

Session 2

July 29, 2018

PLAN

Nehemiah 2:1-8, 17-18

I often tell my students at The Baptist College of Florida, “In ministry, failure is most often the result of poor leadership, poor planning...or both.” Good leadership always involves good planning. Visionaries who are successful either learn to plan well or know enough to surround themselves with people who can!

In this week’s lesson, we see Nehemiah as *intentional*. That means that he has a clear goal and a clear strategy to get there. His goal is a rebuilt Jerusalem, strong and secure. His strategy is laid out in the next few sections of the story. Some important principles emerge.

Good planning involves the right people (vv. 1-4). Just like in the book of Esther, God’s providence is at work. Like Esther, the one who carries the burden for God’s people just happens to have access to the king! The relationship is clearly professional, displayed in Nehemiah’s humility and respect before the king. But the relationship is personal enough that King Artaxerxes quickly notices the sad demeanor of his cup-bearer and questions him about it. The previous chapter made it clear that, although fearful of the outcome, Nehemiah was already planning to bring his request to the king, the one person who could help him the most. The lesson? *Good planning recognizes that God puts people in positions to further His work and encourages their involvement.*

Good planning keeps the prayers going (vv. 4-5). Paul told the church at Thessalonica to “pray without ceasing” (1 Thess. 5:17). Nehemiah had already prayed for “a number of days” (1:4). But now, in the pressure of the moment, just as he answered the king, Nehemiah uttered yet another prayer “to the God of heaven.” Physically, Nehemiah focused on the earthly authority of a pagan king. But spiritually, he was tuned in to the God of the universe who directs the hearts of kings “like streams of water in His hand” (Prov. 21:1). The lesson? *Good planning means praying about it, “without ceasing.”*

Good planning can be clearly explained (vv. 5-8). These verses dispel any notion that Nehemiah was making up things as he went along! His clear explanations, direct answers, and thoughtful requests all indicate that his plans were well formed ahead of his meeting with the king. But more importantly, Nehemiah had the ability to explain his plans to the uninitiated. The king and queen had their own obligations and responsibilities and rebuilding Jerusalem wasn’t on their list! BCF president Tom Kinchen prefers the “draw it on a napkin” principle. Simply put, if you can’t draw your plans on a napkin so others can see them clearly, you need to keep working on them! The lesson? *Good planning makes both the vision and the strategy easy to understand.*

Good planning earns enthusiastic support (vv. 17-18). In the interceding verses, Nehemiah arrived at Jerusalem with the king’s blessing and the documents necessary for both access to the city and for securing the supplies he would need. When the time was right, Nehemiah surveyed the city, then brought together the Jewish leaders and explained what God had led him to do. Notice that good planning does not require “selling” the vision, but rather “casting” the vision.

Nehemiah's commitment to the vision God had given him, together with his prayerful approach, strategic planning, careful preparation, and clear presentation all culminate in these verses. And the result? A unified workforce coming together and declaring, "Let's start rebuilding!" The lesson? *Good planning pays off in enthusiastic support to get the work done.*