

“Preparing for Spiritual Leadership”

Nehemiah 1

Leadership is daunting for anybody to talk about, particularly college guys. It’s even more difficult for us to talk about spiritual leadership in a family context. Yet, as we sit in our college classes and go back and forth between study groups, we are at a uniquely important time in our lives to begin developing traits and tendencies for our future family lives.

Many define leadership as influencing others.¹ Yet influencing others through giving of ourselves in service defines spiritual leadership for those who follow Christ.ⁱⁱ Though it may seem strange to have this discussion now, college is a good time to talk about the development and use of spiritual leadership in our future family lives. God has provided some unique roles for both husbands and wives. Understanding those roles and their expectations is important for each of us to consider.

As family leaders, God wants to use us to mobilize our families toward the Great Commission. God has a great mission for your future family. It’s your job to lead them into it. Nehemiah gave us a great biblical example of a leader who moved people to accomplish a big task. He went from being a servant in the court of a king to leading a citywide rebuilding campaign. During this time, Nehemiah showed many traits that we should incorporate into our own spiritual leadership. Take a look at the following verses and the leadership principles we can pull from them.

- **Nehemiah heard about the situation and began with prayer.** “When I heard these words, I sat down and wept. I mourned for a number of days, fasting and praying before the God of heaven” (Nehemiah 1:4).
- **Nehemiah asked for help when it was appropriate.** “Then the king asked me, “What is your request?” So I prayed to the God of heaven and answered the king, “If it pleases the king, and if your servant has found favor with you, send me to Judah and to the city where my ancestors are buried, so that I may rebuild it” (Nehemiah 2:4-5).
- **Nehemiah carefully evaluated the whole situation before acting.** “After I arrived in Jerusalem and had been there three days, I got up at night and [took] a few men with me. I didn’t tell anyone what my God had laid on my heart to do for Jerusalem. The only animal I took was the one I was riding” (Nehemiah 2:11-12).
- **Accomplishing God’s purpose was Nehemiah’s essential goal.** “I gave them this reply, “The God of heaven is the One who will grant us success. We, His servants, will start building, but you have no share, right, or historic claim in Jerusalem” (Nehemiah 2:20).
- **Leadership is aided by good organization and making sure everyone has an equal part of the responsibility.** “Eliashib the high priest and his fellow priests began rebuilding the Sheep Gate. They dedicated it and installed its doors. [After building the wall] to the Tower of the Hundred and the Tower of Hananel, they dedicated it. The men of Jericho built next to Eliashib, and next to them Zaccur son of Imri built” (Nehemiah 3:1-2).
- **As a spiritual leader, Nehemiah understood that all of our work is in vain without worship.** “Ezra blessed the Lord, the great God, and with their hands uplifted all the people said, “ Amen, Amen!” Then they bowed down and worshiped the Lord with their faces to the ground” (Nehemiah 8:6).

Throughout the book, Nehemiah showed amazing consistency in his leadership. That’s important for us as well. Sometimes it can seem as though the walls are closing in around us. Sometimes we can feel like we’re on top of the world. For these times, and everywhere in between, consistency in our leadership will steady our families. Nehemiah understood this principle and was able to rely on God-given wisdom to provide the needed consistency to the Israelites.

Spiritual leadership involves all of these traits. It looks different from the world’s brand of leadership, because spiritual leadership seeks to reconcile people with God through our cheerful serving of their basic needs first. When it seems that most leaders in our world are condescending, arrogant individuals who just want to push the people below them around, spiritual leaders find their place alongside those they lead and help them accomplish great things for God.

The central task of spiritual leadership is different from worldly leadership. Spiritual leadership focuses on effectively growing people to accomplish God's purpose in their lives. Worldly leadership is simply influencing people towards an economic or personal goal. While worldly leadership isn't a bad thing, it is a far cry from what God has called us to do in our families.

God wants us to become men who are willing to be used by Him to lead our families to do great things for His Kingdom. We must develop these leadership traits today if this will happen in the years to come.

Maybe this week you can take time to study the book of Nehemiah a little closer and see how spiritual leadership works in the life of someone who earnestly tried to follow God. Often, we don't like to even think about spiritual leadership, because we don't believe we're qualified. But we can become spiritual leaders when we willingly follow after God and serve those around us as they discover God's plan for their lives.

God intends us, as men, to become spiritual leaders in our families. As we consider leading others, we should take note of the biblical example He has given us. Nehemiah showed us what it means to be the kind of leader who moves people to accomplish a great task for God. Let us pray that we do the same.

Talk It Up:

1. How is spiritual leadership different from worldly leadership?
2. What are some other spiritual leadership traits you notice from reading the Nehemiah passages above?
3. Why does God call us to be spiritual leaders?
4. What are some traits that you can hold each other accountable for in developing spiritual leadership?
5. How have your actions, words, or thoughts this week affirmed the "whole purpose of God" in your life? (Acts 20:27)
6. How has your mindset and/or actions reflected God's missional purpose for you this week? (Acts 20:29)
7. How has God's Word built you up this week? (Acts 20:32)

Prayer Requests:

- Pray that God gives you both wisdom and opportunities to grow in becoming spiritual leaders.
- Pray for the spiritual leaders around you.
- Ask God to open the hearts of specific people in your life who need a relationship with Jesus. Commit to pray regularly for them.
- Pray for God to start a spiritual awakening on your campus and on college campuses across North America and around the world.
- Take time to pray for any personal requests that group members may have.

ⁱ John Maxwell, *The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership* (Thomas Nelson, 2007) 15.

ⁱⁱ Oswald Sanders, *Spiritual Leadership* (Moody, 1994) 15.