

## MEMOIR

NEHEMIAH 5:14-19 | Judah, from the twentieth year to the thirty-second year of Artaxerxes the king, twelve years, neither I nor my brothers ate the food allowance of the governor. <sup>15</sup> The former governors who were before me laid heavy burdens on the people and took from them for their daily ration forty shekels of silver. Even their servants lorded it over the people. But I did not do so, because of the fear of God. <sup>16</sup> I also persevered in the work on this wall, and we acquired no land, and all my servants were gathered there for the work. <sup>17</sup> Moreover, there were at my table 150 men, Jews and officials, besides those who came to us from the nations that were around us. <sup>18</sup> Now what was prepared at my expense for each day was one ox and six choice sheep and birds, and every ten days all kinds of wine in abundance. Yet for all this I did not demand the food allowance of the governor, because the service was too heavy on this people. <sup>19</sup> Remember for my good, O my God, all that I have done for this people.

**H**ow does one lead by example? *Leadership means going further than those one is*

*leading* (HGM WILLIAMSON). Nehemiah goes further than most. But not just to set an example. Regardless who is watching, he does what is right, simply because it is right. And because he is a man of integrity who fears God and loves neighbour (:15).

Sometimes, in the name of *setting an example*, we end up parading our piety before people in order to be praised by them (MATT 6:1-4). And sadly, some models of leadership training do more to caress the ego than to crucify it. This is one reason why we see so many scandals among high profile Christian leaders today. The most striking thing about Nehemiah is not his leadership skills, as excellent as they are, but his all-out incarnational posture. Like Jesus, he leads by serving and giving his all (MARK 10:45).

Philippians 2 could well be a commentary on Nehemiah's self-emptying solidarity with those he came to serve. He leaves the throne room of the most powerful

king the ancient world had yet seen. An inscription on a cup that Nehemiah may have used to serve his master reads: *Artaxerxes, the Great King, King of Kings, King of Nations*.

When Alexander the Great conquered Susa, one of Artaxerxes' capitals, he found 270 tons of gold and 1,400 tons of silver. Nehemiah leaves that opulent city for the outback of Judah! For twelve years (445 to 433 BC) as provincial governor, he relinquishes his imperial right to tax his people to cover his expenses. Out of his own pocket, he lavishly feasts 150 servants and officials every day and entertains diplomats from surrounding nations. He stoops to serve alongside all classes of people. He soils his hands with mortar, not with mammon. And he never bullies his subjects as his predecessors did (:14-18).

All this Nehemiah does in the fear of God, with compassion for the poor, with no air of importance, no conflict of interest, and no perks. *He was there to rebuild the wall, not a personal empire* (GENE GETZ). And what does he ask in return? Nothing! Except for one thing. The one thing that matters most: *Remember for my good, O my God, all that I have done for this people* (:19). God remembers those who remember the poor. Will he remember us?

## WALL OF DUTY

■ Seminary professor Howard Hendricks famously said: *As a leader, if you want your followers to bleed, you will need to haemorrhage*. Pray for our leaders:

- For the grace to lead like Jesus and Nehemiah, not lording over others but serving them at one's own expense.
- For the humility to exercise authority without being authoritarian or abusive.
- For the wisdom to recognise that they cannot impart what they do not possess (DALLAS WILLARD).
- For the common sense to realise that they can impress from a distance, but they can only impact up close (DALLAS WILLARD).
- For the mind to suffer and sacrifice for the good of all and especially the poor.

- For the magnanimity to relinquish one's rights for the sake of the common good.

- For the integrity to avoid conflict of interest and forego perks and privileges when duty requires it.

- For the guts and grit to dive deeper, push harder, work longer, and go farther than those they serve, not competing with anyone, but laying down their lives for others.

- For the conviction to always do what is right, not for the sake of being seen or praised, but simply because it is right (MATT 6:1-2).

- For the passion to *seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness* (MATT 6:33), not building their personal empire.

- For the maturity to cultivate depth in their personal relationship with God, letting him determine the breadth of their public ministry.

■ Serial entrepreneur David Taylor-Klaus says: *First lead yourself. From there, you grow to lead others*. This echoes Paul's word to the Ephesian elders: *keep watch over yourselves and the flock* (ACTS 20:28). Examine yourself and pray. Journal your responses to the following:

- Think about people in your circle. What needs do you see? What are you doing to help them?
- Think about your relationships at home, church, work, and school. In what ways might you be using your position to take advantage of others?
- Think about your reactions. When you get angry, is it righteous anger in the interest of God's honour? Or is it selfish anger in your own interest?
- Think about your relationship with God. How has your fear of the Lord impacted the way you live your life and make decisions?
- Think about your conduct. In what ways are you setting a good example as one who is other-centred, in word and in deed?