

Life Lessons from Nehemiah

There many people who are unfamiliar with the biblical figure Nehemiah. Yet, he was instrumental in the rebuilding and reestablishment of Jerusalem in the 5th century B.C. following the Babylonian exile. The book of Nehemiah, likely written between 445 and 420 B.C. is one of the history books of the Bible and continues the story of Israel's return from the Babylonian captivity and the rebuilding of the temple of Israel.

Nehemiah had a terrible problem almost 3,000 years ago. God's people had ignored everything that was good and right. So the Lord allowed them to be conquered and taken captive by the mighty Babylonian Empire. There, they were slaves and exiles – and they mourned for their fallen nation. Their story teaches you and me some incredible secrets to success. Here are 21 life lessons believers can take away from the Book of Nehemiah.

Do your job well

Colossian 3:23 says “whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters. Honest hard work is something God seeks from all of us. God's Word tells us that working hard with faith in mind can lead to great things He has planned for us.

When the conquering Babylonians were overthrown by the Persian Empire, Nehemiah, was appointed as a servant to Persian King Artaxerxes. Nehemiah's job was to make sure no one poisoned the king. Nehemiah did this by sipping any drink served to the king. If Nehemiah didn't die, the drink was served to the king. Daily, Nehemiah put his life on the line. As a result, he became very trusted by the king.

Follow your heart

One day, Nehemiah's brother visited him and told him that their hometown of Jerusalem was in ruins. The walls protecting it had been pulled down. The city gates had been burned. The people were unprotected from marauders that roamed the countryside, robbing and looting – and worse. In deep mourning, Nehemiah prayed for the mercy of the Lord, that they might rebuild the walls of the city. In order for that to happen, the Persian King would have to let God's people go home. The Lord blessed Nehemiah, giving the lowly cupbearer favor with the king.

Seek the Lord's guidance

Nehemiah was given his freedom and allowed to go rebuild Jerusalem's walls. There First Chronicles 16:11 says, “Seek the LORD and His strength, seek His face continually.” One of the best ways to seek the Lord's guidance is to pray and listen. Prayer is important, not only because it strengthens our relationship with God, but also because it connects us spiritually with Him and the world around us. When you aren't in a committed relationship with God and don't value the importance of prayer, it's easy to get distracted by everything going on in the world around you. When prayers aren't answered the way we want them to be, the conversation easily goes from “we” to “me”. But when you routinely pray, and listen to what God is saying, our focus shifts from the personal to the needs if others, and you'll better understand what God is telling you.

Seek the Lord's help

Ask God for help when you have an impossible situation. Nehemiah writes: "I sat down and wept and mourned for days and fasted and prayed constantly before the God of heaven, and I said, O Lord God, let Your ear now be attentive and Your eyes open to the prayer of Your servant. We have sinned against You. Yes, I and my father's house have sinned. We have acted very corruptly against You and have not kept the commandments, statutes, and ordinances which You commanded Your servant Moses. All of life, especially the battles we face in the realm of faith, should be bathed in prayer. God loves you. He is waiting to hear from you. Go to your Father and ask for help."

Be alert

Watch for His answers! And the Lord answered Nehemiah, saying: "If you return to Me and keep My commandments and do them, though your outcasts are in the farthest parts, yet will I gather them." If you ask the Lord for something, be ready to act when He answers your prayer. One of the best ways to watch for God's answers is by getting to know Him. Jesus placed great emphasis on the Holy Spirit. He actually told the disciples it was better for them that He leaves so they might receive the Spirit. The Bible tells us, "Nevertheless, I tell you the truth: It is expedient for you that I go away" (John 16:7). Even in His resurrected body, Jesus can only be in one place at a time. His Spirit, however, can be everywhere. This is why Jesus said His departure is to our advantage. He wants all men and women to experience a relationship with Him through the omnipresence of the Holy Spirit. And this benefit is just the top of the iceberg. The Bible also tells us, "For I do not go away, the Counselor will not come to you. But if I go, I will send Him to you" (John 16:7). Here, Jesus refers to the Holy Spirit as the Helper. By trusting in the power of the Holy Spirit, you are getting to know God on earth. The Spirit is the expression of God's inner nature.

Follow through

It's one thing to start a job. It's tough to finish. Nehemiah wrote: Then I said to them, You see the bad situation we are in—how Jerusalem lies in ruins, and its gates are burned with fire. Come, let us build up the wall of Jerusalem, that we may no longer be a disgrace. The Lord opened the door for Nehemiah to return home and rebuild the walls. So, Nehemiah set to work to get the job done – enlisting anybody who would help.

Tell what God has done

Never be afraid to talk about what God has done for you! Nehemiah wrote: Then I told them of the hand of my God which was upon me for good, and also the words that the king had spoken to me. And they said, Let us rise up and build! So they strengthened their hands for the good work.

One great way to tell what God has done is to praise Him. The Bible tells us, "And David danced before the Lord with all his might" (2 Samuel 6:14). Sing and dance like David. Turn up the praise music. Lift your hands in the air and dance with joy for God. Psalm 149:3 says, "They should praise Him with dancing. They should sing praises to Him with tambourines and harps."

Be ready for opposition

No good idea goes unopposed! Nehemiah wrote: But when Sanballat the Horonite and Tobiah the servant, the Ammonite, and Geshem the Arab heard of it, they laughed us to scorn and said, What is this thing you are doing? Will you rebel against the king?

One form of opposition we have to face daily is attacks from the enemy. As Christians, it's important that we are mindful of the enemy's presence and his attacks, so that we are not weakened by his false promises, and led to sin. If we want to protect ourselves from the enemy, we must first turn to God. Only He can protect us from Satan, and our will against Him.

Dare to fight back

Nehemiah didn't tremble in fright. He writes: I answered them, The God of heaven will prosper us; therefore we His servants will arise and build, but you have no portion or right or memorial in Jerusalem. Sometimes God will simply run a protective shield around you where nothing will be able to get through to attack you. Other times something will start to slip through to come directly against you, and then God will move ahead of you to take it out. This is where God will take your enemy head on and do battle with it. God will also use opportunities to fight the battle through you.

Prepare for the worst

Nehemiah was no warrior, but he realized he had to be ready to fight. He wrote: And when our enemies heard their plot was known to us and that God had frustrated their purpose, we all returned to our work. Half worked and half held spears, shields, bows and arrows. Everyone worked with one hand and held a weapon with the other. Each had a sword.

There are various types of hope that we can hold onto when we feel like our world is falling apart. Psalm 62:5 says, "Find rest, O my soul, in God alone; my hope comes from Him." Restful hope allows you to sleep at night because you know tomorrow is in God's hands. When you realize that tomorrow is already taken care of by God alone and the hope you have in Him, then you can find rest. It's easier to sleep tonight if you know tomorrow is in God's hands.

United we stand, divided we fall

Nehemiah's volunteers were determined to rebuild Jerusalem's walls. However, they were threatened on every side. There were gaps everywhere on the old wall. So, they split up, but each group had a trumpeter – and was ready to run to each other's aid if they heard a trumpet call. Even so, they knew they could not win without the Lord. Nehemiah wrote: And I said to the people, 'In whatever place you hear the sound of the trumpet, rally to us there. Our God will fight for us.'

Be determined

These people were dedicated to do what God called them to do – protect their hometown. They could not be sidetracked by attacks from without or from within. They had to be a people with "a mind to work!" When trouble arises, there must be a determination greater than any opposition.

Your purpose as a believer is to build the Kingdom of God. Your role in His Kingdom will require your natural gifts and talents. As Christians, it's important to start the exploration of calling with the call to follow Jesus. The call to belong to Christ is everything. When we belong to Jesus, we're finally able to make God look glorious in our lives. This will also

empower you to live a greater life in Christ. There's no way you can follow God's purpose in your life if you don't know who you are in Christ.

Our faith is worth fighting for

Nehemiah's enemies did not want his people to worship the Lord. He refused to give in to them. Today, God is still looking for those who will worship Him in "spirit and in truth." He wants us to be ready to fight for our right to worship Him His way. We can never allow anyone to silence our praise, empty our congregations or silence our testimony!

Our families are worth fighting for

Nehemiah knew that if he didn't take a stand, then he and his family would perish! Your family is larger than just those who share your name or bloodline. It is our duty to reach out to them! To inspire them. To help them!

Building a foundation of hope for our families will help carry them through the storms of life. In order to do this, we must first submit yourself to God. He is the source of our hope. When we come to Him in humility, He restores us. Next, strengthen your faith. Allow God's previously fulfilled promises to renew your hope. God has given us written record of countless ways He has provided hope for believers in centuries in the past.

Our future is worth fighting for

Nehemiah knew that if he caved in, there would never be life in Jerusalem again. Nehemiah knew that the time to stand was now! We have turned our heads for far too long! We must take a stand today! We must determine that we will not allow the troubles and trials of life, the attacks of any opponents – and the fear we all feel from time to time – to destroy us or the work God has given us to do.

Submit to authority

First Peter 2:18 says that we are to "be subject to your masters with all respect, not only to the good and gentle but also to the unjust." Nehemiah was a captive, probably a slave who became one of the most trusted members of King Artaxerxes' court. Why? Because he was willing to be patient, be submissive to the king – and to wait on the Lord to move the king's heart. The authority we should always submit to is our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ – King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

Respond to God's call

Many Christians wonder what God is calling for their life. This is a question many Christians want to know but have no clue where to start to find the answer. We are drawn to the idea of knowing and pursuing our calling. That's why so many of us want to know that we're on the right path. The reason this question is so significant is because the work we do is important to God. If we know this is significant to God, then it makes sense to ask where God is calling and leading you in life. There is no better place to go than to Scripture for the answer. God calls leaders. Is He calling you? Leaders must listen to God's call. Nehemiah understood his leadership was a calling from God. He rose to the occasion – with God's help.

Care about your people and their troubles

Nehemiah listened to the voice of his wall-building volunteers. He demonstrated that he cared about them. He got in the trenches and worked beside them. He sought the Lord on their behalf. He was not selfish. He loved his people!

Many scholars maintain that in the New Testament “stranger” and “neighbor” are synonymous. We all know the Golden Rule: do unto others as you would have them to do unto you, or in other words, treat others the way you would like to be treated. A Jesus follower lives a life that reflects the Golden Rule. This rule applies not just to people who you may know but also people who you don’t know.

Prayer is essential

Prayer is a powerful tool for communicating with our Heavenly Father. We must be ready to hear God’s voice. He can speak to us at any time. If we are not turning our hearts toward God to seek His guidance, how can His vision reach our hearts? The prophet Habakkuk climbed up onto the broken walls believing that God had a vision for him and his people. Habakkuk was willing to wait for that vision.

Prayer is also an opportunity to become one with the Creator and Giver of all things. Prayer helps us to find strength for today and hope for our future. We should actively pray and trust in its power to change our circumstances for good. Your faith life directly correlates to the quality of your prayer life. Prayer has the power to change not only the people and things around you. Prayer also has the power to change you from the inside out. When you’re in need of strength, remember that God is the number one healer and can guide you in endless ways. If your heart and life are centered on God, His Word and His Holy Spirit, you can rest assured that He will direct your path.

Don’t be discouraged by adversity

As they rebuilt the wall, they were ridiculed and mocked. Their enemies did everything possible to discourage them. They spread lies about Nehemiah. But Nehemiah knew he was “doing a great work” and refused to come down from the wall to debate his enemies. Nehemiah persisted! God’s people cannot give up! Not even when adversity comes.

We all experience times of adversity in our lifetime. How many times have you heard the saying what doesn’t kill us makes us stronger. We can turn to God and His words during times of adversity for strength and comfort. When we put our faith in Him, He will guide us to the a path of happiness and peace.

God always has a vision

When people work hard to accomplish a great goal, the temptation is to stop and rest. God’s people should stop and celebrate victories, just as Nehemiah and his people did. But God is never finished with us. After we give thanks to Him for bringing us to a new place on our journey, we must pause asking, “What, now, is your will?” We are always on a journey with Him. We cannot become what God wants us to be if we don’t listen to Him.

Nehemiah was totally sold out to God. When he heard of the turmoil in Jerusalem, he turned to God in prayer. He poured out all his woes to Him. He prayed in confidence that God would hear and lead him. Throughout his long ordeal, Nehemiah constantly sought the Lord. The work got done because the people worked with all their heart – inspired by a selfless, devoted leader who had their best interests at heart. He loved God without reservation. Lord, send us more Nehemiahs!