

Nehemiah Sermon #13

Turn in your Bibles to Nehemiah 5

So far in this book, Nehemiah has faced one hurdle after another—adversity, conflict.

Today we are going to see another side of Nehemiah.

We live in a self-seeking society. People are taught to feather their own nest.

And part of our society is climbing the ladder of success.

Our society thrives on promotion.

People work hard for it. It means power, prestige, and more money.

Nehemiah demonstrated integrity (character) in the face of adversity and advancement.

Nehemiah was the governor in the land of Israel—there was no higher position of leadership.

With promotion comes perks—it's true that promotion brings privileges.

It is refreshing to meet a man like Nehemiah – who put serving the people ahead of getting gain for himself.

He was more concerned for the people than himself.

Why did Nehemiah come?

He was a man who came to seek the welfare of the children of Israel (2:10)

He had a mindset of a shepherd and a servant to the people.

I've entitled today's sermon "Avoiding Advancement Pitfalls"

Nehemiah 5:14

Let us stand for the reading of God's Holy Word

Nehemiah 5:14-19

Let us pray

You may be seated

Avoiding Advancement Pitfalls

According to vs. 14, Nehemiah was appointed governor of Judah by King Artaxerxes. The exact time span was from 445 B.C. to 433 B.C. (a total of 12 years).

He had a liberal food allowance. This was part of his “expense account.”
Promotion normally brings privileges.

Nehemiah chose not to use this privilege—even though it was rightfully his—during the entire twelve years that he served as governor.

He made this clear in his journal (v. 14e)

Nehemiah forfeited his “rights” in order to help the people.
He was a servant to the people not a servant to himself

Promotions provide unique opportunities to take advantage of privileges.

You ever heard of Westar? Kansas’ largest utility – two people – Wittig, Lake – looted
at least 37 million

Used corporate jets, set their own compensation program

Found guilty of conspiracy, fraud, money laundering, and circumvention of internal
controls

This is exactly what previous governors had done in Israel.

Vs. 15

When Nehemiah was appointed governor, he discovered that the previous governors
and their staff were taking advantage of their positions.

Nehemiah did not tell us what these men had done to abuse their privileges.

However, we're told enough to conclude that they took advantage of their position of power and used it to pad their own pockets.

Did Nehemiah adhere to the old way of doing things?

Vs. 15e – Integrity is what these words reveal.

Nehemiah was in Jerusalem to uphold the law, not to violate it.

He was there to help the people, not to exploit them.

He was there to rebuild the wall, not to build his personal account.

First of all, with every promotion there are privileges.

New or added rights, benefits, and special favors are provided.

The wise leader will use them without abusing them.

A trust is given with these privileges.

With your promotion may have come the privilege of an expense account.

A child of God will guard against taking advantage of the privilege.

It's not what the rest of the people are doing!

We must never abuse our privileges.

This means we must never use our position as a platform to "promote" or to indulge ourselves.

If we're not committed to certain values, we can misuse expense accounts, exploit people to further our own personal interests, and use company time to fulfill our own personal ambitions.

Nehemiah faced these temptations. The opportunity was there.

Other governors before him had done this.

Didn't Nehemiah deserve to use his "expense account"? Sure.

Wouldn't it have been legitimate? The answer is, "yes!"

Few people can live in the lap of luxury and maintain their spiritual, emotional, and moral equilibrium.

Elevation often disturbs balance, which leads to pride and a sense of self-sufficiency.

The right kind of leaders, when promoted, know how to handle honor and privilege.

Nowhere is Nehemiah's heart revealed more beautifully than in the midst of this passage that related to his position and the use of its power.

Now, what motivated Nehemiah not only to *avoid abusing* his privileges as governor but also to *avoid using* the privileges that were legitimately his?

His choices relate directly to how he viewed his leadership role.

He was a servant; he conducted himself so as to reflect the character of the One he served!

Nehemiah expressly states in vs. 15e that he "*did not so do because of the fear of God*"; He knew it was wrong.

Nehemiah was committed to obeying God; He could not and would not abuse his privileges as governor.

This is why he became so furious at the nobles and rulers in Israel when they took advantage of the Jews earlier in this chapter.

Nehemiah knew that God ultimately would not tolerate this kind of behavior among the leaders in Israel. He wanted God's blessing on his life—not a curse!

Nehemiah said, I fear God too much to indulge myself.

Unfortunately, many Christians today ignore this important spiritual guideline.

We need more Godly fear.

Rightly defined, this means we should stand in awe of who God is and what He's done for us—and that eventually we will have to give an account to Him for how we have lived our lives on earth.

The former governors of Judah had taken advantage of their position.

We have an example of this in the New Testament; Zacchaeus exemplifies this kind of exploitation.

Turn to Luke 19:1

Vs. 2 He was a chief tax collector—which means he had a number of tax collectors who served him.

Consequently, he received a percentage of everything they collected from the people; the system was corrupt.

The more they could collect, the more they could keep for themselves.

Zaccheus came face to face with Jesus Christ; His way of life.

He was changed from the inside out.

Zaccheus acknowledged his unethical and dishonest behavior.

He was willing to make right what he had done wrong.

Zacchaeus was more interested in being right with God than making money.

You know something has happened to him—salvation.

Those who led Israel before can be compared with Zacchaeus; in actuality, they were thieves and crooks!

Turn back to Nehemiah 5:

Vs. 16

Nehemiah refused to take advantage of the people.

This was what Nehemiah meant when he wrote, “We did not buy any land.”

He did not take anything on the side.

Rather, he described his approach as follows: “I worked and my servants worked” (vs. 16).

Promotion can lead to laziness.

Nehemiah had the mind of Jesus.

Jesus said, “. . . I among you as he that serveth” (Luke 22:27).

Nehemiah did not use those who served him to take advantage of others.

He had them working beside him rather than out exploiting the people.

See, the previous deal was the more food and money the servants could bring into the governor’s coffers, the bigger their own personal cut.

The privileges? Nehemiah never took advantage of them.

The policies? He changed them in the right direction.

He did not buy any land, and all of his servants were “gathered for work.”

How different from the previous leaders!

There is not a businessman today who wouldn’t agree—someone like Nehemiah is a rare man.

Because of position, there are responsibilities that most people do not know about.

Nehemiah regularly fed over 150 guests, both residents, staff, and visitors, and he gave them a marvelous meal! – vs. 17

He regularly entertained visiting dignitaries from the surrounding nations.

Imagine the amount of food and drink this took every day!

Nehemiah spelled it out (vs. 18a, b)

It is estimated that this amount of food would meet the needs of over 500 guests, so

Nehemiah must have kept “open house” constantly.

As governor he had to entertain visitors and officials from other parts of the Persian Empire.

The fire in the kitchen stove never went out.

He had to feed thousands of people every month. That’s a lot of food!

Nehemiah was well-known.

He was the King's cupbearer (a very intimate position in the King's court).

Anybody who came to see the king—saw Nehemiah.

He was a sought-after political figure.

We can see why—not only because of his position with the king, but also because of his leadership skills.

With all of this going on, Nehemiah never lost sight of the project.

His belly didn't block his vision (vs. 16).

Nehemiah never lost sight of the goal.

He did not get sidetracked from the major objective.

He wasn't dulled by people coming and going.

Some leaders can't do that.

Vs. 18e

He himself endeavored to promote the welfare of his people.

Nehemiah never demanded the food allotted to the governor.

He explained his motives as the fear of the Lord (v. 15) and compassion on the people.

Nehemiah was sensitive to people's needs - "*because the servitude was heavy on this people*" (v. 18).

They already had burdens; life was already tough.

He was not going to add to their loads.

They barely had enough food to feed themselves, and at times they went hungry

Nehemiah's conscience would not allow him to lay this extra burden on the people.

He chose to remove this additional burden.

Nehemiah and his staff were willing to sacrifice their own personal resources and their own comforts to achieve God's will.

Frequently, a strong leader will run roughshod over everybody else to achieve his objective.

Nehemiah had a compassionate heart; he stayed sensitive to the needs of his people. Nehemiah never lost his sensitive spirit.

Vs. 19

Nehemiah did not seek the approval of men but the well done of God. He wasn't looking for a pat on the back—he was looking for approval from God.

If the people had failed to appreciate or even to acknowledge what he had done for them, he was comforted by the knowledge that all was manifest in the sight of God.

He didn't want praise or reward from the people; he wanted only the reward God would give him for his sacrificial service.

Nehemiah was an example of unselfish service.

Nehemiah didn't hesitate to let us know that part of his motivation for doing what was right as a leader in Israel is that he wanted God's special blessing.

With goodwill—doing service as to the Lord and not to men—Ephesians 6:7

If we do our jobs well, we'll normally experience advancement—which brings increased responsibilities.

It's part of our social and economic system.

But how can we accept promotion with a proper Christian perspective?

Let me give you some principles.

Principle 1 We should consider accepting a promotion as a potential blessing from God.

Some Christians are afraid of advancement because it involves authority and increased responsibility.

Some fear failure.

Some Christians feel that advancement is somehow wrong and inappropriate, sinful.

These are not valid reasons for rejecting a promotion.

We must think carefully before we accept increased responsibility.

For example, over the long haul, increased income and benefits may not compensate for the demands that are placed upon us and the price we have to pay in terms of time and effort.

It is never right to sacrifice our family on the altar of promotion.

That's too great a price to pay!

It must be based upon more than an increased salary and other benefits.

We must evaluate the opportunity in terms of what God can do through us!—in the position!

Principle 2 We should consider accepting a promotion because it may give us an opportunity for personal growth.

Increased leadership responsibility stretches us in a number of ways.

It can increase our faith, cause us to pray more effectively, to learn new skills, to develop our abilities, raise our tolerance level in handling difficult situations.

Increased responsibility always brings periods of emotional pain.

We actually need a certain amount of stress.

It causes us to grow spiritually (James 1:2-4).

Principle 3 We should consider accepting a promotion because it may improve our financial situation.

It is not wrong to make money.

An increased income enables us to give more to meet others' needs and to advance the work of God.

For those who have learned the joy of giving, it not only provides personal blessings, but untold blessings for those who are recipients of their graciousness.

We have a number of people who make way more than the need—they are giving people.

So don't feel guilty about making money. Accept it as a blessing from God.

However, be on guard.

It's easy to "love money"—and when we do, we are no longer seeking "first His kingdom and His righteousness"; our priorities are out of order.

Principle 4 We should consider accepting a promotion since it may provide us with an opportunity to create working conditions that will benefit and help others.

We definitely need more Christians directing the affairs of life.

Proverbs tells us, "When the righteous are in authority, the people rejoice: but when the wicked beareth rule, the people mourn" (Proverbs 29:2).

May God give us more Godly people who have significant responsibilities at all levels in our society.

Principle 5 When we accept a promotion, we must realize that we will face new temptations.

We must be on guard. This is especially true if the position brings with it privileges—such as it did when Nehemiah became governor of Jerusalem.

Promotion opens the door of temptation.

Many will walk through that door and abuse their privileges.

Knowing the facts about temptations simply help us to be humble and to be on guard.

Nehemiah illustrates with his life that a man can serve in a high position and yet remain true to God.

This was true of Daniel and Joseph.

When promoted, we must never abuse our privileges.

Nehemiah refused to fall prey to selfish ambition.

Most everyone who is promoted to a position in our own culture faces temptations regularly.

Principle 6 When promoted, we might be wise to give up certain rights.

Nehemiah gave up his rights because of the economic conditions in Israel when he became governor.

He refused to use this right because the people were facing hard economic times. He had also asked the Jews to personally sacrifice in order to rebuild the walls, so he did not add to their burdens.

Principle 7 We should always accept a promotion with proper motives.

We have seen that Nehemiah was motivated by three factors as he carried out his work as governor.

He feared God, he was sensitive to people's needs, and he desired God's special blessing in his life.

If we approach advancement and promotion with these same basic motivations, we, too, will have the key to maintaining our spiritual equilibrium.

Avoiding Advancement Pitfalls

Let us stand for closing invitation

With our employer and with our God, do we have a clear, good conscience about our dealings?

Do we use our blessings rightly or do we take advantage, abuse our privileges?

Are we sensitive to people's needs?

Do we have a holy reverence for God?

And are we concerned about pleasing God with the stewardship He has given to us?

Have we like Zacchaeus come face to face with Jesus Christ?

Zacchaeus was saved.

He was a sinner; he needed salvation; and Jesus saved him.

Are you a sinner?

Have you asked Jesus to save you?

You can today.