



Nehemiah and Development: *Outline*¹

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- 1.0 This is a real story set in a real place at a particular time. Nehemiah is a Jew who was probably born in exile. (1:1)
 - 1.1 This is the story of a man coming from a place with highly negative connotations to a place in need of rebuilding.
 - 1.2 The story is also contemporary; there is little that modern social science or our knowledge about development could add to the way Nehemiah approached and carried out the task of rebuilding the walls as a way of rebuilding the people.
- 2.0 Where does the story begin? What is Nehemiah doing? (1:2)
 - 2.1 He is asking questions of his brother, Hanani. He is gathering information.
 - 2.2 He inquires about the place and the state of mind of the people; he is interested in people in context.
 - 2.3 Nehemiah is an inquirer, concerned about firsthand information from those who have been there.

Development requires an inquiring mind which is eager for firsthand information about the people and the place.

- 3.0 How does Nehemiah respond to the information he receives? (1:4)
 - 3.1 He cries. He is moved.
 - 3.2 He is a whole human being and allows himself to react emotionally to the information he receives.

Development requires an emotional identification with and empathy for the other.

- 4.0 What does Nehemiah's emotional response cause him to do? (1:4)
 - 4.1 He mourned, fasted, and prayed.
 - 4.2 He went to the spiritual disciplines; his action was directed at God, not the problem.

Development begins with seeking God and asking what he would have us do. Development begins and is sustained by the exercise of spiritual disciplines.

- 5.0 What was the content of Nehemiah's prayer? (1:5-10)
 - 5.1 Praise to God for who he is, affirmation of his covenant with humankind, and his actions in history.
 - 5.2 He acknowledges the sovereignty of God.
 - 5.3 He confesses to sin, both his and his people. Identification begins here.

¹ Ted Ward. Nehemiah and Development. Outline for presentation. World Vision International, Hawaii. FDD/FDO International Institute, October 7-24, 1985. Hosted at the East-West Center, University of Hawaii for World Vision field directors.

Development requires our willingness to identify ourselves with the problem, including its causes, from the very beginning.

- 5.4 Nehemiah is steeped in the Scriptures and recalls Israel's history, and God's activity. He counts on this.

Development calls for a knowledge and respect for a people's history. Development must begin with a desire to build on a people's history and set it on track with what God intends.

- 5.5 Nehemiah has an image of the future which goes beyond the immediate reality of God's judgment and which "sees" God's redeemed and restored New Jerusalem.

Development requires an image of the future which sees beyond the immediate suffering and the appearance of hopelessness to what God intends for his creation. Development must be seen as an opportunity to participate in God's plan to redeem and restore his creation.

- 6.0 What does Nehemiah come to see at the end of his prayer? What is God's revelation to him? (1:11)
 - 6.1 He is the cupbearer to the very king who controls the destiny of Jerusalem and the people of Israel.
 - 6.2 The cupbearer to the king was the highest non-official position in the king's court; the cupbearer was the confidant to the king.
 - 6.3 Nehemiah suddenly realized that he occupies a position which uniquely gives him the opportunity to seek help for his people.
 - 6.4 Nehemiah suddenly understands who he is and why he is where he is; he sees how God has strategically positioned him.

We are where we are in the world and in World Vision because it is where God needs us at this particular moment in time to do what he needs us to do. Development agents are in the precise place. They need to be and to do what God has called them to do at that particular moment in time.

- 7.0 What does Nehemiah do with this revelation? (2:1-2)
 - 7.1 He waits four months (Kislev to Nisan) while being continually troubled in spirit.
 - 7.2 He disciplines his instinct to ask for help immediately and waits for God to prompt the king.

A change agent disciplines his requests and waits for God to create the right opportunity.

- 7.3 He is authentic. He looks sorrowful when he feels that way and this is contrary to the norm for Nehemiah.

Aside: What can we deduce about Nehemiah as a person from his circumstances and the king's reaction? (2:2)

- A. In spite of serving the king who defeated his people, who took them into exile, and who destroyed Jerusalem, Nehemiah served with a cheerful, supportive spirit.
- B. To be a cupbearer, he must have been very trustworthy.
- C. His social science skills suggest an active observer, learner, and integrator.
- D. He had an opportunity to watch and study an effective king conduct the affairs of state.
- E. He was steeped in Scripture and was a man of prayer.

Change agents accept their place and fulfill their responsibilities with joy and cheerfulness and are authentic.

- 8.0 When the king asks Nehemiah what is bothering him, how does Nehemiah respond?
 - 8.1 Still he makes no request. Using respectful protocol, Nehemiah states the facts in the form of an “I statement.” No judgmental or accusatory language.
 - 8.2 Nehemiah appeals to the king in a culturally appropriate form:
 - A. Ancestors not properly respected is an easily understood issue for the king.
 - B. Nehemiah does not lead with “God language,” but rather appeals to his relationship with the king. There is no godly language for an ungodly king.

Development enablers make sense only if they use cultural forms and appeals which can be understood by those they are trying to motivate. Development enablers should build relationships and then appeal to the relationship as the ground for mutual change, rather than appeal to what they say God wants them to be. When members of a community ask why we are in their community, the answer is not that we want to do or to act, but rather that we are commanded by the one in whom we believe to be with them and love them

- 8.3 He punctuates the moment by a quick prayer. Nehemiah has thoroughly integrated his relationship with God with his everyday life. The prayer is instinctual.

Development educators must strive to fully integrate their knowledge and relationship with God with their daily work.

- 8.4 He asks for what his image of the future tells him is the desired end result. He does not ask to go and do a study or make a survey in order to get an image of the future. He understands that his fundamental agenda has to do with redemption and restoration.
- 8.5 He sets a time. There is no pleading as to how hard it is to know how long will be needed, or rhetoric that development is a process and hence setting a time is impossible. Nehemiah understands that times are set to be changed and that to set no time limit almost always means the development facilitator stays too long.

The facilitators of relief and development need to set times to leave in order to remind themselves not to stay too long.

- 8.6 When asked what he needs, Nehemiah has an answer. He has thought it through. He had answered the question, “What will it take to get there?” Visas, permissions,

access to materials not found in Israel. Not a faith mission approach. On the other hand, he did not take anything with him that was already available in Israel.

Development requires the integration of the practice of management and the dependence on the providential. The development enabler only takes those which comes with permission, bringing only those resources which are not available locally

- 9.0 How was Nehemiah perceived upon his arrival in Jerusalem? (2:9)
 - 9.1 He was an outsider and was unknown to the people.
 - 9.2 Because he was accompanied by the army, he was probably viewed as being important and powerful.
 - 9.3 He might even have been seen as a collaborator.
 - 9.4 However he was perceived, Nehemiah's first task was to develop some rapport and a relationship of trust with the people, and the style of his arrival was a hindrance to this.

World Vision Development facilitators always appear both wealthy and powerful to those we seek to serve. A community tends not to trust or accept an outsider and, therefore, the first task is building trust in a climate of suspicion

- 10.0 What did Nehemiah bring with him? (2:7-8)
 - 10.1 Himself and all his facilitation and leadership skills.
 - 10.2 His faith in an active God who was in the business of redeeming and restoring.
 - 10.3 His self-awareness which reflected itself in his integrity and knowledge of his limits.
 - 10.4 Permission and support from the one who controlled the power structure.
 - 10.5 Only those materials not available in Israel.

Change agents who have a vital relationship with God and a keen awareness of who they are and what their skills and experience are represents the primary resource which needs to be brought into the community.

- 11.0 What does Nehemiah do immediately upon his arrival? (2:11-12)
 - 11.1 We know he didn't tell them about his agenda, so what did he do?
 - 11.2 One thing he might have done is let them talk to him about theirs.
 - 11.3 By reserving his agenda, he avoids the manipulative needs analysis wherein the change agent listens to the needs of the people waiting to hear those which fit his own agenda.
 - 11.4 He probably did not say that he had no agenda and was there simply to do whatever they wanted him to do, since the pile of timber outside the gate and his presence from such a far distance clearly indicates this is not the case.

Development educators must know and be honest about their agenda and values: World Vision intends to help, spend money, and witness to the one whom we serve. The initial focus of all development work is on building relationships of trust, not needs assessment. The fundamental premise of Christian development workers must be that God is sovereign in the life of the workers and the community and that he is calling both the workers and the community to a common task. Development workers must own and honor their call to help,

but also discipline themselves to wait to hear the call God has given to the people since their common call is the key to a common vision for the work.

Key question: How do development workers know when it is time to share their agenda?

- 12.0 Why did Nehemiah make his inspection during the night? (2:11-15)
 - 12.1 He wanted to see the problem for himself, but he disciplined himself to do it at the right time in the right way.
 - 12.2 At night no one was around to take notice of what he was doing.
 - 12.3 Thus he avoids calling attention to the symbol of their defeat and disgrace.
 - 12.4 Had he said, “I heard your walls were a mess and I’ve come to see and to help. Show me the walls,” the people would have been confirmed in their weakness and shame.
 - 12.5 The remnant could have done something about the broken wall; they could have begun some attempt to restore, even if small. They hadn’t because they have a mentality of defeat, of powerlessness. To face them publically with the inspection of the walls by the obviously powerful outsider would have publically underscored their state of mind and, thus, created a major obstacle to partnership and ultimately to change.
 - 12.5 He also avoided embarrassing their leadership by calling attention to their shortcomings.

Change agents must constantly discipline themselves to avoid actions which diminish the view the community has of itself and its leadership. Even in the initial surveys and investigations, care must be taken that every action builds up rather than reinforcing existing barriers to change.

- 12.6 The circumstances forced Nehemiah to get off his horse. He was the only person with one.

It’s hard to convince people that you really want to join them if you are the only one on a horse. A change agent can’t get fully in touch with the problem as long as he or she is not seeing it from where the people see it.

- 13.0 Let’s examine Nehemiah’s first public statement. (2:17-18)
 - 13.1 “Then” means:
 - A. Nehemiah has seen the situation firsthand.
 - B. Nehemiah has the resources: permissions and the only materiel not available locally.
 - C. Nehemiah recognizes God’s sovereignty and presence.
 - D. Nehemiah has somehow developed a climate of trust in a very short period of time.

Development agents do not share their calling or their intent until the right time

- 13.2 “You see” reflects a careful choice of pronouns:
 - A. It is not the presumptuous “we.”

- B. Nehemiah acknowledges that the people themselves are able to see the problem. There is no presumption that he is somehow necessary for them to recognize the issues.
 - C. When you are talking about perceptions, it's always "theirs," never "ours."
- 13.3 "... the trouble we are in . . . ," reflects Nehemiah's willingness to identify himself with the problem.
- 13.4 It is not possible to effectively communicate a message like this if your only medium is words. Therefore, the work of the prior three days—of which we know almost nothing—was critical to the effectiveness of this brief speech. Nehemiah must have taken great care in choosing what and how he did what he did.

The selection of the moment when the change agent decides to attempt the formal engagement with the community is critical and requires the most careful and thoughtful of preparations and sensitivity to the biblical concept of the fullness of time.

- 13.5 Finally, Nehemiah states clearly what God has been doing in his life and has called him to do.
- A. He does not presume to attempt to state what God wants them to do, or convince them to do what he thinks they should do.
 - B. He understands that that is their issue and requires their decision.
 - C. Nehemiah understands that he cannot motivate the people.
 - D. One way to attempt to rekindle motivation is to talk and talk about something in order to raise interest in a proposition. Nehemiah did not select this approach.
 - E. Another way is to share your own motivation. Nehemiah chose this approach but recognized that its effectiveness rested on his selecting the right moment to reveal this to the people.

A development educator cannot motivate people; he or she can only attempt to rekindle the motivation which has been repressed by the circumstances under which the people have been living.