A Biblical Model of Lay Ministry
Scripture: Mark 10:44, 1 Corinthians 1:26-29
Code: A101

Nehemiah is often regarded as an ideal role model for spiritual leadership—and he certainly is that. He had all the strengths of good leadership: he was decisive, well-organized, a wise overseer of other people, a good administrator, and a skilled project manager who knew how to get things done.

He likewise had all the biblical qualifications for *spiritual* leadership: godly character, a consistent testimony, a burning zeal for the Lord, a desire to serve, and a commitment to honor God in all that he did. Above all, his prayer life was exemplary. (Perhaps more than any other single character in theOT, Nehemiah teaches us what a vibrant prayer life ought to be like.)

Nehemiah also had all the masculine traits Scripture associates with men who are called to be shepherds and overseers among the people of God. He was passionate but not driven by his emotions; he was a hard-working man himself, but he also understood the importance of delegating tasks; and he loved people, but never compromised on matters of principle.

What’s often missed about Nehemiah is that he is primarily a model for lay leadership. Some of the key lessons of his life and work are as immediately applicable to laymen as they are to pastors and teachers in the church.

Nehemiah himself was not a priest, a scribe, an expert in the law, a theologian, or a teacher. As far as we can tell from Scripture, when Nehemiah began his ministry in Jerusalem, he had never been a leader of any kind. He apparently had no special training to do what he ultimately did. He was simply a model of hard work, practical ministry, and principled living.

He is the epitome of what every lay person in the church should aspire to be. And his leadership shows us what all spiritual leadership should be like.

When we meet Nehemiah on the pages of Scripture, he was a servant in the king’s palace in Shushan, in Persia—far from his homeland, which he had never even seen.

As servants go, he was an important one. But this special status among servants certainly gave him no particular renown in Jerusalem. He was still a servant, not anyone’s boss.

In fact, as far as the people of God in Jerusalem were concerned, Nehemiah was an outsider and a latecomer with direct ties to the ruling echelon of their former captors. That probably even made him somewhat suspect at first.

So he labored among them as a layman and a fellow-worker. And he earned their respect as a leader solely by serving them, and by being a flesh-and-blood example of what all the people of Israel ought to be.

So, as it turned out, his work as a servant was his training for his life's work. After all, servitude is the best kind of training for spiritual leadership, because a servant is exactly what Jesus said every true leader ought to be (Mark 10:44).

Nehemiah is thus a reminder to us of how God uses the weak things of the world to accomplish His work (1 Corinthians 1:26-29).

Next time you read Nehemiah, bear that in mind: this book is full of rich lessons for lay people who want their lives to count for the Lord.

As someone who has technically been a layman for most of my ministry, I love this aspect of Nehemiah's life-message. He teaches us that whoever we are, whatever our background or training, and whatever our position in life—God has gifted us and called us to use our gifts as servants. If we're willing to serve, He can use us in a mighty way.

Phil Johnson
Executive Director

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