COVINGTON THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY
Training Leaders, Impacting Eternity

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.
[5] When 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

A WISE MASTER BUILDER

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**.

We see that, too, in Nehemiah. Notice that he knew his workers. He listed them by name and recorded precisely what section of the wall each one built (**Nehemiah 3**). He remained committed to the project and intimately involved in every phase of it until it was brought to completion.

He Delegated Responsibility

Nonetheless, Nehemiah did not take the responsibility of oversight and labor for the entire wall upon himself. He appointed trustworthy men to oversee sections of the labor, dividing their responsibilities in accord with their abilities.

This was the only way to accomplish the rebuilding of Jerusalem's walls in so short a time. It was a team effort—or rather, the combined effort of multiple teams. That way Nehemiah was able to employ the maximum number of workers and get the most out of them.

Furthermore, he shrewdly assigned people to work at locations close to their own homes. The priests built the section closest to the Temple (**3:1**).

> **Nehemiah 3:1 (NASB)**
> [1] "**Then Eliashib the high priest arose with his brothers the priests and built the Sheep Gate**; they consecrated it and hung its doors. They consecrated the wall to the Tower of the Hundred *and* the Tower of Hananel."

"Jedaiah the son of Harumaph made repairs in front of his house" (**v. 10**).

> **Nehemiah 3:10 (NASB)**
> [10] "Next to them **Jedaiah the son of Harumaph made repairs opposite his house**. And next to him Hattush the son of Hashabneiah made repairs."

"Hashabiah, leader of half the district of Keilah, made repairs for his district" (**v. 17**).

> **Nehemiah 3:17 (NASB)**
> [17] "After him the Levites carried out repairs *under* Rehum the son of Bani. Next to him **Hashabiah, the official of half the district of Keilah, carried out repairs for his district**."

"Benjamin and Hasshub made repairs opposite their house. After them Azariah the son of Maaseiah, the son of Ananiah, made repairs by his house" (**v. 23**).

> **Nehemiah 3:23 (NASB)**
> **23** **"After them** **Benjamin and Hasshub carried out repairs in front of their house**. After them Azariah the son of Maaseiah, son of Ananiah, **carried out repairs beside his house**."

"Meshullam the son of Berechiah made repairs in front of his dwelling" (**v. 30**).

> **Nehemiah 3:30 (NASB)**
> **30** **"After him Hananiah the son of Shelemiah, and Hanun the sixth son of Zalaph, repaired another section. After him** **Meshullam the son of Berechiah carried out repairs in front of his own quarters**."

And so on. This gave each team an extra incentive to do excellent work. No one would want the part of the wall next to his own house to be weak or sloppy looking.

It was a wise plan that made the most of each man's labor. It guaranteed that they would take pride in their work. And it assured that they would finish their assigned tasks.

He Knew How to Motivate People

When Nehemiah first arrived in Jerusalem, the captivity had already been over for a full century. Jews had been returning to the land in waves, starting with Zerubbabel in **538 BC**. The first job undertaken by the first returnees was the rebuilding of the temple. The Old Testament book of Ezra records what an ordeal that was. After the foundation was laid in **536**, the temple remained unfinished for some twenty-one years. It was finally completed at the urging of Haggai and Zechariah, in **515**. Nehemiah arrived in Jerusalem seventy-one years later, in **414 BC**.

No one in all those years had taken the initiative to complete the rebuilding of the city. The first sight that greeted every visitor was the ruined wall. Massive piles of rubble surrounded the city, mute testimony to the divine judgment that had overthrown Judea and carried her people into captivity. It was an embarrassment as well as a hazard. But a hundred years had passed and no one had even suggested a rebuilding project.

Isn't it remarkable that Nehemiah, a newcomer to the city, could gather the people together, challenge them to rebuild the walls, and get an immediate positive response: **"Let us rise up and build"** (**Nehemiah 2:18**)?

> **Nehemiah 2:18 (NASB)**
> **18** **"I told them how the hand of my God had been favorable to me and also about the king's words which he had spoken to me. Then they said, "**Let us arise and build**." **So they put their hands to the good** *work*.

Nehemiah obviously knew what it takes to motivate people. He did not do it by sheer **hype**, **manipulation**, or **theatrics**. But he shared his vision in a way the people could grasp. He explained how the goal was attainable. And, in Nehemiah's own words, "I told them of the hand

of my God which had been good upon me, and also of the king's words that he had spoken to me" (2:18).

> **Nehemiah 2:18 (NASB)**
> **18** "I told them how the hand of my God had been favorable to me and also about the king's words which he had spoken to me. **Then they said, "Let us arise and build." So they put their hands to the good *work*.**

He helped them to see that this was a work of God. He showed them the spiritual importance of it. He was sincere and believable. His enthusiasm was infectious. His optimism was contagious. They caught the vision.

He Worked Alongside the People

Nehemiah was not a *passive* leader. Good leaders never are. They don't ask others to do what they are unwilling to do themselves. Nehemiah rolled up his sleeves and worked as diligently as anyone else. **"We labored in the work,"** Nehemiah said (**4:21**). He wasn't afraid to get his own hands dirty.

> **Nehemiah 4:21 (NASB)**
> **21** "So we carried on the work with half of them holding spears from dawn until the stars appeared."

In fact, as Nehemiah described the work, he put in long days of nonstop toil until the task was complete:

> **Nehemiah 4:23 (NASB)**
> **23** "So neither I, my brothers, my servants, nor the men of the guard who followed me, none of us removed our clothes, each *took* his weapon *even to* the water [washing]."

He said in **Nehemiah 5:16**,

> **Nehemiah 5:16 (NASB)**
> **16** "I also applied myself to the work on this wall; we did not buy any land, and all my servants were gathered there for the work."

All his other business was put on hold while he worked.

He was relentless. He was dedicated to the work. And the people of Jerusalem followed his lead against **ridicule**, **conspiracy**, **discouragement**, **deceit,** and every form of **vicious opposition**. **Chapters 4** through **6** of his account record in detail how Nehemiah's enemies desperately tried to stop his work.

And in spite of all of that, because of the initiative of this one man, the entire wall around Jerusalem was completed in just fifty-two days' time (**6:15**).

> **Nehemiah 6:15 (NASB)**
> **15** "So the wall was completed on the twenty-fifth of *the month* Elul, in fifty-two days."

Nehemiah was the epitome of an effective leader. He was a starter. He was strongly motivated. He knew how to organize and motivate followers. He overcame obstacles. He was practical and wise and determined. He was a man of action, but thoughtful, too. All those qualities are essential to effective leadership. Combined, they made Nehemiah the kind of man—like the apostle Paul—who was not afraid to take initiative. And therein lay the secret of both men's success.

Into the Tempest

Meanwhile, back in Fair Havens, the soldiers and sailors discussed Paul's advice and decided to reject it. Luke wrote,

Acts 27:11-12 (NASB)
[11] "But the centurion was more persuaded by the pilot and the captain of the ship than by what was being said by Paul.
[12] Because the harbor was not suitable for wintering, the majority reached a decision to put out to sea from there, if somehow they could reach Phoenix, a harbor of Crete, facing southwest and northwest, and spend the winter *there.*"

In what seems an unusual, and utterly desperate, deviation from the norm, the captain of the ship seems to have solicited the will of **"the majority."** Most were in favor of trying to reach a more advantageous harbor. Give me one great, careful, thoughtful, analytical, wise leader over the majority *anytime*. But in this case, they took a vote. **The ship's captain let an opinion poll make the decision for him**.

Notice that the decision was made for purely pragmatic reasons. No one wanted to stay at Fair Havens. They were motivated by expediency and selfish desire, not by wisdom.

Here is a third vital principle of leadership: *A leader uses good judgment.*

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LEADERSHIP PRINCIPLE #3
A LEADER USES GOOD JUDGEMENT

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