

Principles of Good Leadership **Illustrated from the Book of Nehemiah**

Introduction:

One of the greatest needs of society – especially the church, the home, and government – is good leadership. Every institution needs leadership. All of us are affected by leadership: we are all subject to it, and most of us exercise it at times or expect to exercise it someday. So good leadership is a concern for us all.

To “lead” means “to guide in direction, course, action ... to command or direct...” – *Random House College Dictionary*. We are discussing the responsibility to make decisions and give guidance regarding what must be done by a group of people working together.

God has ordained various leadership roles.

Parents lead children.

(Proverbs 6:20; Ephesians 6:1,4; Colossians 3:20,21; Luke 2:51; Deuteronomy 21:18-21; Proverbs 1:8; Romans 1:30,32; Proverbs 22:6; 2 Timothy 3:2)

Husbands lead wives.

(Ephesians 5:22-25; 1 Peter 3:1-6; 1 Timothy 3:4,12; Colossians 3:18; Titus 2:4,5; 1 Corinthians 11:3; Exodus 6:25; Genesis 2:18ff; 3:16)

Elders lead local churches.

(1 Peter 5:1,2; Hebrews 13:17; 1 Timothy 3:1; Acts 20:28; Titus 1:5,6; 1 Timothy 5:17; 3:5; Hebrews 13:7,24)

Men lead women in the church.

(1 Corinthians 14:34,35; 1 Timothy 2:11,12; Titus 2:15)

Masters lead servants.

(Ephesians 6:5; Titus 2:9,10; Colossians 3:22; 1 Timothy 6:1,2; 1 Peter 2:18)

Civil rulers lead citizens.

(Romans 13:1-5; 1 Peter 2:13,14,17; Genesis 37:8; 41:40; Deuteronomy 1:12-17; 2 Samuel 5:2; Matthew 8:8,9; 1 Timothy 2:1,2; Titus 3:1)

If leadership were not important, then it would not matter whether or not people follow their leaders. But God has repeatedly commanded people to follow the leaders in all these relationships, so leading must be important.

There are many indications that we face a famine of good leadership in society, especially in God’s ordained institutions.

In the home we face divorce, violence, quarreling, juvenile delinquency, adultery, drugs, immorality, and sin of all kinds.

In government there is injustice, graft, greed, lying, moral confusion, outright wickedness, and spineless refusal to stand for decency. How often do you find really good candidates for public office that godly people can wholeheartedly endorse?

In the church we face strife, division, false doctrine, indifference, pride, stubbornness, worldliness, materialism, and immoral conduct of all kinds. As the older generation of preachers passes away, churches often face serious difficulties finding dedicated, qualified preachers.

Worse yet, many churches have existed for years without elders and have no prospects of appointing qualified men in the near future. Other churches become impatient and appoint unqualified elders.

Not all these problems are the fault of poor leadership, but a significant portion of them is.

The purpose of this study is to consider Bible teaching about principles of good leadership, using the book of Nehemiah to illustrate these principles.

Nehemiah lived during the period of Judah's return from captivity. As cupbearer to the king of Persia, he heard that the wall of Jerusalem was broken down and the people lived in danger. He determined to return to Jerusalem to lead the people to rebuild the wall. Eventually he was appointed governor of the land.

The record of Nehemiah's work includes many important lessons about good leadership. Our studies will emphasize that good leadership is essential to any group endeavor. Good leadership does not guarantee success, but poor leadership almost always leads to failure. So, Christians should diligently fulfill any leadership role they are given.

I do not claim any expertise or success in leadership. Nevertheless, Nehemiah was a very successful leader. The Bible is God's word, and the principles of leadership it teaches are true. As with teaching and many other areas, people tend to have greater or lesser leadership skills. As Christians we should learn to do the best we can.

Please consider important lessons we can learn about proper leadership from Nehemiah.

I. Service to God and to Followers

God established leadership in order to enable people to better accomplish the work He ordained. This means that leaders ought to lead to accomplish God's work and to help those who follow them to please God. ***In other words, proper leadership is intended primarily to benefit others, rather than the leaders.***

A. Consider Bible Teaching about Good Leaders.

The Example of Nehemiah

Nehemiah 1:3-7,10

Nehemiah's brother and other men from Judah told him about the distress of God's people in Jerusalem. Note his reaction:

* He wept and mourned many days, fasted and prayed (verses 4,5).

* He called on God to hear his prayer for the children of Israel (v6).

* He acknowledged that they had not kept God's commands (v7).

* He reminded God that God had redeemed Israel to be His people and had promised to return them from captivity if they would repent (verses 9,10).

From the outset, Nehemiah's motivation for leading the people was his concern for the people and for God's will.

Nehemiah 2:10

The enemies of God were disturbed because Nehemiah came to seek the well-being of the children of Israel. This tells us as much about Nehemiah as it does about the enemies.

Nehemiah 5:1-9

Certain powerful, wealthy Jews were mistreating others, taking their lands and houses, and enslaving them. This angered Nehemiah, so that he rebuked the rulers (v7), saying they should walk in the fear of God (v9). As a result, the rulers agreed to return what they had taken.

Again, Nehemiah acted out of concern for the people and for the will of God.

[Compare 13:15-31.]

Nehemiah 10:28-31

As governor (v1), Nehemiah led the people to take an oath or covenant (9:38) to observe all the Lord's commands. He sought to please God and to help the people to please God.

Too often leaders think they may use their position to please themselves and seek their own pleasure, power, fame, honor, or prosperity. But Nehemiah led, not for his own benefit, but for the well-being of the people and to please God.

Other Bible Teaching about Good Leaders

Moses and Joshua

Exodus 3:7-10 – Because God had compassion on the Israelites, He called Moses to lead the people out of slavery. Moses’ job was to accomplish God’s purpose to help the people.

Numbers 27:16-20 – God appointed Joshua to lead Israel into Canaan after Moses died (Joshua 1:6), so they would not be like sheep without a shepherd.

Without a shepherd, sheep will scatter, become useless, and be consumed by enemies. Just as sheep need a shepherd, groups of people need leaders so they will work together. Leaders exist to help people organize their work, to watch for problems, and to make necessary decisions so the group can accomplish its work.

Like Nehemiah, Moses and Joshua are heroes of Bible history, not because they possessed authority, but because they used their authority to benefit God’s people and accomplish God’s work.

Civil Rulers

Romans 13:1-5 – Civil rulers are ministers of **God to you** (citizens) for **good**. They are ordained to punish evildoers and reward those who do good (v3). In other words, they protect the good people from the evil people. This benefits the people and so accomplishes the will of God.

Many politicians say they are “servants of the people,” but how many really act that way? And how many of them seriously realize that they possess authority so they can accomplish the will of God? Most appear to think the people should serve **them**. And in our country, secular and Humanistic people have convinced rulers to believe in a “separation of church and state” that forbids rulers to even mention God’s will or to consider it when making decisions!

When the United States first separated from England, its first group of rulers was called the Continental Congress. On September 6, 1774, the first act of the first session of the Continental Congress was to pass a resolution to pray together. This prayer included the following words:

Be thou present, God of wisdom, and direct the councils of this honorable assembly ... that ... truth and justice, religion and piety, prevail and flourish amongst thy people ... and crown them with everlasting glory in the world to come. All this we ask in the name and through the merits of Jesus Christ, thy Son, our Saviour. Amen! (*Journals of Congress*, via Morris, pp 246,249f; Federer, pp 136,137; Barton, p92)

How does the view of our founding fathers compare to that of our current leaders? Do present-day rulers seek to do what this prayer expresses?

Like Nehemiah, the great leaders of history – George Washington, Abraham Lincoln, and Winston Churchill – were great because they sought the good of the people. But infamous leaders – Hitler, Stalin, etc. – were evil because their leadership brought great harm to people.

Leaders in the Home

Proverbs 4:10-12 – Wise guidance from parents gives children wisdom and uprightness, so they can walk uprightly and the avoid problems of sin.

Again, many people today object to the authority of husbands over wives or even parents over children, because they claim the leaders just want to honor and please themselves. All such concepts are a misunderstanding of authority.

Parents and husbands are given authority, not so they can seek their own convenience, but so they can benefit the group and accomplish the will of God.

[Proverbs 6:20-24]

Leaders in the Church

Titus 1:7 – Serving as an elder is a “good work” (1 Timothy 3:1), because a bishop is a steward of God. What is a steward?

Luke 12:42-46 – Note carefully: A steward is a servant to his master, but he has authority over the master’s other servants or possessions. He rules the household. Why? To give food to the servants (v42) and do the master’s will (v43).

Every leader is a steward: he leads to benefit his followers and to accomplish the work God appointed. This is true, not just of elders, but of every leader in every God-ordained institution. The idea that people are appointed leaders so they can enjoy honor and get their own way is a complete perversion, and it leads to many other perversions.

Consider how it would change the conduct of leaders if every one of them, like Nehemiah, would view himself as a servant of God for the good of those he leads. What about your leadership and mine? Do we lead for our own benefit, or for the good of the group?

[1 Kings 3:9,11; 4:25; 1 Peter 2:13,14; Acts 20:28; Ephesians 5:22-29; 1 Peter 3:7; 2 Corinthians 10:8]

B. Good Leaders Help People Obey God.

Not only did Nehemiah dedicate himself to God’s service, but he prayed for the people to obey God, rebuked them when they disobeyed, and led them to make a covenant to keep God’s commands. He realized that one of his main goals was to help his followers to serve God.

Other Passages Showing Leaders Should Help Followers Serve God

Ephesians 6:4 – Fathers should bring children up in the training and admonition of the Lord. Leading children to serve God is the main goal of fathers. If our children grow up to be good citizens, have good jobs and happy marriages, but don’t serve God, then we have not achieved our primary goal as parents.

Genesis 18:19 – Abraham determined to lead his family to keep God’s way and do righteousness and justice. This is the ultimate goal of parents.

Genesis 6:9-14,22; 7:1,5,7 – Noah lived in a society that was so corrupt God determined to destroy everyone else in it. Yet despite all this evil around him, Noah not only served God, he also led his family to serve God so they were saved. Considering the environment he lived in, just saving his family was a major accomplishment of good leadership. If Noah could save his family in that environment, surely we can do the same today.

Examples of Poor Leaders Who Failed to Lead Others to Obey God

Some leaders are not like Nehemiah.

1 Kings 12:28-30 – Jeroboam was the first king of the northern tribes of Israel after they separated from Judah. To keep people from going to Jerusalem to worship as God had commanded, Jeroboam made golden calves to worship. This led the people to sin.

The duty of rulers is to encourage people to do right, but instead Jeroboam led Israel into sin. From that time on Israel never had a single righteous king, and the nation eventually went into captivity because of sin, primarily idolatry. God needs leaders who lead people to do right.

Jeremiah 5:30,31 – Horrible things happen when prophets prophesy falsely, and priests rule, not by God’s power, but by their own power. Of all people, religious leaders ought to lead others to please God; but sometimes they are the very ones who lead people away from God. They may be motivated by money, popularity, fame, etc. And often the people like it, because the preachers say it’s all right to participate in sinful practices that the people enjoy.

Jeremiah 23:13-15 – Teachers, who ought to turn the people back from sin, are often the very ones who strengthen their hands in the sin! How can leaders be successful when they lead people in the opposite direction from where they ought to go?

Proverbs 29:2 – When the righteous are in authority, the people rejoice; But when a wicked man rules, the people groan.

Nehemiah led people to serve God. I can think of nothing our society today needs more than leaders who imitate that example.

[Isaiah 3:12; 9:16; Jeremiah 50:6; Micah 3:1-12; Matthew 14:6-11; 1 Timothy 3:4,5; 1 Peter 3:7; Joshua 24:15; Matthew 15:14]

C. Good Leaders Help Souls Receive Eternal Life.

When leaders, like Nehemiah, lead people to serve God faithfully, they lead them to receive eternal life. This is the greatest good a leader can ever do.

Proper Leadership Can Lead Souls to Be Saved.

2 Kings 22:10,11; 23:1-3,25 – Like Nehemiah, when Josiah realized that the people had departed from God's way, he was deeply grieved. He led Israel to remove evil from the land and make a covenant to serve God. As a result, God recognized him as one of Judah's greatest kings.

Proverbs 22:6 – When children have been properly trained in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, they will remain faithful even when they grow old.

Hebrews 13:17 – We should submit to those who rule (elders), because they watch on behalf of our souls.

There is no greater good that any leader can do than to lead his followers to serve God faithfully and receive eternal life. Brother or sister, the eternal destiny of souls may depend on your leadership!

[2 Chronicles 30:1,2,12; Genesis 18:19; Ephesians 6:4; 1 Peter 3:20,21]

Improper Leadership Can Lead Souls to Be Lost.

Ezekiel 34:2-10 – The leaders of Israel are again compared to shepherds who are supposed to work for the good of the sheep, providing them with nourishment, care, and protection. But these shepherds used their authority for their own personal profit, while the sheep were destroyed. So God held the leaders accountable for the destiny of the sheep.

Matthew 15:14 – If the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch.

If the greatest good we can lead people to is eternal life, then the greatest harm we can lead them to is eternal destruction. Leaders must realize that the eternal destiny of souls is often in their hands. Yes, each person will be judged for himself. But all of us have influence over others, and leaders often have the greatest degree of influence.

If souls are led to eternal death because you misused your leadership, where will you stand at the judgment? On the other hand, imagine your joy at the judgment if you are blessed to see souls enter eternal life because you used your leadership to lead them to salvation!

[Isaiah 9:16; Numbers 13:2; 16:2; Ezra 9:1,2; 10:3,5; Isaiah 3:12; 52:5; Jeremiah 5:30,31; 50:6,7; Matthew 14:6-11; 23:13-15; Acts 20:28-30]

Conclusion

Stories have been told of football players who became confused and carried the ball in the wrong direction. The runner may have traveled many yards, and some fans cheered him on (the fans of the other team). But he was leading his team to defeat!

On the other hand, when a runner tries to run to the proper goal, opponents will try to hinder him every step of the way. But he cannot possibly win the game if he doesn't work toward the proper goal.

The fact is that many modern leaders have lost sight of their goal. They do not appreciate the real reason why they were appointed as leaders.

Matthew 20:25-28 – Jesus taught that people are great, not just when they possess authority, but when they use their position – whatever it may be – as servants: to serve God and help others. This is also the lesson we learn from Nehemiah.

God's institutions today need leaders like Nehemiah who understand that the goal is to help people serve God and glorify Him.

How does your leadership and mine compare to that of Nehemiah?

II. Trust and Obedience toward God

If leaders are stewards of God, appointed by Him and serving His purposes, it follows that they should trust Him and obey His instructions in order to accomplish His purpose.

A. Leaders Should Trust in God.

Consider Bible examples:

Nehemiah

Nehemiah 2:17-20 – Nehemiah encouraged the people to work by telling them about the blessings God had supplied. When enemies mocked the work, he said that God would prosper the work. So he encouraged the people to put their trust in God.

Nehemiah 4:1-8,14,20 – When enemies mocked and threatened to do harm, Nehemiah led the people to trust God. They worked and took measures to deal with the problems, but they trusted God to protect them and make their efforts successful.

Nehemiah recognized that he was doing God's work. If it was God's work, then it would succeed only by God's blessings. He trusted God for protection and success. All leaders in God's ordained institutions need to learn these same lessons. We must work hard to achieve the goal, but ultimately success comes because God provides what is needed.

David

1 Samuel 17:32-37,41-47 – When David fought Goliath, he realized he was fighting for the Lord against those who opposed the Lord. So, he trusted God to give the victory. Not only did this result in a great victory for Israel in this case, but David was here developing and demonstrating the qualities he would later need when he became king.

Notice that David had to work hard, face great danger, and show great courage. Faith in God did not mean he did nothing and let God do everything. But he recognized that his strength and abilities were not enough to bring victory; he needed God's power to bless his efforts and accomplish the victory.

Heroes of faith in Hebrews 11

Many of the people named in the chapter of faith were leaders, but they all acted by faith or trust in God:

Verse 7 – **Noah** led his family to safety by preparing an ark by **faith**.

Verses 8,17 – **Abraham** led his family to serve God (Genesis 18:19). He demonstrated **faith** when he left Ur to go to Canaan and again when he sacrificed Isaac.

Verses 24-29 – **Moses** refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing instead to suffer with God's people. He eventually led them out of slavery in Egypt and through the Red Sea. All this he did by **faith**.

Verse 30 – **Joshua** led Israel to conquer Canaan including the defeat of Jericho by **faith**.

In every case, faith required action. These and other great leaders had to act to accomplish God's work; but to succeed they had to believe and trust God to bless their work and accomplish the results He wanted.

No one should ever accept a leadership role for God on the basis of trusting his own human wisdom and ability to achieve what is needed. Many leaders depend primarily on their own abilities, and many fail to acknowledge God at all. But true success comes only when we trust God to provide what we need and work through us to achieve His purposes.

Nebuchadnezzar

Daniel 4:28-35 – In contrast to these faithful leaders, King Nebuchadnezzar praised himself. Instead of honoring God, he bragged about his honor and his accomplishments. God drove him from among men so he lived like an animal till he learned to respect God and give Him honor. He returned to greatness when he realized God is in charge and can humble the proud.

This is the same mistake many leaders today make: rulers, husbands, parents, elders. They trust in their own wisdom and ability. This often results in failure. But if their leadership results in success, they take the glory to themselves.

Nebuchadnezzar learned what Nehemiah and other faithful leaders knew: to be the best leaders we can be, we need to trust God for wisdom and then give Him the glory.

Proverbs 29:2 – When the righteous are in authority, the people rejoice; but when a wicked man rules, the people groan. People are greatly blessed when their leaders trust and serve God, but leaders cause serious problems when they put their faith in themselves or lead the people to put their trust mainly in human ability.

This is true in all leadership positions. We see it all around us in government. Yet even in the home and the church far too often men lead who are not devoted to putting God first. Husbands, elders, and preachers too often emphasize material things, pleasures, sports, personal glory, and human ability, instead of putting their faith in God. These leaders cause their followers to groan.

Where do you place your trust in life, specifically when you have leadership responsibility? How many times have we failed God and our followers because we tried to do it all ourselves? We can do our best only when we trust God enough to let Him work through us to achieve His goals.

B. Leaders Should Obey God's Instructions.

As in all the above examples, true faith in God requires obedience. Those who lead in God's institutions must strictly follow His instructions. They must not follow their own human wisdom apart from His word. They surely must not please themselves nor their followers above God.

This does not mean leaders do not need good judgment in making decisions. But it does mean that they must recognize God's word as the source of true wisdom, and their most basic consideration must always be: What does God's word say? Leaders must use their God-given wisdom to apply God's word to situations, but they must never follow their own thoughts or desires to do differently from what God's word says.

Nehemiah

Nehemiah 5:9 – When people mistreated other Israelites, Nehemiah said they should walk in the fear of God: their actions should show proper respect for God's authority.

Nehemiah 8:13-18 – He led the people to keep the feast of booths, because they found it written in the book of the law that God commanded.

Nehemiah 9:3 – They taught the people from the law and led them to worship God.

Nehemiah 9:38; 10:29 – They led the people to make a covenant to obey God's law.

Nehemiah knew that he needed guidance to know how to lead the people properly, and the only infallible guide is God's word. True leaders will always respect God's word and will never violate it to please themselves or their followers.

Noah

Genesis 6:22; 7:5 – We have already observed that, by faith, Noah led his family to salvation. But his faith required him to obey God.

Noah is an example of our salvation (1 Peter 3:20,21). We can lead others to please God only if we ourselves are following God's word and leading them in harmony with God's teachings.

Joshua

Joshua 1:6-9 – God instructed Joshua to be strong in leading Israel into Canaan. In order to succeed in this leadership role, Joshua had to meditate on God’s law and strictly obey it. He must observe to do all that God commanded, not departing from it to the right or the left. Then God would prosper his work.

Joshua 24:15 – At the end of his life Joshua challenged the people, “...choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve ... But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.” All good leaders should affirm this same devotion and should give this same challenge to their followers.

Solomon

1 Kings 3:5,9-12,28 – When Solomon became king, God offered to grant him a gift. He asked for understanding to discern between good and evil, so he could wisely rule God’s people. God granted him wisdom such that none before or after possessed.

Wisdom is a gift all leaders need. Good leadership requires many difficult decisions, especially for those who conscientiously seek to do what is right. Good decisions are sometimes hard enough to make when they affect ourselves alone, but they become much more difficult when they affect others too.

Proverbs 8:12-16 – Solomon’s wisdom was a gift directly from God. But he and other inspired men have recorded in the Scriptures the wisdom that God gave them. This wisdom is now available to give knowledge, discretion, and understanding to all of us today, especially to kings and princes. This wisdom is based on fear of the Lord and hatred of evil.

Good leaders must recognize that true wisdom comes ultimately from God’s word, and no decision that contradicts the Scriptures can ever be a wise decision.

Modern leaders

In government, in our homes, and in churches today we need leaders who have the kind of wisdom possessed by Nehemiah and these other great leaders. We can have that wisdom if we study and follow the word of God.

Leadership in the home

Ephesians 6:4 – Fathers must train their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. Where do we find guidance to tell us to teach our children? In God’s word. Parents can train their children in God’s ways only when they themselves know and follow the Scriptures.

[Deuteronomy 6:6-9]

Leadership in the church

Titus 1:9 – The qualifications of elders require them to hold the faithful word so they can speak sound doctrine and convict those who contradict. They must guard against false teachers and watch on behalf of the souls of the members (Acts 20:28-30; Hebrews 13:17). The only way they can do this is to know and strictly follow God’s word.

Many churches do not have elders because they have no plurality of men who have demonstrated the necessary knowledge and wisdom from God’s word. Sometimes the church appoints unqualified men anyway. As a result the church goes astray, either because the elders lead the church into error, or because they lack wisdom to deal with error when others introduce it.

The danger of poor leadership

Matthew 15:14 – If the blind lead the blind, both fall into the ditch. Leaders who are ignorant of God’s word are a serious danger. Families and churches have been led into error by parents and/or elders who don’t know the truth.

Families or congregations must often deal with people who are disputing among themselves or otherwise acting improperly. Resolving such problems requires tough decisions, which in turn requires wisdom.

God's word gives spiritual guidance in all good works (2 Timothy 3:16,17). All Christians must study and trust His word for wisdom, but this becomes even more important when we are responsible to lead others.

Like Nehemiah, to be a good leader one must trust and obey God and put Him first as the number one priority in life. One of the greatest needs of today's homes, congregations, and society is leaders who understand God's word and stand up for it. No matter what authority a person may have, the only way any leader can do his best is to trust God enough to follow His word.

Do you appreciate your need to follow God's word in order to be a good leader? You may be greatly honored in this life, but if you or your followers are lost eternally, what have you accomplished? But if you lead your followers to eternal life, what greater success could anyone have?

[Hebrews 5:14; Ephesians 6:9; Colossians 4:1; Romans 12:8; 1 Timothy 2:2; 1 Peter 3:7; Numbers 27:16-21; Deuteronomy 1:13-15; Nehemiah 8:13; Daniel 1:7-20; 1 Peter 5:2 – ASV]

III. Prayer

When leaders really trust God, they will surely seek God's blessings in prayer.

A. Nehemiah

As a leader, Nehemiah repeatedly sought God's blessings in prayer.

1:4 – When he heard the condition of Jerusalem, the first thing Nehemiah did was to pray to God (verses 4-11; cf. 2:4).

4:4-9 – When enemies criticized the work and made threats, the first thing Nehemiah did was pray. He put the problems in God's hands and trusted Him to provide what was needed.

6:9 – When enemies lied about Nehemiah and threatened to send lies to the king, Nehemiah prayed for God's strength.

Nehemiah knew he was doing God's work. He knew he would face hardships beyond his ability to handle. So, he needed God's help, and the way to obtain that help was by prayer.

B. Other Leaders

To do their best leaders must trust God and know that the way to obtain God's help is through prayer.

Moses

As the leader of Israel, Moses faced insurmountable obstacles. Time and again he went to God for help.

Exodus 5:22,23 – When Moses first told Pharaoh to let Israel go, Pharaoh instead reacted by increasing the people's burdens. So Moses went to God asking why this was happening and why His purpose was apparently failing.

Exodus 15:23-25 – In the wilderness when the people murmured because they needed water to drink, Moses went to God in prayer about it.

Exodus 32:9-14,30-32 – When Israel worshiped the golden calf, Moses rebuked and punished them. But he interceded to God in prayer on their behalf, urging God to forgive them. This pattern of prayer on behalf of the people for their sins characterized the rest of his life.

How does our diligence in prayer measure up to that of God's leaders in the Bible?

[Numbers 11:2; 21:7; 14:13-20; Deuteronomy 9:18-20,25-29].

Daniel

Daniel 6:3-5,10,25-28 – Daniel served as a trusted advisor in two world empires under at least three different kings. Under Darius, king of Persia, he was one of three presidents directly under the king, and the king thought to put him over the whole kingdom.

Other jealous leaders tried to eliminate Daniel by a law that would require anyone to be cast into a lion's den if he made petition to anyone except the king. Daniel continued to pray to God

and was arrested and thrown into the lion's den. God spared him, then the king had his enemies thrown in and they were destroyed. Darius then urged all people to worship the true God.

Daniel was so diligent in prayer that his enemies knew he would continue it no matter what danger he faced. As with Daniel, when leaders today are known to serve and pray to God, some people try to use it against them. Some even claim that such people do not belong in leadership roles. Yet the Bible shows that, in fact, all good leaders must seek God's help in prayer.

Do you trust God to answer prayer to give the blessings you need to be a good leader? Do people know that you pray to God?

Paul

Great leaders of the New Testament were also known for prayer. The apostles, including Paul, had a major leadership role in the early church.

Acts 16:25 – When Paul and Silas had been arrested and imprisoned for healing a demon-possessed girl, they prayed and sang praises. This resulted in their release and an opportunity to teach the jailer's household.

Acts 20:36 – After instructing the elders of Ephesus regarding their duty, he prayed with them. Not only was Paul a leader in the church, so were these elders. They all realized the need to pray for God's blessing on their work.

Acts 27:35 – Facing shipwreck in a violent storm at sea, Paul led people in prayer.

Nearly every letter Paul wrote expresses his prayers for the people he addressed. He prayed for their needs and their faithfulness to God. [Colossians 1:3,9-14; Romans 1:9-12; Ephesians 1:15-19; Philippians 1:3-11; 1 Thessalonians 1:2; 2 Thessalonians 1:11,12; 2:13; 2 Timothy 1:3]

How diligent and regular are we in praying for others, especially those whom we lead? Do we remember them regularly and ask God's blessings on them?

Jesus

The greatest leader of all time was the Son of God. His life was filled with numerous times of prayer. He prayed alone at times and with His disciples at times. He did not pray just for Himself. He prayed with His followers and for His followers and for His work in leading them.

Matthew 14:23 – He went out to a mountain at evening to pray alone.

Mark 1:35 – He went out a long time before sunrise to be alone to pray. [Luke 9:18]

Luke 6:12 – Before making the leadership decision of choosing His twelve apostles, He spent all night on a mountain in prayer,

Luke 11:1 – He taught His disciples' how to pray. So He not only prayed for those He led and with those He led, but He also taught them that they ought to pray and how to pray.

Luke 22:31,32 – He told Peter that he was praying that Satan would not defeat Peter. So Jesus' prayers included praying for His followers, and He let them know He was praying for them.

John 17:9-22 (note verses 9-17) – As His time on earth drew to a close, Jesus prayed for the success of His work. Most of the prayer specifically concerned His disciples that they might remain faithful and united. So again He prayed for His disciples, apparently in their presence.

Matthew 26:36-46 – In Gethsemane, facing the greatest trial of His life, He took His disciples and asked them to pray with Him. He prayed in great agony for His work for the Father.

If the Son of God needed prayer, how can we succeed without it? Leadership is an awesome task, even with the help of God. Who can hope to do their best without His help?

Nehemiah and all these other examples show that good leaders are prayerful leaders. How often do you and I pray that we might lead properly? Do we pray regularly for those who follow us that they will serve God faithfully? Do they know that we pray for them? How does our diligence in prayer compare to that of Nehemiah and other faithful leaders in the Bible?

IV. Love, Patience, and Self-Sacrifice

We have learned that people are given leadership so they can please God and benefit their followers. It follows that, not only must they follow the teachings of God's word, but they must make decisions based on love and unselfish concern for the followers. They must not make decisions simply to get their own way or provide their own advantage. This requires self-sacrifice and patience.

A. The Example of Nehemiah

1:3-6,10 – Nehemiah heard the people were in deep distress and reproach because the wall was still destroyed (v3). This led him to weep and mourn with fasting and prayer (v4). He then prayed specifically for the people (verses 6,10) and determined to rebuild the wall.

4:6,10,16-23 – His concern for the people produced patience: he did not give up the work despite hardship and opposition. When enemies ridiculed and threatened violence (verses 1-5,7,8), he and his men kept working. Even when the people themselves became discouraged and wanted to quit (v10), Nehemiah urged them on, arranged for their defense, and made personal sacrifices (they did not even take off their clothes – v23).

5:1-13 – When the people mistreated one another, Nehemiah rebuked them and required them to change. He did not use their improper conduct as an excuse to give up or neglect his responsibility. He continued to work for their good, but he also stood firmly for what he believed was best. Love does what is best, not just what others want.

5:14-19 – When the people were suffering financially (v19; cf. verses 1-13), Nehemiah did not require them to pay for his service as governor. Instead, he fed over 150 people at his own expense. He may have done differently if he needed the financial income or if the people were able to give it. The lesson is that he acted sacrificially, not selfishly, because he cared for the people.

Nehemiah's example shows that proper leadership requires love and genuine concern for those who follow, even to the point of personal sacrifice for their good. It requires patience to continue serving when circumstances are hard. Yet one must continue standing firmly for what one is truly convinced is best.

B. Other Bible Examples

Moses

Moses faced incredible hardship leading Israel out of Egypt, through the wilderness to Sinai, and on to Canaan. The people repeatedly complained and were ungrateful. And despite the clear proof that God was with him and despite the great good that he had accomplished for them, they blamed him anytime things happened that they did not like, even when it was not his fault.

Exodus 32:7-12

After repeated grumbling, the people made and worshiped a golden calf while Moses was on Mt. Sinai. God said He would destroy the people. Moses firmly rebuked and punished the people, yet he prayed for God to spare them.

Numbers 14:1-5,11-19

After Moses finally managed to lead the people to Canaan, they refused to go in because they feared the inhabitants. They determined to reject Moses and appoint some other leader to take them back to Egypt! Still Moses pled with God to spare them. Other than Jesus Himself, no leader has ever shown more patience, care, and self-sacrifice.

This does not mean Moses overlooked the people's sins. He often forcefully rebuked them. But he did not use the people's sins as an excuse to neglect his own responsibilities. He continued to endure great hardship and sacrifice because of his concern for them and for God.

Leaders often face criticism, complaint, and hindrances from their followers. The very people who ought to encourage and appreciate the leaders, will at times be their greatest discouragement by complaining, criticizing, and nagging. Some followers are better than others, but this is a common experience of leaders.

Leadership is not fun and games. Those who do it for selfish ambition will ignore the people's needs. But those who love the people will stand firmly for what they believe to be best while patiently making sacrifices for the good of the followers.

Religious Leaders of Israel

Ezekiel 34:2-10 – God refers to the religious leaders of Israel as shepherds, just as elders in the church are called shepherds. Shepherds should feed and protect the sheep, care for the sick and injured, and seek the lost. Instead, these shepherds fed themselves, used the sheep for personal advantage, and neglected the sheep. As a result, the sheep were scattered and the shepherds were rejected.

Leaders who view their position as prestige and a means of indulging their own pleasures, while neglecting the needs of their followers, are selfish and unloving. God says He will reject and punish them. Proper leadership requires patiently doing what is best for the people with firmness and yet with genuine concern for those who follow.

Jesus

Matthew 20:25-28 – Jesus taught that people are not great just because they have authority. Greatness is measured by service. As in all the characteristics of leadership we are studying, Jesus' own life illustrated His teaching. He came to die as the ultimate act of service to man.

Society tends to think that just being a leader makes someone important. The more followers one has, the more important he is. Instead, Jesus says we are important if we help people.

This does not mean authority is bad. Jesus used Himself as an example of service, yet He has supreme authority (Matthew 28:18). And He was always firm in standing for what was right. But He loved others so that He dealt patiently with them and even sacrificed His life.

The lesson is that simply possessing authority proves nothing. If you possess authority, use it to serve others. If you don't have authority, serve others in whatever way you can. Either way, service is what's important.

The lesson to leaders is to be like Nehemiah, Moses, and Jesus: be firm to stand for what you believe is best, but act with love, patience, and self-sacrifice for the good of others.

B. Modern Leaders

Husbands

Ephesians 5:25,28-30 – Jesus' love is specifically an example for husbands. Jesus' leadership toward the church is based on love and self-sacrifice, so much so that He died for the church. Husbands should love their wives as Jesus loved the church and as they love themselves. You should not destroy your body nor neglect it, so you should not neglect your wife but nourish and cherish her.

No man has the right to do just whatever he wishes and make decisions without regard to the well-being of his wife. To ignore her needs would be selfish, unloving, and sinful.

This does not justify a wife in just doing what she wants, either. She may disobey only if her husband tells her to sin (Acts 5:29). But, like Jesus, the husband should stand for what he believes is right, but he should lead with love, self-sacrifice, and patience. Otherwise, he fails as a leader and, above all, he disobeys God who appointed him.

Elders

Hebrews 13:17 – Elders lead (rule) a local church, so members should submit. But elders should not lead for their own glory or to get their own way. They watch on behalf of members'

souls, like shepherds guarding a flock to protect it from enemies (Acts 20:28-30). They should act for the members' good.

None of this means elders should accept whatever the members want, any more than Nehemiah or Moses followed whatever the Israelites wanted. If they did, then the followers would be the leaders! The leaders make the decisions, but they must do so based on what they genuinely believe to be best for the people. This kind of leadership benefits the followers, but followers must still abide by the decisions of the leaders.

1 Peter 5:3 – This is what the Scripture means when it says elders must not act as “lords” over the flock. It does not deny that elders have authority or that the congregation must follow them. The Scriptures say elders should “rule” and the members must “obey” (cf. 1 Timothy 5:17).

The lesson is that elders have no right to do just whatever pleases themselves, since they have a Master over them (v4). He is the real Lord. Like shepherds should care for their sheep [John 10:3ff], so leaders should care for the needs of their followers.

Like Nehemiah, good leaders must put the well-being of their followers ahead of their own personal desires. They stand for what they believe is best, but they lead with love, patience, and self-sacrifice. This balance is extremely difficult to achieve, but to be good leaders we must accept the challenge.

What about your leadership and mine? Do we use our authority to please ourselves? Or like Nehemiah, do we sacrifice our own desires to do what is best for others?

[1 Samuel 25:14,17; 30:22-24; 8:9-18; 1 Kings 12:6-16; 21:5ff; Nehemiah 5:15; Isaiah 52:5; Jeremiah 23:1-15; Micah 3:1-12; Matthew 18:26-34; 24:45-50; Luke 12:42-47; Titus 1:7,8; Ephesians 6:9; 1 Peter 3:7]

V. Teaching and Instruction

To accomplish their purpose, especially in spiritual matters, leaders must diligently train and instruct their followers.

A. The Example of Nehemiah

8:1-3,7-9 – Nehemiah and the other leaders of Israel (including Ezra) gathered the people, read the book of the law, and explained it so the people could understand. As a result, the people kept the feast of booths as the law instructed (verses 13-18).

9:1-3 – Again the people gathered and the book of the law was read. As a result the people confessed their sins; then the leaders led them in praising God (chap. 9) and making a covenant to obey the law (chap. 10).

If people in leadership roles expect others to follow their decisions, then they need to tell the followers clearly what they are expected to do. Otherwise, how can the people follow? But especially if our ultimate goal is to help people serve God, then we must teach them God's word.

B. The Example of Jesus

Matthew 28:18-20 – Jesus is the greatest leader who ever lived, and He spent the majority of His time in teaching. He had all authority as God's Son, and He insisted that His disciples must know and obey His commands.

When He left the earth, Jesus appointed His apostles as leaders in the church, and He required that they too be diligent teachers. Disciples need instruction both before and after they are baptized. [7:29]

Nehemiah, Jesus, and many other leaders in the Bible illustrate that instruction is absolutely essential to effective leadership. In particular, in order to lead people to obey God, leaders must diligently teach God's word.

C. Modern Leaders

Parents

Proverbs 6:20-22

A child should keep his father's command and not forsake his mother's law. The parents' instructions benefit the children by giving them guidance and protection. This means that children must follow their parents' instruction, but it also shows that parents are required to give it.

Parents must be teachers. Children need to learn right from wrong, how to deal with life, how to treat others, how to face temptation, and how to accomplish God's work. The best way they can learn this is by instruction. Proper leadership from parents requires diligent teaching.

Ephesians 6:4

Fathers should bring children up in the training and admonition of the Lord. Parents' teaching must especially emphasize the will of the Lord. It is not enough just to teach them what **we** want them to do. We must teach them what **God** has revealed so that, when they leave our authority, they will have a knowledge of God's will to guide them.

And notice that it is the **father's** responsibility to lead in this teaching, because he is the highest leader in the family. This does not deny that the wife should also teach. But I continue to be amazed by how many fathers, even in the church, think that they have little or no responsibility in training and disciplining their children.

Fathers, hear and understand this: If your children are lost because they have not been adequately taught God's will, God will hold **you** responsible. Yes, wives are responsible too, but the ultimate responsibility for seeing that the necessary teaching is done rests on fathers.

Deuteronomy 6:6-9

In order to teach, parents must first know God's will. You can't teach what you don't know.

A conductor once began checking passengers' tickets. He told the first passenger, "Friend, you're on the wrong train!" The same happened with the second passenger. After some confusion, they determined that the conductor was on the wrong train! When the leader is lost, the followers will surely be confused. – <http://www.sermonillustrations.com/a-z/1/leadership.htm>

So parents must know the truth, then they must teach diligently. Diligent teaching requires speaking regularly and frequently about God's will, throughout daily activities.

Note that it is not enough just to leave the teaching up to the church or to other people. It is surely not ultimately the responsibility of the schools or the grandparents (though they may and should help). Nor is it enough to teach only at special pre-arranged times, such as classes. Parents must teach through the normal activities of life.

We should bring our kids to church assemblies and classes, because it helps parents and the church to fulfill their role of teaching. But even that is not enough. God says the primary duty for teaching children the Scriptures rests on the parents.

And too many parents put more emphasis on other activities rather than on Bible study, yet they think somehow the children will grow up serving God anyway. All kinds of other activities are allowed to take priority. Some families let their children miss Bible classes for sports, school-work, or social activities.

Parents need to learn from Nehemiah that good leadership requires us to appreciate the importance of diligent instruction.

Elders

Titus 1:9-14

Elders must hold fast the faithful word so they can exhort in sound doctrine and convict gain-sayers. In order for members to practice what is right, they must be taught what is right. Elders are responsible to see that this is done.

Furthermore, members are often faced with people who tempt them to sin or who teach them error. The elders are responsible to see that this error is plainly exposed (verses 10-14; Acts 20:28-30). Yet many elders are unwilling to plainly rebuke sin, and many members oppose plain preaching against sin.

When members object to leaders who reprove sin, those members need to realize that they are hindering God's ordained leaders in the work He commanded them to do! And when elders fail to speak out against error, they need to realize that God will hold them responsible.

Hebrews 13:7

Remember those who rule over you, who have spoken the word of God to you, and follow their faith. Note that those who rule must be teachers, both by setting good examples and by "speaking" the word of God! Furthermore, the members must follow the truth that is taught.

When elders neglect teaching, God will hold them accountable for failing to be proper shepherds to the flock. Likewise, when members fail to follow the truth that is taught, God will hold them accountable for failing to submit to the leaders.

This does not say elders are the only teachers. Other passages show that other members are also responsible to teach. But many elders pay a preacher and organize classes, and think that fulfills their duty. Then they focus on maintaining the building and paying bills, but they rarely teach Bible classes, preach sermons, or conduct home Bible studies.

Elders are appointed because God's word authorizes them to lead. But the passages that authorize elders, also require those elders to speak the word of God and to exhort in sound doctrine. Men who will not do the work of teaching are not qualified to serve as bishops, and elders who fail to teach are neglecting their stewardship. [1 Thessalonians 5:12]

From the story of Nehemiah we learn that effective leadership requires effective teaching, especially in the home and in the church. How does your leadership and mine measure up to God's standard? Have we been negligent or diligent in our roles as leaders? Will our followers know the will of God so they can have the hope of eternal life? Will we stand pleasing before God in the Judgment Day because we have been faithful stewards as leaders?

[Exodus 18:20; 1 Timothy 3:2; Titus 2:15; Proverbs 1:8; 2 Corinthians 10:8; Genesis 18:19; 2 Chronicles 23:1ff; Joshua 23:2ff; chap. 24]

VI. Good Example

To lead effectively, one must not just tell people what to do, pull strings, issue orders, and make demands. He must actively and personally participate in the work that others may imitate.

A. Nehemiah's Example

Nehemiah 4:22,23 – When enemies threatened Israel, Nehemiah told people to work by day and guard against the enemy by night. Then he and his men set an example of diligence in the work.

Nehemiah 5:9-11,14-18 – Nehemiah rebuked the leaders who were charging usury of other Israelites and then foreclosing on their property and making them slaves. He required them to cease taking unfair advantage of those who suffered. But he also set a good example by lending money without charging usury, by not expecting those in poverty to support him as governor, and by actually providing for other people from his own funds.

Nehemiah did not just tell others how to act or what work to do, he and his men set a good example. He taught, not just by word of mouth, but by influence and conduct.

B. Other Leaders Who Set Good Examples

The Apostle Paul

Paul taught by example, as well as by oral instruction.

Philippians 3:17 – Brethren, join in following my example, and note those who so walk, as you have us for a pattern. We should notice and imitate the pattern set by the example of Paul and others who lived as he did. Good leaders always recognize the value of setting a good example.

1 Corinthians 11:1 – Paul called on others to follow his example. But to be a good example, he himself first had to follow the example of Christ. In order to effectively lead others to be a disciple of Christ, one must first become a good follower of Jesus.

Several passages we have studied compare leaders to shepherds who guide sheep. But good shepherds do not stand behind the sheep and drive them; they walk before the sheep leading them. People need instruction, but they learn as much or more by observing the work of others. They often understand what they see in the conduct of others more easily than they understand what they hear.

This is a tried and proven teaching method.

How do adults teach a child to talk? They say the name of some object, then the child tries to imitate the word. Our grandchildren regularly would point to an object and say, “What dat?” Mothers teach their daughters to cook and to set the table by example, fathers teach sons to work on the car, etc. Likewise, kids learn spiritual truth, right from wrong, and how to deal with tempting situations by watching their parents.

And this is the best way to teach people many skills they need as Christians. This is how men learn to lead prayer, lead songs, and wait on the table. They watch others, then they do it guided by experienced leaders. This is also the best way for members to learn how to teach a Bible class and teach the lost: put them in a Bible study led by experienced teachers, let them observe a while, then have them do it.

Jesus

Matthew 10:24,25 – A disciple seeks to be like his teacher, and a servant like his master. Jesus also set us a good example. Paul followed the example of Jesus because He is the ultimate example we should all follow. The goal of every disciple/servant is to be like the teacher/lord.

Jesus was a perfect leader, and He set a perfect example. If we imitate Him, He will always lead us to do right, never wrong. Paul set a good example because he followed Jesus. If we follow Jesus, then like Paul and Nehemiah, we in turn will set a good example for those who follow us.

But to the extent we fail to follow Jesus, people who follow us will be led astray or at least confused because our example does not match that of Jesus. This is why effective leaders, especially in the church and the home, must be good imitators of Jesus, setting a good example.

C. Leaders Who Failed to Set a Good Example

A man’s friends wanted to offer a special remembrance at his funeral, so they asked the preacher for permission to stand at the casket at the end of the service for a moment of silence, then the preacher would lead them out the side door. Unfortunately, the preacher picked the wrong door and led them right into the broom closet. Leaders must set a good example, not a bad example. [Stuart Briscoe; <http://www.sermonillustrations.com/a-z/l/leadership.htm>]

We may laugh, though I doubt the preacher thought it was funny at the time. But what is really sad is that some religious leaders do exactly that kind of thing spiritually.

Religious Leaders Who Live in Sin

Jeremiah 23:9-12 – When religious leaders live in sin, they break the hearts of those who want to do right. When those who are supposed to teach God’s word really lack respect for the truth,

their example leads others to practice evil. The same has happened today in far too many homes, churches, and nations.

Leaders who profess to be religious but do not practice what they preach are hypocrites. They not only sin themselves, but their example leads others to sin.

Scribes and Pharisees

Matthew 23:1-4 – Scribes and Pharisees should have been leaders in Moses' place. They taught many truths, and they expected others to do right. But they themselves did not practice what was right. They made firm demands but they did not lead by their own example. Jesus called them hypocrites.

Mark Twain blamed church leaders for his hostility to the church. As he grew up, he observed religious leaders who professed godliness in church on Sunday but then abused their slaves, used foul language, and practiced dishonesty. Although he saw people who set good examples, including his mother and his wife, he was so disturbed by the poor examples that he became bitter toward religion. [<http://www.sermonillustrations.com/a-z/1/leadership.htm>]

We had a neighbor in Illinois whom we could not influence with the gospel because, in his younger years, a preacher he knew ran off with the church secretary.

The religious world today is well populated with such hypocrites. They profess to be devout religious leaders but they do not live the life they pretend: many televangelists, Catholic priests who seduce children, etc. Worldly people have a hey day mocking such people. As a result religion is given a bad name and many people reject the truth of God's word.

People need to realize that we are not excused from serving God because of the sins of others. God is not to blame for such hypocrites. He is even more upset at them than people are. But the lesson is that God's people need leaders who set a good example like Nehemiah.

D. Applications to Modern Leaders

Elders

Elders must be good examples to the flock.

1 Peter 5:3 – Nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock. Instead of being domineering tyrants, simply bossing people around, elders should set a good example for others to follow.

Verse 2 also says elders should shepherd the flock. Remember, shepherds do not drive, they lead. They cannot expect the sheep to go where they themselves refuse to go. Elders who do not set a good example are failing their stewardship toward God and toward those they lead.

Influencing others requires us to spend time with them.

John 10:14 – A good shepherd must know his sheep and they must know him. In order for followers to learn from the example of leaders, leaders and followers must spend time together. Elders must spend time with the flock. Parents must spend time with children, and new members in the church with those who are more experienced. How else can we learn from one another and observe their example?

Members can't learn how to live as Christians if they don't attend the services and spend time with other mature Christians. And mature Christians can't lead other people to grow as Christians if they don't spend time with them doing spiritual activities.

Members must imitate the good example set for them.

Sometimes members think it is important for leaders in the church to set good examples, but they excuse themselves from living by the rules they expect the leaders to follow.

Sometimes members think, "Bro. X is an elder (or preacher or Bible class teacher, etc.), and he's supposed to set a good example. So I think he and his family should attend every time the church meets. And I don't think he should smoke, or tell crude stories, or let his wife or daughters

wear short skirts, or let his kids dance, or let his sons wear long hair, etc.” I agree with that. But the same people then sometimes excuse themselves or their family members in **not** living the way they expect the leaders to live.

But the whole point of leaders setting a good example is so others will **follow** the example! Nehemiah, Paul, and Jesus expected others to follow their example. For us to think that leaders should set a good example but we don’t have to follow that example, constitutes a double standard and defeats the whole purpose of good examples!

What is needed in the Lord’s church, in our homes, and in our nation are leaders who know right, speak right, and set an example of practicing right. What is also needed is followers who observe whether or not the lives of the leaders harmonize with the Bible, refuse to follow examples or teaching that does not harmonize with the Bible, but diligently practice to the best of their ability everything that they expect the leaders to practice.

Parents

Children will be influenced by their parents’ lives.

2 Timothy 1:5 – Timothy possessed unfeigned faith, but it was first possessed by his mother and his grandmother. They did not just tell Timothy what to believe. They showed him by their own faith. “Actions speak louder than words.”

Ezekiel 16:44 – As is the mother, so is the daughter. Occasionally a child may grow up to be significantly better than its parents. But generally children are much like their parents. “The apple does not fall far from the tree.”

If your children imitate you, what will they practice?

Will they learn to lie, deceive, drink, gamble, and neglect the work of the Lord and the church? Or will they learn honesty, hard work, Bible study, prayer, teaching God’s word to others, and diligent involvement in the work of the church?

Parents, like all leaders, teach by example, good or bad. Do you have things about your life that you don’t want your children to imitate? If so, you need to change, and change now! Woe to us if, by our example, our children are lost eternally.

Each of us will be judged for his/her own life (2 Corinthians 5:10). Even if parents, elders, or other leaders don’t do right, that is no excuse for us to sin. God still expects us to do right. But God will also judge the leaders who fail to set a good example. Some of Jesus’ most forceful rebukes were directed against these hypocritical leaders.

What we need is leaders like Nehemiah, who set a good example for others to follow.

[Joshua 24:15; Philippians 4:9; Isaiah 28:14-17; Matthew 15:14; 20:25-28; Acts 20:28; 2 Thesalonians 3:8,9; 1 Timothy 5:14; 3:1-6; 1 Peter 2:20-22]

E. Specifically, Leaders Should Set an Example of Submission to Authority.

Nehemiah

Nehemiah 2:1-8 – Nehemiah became a great leader. But he also had others in authority over him: the king and God. He was respectful and submissive to them both.

Before one can be a good leader, he must first be a good follower.

Joseph

Genesis 39:2-9 – Joseph became a great leader. He eventually rose to the second-highest position in Egypt, and spared Israel from destruction. But first he had to demonstrate faithful subjection to God and human authorities.

His jealous brothers sold him as a slave to Egypt, but as a slave he served his master faithfully. When tempted, he refused to sin against his master or against God. Imprisoned because of false

accusations, he submissively served the keeper of the prison. In the end he became a powerful and effective ruler.

No one is prepared to use authority wisely till he understands what it is like to submit to authority. We should do to others as we would have them do to us (Matthew 7:12). The best way to know how to treat those who are subject to us is to first learn subjection to others.

David

1 Samuel 24:1-7 – David also became a famous king of Israel. But first he had to learn to faithfully serve King Saul.

When Saul became jealous of David's military victories and popularity, he spent many years trying to capture and kill David. But despite Saul's attitude, David never became rebellious or did evil to Saul. Given opportunity to take Saul's life, David refused. He was faithful as a servant, and eventually became a great king.

A question on an application for college admission read, "Are you a leader?" An honest young woman answered the question "No," and figured she would never be accepted. To her surprise, the college responded: "Dear Applicant: A study of the application forms reveals that this year our college will have 1,452 new leaders. We are accepting you because we feel it is imperative that they have at least one follower." [S. I. McMillen via <http://www.sermonillustrations.com/a-z/1/leadership.htm>]

Before you can be a good parent, you need the experience of being a child. Before you are a supervisor, you need to be an employee. Before you are an elder, you must be a member. Subjection to authority teaches us how authority works and helps us appreciate the viewpoint of those subject to authority.

Korah, Dathan, and Abiram

Numbers 16:1-3,12-14 – Moses and Aaron were God's ordained leaders. They had made great sacrifices for the people. But Korah, Dathan, and Abiram rebelled and refused to follow their instructions. So God slew them. [17:2-11]

People who desire to exercise authority are often very rebellious against higher authority. Teenagers rebel against their parents, wives against their husbands, members against the elders, and citizens refuse to obey civil law. They fuss, complain, argue, find fault, and generally are uncooperative troublemakers. Often they think they can be better leaders.

But when such people come into positions of authority, their followers are miserable. When people don't know how to submit to authority, they do not make good leaders. They don't understand how authority relations work; and their bossy, self-willed attitudes cause them to mistreat their followers.

Jesus

Luke 2:51 – Though He was the Son of God and King of kings, when Jesus came to earth as a human, He was subject to His own parents. The greatest of leaders began by being the greatest of followers.

Hebrews 5:8-10 – Jesus learned obedience by the things He suffered. This perfected Him to be the King and High Priest whom we must obey to be saved. In this way He demonstrated to us that He understands what it's like to be a follower. And by His subjection, He gave an example showing us how we should be subject to Him.

The same is true of our example before those who follow us. If a child sees his father break traffic laws or cheat his employer, or if he sees Mommy bending Daddy's rules, the child will grow up thinking it is all right to disobey authority if he thinks he can get away with it. Our attitude toward those with authority over us becomes an example for those who are subject to us.

How do your example and mine compare to those of Nehemiah, Jesus, and these other great leaders? Will our example lead others to respect God and His word, worship and serve faithfully, and submit to others who have legitimate authority? By observing our lives as leaders, will our

followers become worse people, or will they be what God wants them to be? Does our example hinder our work as leaders, or do we show by our lives how those who follow us ought to live?

[Genesis 18:19; Exodus 18:21; Joshua 1:6-10; 1 Samuel 8; Numbers 13:2-14:10; 3:4; 2 Samuel 23:3,4; 2 Kings 5:1-14; 22:1-23:5; 1 Chronicles 10:13; 2 Chronicles 19:5-10; Nehemiah 7:2; Matthew 24:45-50; Luke 12:42-47; 16:13; Acts 8:27; Romans 13:1-3; Ephesians 6:9]

VII. Initiative, Planning, Organization, and Wisdom

The purpose of leaders is to organize a group of people to work together to accomplish goals. If a person works by himself independently from others, he does not need a leader. But when people work together, leaders are needed to plan and organize the work. The leaders need to take **initiative**: consider what work needs to be done, plan a good way to do it, and organize the work and the workers so each person knows what to do to help achieve the whole task.

A. Bible Examples

Nehemiah

2:11-18 – The people needed leadership to organize the rebuilding of the wall of Jerusalem. Nehemiah viewed the task, determined what needed to be accomplished, discussed it with the workers, and challenged them to do the work.

Chapter 3 describes how the work was organized. Each section of the wall was assigned to a group of workers. Each group was given specific tasks to complete.

4:13-23 – When enemies threatened violence, the people needed to build while also defending against an enemy. So, Nehemiah devised a plan for some people to work while others guarded.

12:44,45; 13:30,31 – After the wall was completed, people were assigned various duties in the work of the temple. Again, each worker was given a job to do.

Apostles

Acts 6:1-4 – Widows in the Jerusalem church were being neglected. The apostles did not have time to preach and still distribute to these widows. So, they initiated a plan to organize the work and delegate supervision to seven qualified men. This left the apostles free to pray and preach.

Those who have oversight are responsible to recognize the needs of the group they lead and then develop a plan and assign workers to specific tasks to get the job done. This applies to elders in the church, parents in the home, etc.

Consider some specific aspects of this work:

B. Delegating Responsibility

Organizing the work involves determining who is responsible to do certain jobs. This includes delegating work to people who assist the leaders to do their work.

Examples of Delegating Responsibilities

Nehemiah 7:2; 13:13 – As we have discussed, Nehemiah assigned specific tasks to each worker according to his ability. This included delegating leadership responsibilities to others. The duties of leaders include considering the abilities of the workers and seeing that everyone has something worthwhile to do. This includes assigning some to help in the leadership.

Exodus 18:13-22 [cf. Deuteronomy 1:9-17] – Moses' father-in-law said the job of judging the people was too big for Moses (verses 18,22). So, men were appointed, subject to Moses' leadership, to judge various groups of people. But the harder cases they brought to Moses.

Luke 9:1,2 – Jesus delegated authority to the apostles to preach, heal the sick miraculously, cast out demons, etc. Jesus had been doing this work, but here He gave the apostles responsibility to help, still subject to His guidance.

Acts 6:1-4 – The problem of neglected widows was resolved by delegating leadership responsibility to seven men.

So delegation means placing responsibility on people who are subject to the leaders to assist the leaders in the work. These followers accomplish the assigned work, perhaps including work the leaders had been doing, but subject to the guidance of the leaders.

Advantages of Delegating Responsibilities

Leaders have help with their work.

When Moses appointed men to judge in easier matters, that freed Moses to judge the more difficult cases.

When the seven men were appointed in Acts 6 to care for widows, that freed the apostles to preach.

We have seen that leaders should set a good example by actively participating in the work. Yet often members seem to think that leaders are responsible to do most of the work. But as in the Bible examples, there is always more work than can be done by a handful. If it is all left to a few, they get discouraged, frustrated, and may even quit.

The duty of leaders is, not to do all the work, but to lead others in doing the work.

More work is accomplished.

Ephesians 4:11,12,16 – Jesus appointed leaders in the church to equip the members to do their work, so that all can build up the body.

When leaders delegate work that requires less experience or qualifications, this sets the leaders free to handle other work that requires greater experience, wisdom, etc.

In some families, parents do nearly all the work. They run themselves ragged caring for the kids, fixing meals, picking up after the kids, and running a taxicab service. If parents would assign areas of responsibility to each child, this would free the parents to do jobs that require adult skills and wisdom. As children grow, they can be taught more challenging responsibilities.

Likewise in the church, if elders (or the men) would assign work to the various members according to their ability, more work would get done, and the leaders could have time to deal with more serious matters, initiate new works, etc.

New leaders are trained.

When people are assigned to work under leaders, they develop skills so they themselves can eventually become leaders (we will discuss this more later).

The Need for Continued Supervision

Leaders must continue to supervise those to whom they delegate.

In Bible examples, work was delegated only to people subject to the leaders' authority. The leaders were still in charge and could see that the work was done properly and that changes were made if work was done unsatisfactorily.

Judges appointed by Moses worked under his leadership. He taught them what to do, and they came to him for decisions regarding the harder cases.

Likewise, Jesus' disciples worked subject to His instruction and supervision.

The seven men in Acts 6 were still subject to the apostles.

When leaders give responsibilities to people who are not subject to the leaders, that is not delegation but shifting responsibility. It constitutes neglect. The leaders are failing to supervise the work God that God put under their leadership. They surrender their power and no longer give guidance to see the work is done rightly.

Shifting responsibility or surrendering authority to others is not delegation.

Consider some examples:

Parents and children

Ephesians 6:4 – Parents must bring their children up to serve God. But some parents just let children decide what TV programs to watch, what music to listen to, what friends to choose, etc. Parents are responsible to check on their children and change habits or practices that are harmful. To fail to do so is a surrender of authority. Most parents used to agree with this.

But when children go to school, some parents just leave all the decisions about their children to the schools. They don't check up on what is taught or what the rules are or with whom their children associate. If they find out their children are being taught error or being subjected to harmful influences, they just give in to the schools.

If you choose to let others help educate your children, you are delegating authority to the teachers. But you must still be in charge. You must know what is done and must not permit the schools to do what is harmful to your children. If you do not stay in charge, that is not delegation; it is surrender of authority. God will still hold parents accountable.

Husbands and wives

God says the husband should be the head of the family. But some husbands don't like to make tough decisions, so they let the wives take the lead and they just go along with whatever is decided. A good husband will allow his wife to have areas of responsibility in making decisions (delegation), but he is still responsible to make sure decisions are made well. If he sees problems, he is responsible to step in and make changes. Otherwise, he is not delegating; he is surrendering his authority.

Elders and church work

Elders should oversee the flock among them (1 Peter 5:1-3). But some churches send donations to human institutions or sponsoring churches to carry out a work, such as caring for needy members or preaching on radio/TV, etc. As a result, the funds and the work are supervised by the leaders of the man-made institution or by the elders of another church. The elders of the sending church cease to supervise the funds and work.

Some justify this saying the elders "delegate" the work to others. But this is not valid delegation, because the institution or sponsoring church is not subject to the elders of the sending church. Those elders have surrendered the power to make decisions over the work God told them to supervise. Other people are deciding what work will be done, by whom, when, where, etc. This is not delegation of authority but **surrender or abdication** of authority. It constitutes a **shift of responsibility** from those whom God said should be in charge.

Good leaders need to delegate authority to those who are subject to them, so more work gets done. But they must not give away their authority and expect others to supervise the work God gave them to supervise.

C. Training Workers, Including Other Leaders

Leaders train others by instructing them in their work, by setting a good example, and by delegating work when needed. In particular, the leaders of today are responsible to train the leaders of tomorrow.

Consider Some Bible Examples.

Moses trained Joshua.

Exodus 24:12,13 – Moses was not alone when he received the law. Joshua was his servant and was with him on Mt. Sinai (cf. 32:15-17). When God spoke to Moses at the tent of meeting, gain Joshua was present (Exodus 33:7-11).

Numbers 27:18-23 [Deuteronomy 1:38] – As a result, when Moses died, God appointed Joshua to replace Moses as leader of the people.

Joshua not only helped Moses (a form of delegation), but he also gained experience in leadership. He saw how Moses dealt with needs and problems. This trained Joshua to become Moses' replacement.

Jesus trained the apostles.

Mark 3:14 – He appointed twelve that they might ***be with Him*** and that He might send them out to preach. They spent three years observing the Master Teacher.

Mark 16:15 – When Jesus left the earth, He gave the apostles responsibility to preach the gospel in all the world. By being with Him, they became qualified to do this work.

Jesus' work included training others to teach after He left. Likewise, leaders today need to train the leaders of tomorrow.

Preachers and teachers should train others how to become teachers.

Parents should train children to become good parents.

Elders should develop other men to qualify as deacons and elders.

“A major part of my job is to work myself out of a job.” My goal was not just to help others learn God's word. My goal was to train teachers so they could continue the work when I'm gone.

Paul trained young preachers.

Acts 13:5 – On their first preaching trip, Paul and Barnabas had John Mark as their assistant (KJV; “attendant” – ASV).

Acts 16:1-3 – On his second preaching trip, Paul took Timothy with him. Almost always Paul took at least one young man. Why take young, inexperienced men? Why not take only older, wiser, more experienced men? Surely it was for the same reason Moses took Joshua and Jesus took the apostles. It was training.

Why does the Lord's church so often lack qualified leaders? Why are there so few elders? One reason is that elders of the past did not train men to take their place!

Why do so many young people get married knowing so little about how to be good husbands, wives, and parents? Because parents of the past failed to train their children!

Why do we sometimes struggle finding qualified preachers and Bible class teachers? Because preachers and teachers of the past did not train others to take their place.

I have known excellent personal evangelists who refused to take other Christians with them when they taught. They convert many, but they make no attempt to encourage other Christians to observe how to do it. How can Christians learn to teach others, when the people who know how to do it will not use the training methods used by Nehemiah, Paul, Jesus, etc.?

[Cf. Elijah and Elisha.]

Timothy trained other teachers.

2 Timothy 2:2 – The things that you have heard from me, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also. As Paul taught Timothy, so Timothy should teach others. But what did Paul teach him? One thing he taught him was how to teach others. And Timothy was to do the same – teach others how to teach others.

The chain of training should continue. Like a “train,” each car pulls another car to follow it.

That same responsibility then rested on those people that Timothy taught and everyone who followed them. Teachers must teach others to become teachers. Leaders must train others to become leaders. When you have developed skill in God's work, train others to do it.

Training More Effectively

Where should we improve to train others more effectively?

Realize the need.

I have known churches that insisted the “full-time preacher” do all the teaching: both sermons on Sunday, both adult classes, Wednesday invitation, etc. I have known preachers who objected when others want to teach or preach – or they never encourage others to do so.

Such folks need to consider passages like those we have studied. Will we follow the example of Nehemiah, Jesus, Paul, etc., or not? Will we obey the instructions Paul gave Timothy about training others, or will we refuse to obey?

Make the investment of time and trouble.

Parents often think, “I can do the work myself quicker than I can teach my kids to do it.” But how will your kids learn to be good husbands, wives, homemakers, and parents if you don’t take time to train them?

Training others is an investment in the future. No doubt it took time for Nehemiah and Moses and Jesus and Paul to train the judges and the apostles and young preachers. But after people learn the job, they can free you to do other things and they can continue after you are gone. Investing the time now pays dividends later.

Give opportunities to gain experience.

Some people object to using inexperienced speakers. They say, “I think we should always use the **best** we have.” Sounds good ... as long as you don’t think about the consequences. But is that what Nehemiah believed or Jesus or Paul? Is it what Paul taught Timothy?

Matthew 9:37-10:1 – Just before Jesus called the apostles to preach the gospel, He taught the disciples to pray for more teachers to bring in the harvest. Do we have enough experienced teachers to do all the teaching needed in the whole world? How can we develop teachers if we don’t let them get experience?

Suppose we just keep using “the best we have.” What happens as they grow old and die? Then everybody will have to listen to inexperienced teachers, because that’s all there will be! Then those teachers will have to learn on their own without the guidance of the experienced teachers! How much better to just do it the Bible way and let the inexperienced teachers learn under the guidance of the experienced teachers!

Far too often families and local churches fail to be what God wants because leaders fail to assign and delegate work and train others to become leaders.

How are we doing in our homes and in this congregation? If we want the church and our homes to prosper, we must learn to be like Nehemiah. We must organize the work, assign each person work to do, and train them how to work effectively, including training other people to become leaders.

VIII. Motivation

A good leader not only plans and organizes work, but he also motivates people, encouraging them to see the need for the work they should do.

A. Examples

Nehemiah

Nehemiah 2:15-20

Nehemiah motivated the people to see the need to rebuild the wall of Jerusalem.

First, he **investigated the job** (verses 12-15). He did not require others to do a job he knew nothing about. He learned the job, so he knew why it was needed.

Then he **explained** to the people **the need** by discussing the **advantages** of doing the job and the **disadvantages** of not doing it – v17. “See the distress we are in.” “That we may no longer be a reproach.”

Then he challenged the people to accept the task (verses 17,18).

People work more willingly when they see the value of a job. Otherwise, they may lack commitment, give up easily, and need continual encouragement. The more they see the need and the advantages, the more diligently and patiently they will work.

Nehemiah 4:10-15

Workers became discouraged and wanted to give up, because the work was so hard and because people of the land threatened violence. Motivation is especially important in times of opposition and difficulty.

Nehemiah reminded the people of the **need** for the job and the **advantages** they had in doing it (v14). He said **God** was on their side and would work with them. And they needed to work for the good of their **families** and property.

Good leaders, like Nehemiah, motivate people by showing the reasons why they need to work. And two excellent reasons for working hard are God and family.

Eli - 1 Samuel 3:10-14

God punished the family of Eli the priest because his sons were wicked, but he did not restrain them. He said they were wrong (2:22-25), but God required that he restrain them.

When leaders know their followers are doing wrong and won't repent, God expects us to do more than just tell them they are wrong. We must take action to motivate them to change and to clear ourselves from appearing to approve of their conduct.

In the home, church, and government, God has ordained that those in authority have specific means of motivating obedience. If we don't use these means, He not only holds the followers accountable for their conduct, but He also holds the leaders accountable for failing to do what we could to motivate obedience.

[See also Psalm 101:7; Numbers 25:1-13; Deuteronomy 21:18-21; Joshua chap. 7; chaps. 23 & 24; Luke 19:16-20ff; Matthew 25:14-30; 2 Corinthians 5:11,20.]

B. Observations about Motivation

Good Leaders Try to Help People See the Reasons and the Advantages of the Work.

Some leaders just boss people around: "I said so. That's all the reason you need." They act insulted if people ask them to explain their reasons. But it is not enough for leaders to make good decisions. Usually leaders also need to help the followers understand the decisions.

This does not mean that followers have the right to refuse to obey just because they think the rules don't make sense. God's word requires us to obey those who have authority over us whether or not their decisions seem wise to us. That is the nature of authority. The only exception is if we are told to sin against God (Acts 5:29).

But the fact remains that people will work more effectively, with better cooperation if, like Nehemiah, leaders will explain their reasons so people can understand the need for the work.

Good Leaders Also Motivate by Rewards and Punishments.

Bad conduct should be punished. Good conduct should be rewarded.

1 Peter 2:14

Civil rulers are sent by God for the punishment of evildoers and for the praise of those who do good. Most people realize rulers should punish evildoers, but God says they should also praise those who do good. Often the best motivation is praise.

[Romans 13:3; Proverbs 31:28,29; Luke 15:22-24]

Revelation 3:19-21

Jesus reproves and chastens His followers who do wrong. But those who do right have the blessing of His fellowship and will be rewarded eternally. Notice that the use of rewards and punishments actually benefits those whom Jesus loves.

The ultimate reward for those who serve God is eternal life. So earthly leaders can motivate people by reminding people of God's eternal reward.

Hebrews 12:5-11

God compares His chastisement of people to earthly fathers who chasten their sons. He says that all fathers should chasten their children (verses 6-8). This chastening is an act of love (v6), because it results in good for the child (verses 10,11).

Some followers are so rebellious that they resent any chastisement. But God says that punishments and rewards, properly used, are an act of love and generally lead people to respect those in authority.

Some people claim that parents should not punish disobedient children and churches should not discipline erring members. However, the same reasoning would mean that God should not punish evil men. But He does punish evil men, and no one is wiser than He is.

God has ordained the use of rewards and punishments as a means of motivation. He practices it, and all good leaders, like Nehemiah, also practice it. But it must be done with wisdom and love for the good of all who are involved.

[Proverbs 22:15; 19:18; 13:24; Matthew 18:15-17; 1 Corinthians 5; 2 Thessalonians 3:6-15]

IX. Courage and Strength

A. Leaders Need Courage to Deal with Outside Opposition.

Leaders often take flak from people who are not their followers. Satan often focuses his attack on those who are godly leaders.

Bible Examples

Nehemiah 6:1-14

As Nehemiah led Israel to rebuild the wall, enemies threatened war to stop the work (4:8-14). Then three times they used personal attacks on Nehemiah to stop the work.

6:1-4 – First, they called for discussion, but they intended to use the discussions as an opportunity to attack him. He saw the danger and refused to participate. Note that leaders must learn there are times when talking with their enemies is useless and even harmful.

6:5-9 – Then they falsely accused Nehemiah of seeking to be king, and they threatened to accuse him before the emperor. Nehemiah realized that the real problem was that they were trying to stop him from doing the work God wanted done. So he denied the charge, continued to do what God commanded, and put his faith in God.

6:10-14 – The enemies then hired a man to make a false prophecy to frighten Nehemiah into violating God's law in order to save his life (hide in the temple). They hoped to provoke him to do wrong so they could discredit him in the eyes of the people.

Leaders need courage to do the Lord's work in the face of opposition from those who are not their followers.

Joshua and Caleb – Numbers 14:4-10

Joshua and Caleb were among the twelve men sent to spy on Canaan. Ten said Israel could not take the land because the inhabitants were too big. Joshua and Caleb said the people could take it, because God was with them. They challenged Israel not to be afraid but to do what God said despite the enemies.

Joshua and Caleb showed great courage in the face of their enemies. Forty years later, Joshua was appointed to lead Israel into the land. God then reminded him of his need for courage (Joshua 1:5-9).

Courage was needed to face the enemies outside the nation of Israel.

Modern Applications

Today the church and our families face spiritual enemies (Ephesians 6:12).

As with Nehemiah, people may tempt us to sin, or they may seek to intimidate us to give up the work, or they may attack us personally hoping to discredit us.

Please note that enemies of truth will not be satisfied to oppose God's work in general. If we continue to do what is right, sooner or later the attacks will get personal. If you lead effectively, sooner or later you will face personal attack. People will lie about you, falsely accuse you, try to turn people against you, and seek any opportunity to discredit your work

Faithful leaders actively oppose efforts of those who seek to hinder their work.

Acts 4:27-29 – When rulers opposed God's work and persecuted His people, disciples prayed for strength to speak His will boldly. Some leaders prefer to stay quiet and hope problems just go away. But this was not the approach of Nehemiah, Joshua, or any other faithful Biblical leaders.

Those who seek to lead others in harmony with the will of God may as well expect Satan's attacks. We need courage to fight spiritually for our families and our brothers in Christ like they did. Christians need leaders who are willing to boldly speak up for truth, not compromise and keep quiet. [Acts 20:28-30]

B. Leaders Need Courage to Deal with Their Own Followers.

Often those in leadership position face criticism and even opposition from their own followers. Courage and strength, as well as wisdom, are needed to deal with these problems.

Bible Examples

Nehemiah 13:4-29

In chap. 5 Nehemiah had the courage to rebuke influential Jews who cheated and mistreated their fellow Jews. But note other errors Nehemiah dealt with in chap. 13.

13:4-9 – Tobiah kept his household stuff in a chamber of the temple, which had been appointed for storing temple vessels, meal offerings, tithes, etc. Nehemiah threw out Tobiah's household stuff and restored the room to its intended use.

13:10-12 – Nehemiah contended with rulers who had not brought the tithes to support the Levites as commanded by the law.

13:15-22 – He contended with some who did business on the Sabbath. He commanded that the doors of the city be shut on the Sabbath, then he threatened the merchants.

13:23-29 – Nehemiah rebuked some Jews who had intermarried with people of the land. He made them swear to obey God's command not to intermarry.

In all these cases Nehemiah needed strength and courage to deal with problems caused by those who were part of the people he was responsible to lead.

Joshua and Caleb

Numbers 14:4-10 – Joshua and Caleb also faced opposition, not just from enemies outside Israel, but also from those within Israel. Some Israelites wanted to rebel against Moses and return to Egypt. When Joshua and Caleb urged them instead to put their faith in God, the people threatened to stone them to death.

Often leaders face conflict with those who ought to respect and submit to them. This conflict often takes more courage to deal with than conflict with those outside.

Aaron

Exodus 32:1-6,17-24 – As a leader, Aaron lacked strength and courage. When Moses was receiving the law at Sinai, Israel tired of waiting for him. They urged Aaron to make gods, so he fashioned a golden calf, in violation of God's command.

Aaron excused himself by saying the people made him do it. But Moses had repeatedly dealt with the same people; when they sinned he rebuked and punished them (verses 25ff). Why couldn't Aaron have stood firm like Moses?

Weak leaders like Aaron are all too common in government, home, and church. They know what is right, but they lack the courage to stand up to their own followers.

Modern Examples

Leaders are often subjected to criticism.

A sportswriter once asked quarterback Sonny Jurgenson if it made him want to quit when people criticized him. Sonny replied, "No, ... I've been in this game long enough to know that every quarterback ... spends his time either in the penthouse or in the [basement]." – Chuck Swindoll, via <http://www.sermonillustrations.com/a-z/1/leadership.htm>

The quarterback is always the hero or the goat, depending on whether his team won or lost. Likewise, in almost every institution leaders are criticized for every problem.

In civil government

Inner city dwellers sometimes threaten to riot if rulers do not meet their demands. Homosexuals march, disrupt speeches, take over meetings, and desecrate church buildings. Feminists attack public figures who dare to oppose their agenda. It takes a courageous leader to stand against such people.

In the church and in the home

Some "followers" are contentious, manipulative, self-willed, and obnoxious if they don't get their way. They can make life miserable for husbands, parents, elders, etc. When a leader makes an unpopular decision, he will be accused of being unwise or uncaring. That hurts, especially when he really does care and has made a conscientious effort to do what is best.

It is especially hard to discipline followers. It hurts to look in the eyes of a family member or erring church member and tell them they are wrong and must change or be chastised.

It takes a strong, courageous good leader to deal with the pressures both from among and from outside his followers.

C. The Source of Strength and Courage

First, leaders need to carefully evaluate criticisms and suggestions. Sometimes the ideas others raise have some validity. Most of us do not like to be criticized; but the truth is that, if we are honest, some good can come from most criticisms regardless of the motives of the critics.

Then we should learn to distinguish genuine needs from reasonable wants or unreasonable demands. Sometimes followers communicate to us real needs, which we should seek to meet. Other times they say they have a need, when they really just have a want. Still other times they are just making unreasonable demands. Leaders need to learn to make careful distinctions.

Having made a decision, where then do leaders get the strength to stand for what they believe is best? Consider the following examples:

Joshua

Joshua 1:6-9 – God told Joshua he could be strong if he did the following:

- (1) Meditate on God's word.
- (2) Obey God's word without deviation.
- (3) Trust God to be with him and give success.

This is the same way leaders today can get the strength they need.

Elisha

2 Kings 6:15-17 – Elisha's servant was afraid when the Syrians came to fight them. In one of the most stirring passages in the Bible, Elisha told him to not be afraid but to realize they had far

more strength than the enemies had. The servant was enabled to see that the mountain surrounding them was full of horses and chariots of fire.

We cannot see the forces of God with our physical eyes, nor will they work miracles for us. But just as surely as God helped His leaders in the Old Testament, He will still work for us today in answer to our prayers as we obey His will.

The reason we are cowardly and lack courage to stand as we should is that we trust in our own strength instead of God's. But if we use God's strength, we too can deal with the problems we face. No hardship or difficulty can overwhelm us.

What about you and me? Do we fail God when He needs us to be strong and courageous leaders? Or do we stand strong and courageous like Nehemiah, Moses, and Joshua to do right regardless of what opposition is faced?

[Cf. Romans 8:31; Hebrews 13:6; Nehemiah 8:14; Daniel 6:3-26; Titus 1:9.]

X. Justice and Fairness

To be an effective leader, one must make decisions without partiality or favoritism.

A. The Example of Nehemiah

Nehemiah 5:7,8,11-13 – When nobles and rulers in Israel mistreated those who were poor, Nehemiah made them return what they had taken improperly. Even though powerful and wealthy people were mistreating those who were poor and humble, that did not influence Nehemiah's decision about right and wrong. He showed no favoritism.

Nehemiah 13:23-29 – Some men had married women of the land in disregard of God's command. One man involved was a son of the high priest (v28), but this did not change Nehemiah's conclusion. The man was banished, and Nehemiah required all people to obey the command.

Leaders must not show favoritism toward people who are rich, famous, popular, or members of influential families. If a person does wrong, he should be dealt with the same as anyone else who does wrong.

B. Other Leaders Who Were Just and Fair

1 Samuel 12:3-5 - Samuel

When Samuel's service as judge was coming to an end, he asked the people what wrong he had done. The people all agreed he was not guilty. Note how Samuel here identifies several ways leaders are often guilty of injustice:

(1) Using authority for personal advantage at the expense of the followers.

Some leaders use devious means to take what others have. Or they may often demand that followers sacrifice what they want, but the leaders rarely sacrifice what they want.

(2) Showing partiality to favored followers at the expense of other followers.

When leaders show special favors to certain followers but would not do the same for others under the same circumstances, that is partiality or respect of persons. If they hand out punishments or demand sacrifices of one person, but would not make the same demands of other people under the same circumstances, that is unfair oppression.

(3) Taking bribes to change the rules or give special treatment.

If someone gives us a gift or does us a favor, so we let him get away with something that others would not be allowed to do, that is injustice – bribery.

As a good leader Samuel was guilty of none of these. Are we guilty?

Deuteronomy 1:15-17 - Judges in Israel.

Moses taught judges that righteous judgment requires judging great and small alike, because the judgment belonged to God. People in authority sometimes favor people who are viewed as great: rich, powerful, or influential.

Others show favoritism to those who are disadvantaged. They think certain people should be allowed to get away with breaking the rules or should be given lesser punishments, because they are **not** among the advantaged.

Like Nehemiah, leaders must judge the great and small **alike**! Anything else is partiality.

C. Examples of Leaders Who Were Not Just

1 Kings 21:5-16 - Ahab

When Naboth refused to sell his vineyard to King Ahab, Jezebel used the king's authority to have Naboth falsely accused and killed. Then Ahab took possession of his vineyard. Here an innocent man was condemned and killed for the personal gain of the leader.

How often are we guilty perhaps in a lesser way? Do we as parents make unfair decisions affecting our children, or as husbands regarding our wives, because of what we want for ourselves? Obviously we have the right to consider our own needs and desires alongside those of others. But it is unjust to use our authority to compel others to sacrifice to please us, while we rarely sacrifice to please them.

Micah 3:1-4,9-12 - Rulers of Israel

Rulers should have loved justice, but instead they hated good and loved evil. They mistreated the people, perverted equity, took bribes, and filled Jerusalem with evil and bloodshed. Religious leaders would preach whatever people paid them to preach. Yet they thought God would overlook it.

Today all around us we see this same kind of perversions in government and in false religious groups. We sometimes see it even in the homes of Christians and in the church. If God didn't overlook it then, will He now?

We need to imitate Nehemiah, not those who were unjust leaders.

D. Modern Applications

Parents

Ephesians 6:4 – Fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord. One of the surest ways to provoke a child to wrath is to treat him unjustly. Kids are quick to accuse parents of being unfair.

If one child violates a rule and is punished, then another child under similar circumstances violates a rule and is not punished, that is unjust. Justice requires that people who break the rules must be considered guilty and people who obey the rules must be considered innocent.

Children themselves are sometimes unfair and accuse parents of doing wrong simply because the children don't like the parents' rules. Just because kids accuse us of being unfair, does not make it so; but as parents we need to make sure our rules are applied consistently.

Church Leaders

1 Timothy 5:20,21 – Leaders in a local church must also practice justice. One specific area where this is needed is in rebuking and disciplining sin.

Sometimes leaders in a congregation will rebuke or discipline a member who has little influence or is poor. But someone else may commit sin without being disciplined, because they are family members or close friends of certain leaders or because they are big givers, etc.

If leaders seek to please God and lead effectively, they must practice justice like Nehemiah, applying the rules fairly. How fair are we when we have leadership responsibilities?

[Genesis 18:19; Exodus 18:21; 2 Samuel 23:3,4; 2 Chronicles 19:5-10; Job. 34:17; Isaiah 28:14-17; 32:1; Jeremiah 23:5; Matthew 18:26-34; Deuteronomy 33:21]

XI. Humility

A leader needs strength and courage to stand for what is right. But he also needs meekness to give up his own personal desires and opinions for the good of the group. Too many leaders allow their pride and stubborn self-will to lead them to make poor choices.

A. The Example of Nehemiah

Nehemiah 1:6,7 – Nehemiah humbly confessed his sins. He stated plainly that, not only others, but he himself had failed to keep the commandments. Many leaders are too proud to admit their errors. A good leader needs humility to acknowledge errors, especially sins.

Nehemiah 2:18 – He expressed appreciation for the blessings given him and the opportunity to work for God. Many leaders want to take glory to themselves for whatever good is accomplished. Nehemiah gave praise to God and recognized his need to depend on God.

These examples illustrate that Nehemiah was not seeking to exalt himself above others. He was not too proud to admit his errors, and He recognized that He could succeed only by the help of God. These are characteristics of humility.

B. Other Examples of Humble Leaders

Genesis 13:8,9 - Abraham

Conflict developed between Abraham's servants and the servants of his nephew Lot about food and water for their flocks (verses 1-12). Abraham was Lot's uncle; he had cared for Lot for years. God had promised the whole land to Abraham and his descendants.

So, Abraham could have insisted on doing whatever he wanted. But instead he offered to let Lot choose where he wanted to live and Abraham would go elsewhere. Instead of using his leadership position for his personal gain, he was humble and unselfish.

This also demonstrates that a leader may listen to the views of his followers in making decisions, and may even, within limits, allow followers to make decisions. Some leaders are so jealous of their authority they think they must make all the decisions. Other leaders may **think** about the needs of their followers, but they rarely **ask** the followers what they think or allow them to **express** their views.

This is not the same as **just turning the leadership over** to the followers. Abraham was still the leader. He set the ground rules and defined the two acceptable choices; then, within the limits he had defined, he allowed Lot to make the choice, even though the result may have been to Abraham's disadvantage. This is an example of humility in a leader.

Judges 8:22,23 - Gideon

Because Gideon had defeated Israel's enemy, the people essentially offered to make him king (ruler) and his sons after him. But he refused saying God should rule over them. This had been God's plan under the judges.

Leaders must be humble enough to realize the limits of their authority. Just because you are a leader does not mean you get to do whatever you please. Men must not assume authority beyond the limits God has set. Some leaders become proud and assume privileges God never granted them.

C. Examples of Leaders Who Lacked Humility

Someone illustrated lack of humility by telling of a mamma whale who supposedly told her baby whale: "When you reach the top and start spouting off, that's when you're most likely to be

harpooned.” – <http://www.sermonillustrations.com/a-z/l/leadership.htm> That illustrates the problem that some leaders have.

1 Samuel 15:17-23 - King Saul

Saul began as a humble king, but military success made him proud. He wanted honor from the people. When God told him to destroy the Amalekites and their flocks, instead he spared the king and the best of the flocks. When confronted by Samuel, Saul said he did what the people wanted.

This demonstrates the danger of being **too** concerned to please the people. Leaders should consider what people want, if those desires are wholesome and beneficial. But when the people’s desires conflict God’s will or are not wise, leaders must have courage and strength to resist.

Saul sought to exalt himself even above pleasing God. Samuel said he was guilty of stubborn rebellion, which was as bad as witchcraft and idolatry. So, God rejected him as king.

Leaders need to realize that pride can lead to misuse of authority that is as bad in God’s eyes as idolatry and sorcery. The end result is rejection by God.

1 Samuel 25:14-17 - Nabal

Because David had protected Nabal’s flocks, he requested some provisions for his men in exchange. Nabal answered roughly and refused. His servant said evil was determined against him, because he was worthless and “one cannot speak unto him.”

Many leaders are like Nabal: “One cannot speak to them.” You cannot reason with them or show them a better way. Even when they are clearly wrong, they will not listen to criticism; they refuse to admit error or change their views. If a follower expresses disagreement, the leader immediately becomes angry, spiteful, and may take personal revenge.

Nothing we have said justifies **followers** in being stubborn and self-willed. They are not justified in nagging and harping on an issue, hoping to wear down the leaders till they finally give in. That would be self-will and stubborn rebellion on the part of the followers!

So leaders are not required to just accept their followers’ views, nor do followers have the right to rebel if they believe their leaders are unreasonable. But leaders should be humble enough to listen to evidence and not just insist on their own personal desires.

D. Modern Applications

Titus 1:7 - Elders Must Not Be Self-Willed.

Some men stubbornly insist on their own way regardless of the needs of others. If they can’t get their way, they create strife and trouble till other people give in. Such people are self-willed and must never be allowed to lead God’s people. [1 Timothy 3:1-6]

Elders do have oversight in a local church. Yet some elders think this gives them the right to ignore the views of the members, ask no advice, and resent any attempts from the members to give input about the decisions. Such is self-willed and unloving.

Likewise, elders are wrong if they lead the church to practice things God never authorized. Sometimes churches sponsor recreation, entertainment, human institutions, sponsoring church arrangements, or even allow instrumental music or women speaking in worship assemblies. When asked about it, members say the elders decided to do it, as if that settles it.

Elders have no right to lead the church to practice what God never authorized (Matthew 15:9; Galatians 1:8,9; 2 John 9). To do so is to assume authority God never granted. Such elders need to learn to humbly submit to God’s will instead of following their own self-will.

Romans 13:3,4 - Civil Rulers Must Punish What Is Evil, Not What Is Good.

They should execute wrath on evil doers but praise those who do good. Some rulers assume the right to make laws that clearly violate God’s law. Like King Saul they go beyond the authority granted them by God.

They may grant divorces for unscriptural reasons, permit the murder of unborn babies, spend tax funds to finance obscene art, grant marriage and other special benefits to homosexuals, and run schools that promote evolution and other anti-Biblical concepts or that violate the decency and privacy of students. Some have persecuted, outlawed, and even killed people for serving God. This assumes powers that God never granted anyone.

God has ordained leaders in government, home, and the church; but He has set limits on their authority. He expects them to respect these limits, and also to make a diligent effort to consider the views of their followers in decisions that affect them. Those who disregard God's teaching will be rejected and punished by God like King Saul.

What about you and me when we have leadership roles? Are we self-willed, or are we humble like Nehemiah? Do we consider the needs and views of followers in matters that affect them? Do we humble ourselves to follow God's will? Do we honestly admit our errors and remember to give praise to God for good that is accomplished?

[Numbers 12:3; Matthew 11:28-30; 2 Kings 22:11,19; Jeremiah 13:18; Daniel 4:17-34; Matthew 20:25-28; Acts 8:27; Ephesians 6:9; 1 Peter 5:3]

Conclusion

Romans 12:8 – He who leads should do it with diligence.

Nehemiah was a diligent leader

When he learned that God's people had a serious problem, he took initiative and developed a plan of action to deal with the problem. He saw work that needed to be done and he found ways to accomplish it.

Nehemiah 6:15 – The result: the wall was finished in 52 days.

Never underestimate the influence for good that godly, zealous, dedicated leaders can have.

As in Nehemiah's day, today our homes, the church, and society face many serious problems. Many congregations are filled with worldly, indifferent members who practice immorality or teach error. Many families have serious marital problems or children who grow up living in sin. Our society is drowning in crime, sexual immorality, failing marriages, murder of unborn infants, drunkenness and drug abuse, gambling, and evils of all kinds.

Where are the Nehemiahs? Where are the Christians who are willing to exercise leadership to recognize the problems and take action to deal with them? Will you be a Nehemiah in whatever role God has placed you?

Remember, God will judge us for the leadership we provide.

Remember, leaders are stewards for God (Titus 1:7; etc.).

1 Corinthians 4:2 – It is required in stewards that one be found faithful. Faithfulness is the primary responsibility of a steward. A steward will be judged by his master for how well he fulfills his duties. If he becomes selfish and neglects the master's work, he will be punished. But if he does the work the master has given, he will be rewarded. [Luke 12:42-46]

The conclusion is that every person needs to be the best leader he can be in whatever Scriptural and legitimate leadership role he fulfills. There is no greater need in the world than the need for well qualified, dedicated leaders in God's institutions, especially in the church and the home. Will you accept the challenge to be a Nehemiah?