

Session 5

August 19, 2018

PRIORITIZE

Nehemiah 6:1-3, 15-16; 8:1-3, 5-8

All good leaders know how to set priorities; that means learning when to say “yes” and when to say “no.” But priorities must never be set based on personal preference or selfish desires. The best leaders are servant leaders who know what’s best for everyone and how to bring out that best. In this week’s study, Nehemiah has clear priorities, illustrating just when to say “yes,” and when to say “no.”

Good leaders avoid distractions (6:1-14). Chapter 6 is filled with lies, deceit, and personal attacks against Nehemiah. Since threats of physical violence had not stopped the construction, the opposition now attempted to destroy Nehemiah’s influence by attacking his character and his motives. First, they appealed to his *vanity*. “Come, let’s meet together in the villages of the Ono Valley” (v. 2) could have been taken several ways. But most likely it was an attempt to lure Nehemiah with the promise of some type of agreement. The appeal would have looked like Nehemiah was the better man, had won the conflict, and the opposition was ready to admit their defeat and join him. But with the Ono Valley some twenty miles from Jerusalem, Nehemiah smelled a rat: “They were planning to harm me,” he said. Second, they appealed to his *friendship* (vv. 5-7). They planted a false rumor that he was preparing to lead a rebellion and crown himself as a king, then offered to help him out of the danger he was in! Their offer to “confer together” (v. 7) was just another trap. Third, they appealed to his *insecurities*. Their encouragement to hide Nehemiah away in the temple—ostensibly for his own good— (vv. 10-11) was not only deceitful, but unthinkable to Nehemiah, who, as a layman, had no authority to enter there. In every case, the attacks had become personal and each had the potential and purpose of distracting Nehemiah from his singular task. Good leaders see those traps and avoid them.

Good leaders avoid the spotlight (6:15-16). Nothing succeeds quite like success! These verses plainly state three facts: the wall was completed; the opposition folded; and the glory was given to God. But there is another fact that is insinuated: that “this task had been accomplished by our God,” shows that Nehemiah not only recognized God’s hand in all this, but celebrated God’s accomplishment rather than spotlighting his own. How easy it would have been to pat himself on the back and rename one of the city gates the “*Nehemiah Gate!*” While the Bible is clear to give honor to whom honor is due (Rom. 13:7), Nehemiah knew the pitfalls of pride. Good leaders avoid the spotlight and give the glory to God.

Good leaders promote God’s word (8:1-8). Chapter 7 recalls the re-population of the city following its completion. To insure the prosperity of the people, the priority was now placed on the firm foundation of God’s expectations. Several characteristics of what took place are noteworthy. First, the *people* gathered and asked that God’s word be brought (v. 1). What a wonderful testimony of their desire! Second, the book of the law was directed to *everybody*. It was read to the men, the women, and all the children who were old enough to “listen with understanding” (vv. 2-3). Third, God’s word was *respected*. It was elevated *above* the people and the people *stood* (vv. 4-5). This was not in reverence to Ezra, who read the law, but rather to the word of God itself. Fourth, God’s word was presented from *early morning to noon* (v. 3). This

was no mere “sermonette!” Fifth, the word of God was *explained* (v. 8). How important it is to give proper interpretation, explanation, and application. Finally, the opening of God’s book was central to the *worship* experience (v. 6). In a day when worship is too often associated with music, we must never forget that God’s word is the main priority. Good leaders keep God’s word in front of the people.