THE FOUNDATION OF LEADERSHIP IS CHARACTER NOT CHARISMA. NEHEMIAH MODELED ...

EIGHT CHARACTERISTICS OF A GREAT LEADER

1. ____________________________________________
   1:4 - Wept & mourned over Jerusalem
   5:2-6 - His reaction to injustice
   5:17-18 - Fed and supported others

2. ____________________________________________
   Nehemiah spent much time in prayer and thought.
   1:4-11, 2:4, 4:4-5, 9, 5:19, 6:9, 13:14, 22
   2:11-13 - Midnight ride around the city
   5:7 - Think before speaking

3. ____________________________________________
   Nehemiah maintained a positive attitude.
   2:1 - Had never been sad before the king
   8:10 - The source of his strength
   12:27-47 - Great celebration
4. _____________________________________________

Nehemiah always focused on his goal.

2:5-18  - He devised a plan.

3:1-32  - He organized the work.

6:3-4  - He refused to be distracted.

5. _____________________________________________

Nehemiah was a problem solver.

2:7-8  - He anticipated problems

4:13  - Posted them by families

4:16-18  Creative work shifts

6. _____________________________________________

2:2  - When asking the king for permission

4:14  - When responding to enemy attacks

5:7-13  - When confronting corruption

"Courage is when only you and God know you are afraid!"

7. _____________________________________________

Nehemiah was a man of integrity.

5:14-19  - He did not abuse his position, power, or privilege.

8. _____________________________________________

Nehemiah refused to give up or become discouraged in spite of strong opposition.

4:1-23  - He continued in the work

6:1-19  - He was persistent
SELF - EVALUATION

* Which of these character qualities are strongest in my life?

* Which of these character qualities are weakest in my life?

* Which of these character qualities would I like to develop the most in my life?

* What could I do this week to practice demonstrating this character quality?
Tonight we're going to look at "What Does It Take to be a Great Leader?" We're going to look at a summary of Nehemiah's life and look at eight characteristics of the man himself.

The first study we did as we started through this book, I said that the foundation of leadership is character nor charisma. You don't have to be a charismatic, bubbly, over energetic person to be a leader. What you do have to have is character. I want to pull out from the life of Nehemiah what I see as the eight characteristics of great leaders.

1. Compassion. Nehemiah was a compassionate man. He cared about people. Everything he did was motivated by love.

2. Contemplation. Nehemiah was a man who thought deeply. He prayed deeply. He spent much time alone with God.

3. Cheerfulness. He maintained a positive attitude in spite of the fact that he was constantly under criticism, constantly being attacked, constantly being opposed on everything he did while he was rebuilding the wall.

4. Concentration. Nehemiah knew how to concentrate. He knew how to set a goal and focus and say, This is what we're going to get done whether anything else gets done or not.

5. Creativity. Nehemiah was a very creative person. He knew how to solve problems with creative things because he obviously didn't have all the resources at his disposal.


7. Clear conscious. Nehemiah was a man of integrity. He walked blamelessly before people and before the Lord.

8. Conviction.

If you want to be a leader, these are things you want to build into your life in order to be effective.

1. COMPASSION

Nehemiah really cared about people. You don't get four verses into the book of Nehemiah and you're confronted with his compassion. Nehemiah 1:4 "When I heard these things [that the walls of Jerusalem were broken down and the gates had been burned by fire] I sat down and I wept and for some days I mourned and fasted and prayed before the Lord."
Nehemiah had it made. He was cupbearer to the king of Persia. He was like the Prime Minister, a high ranking assistant. He had a very cushy job. He had everything he could ever want. Jerusalem is a million miles away as far as he's concerned. It's a foreign country; he's never seen it. He cares about the problems in Jerusalem and he gets concerned. He didn't have to be concerned. He was living on Easy Street. Why get upset? Everything was easy for him. But Nehemiah cared. He was a man of compassion and he saw that the people were having a tough time because their walls were torn down. Their city was in destruction.

Isn't it true, when things are going good for you it's easy to forget that most of the people in the world are hurting? I become oblivious to the fact that most of the people in the world are in pain -- physical, emotional, relational. They're having difficult times. Particularly in the Saddleback Valley. We're kind of in this encapsulated Utopia -- 75-80 degree weather the year around. We don't know what it's like to have the heat go out and be freezing to death for 3 or 4 months and to not have food and not have everything at our fingertips.

Nehemiah was a man of compassion. Love is the foundation of Christian leadership. Examples:

Nehemiah 5. Nehemiah's reaction to injustice. The poor had given four complaints: food shortages, our homes are over mortgaged, interest rates are high and taxes are high, we have to sell our children into slavery just to pay our bills. Nehemiah heard about how these fat cats were ripping off the poor while they were rebuilding the wall. His reaction 5:6 "When I heard their outcry to these charges I was very angry."

Can anger ever be a loving reaction? You bet. Sometimes if you're not angry you're not loving. We need to be angry at sin. We need to be angry when people are hurt by other people. There is a righteous indignation there. Nehemiah got angry. That's evidence of his compassion for people.

5:17-18 "Furthermore 150 Jews and officials ate at my table, as well as those who came to us from the surrounding nations. Each day one ox, six choice sheep, some poultry were prepared for me and every ten days an abundant supply of wine of all kinds. In spite of this I never demanded the food allotted to the governor because the demands on the people were heavy." He's saying, I personally assumed the welfare of 150 people during this time. Nehemiah was a man of compassion.

The law of leadership is that People don't care how much you know until they know how much you care. As a leader the bottom line is love. Do you love people? Do you care about people? Leadership without love will just become manipulation.

2. CONTEMPLATION

Great leaders instinctively know that they need to balance the time that they spend with people, leading them, with time alone with God. They need a time of contemplation. The effectiveness of your public leadership is determined by your private life. The two go together. Nehemiah was a man of prayer.
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Nine times in this very short book, Nehemiah prays. He is a man of prayer. He is a man of contemplation. Every decision he had to make, every crisis he had to face, every criticism he received he prayed about it. In chapter one is one of the great prayers of the Bible. I encourage you to study it. 1:5 “Then I said, ‘O God of heaven, the great and awesome God, who keeps his covenant of love with those that love him and obey his commands, let your ear be attentive and your eyes open to hear the prayer your servant is praying before you day and night for your servants, the people of Israel.’" He prayed day and night.

Another example was Nehemiah 2 -- the midnight ride. Remember when he went to Jerusalem. It says he sat in his room for about three days and when no one was looking, he got on his horse, kind of like Paul Revere, and road around the city, checked it all out and saw that it had been defeated and destroyed. What was he doing all during that time? He was contemplating, praying, surveying, talking to the Lord. He was going over, in his mind, what was going on.

Great leaders know that they have to spend time alone because of the time they spend in public all the time. 5:6 "When I heard the outcry of the poor and these charges, I was very angry. I pondered them in my mind [underline this] Then I accused the nobles and the officials." He said, I put my mind in gear before I started activating my mouth. I am a man of contemplation. He kept his cool. He waits for perspective: "God, what do You want me to say?"

Do you ever speak without thinking? One of the laws of leadership that we have to learn is that we get ourselves in trouble when we speak before we think. Great leaders contemplate. He said I pondered what I was going to say.

On Sunday morning when I get up to speak, I've spent approximately an average of about sixteen hours contemplating what I'm going to talk about -- reading, praying, going over, thinking. Contemplation precedes presentation. Once you have the contemplation down the presentation is automatic. It just comes out.

Nehemiah is a man of compassion; he cares about people. he's a man of contemplation; he spends time in prayer and in thought.

3. CHEERFULNESS

He's a positive guy, upbeat, optimistic. He has a positive attitude. Do you like to follow a grouch? No. Would you rather follow somebody with a positive attitude? Nehemiah was evidently a very cheerful, positive person.

Nehemiah 2:1 "In the month of Nisan, the twentieth year of Artaxeres, when the wine was brought forth, I took the wine and gave it to the king I had not been sad in his presence before." Nehemiah has been serving this guy all of his life and this is the first time he went in with a frown, a down attitude. He had always been cheerful, upbeat. He didn't go in and lay his problems on the king.
Leaders are to be encouragers, not discouragers. The job of leadership is to give people a lift not to let them down. This is why cheerfulness is an important characteristic. If you want to be a leader, then you're going to have to work on this. Some of you by nature are not naturally cheerful. Some people get up in the morning and say, "Good morning, Lord!" Others get up and say, "Good Lord! It's morning!" Some of you are just not naturally cheerful. But you can work on it. You can develop it. I would encourage you, if you want to be a leader, practice smiling. I do this every time I get in the car on Sunday morning. And I don't feel like it at all! I'm still stiff, not woke up, but I start smiling. But you can smile yourself into a good attitude. The doctors tell us that there is actually a biochemical change when you start smiling, hormones are produced in your body. I do this when I go to work, too. I intentionally -- I've trained myself -- when I get out of the car and walk into the office, I intentionally just pause and start smiling. When I walk in I realize that everybody in that office -- 35, 36 people -- are carrying their own load, they have a heavy load. I'm not going to go in and lay anything else on them. We smile to keep them built up. I do this when I go home at night. When I go home at night, I walk up to the front door, and before I put the key in, I smile. I know that the moment I go in, three kids are going to come zooming around me. They don't need the problems I dealt with today.

How do you be a cheerful leader when you work with the kind of people you work with? How do you be a cheerful leader when you're tired and worn out?

Nehemiah 8 is the secret of Nehemiah's strength. He says it in a simple phrase. "This day is sacred to the Lord. Do not grieve for the joy of the Lord is your strength." That's how Nehemiah was cheerful in spite of all the opposition he had. Joy is different from happiness. Happiness depends on happenings. Joy is internal. It is not based on circumstances. You can have joy in the midst of tragedy. You can have joy when you're absolutely fatigued. "The joy of the Lord is my strength."

Nehemiah is compassionate, he's contemplative, he's cheerful.

**4. CONCENTRATION**

Nehemiah always focused on his goal. He has the ability to maintain his focus in the middle of a project. He doesn't worry about other things and distractions. There are examples in chapters 2 and 3. In chapter 2, Nehemiah anticipates the problems he's going to have. He knows he'll need timber so he asks for timber. He know he'll need protection on his trip to Jerusalem, so he asks in advance for a royal passport. He'll need a place to live so he asked for it in advance. He had obviously thought it out in advance. He was concentrating on what he needed to have.

One of the key differences between leading and following is that leaders are always thinking of the future, further out ahead of everybody else. They're trying to see the problems in advance, anticipate them, and have a solution there by the time you get there. That's a mark of leadership.

Chapter 3, He organizes the work. He's very focused.
I think the best example of how Nehemiah concentrated is how he handled distractions from the opposition. Chapter 6:2 & 3 "Sanballat and Geshem sent me this message, 'Come let us meet together on the plain of Ono.' But they were scheming to harm me. So I sent messengers to them with this reply. 'I am carrying on a great project and I cannot go down. Why should the work stop while I leave it and go down to you?' Four times they sent me the same message and each time I gave them the same answer." He knows these guys are trying to distract him. He's trying to build a wall and the opposition says, Why don't you come down here and have a peace party? Four times they say, come down to Ono and we'll talk. He says, no, I'm not going to be distracted. I'm concentrating on what I need to do. This is a mark of leadership: the ability to focus on what needs to be done and not be distracted. He wouldn't allow anything to delay its completion.

The main thing is to keep the main thing the main thing. That is the principle of concentration. That's a mark of leadership. Paul said, "this one thing I do"... not "these forty things I dabble in." Light when it is focused has tremendous power; it becomes a laser. But light diffused has no power at all. The more focused your life is -- the more concentrated your life is -- the more effective it is. That's a characteristic of great leaders -- concentration, the ability to focus.

5. CREATIVITY

The fifth characteristic of great leaders, as we look at Nehemiah's life is Creativity. Nehemiah was a very creative person. The way he approached his problems is fascinating to me. Creativity, people think, is something you're born with -- a predisposition. But Creativity is something that can be developed; it's a skill. It's simply a way of thinking. Any book by Edward Debono are good books on how to become a creative person -- New Think and Lateral Thinking. He's the number one authority on creativity. He did a series of tapes called "Six Thinking Hats" -- six different ways we think. William Colman You Can Be Creative. Roger Von Oech, A Whack on the Side of the Head and A Kick in the Seat of the Pants -- these books get you stimulated to think beyond the boxes. You are going to face new challenges and new challenges require new solutions; a lot of times the same old ways just don't work.

Examples of Nehemiah being a creative problem solver.

Chapter 4. The situation: Those who opposed the rebuilding of the wall from outside said, "We're going to come and attack you while you're trying to build the wall." v. 13 "Therefore I stationed some of the people behind the lowest points of the wall's exposed places posting them by families with their swords and their spears and bows." He divided them by families and put them by their own house to build their portion of the wall closest to their own house. v. 14-18 "The Lord is great and awesome. Fight for your brother and wives and sons and daughters... From that day on half of the men did the work while the other half were equipped with spears and shields and bows and armors." He has a creative work shift.

He's taking a creative response to the situation. They are all out working on the wall and the enemy says, We're going to come while you're working on the wall and not prepared for battle.
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and kill you all. Nehemiah says: Step one, everybody works by their own house and with your own family. That motivates you to do your best job because if you're building the wall by your own house it will be stronger than if you're building the wall by somebody else's house. You're going to really reinforce the wall by your own house. That's the principle of ownership and delegation.

Also, working as a family unit they will support each other. It's also more efficient -- if you're right by your house you don't have to walk all the way across the city to eat lunch.

He was being creative. Half of the crowd built the wall while the other half stood guard with swords and spears. Then they'd shift. These are creative solutions to the difficult problem he faced. If life gives you a lemon, you make lemonade.

6. COURAGE

When you think of all that Nehemiah went through he was a very courageous person. Would you do what he did? Leave a well paying, safe, secure job at the peak of your career and ministry in your own country to go to a country you've never been to and build something you've never been trained to build? Nehemiah was not a contractor. As far as we know he'd never lifted a hammer or put a brick in place in his life. He was a cupbearer -- the wine taster for the king -- a butler. So here's this butler saying I'm going to go to a foreign country and supervise a construction project of building a wall around a city. He had no preparation for that. That took courage. He said, I'm going to do what God called me to do.

We have three examples of courage in Nehemiah. Nehemiah 2:2 "I'd never been sad in the king's presence before. So when the king asked me `Why do your face look so sad and you're not ill? This can be nothing but sadness of heart.' I was very much afraid but [circle this] I said to the king `May the king live forever! Why should not my face look sad when the city where my fathers are buried lies in ruins and the gates have been destroyed by fire.' The king says, `What is it you want?' Then I prayed to the God of heaven and answered the king, `If it pleases the king and your servant has found favor in his sight, let him send me to the city of Judah where my fathers are buried so I can rebuild it.'

In those days when a person came into the presence of the king to make a request, if the request was denied it meant automatic execution of the person. The king, rejecting your request, meant that the king was rejecting you. And if the king rejected you then you had no use in the kingdom and you were immediately executed. No wonder Nehemiah is scared to death. He's depressed over Jerusalem being destroyed and the king says "What's up? You've been happy all the time you've been serving me now you're sad." Nehemiah said, "I was afraid but I said..." Courage is when only you and God know you're afraid. Courage is not the absence of fear; courage is moving ahead in spite of your fear. Nehemiah said, "I was afraid" and he knew he was taking his life into his hands and it was risky to ask the king's permission to leave his service and go to a foreign country to rebuild the wall of a nation that had been an enemy. He also asked for timber and bricks for the wall and the horses to carry him there and a house to live in.
Another example: 4:14 when the enemy came and said they were going to attack "I looked things over and stood up and said to the nobles and officials and the rest of them, 'Don't be afraid of them. Remember the Lord is great and awesome. Fight [circle this] for your brothers, your sons, your daughters and wives.'" Nehemiah had never led an army in his life. He'd never fought in a battle. But he had courage to do what God had told him to do.

5:7-13 when he confronted the political corruption. There was the "old money" people of Jerusalem who was very wealthy and then everybody else who was very poor. The very rich were playing on the misfortunes of the poor. They were charging them very high interest to pay their bills and then when they couldn't pay the interest they had to sell their children into slavery. Nehemiah hears about it, gets all upset, and publicly confronts them. "I pondered in my mind and I accused the nobles and officials and I told them 'You're exacting usury from your countrymen.' I called together a large meeting to deal with them. As far back as possible we bought back our Jewish brothers who were sold to the Gentiles. Now you're selling your own brothers only for them to be sold back to us.' They kept quiet because they could find nothing to say. So I continued, 'What you are doing is not right. Shouldn't you walk in the fear of God to avoid the reproach of our Gentile enemies? I and my brothers and my men are also lending the people money and grain but let the exacting of usury stop. Give back to them immediately their fields and vineyards and olive groves and houses and also the interest you're charging them, the hundredth part of the money and the grain and the new wine and oil.' 'We will give it back,' they said 'and not demand anything any more from them. We will do as you say.' Then I summoned the priests and made the nobles and officials take an oath to do what they'd promised. I also shook out the folds of my robe and said, 'In this way may God shake out of His house and possession every man who does not keep his promise.'"

This guy is ticked! He's not afraid to take on the fat cats. He says you guys are ripping off the poor; you're capitalizing on their misfortune. Leaders have to have the courage to confront when they need to confront.

What is courage? Courage is really another word for faith. Being willing to risk, being willing to step out on faith. That's what Nehemiah did. If you want to walk on water you've got to get out of the boat. You've got to take a risk. You've got to take a step out in faith. Courage is a characteristic of great leadership.

7. CLEAR CONSCIOUS

Nehemiah was a man of integrity. He handled success very well. Most of us handle failure better than we handle success. Nehemiah knew how to handle success. He was a man of integrity.

One of my favorite passages is in chapter 5:14-19, "In the past the earlier governors, those preceding me, placed a heavy burden on the people, they took 40 shekels of silver from them in addition to food and wine [heavy taxation of the people] and their assistants also lorded it over the people. But out of reverence for God I didn't act like that. I devoted myself to the work of the wall..." Nehemiah had been made the governor of this area by Artaxerses, the king of Persia and the most powerful man at this time. That made Nehemiah the most powerful man in all of
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Judea. For 12 years Nehemiah could do anything he wanted to do. If he had wanted to he could have been like modern day dictators and amassed a personal fortune. Nehemiah says for 12 years I was the most powerful man in the country. I reported to nobody. I was accountable to nobody. In all of that time, when I could have ripped off my own people, I refused to accept a salary, to tax the people, I personally worked on the wall myself, supervising it. I refused to buy land for profit. I paid my servants to do public work and I personally fed 150 people everyday from my own welfare.

He's saying, For 12 years I was ruler, the leader of this country, there was nobody I was accountable to. Yet in that time, I didn't take any money and I didn't make any money. Do you know many politicians who can say that? This is a man of integrity. This is one of my favorite passages. He says I did not benefit myself from the leadership position I was in. I did not take advantage of the people who were under me. I was a man with a clear conscious.

When you become a success three things go with that: power, prestige, and privilege. The temptation is to abuse all three of those. Nehemiah didn't do it. The key is in v. 15, the last part, "But out of reverence for God I didn't act like that." The other guys did in the past, but Nehemiah didn't act like that. He was a leader with a clear conscious.

8. CONVICTION

Great leaders have strongly held beliefs. An opinion is something you'd argue about; a conviction is something you'd die for. Nehemiah was a man of conviction. He believed very strongly that God had called him to this job and nothing could stop him. Eight different times the opposition tried to keep the wall from being built:

1. Derision. They made fun of him. They laughed, "Those guys over there will never get the wall built." When you're a Christian, one of the first ways people will try to get you to deny your conviction is to make fun of you. If that doesn't work they'll try the second way...

2. Discouragement. The enemy came and tried to frustrate their plans. There was a lot of rubble and the people started getting discouraged. v. 4 "When the wall was half finished they began to get discouraged." Discouragement usually comes at the half way point -- half way done with the project, half way up the mountain.

3. Dread. They tried to make them afraid. We're coming to attack you. We're going to kill you all. That didn't work. Nehemiah had half of the people stand guard.

4. Discord. They started spreading gossip all among the people. They gossiped about the wall, the leadership, everything. They tried to spread rumors to split up the work of God.

5. Division. They got a few people to form a little clique, a committee: "We think it ought to be done this way..." Another group: "We think it ought to be done that way..." They tried to cause division to split up the project God was working on. Internal conflict. Up to that time it had all been external.
6. Distractions. The enemy tried to get the leadership into a peace conference. We may not get them stopped but at least we'll get them slowed down.

7. Defamation. ch. 6. Personal smear campaign against the leader, Nehemiah. Previously they tried to attack the people because they were the weak point. Now that the wall is almost built, the leader is tired. When you're tired, Satan starts trying to attack you. "This guy Nehemiah has just got a big ego. In fact he's building the wall for his own benefit. He's trying to set up his own empire and set himself up as king. We're going to tell the big king in Persia." Nothing could be further from the truth. Nehemiah says, I didn't make a penny off this. God told me to do this." They tried to defame him and they personally attacked him.

8. Danger. The last attempt was assassination attempts. "We're going to send a hit squad and knock this guy off."

In all eight of these ways the opposition tried to use to stop the project, Nehemiah kept on doing the will of God. He would not give up. He was persistent. He endured. He was diligent, determined. Why? Because he had conviction. He had the conviction "God called me to do this. God told me to do this and I'm going to do this regardless of derision, discouragement, dread, discord, division, distraction, defamation and danger." I've seen some churches go through these things. Satan will try anything. Nehemiah was a man of conviction and nothing could get him to quit.

What did he base his conviction on? Four things:

1. He had a compelling purpose. In chapter 6 he said, "God has called me to do this great project and I'm not going to come down and talk with you."

2. He had a clear perspective. He had asked God for wisdom.

3. He had a continual prayer. He could see the overview, what God was doing.

4. He had a courageous persistence. He kept on keeping on. I think a good theme verse for Nehemiah would be Galatians 6:9 "Let us not become weary in doing good. For at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up."

These eight characteristics we see in Nehemiah's life, I want us to take a little time for self evaluation. Four questions:

1. Which of these character qualities are strongest in your life? Compassion, contemplation, cheerfulness, concentration, creative, courageous, clear conscious, conviction.

2. Which of these character qualities is weakest?
3. Which of these character qualities would you like to develop the most? It's hard to work on something if you haven't clearly identified it.

4. What could you do this week to practice demonstrating this quality? Is there a project you could think of this week, or a situation that you might best demonstrate the quality you want to work on. Force yourself to make an application.

I'm praying that the decade of the 90's will be the decade of character development at Saddleback, that we'll be more like Jesus Christ in character. There are other things out there that are going to pass away, but character is the long haul. Character is what you're going to have in eternity.

Prayer:

Father, this has been an exciting study as we've looked at the life of Nehemiah. He's taught us a lot about leadership, lessons we can apply as leaders in our church, in our home, at work. We're all called to be leaders at different times. May we understand that leadership foundation is character not charisma, not education, not talent but character. Would You this year work on the qualities in our lives? I pray for each person as they've written down the one that they're weakest or the one that they want to work on the most, that You would give them opportunities to develop this, to be more the person You want them to be. Help us all to be leaders for Jesus' sake. We pray this in His name. Amen.