end of the necessity until all bases are covered and the objective is achieved. This is a far cry from the common idea of people who think they have the answer to the dilemma but cannot ride that initiative from the initial idea to its fulfillment. **The only kind of starting power that makes true leaders is that which not only starts the ignition, but also drives to the end of the journey, organizing and mobilizing people along the way.**