

The Six Leadership Hats (Nehemiah 2)

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 25 August 2024

Preacher: Barry Lee

[0 : 00] In the month of Nisan, in the 20th year of King Artaxerxes, when wine was brought for him, I took the wine and gave it to the king.

I had not been sad in his presence before. So the king asked me, why does your face look so sad when you are not ill? This can be nothing but sadness of heart.

I was very much afraid, but I said to the king, may the king live forever. Why should my face not look sad when the city where my ancestors are buried lies in ruins and its gates have been destroyed by fire?

The king said to me, what is it you want? Then I prayed to the God of heaven and I answered the king, if it pleases the king and if your servant has found favor in his sight, let him send me to the city in Judah where my ancestors are buried so that I can rebuild it.

And then the king with the queen sitting beside him asked me, how long will your journey take and when will you get back? It pleased the king to send me.

[1 : 20] So I set a time. I also said to him, if it pleases the king, may I have letters to the governors of Trans-Euphrates so that they will provide me safe conduct until I arrive in Judah?

And may I have a letter to Asaph, keeper of the royal park, so that he will give me timber to make beams for the gates of the citadel by the temple and for the city wall and for the residence I will occupy?

And because the gracious hand of my God was on me, the king granted my request. So I went to the governors of Trans-Euphrates and gave them the king's letters.

The king had also sent army officers and cavalry with me. When Sanballat the Horonites and Tobiah the Ammonite official heard about this, they were very much disturbed that someone had come to promote the welfare of the Israelites.

I went to Jerusalem. And after staying there three days, I set out during the night with a few others.

[2 : 33] I had not told anyone what my God had put in my heart to do for Jerusalem. There were no mounts with me except the one I was riding on. By night, I went out through the valley gate towards the jackal well and the dung gate, examining the walls of Jerusalem, which had been broken down, and its gates, which had been destroyed by fire.

Then I moved on towards the fountain gate and the king's pool, but there was not enough room for my mount to get through. So I went up the valley by night, examining the wall.

Finally, I turned back and re-entered through the valley gate. The officials did not know where I had gone or what I was doing, because as yet I had said nothing to the Jews or the priests or nobles or officials or any others who would be doing the work.

Then I said to them, You see the trouble we're in? Jerusalem lies in ruins, and its gates have been burned with fire.

Come, let us rebuild the wall of Jerusalem, and we will no longer be in disgrace. I also told them about the gracious hand of my God on me, and what the king had said to me.

[3 : 53] They replied, Let us start rebuilding. So they began this good work. But when Sanballat, the Horonite, Tobiah, the Ammonite official, and Geshem, the Arab, heard about it, they mocked and ridiculed us.

What is this you are doing? They asked. Are you rebelling against the king? I answered them by saying, The God of heaven will give us success.

We, his servants, will start rebuilding. But as for you, you have no share in Jerusalem or any claim or historic right to it. This is God's word.

It's good to be here. So, let's talk about the six leadership heads of Nehemiah. Now, how many of you consider yourself a leader in some sort of capacity, either in church or in your community or in

school?

Anyone? Yes, we've seen some leaders here. Wonderful. Well done. Yes. Great. Great. So, what comes to mind when you think of good leaders?

[5 : 17] Six heads. Okay. All right. We'll go through them. Hmm. What about our prime minister and former prime minister? Any idea?

You guys are really shy. Like, this morning, you know, our uncles and aunties were like... Okay.

Okay. Christopher Laksin, Jacinta Ardern.

Okay. Okay. Hmm. What about Putin and Zelensky? Yeah. Someone think... Yeah, Putin. Great leader, right?

Yeah. This morning, people are like... And as US politics is really heating up, how about Kamala Harris or Donald Trump?

Anyone? Anyone? Anyone? Anyone? Anyone? Anyone? Anyone? Anyone? Anyone? Anyone? Anyone? Anyone? Anyone? Anyone? Anyone? I'm a perfect example of leadership, right? So, where do we turn to for lessons on authentic and effective leadership?

[6 : 26] But thankfully, the Bible offers us guidance. the book is full of wisdom not just pointing us towards eternity but also enlightening our lives today so our ultimate model of leadership would be of course Jesus there are many books written exploring this already so today we're going to focus on another great leader Nehemiah so he is a remarkable civil leader who changed Jewish history his work on the city wall and temple worship laid the groundwork for a famous revolt that won the Jews a century of freedom a few hundred years later his impact is undeniable so who is Nehemiah Pastor Albin introduced him to us last week but let's refresh our memory

Nehemiah was the king's cupbearer a top official in the Persian Empire now think of him as someone having the expertise of a master of wine and a close relationship with the king like a personal aid of the United States president the powerful Persian Empire ruled over Middle East back then though its prime has already passed yet its influence remains very strong especially over provinces like Judah this is where our story unfolds Nehemiah isn't in Judah yet he is still in the empire's capital with the king but in today's chapter we will see him finally traveling to Jerusalem Judah's capital though he is raised like a Persian Nehemiah's heart is deeply connected to his Jewish roots his body may be in the empire's capital but his heart already belongs to Jerusalem so as I meditated on this chapter

I was struck by how Nehemiah's great at his leadership qualities so I've written six points and initially I thought maybe I should trim it down to five six seems a little bit awkward it's like having six fingers but then I remember there was a book called The Six Thinking Hats by De Bono how many of you have heard about this book?

yes? yeah pretty famous book right? so I decided to frame you know my sermon as you know the six leadership hats now these six hats are just one way to organize you know our thoughts there will be many other ways to look at this chapter and I would love to hear your spiritual insights as well now just a quick disclaimer I'm far from being a perfect leader I'm sharing these points not as someone who has mastered these skills or hats but as someone learning from Nehemiah alongside all of us here so the first leadership hat Nehemiah wears is the sufferer's hats so now Nehemiah as the king's cup bearer was expected to wear a cheerful face right?

I mean imagine if you go to like a high-end restaurant and the sermon would be like there you go you know you wouldn't be expecting something like this right? no tips so being cheerful was his job but this time he couldn't hide his sorrow and from chapter 1 we know he mourned fasted and prayed earnestly for days and maybe even weeks the process wore him down emotionally and physically and at the end of chapter 1 he prayed to God for favor from this man the king perhaps Nehemiah knew that showing his true emotion would catch the king's attention and it did so let's focus on his genuine emotion born from suffering what is he suffering from?

[11 : 07] so despite being raised in Persia he deeply cares about his Judean roots the humiliation his people endured for decades weighs heavily on him yes people may have returned the temple is now rebuilt and Ezra's teaching is restoring the community but the city itself remains in ruins now imagine you know walking out of your home every day only to be confronted by burnt rubble a reminder of a painful past every day you drive past Tiwaku Drive you would know what I mean for the past several years imagine if your house one of those houses living right in front of a construction site you know a glorious city Jerusalem now a symbol of shame and failure and mocked by foreign nations where is their God?

a great leader feels this pain he doesn't become detached or indifferent a leader who lacks empathy cannot lead well now consider our ultimate example Jesus he mourned and wept with those around him outside Lazarus' tomb he has feeling and he's willing to show it and perhaps the old saying is true when there is love there is pain a good leader loves deeply knowing the suffering it brings love and suffering this is the first and foremost quality of a great leader even our Lord Jesus loves us so much that he's willing to bear the most excruciating pain for us now the second leadership hat is the prayers hat a great leader must have a deep prayer life and if you look at verses you know four to five it doesn't seem so right at the first glance so he was like what is it that you want then I pray to

God of heaven doesn't sound deep at all but let's unpack it look when the king asked him a question Nehemiah wasn't like excuse me your majesty give me a minute I need to go outside to the garden to pray right no never happened like that so how does Nehemiah pray during a conversation and what would you do in his place what would you do you can imagine him offering a quick silence prayer Lord help me now or something like Lord grant me favor this brief prayer is just the tip of the iceberg of Nehemiah's deep spiritual life he's totally immersed in prayer remember back in chapter 1 he prayed and fasted for days and specifically asking for favor when dealing with the king now the moment has finally arrived this silence prayer is the culmination of hours and days spent fasting praying and connecting with God it is not a chi prayer like once spoken by someone with a shallow fickle relationship with God our true prayer life has two aspects we can see first we must dedicate focused time to connect with God and second we must cultivate a constant awareness and readiness to pray at any moment if we look forward a little bit in verse 8 so this constant connection allows

Nehemiah to recognize the gracious hand of my God a true prayer can rest assured that God's gracious hand will guide them through and our Lord Jesus is the perfect example right he's very busy with his ministry throughout the three years but he would retreat to the mountainside to pray and even we are seeing him praying continually even on his way to the cross so the second quality of a great leader is a deep and continual awareness of God through prayer prayer the third leadership hat is the planner's hat so the king asked Nehemiah how long will you be away now the queen is present that's a special cue possibly telling us that it is a private dinner with no opposing officials around it is a safe space for

Nehemiah to lay out his plan what's the plan here Nehemiah is asking for a convoy of gods to ensure safe passage to Judah he's also requesting a large supply of timber to build the gates the city wall and his own residence and on top of that he needs letters signed and sealed by the king himself to ensure he gets the right support from the governors and officials along the way think for a second do you think he just made up his plan on the spot very unlikely Nehemiah knew exactly what he needs and how much it would take to get the job done it is clear he has spent significant time working out the logistics we're talking about a journey nearly nearly a thousand kilometers from [17:37] Susa the capital to Jerusalem you know how long that is that's about the same distance for us from Auckland to Christ Church walking there by foot maybe oh you know by horse this time well surely we could say Nehemiah is a seasoned politician he's lived within the government system long enough to know how to navigate it but even with that experience meticulous planning and hard work are still essential now imagine someone with great empathy and deep relationship with God but no planning skills can they bring meaningful projects to life unlikely as Proverbs 21:5 says the plans of the diligent lead to profit as surely as haste leads to poverty even our

Lord Jesus demonstrates the importance of good organizational planning he appointed the 12 apostles and within that group we have Peter James and John forming the inner circle now beyond the 12 Jesus has set up 72 disciples and send them out to preach and heal that's organizational planning so the Bible encourages us to take planning seriously especially those in leadership leadership the fourth leadership hat is the endurer's hat so from verse 13 to 15 now after Nehemiah's long journey he finally settles in Jerusalem and begins his secret scouting mission of the city walls but why the secret sea at night he doesn't want anyone to know his plans yet as verse 16 tells us if he inspected the walls during the day people would question his intentions especially with a few named enemies watching him closely already scouting a night is inconvenient for sure first even with a torch visibility is very limited you can't see much and second sacrificing sleep makes the next day harder right and that's not the only inconvenience if you follow

Nehemiah's route he passes by a place called Dungate right do you see that like at the tip the southern tip it is a place where the city's waste including human and animal excrement and refuse from temple sacrifices is dumped imagine the stench like all the public toilets and rubbish bins of our city lumping together not exactly a pleasant ride right now see a true leader isn't afraid of smell and now you know how to test your next person whether they are leadership material now you may think riding a horse makes scouting easier right but when

Nehemiah reaches the king's pool verse 14 he has to dismount and continue on foot he doesn't skip this path because it's inconvenient instead he walks up the valley to inspect the wall thoroughly Nehemiah endures all these necking inconveniences because the job requires this no whining no complaints when was the last time we avoided something because it is too inconvenient or difficult how often do we say let's just put it off it's too hard no a true leader endures these challenges because they have a strong sense of mission especially one given by God great leaders are gritty and do the hard yards the fifth leadership hat is the motivators hat now after doing his due diligence Nehemiah decided it's time to ignite the mission by galvanizing the community leaders to rebuild the city walls verse 16 tells us these leaders are the religious leaders government officials and nobility people with real power and influence to mobilize the community how does he motivate them let's look at 17 and 18 so Nehemiah says you see the trouble we're in Jerusalem lies in ruins and its gates have been burned with fire in other words what is wrong right now the why come let us rebuild the wall of Jerusalem in other words how can we do about it what can we do about it the how and we will no longer be in disgrace what the benefits I also told them about the gracious hand of my [23 : 24] God on me and what the king had said to me do we have the green light from above here we see God's signature and the king's approval so people replied let us start rebuilding once they knew the why the how the benefits the blessings the leaders were united and no one opposed the project hallelujah and remember the broken city wall had been lying there for almost a hundred years since the Israelites returned what was once a magnificent city was now a remote town of rubble but people had grown numb to it it was an eyesore but they felt powerless and no one dared to tackle such an ambitious project like they feared it would upset the local officials until

Nehemiah arrived he turned the tide and in today's term God used Nehemiah's political credentials and his experience from the secular world for his glory and his kingdom Nehemiah was the right man at the right time ready to be at the right place to mobilize a civil and cultural revival a great motivator not only knows the art of communication and rhetoric they must also carry the presence of God Nehemiah a devoted prayer radiates God's presence though he's not a priest who is the priest there Ezra right he's not and likewise you don't have to be a pastor or vocational Christian to have this quality we come to the sixth hat the fighter's hat a true leader is not afraid of ungodly opposition now who are these people

Sambalat and Tobiah were introduced earlier as the antagonist of the story and now Geshem joins them strengthening the opposition as we will see in the coming weeks they will plot sinister schemes to sabotage Nehemiah's work so who are these people what is their political motivations Sambalat is the governor of Samaria Judah's northern neighbor with Tobiah as his sidekick Geshem from Judah's southern neighbor leading a powerful Arab confederation allied with the Persian empire so both the northern and southern neighbors see a common interest to destroy Nehemiah so that they can continue humiliating Jerusalem it's like three big bullies threatening a weak schoolboy essentially saying we don't care if you're coming from the palace you're just the new kid on the block watch your step or we'll crush you

Nehemiah could have taken out paused the project and you know try to make peace with them but he didn't he stood up and opposed them alright if you're looking for a fight we are ready not because of ourselves because the God of heaven is with us you have no claim to this land stop messing with us a great leader is always ready to battle for a good cause and knows how to pick the right battles while the Bible encourages to be peacemakers right some threats are too great to resolve peacefully a great leader is not afraid to engage in conflict even Jesus used the whip to cleanse the temple to drive out the merchants a great leader is willing to fight whenever necessary now maybe you're thinking

Nehemiah has all the makings of a great leader you know his upbringing he's got great education even great connection with the king and I don't have any of that let me introduce you to an incredible woman named Harriet Tubman how many of you have heard of this name yes amazing woman she didn't start out with power or privilege in fact she was born into slavery in Maryland and

one day when she was still a slave an angry overseer threw a heavy metal weight intending to hit another slave but it struck Harriet instead and that injury caused her to suffer from dizziness and hypersomnia that means she felt tired all the time for the rest of her life and despite these challenges

[29 : 02] Harriet was deeply religious she was raised as a Methodist and she often had visions and dreams during her prayers people eventually called her the Moses because she led hundreds of people to free from slavery so I would like us to watch a video together it's just one minute okay I ain't giving up rescue and slaves because it's fall don't you tell me what I can't do isn't she remarkable isn't she remarkable just like

Nehemiah Harriet Tubman suffered with her people even even though she was free already but she made multiple trips back to her own place to free her friends and her family from slavery she prayed fervently to experience God she planned every detail to rescue others endured life threatening situations motivated those who followed her and fought tirelessly against slavery and injustice so she too wore the six leadership hats Harriet was born powerless she was unable to read or write but as she followed God she did incredible things her story is so powerful and inspiring that even the US government is considering putting her on the \$20 bill while we're still waiting that to happen they've already released coins featuring

Harriet Thurman incredible woman now Nehemiah has shown us the six leadership hats sufferer prayer planner endurer motivator and fighter how many of these hats have you worn and which ones haven't you tried yet shall we bow our heads and we'll let God's word settle in our hearts maybe you are an older person who experienced God's gracious hand throughout your life if that's you why don't you share your stories with our young people inspire them disciple them and pass on those leadership hats and perhaps you are already serving in church leadership whether it is leading small groups fellowships departments committees what is a city wall project

God has called you to recently and what leadership hats is he asking you to pick up or maybe you don't have a former role in church but you've got a wealth of experience in the secular world as a CEO or director or manager you've been given the responsibility of overseeing many employees people you've got tons of business acumen and political savvy but maybe not as much depth in your spiritual life and that's okay perhaps God has been preparing you just as he prepared Nehemiah to place you in a prominent position in the secular world but now you know what to do pray like Nehemiah and let the Holy Spirit fill you completely let

God's radiance shine in your heart so you're ready to take on God's eternal projects and maybe you are someone who feels powerless not seeing yourself as a leader at all but would you keep an open mind and listen and listen for God's voice think about Harriet a slave woman more powerless than anyone else here yet God used her to become a Moses for her people saving hundreds of lives if God could use Harriet why not you what mission of salvation has God placed in your hearts today and are we ready to follow let's continue to pray dear Lord thank you for your gracious hand that continues to shape our lives with such love you've raised some of us as leaders in our fields and we want to acknowledge that we don't deserve this grace we have nothing to boast except

[35 : 16] Christ who suffered on the cross more than we could imagine in you Lord we find the ultimate example of leadership flowing from sacrificial love so help us to love to suffer and to be with you as we learn to lead give us wisdom to make the plans we need enlighten us so that we can bring light and motivate others and bolden us to fight against injustice and evil we do all this not for our own sake but to bring glory to you in Jesus name amen them to bless Mary Aaron to serve who are ■■■ shoes to E Se vα■ size