



Nehemiah, with Respect: *Study of a Developmental Leader*¹

Ted Ward

There is no such thing as social change that begins with an outsider arriving with an answer. Social change occurs because the people in the context begin to identify for themselves a situation that they want to do something about.

Consider the example of Nehemiah. When he finally begins talking about the condition of Jerusalem, he says, "You see the trouble we are in" (Neh. 2: 17). They had come to a point where he could say with integrity, "We have a problem." Two ingredients: respect and mutuality. That's where change occurs. And then they said, "Let's start building!"

Many of our images and ideas about Nehemiah are drawn from the fact that he organized and managed a very large job. While the largeness, the difficulties, and the evidences of success are compelling features of the story, they should not cause us to overlook the person, Nehemiah.

Among the many things that the Bible tells of this remarkable person is a series of clues about his respectful posture toward God, toward the people of Jerusalem, and toward "the powers that be." In the early chapters of the book, as the dramatic story unfolds, a number of instances are recorded that where Nehemiah is described in actions and attitudes that show respect for others.

Today's leader is tempted, as Nehemiah must have been, to let his or her influence and authority show through as displays of power. If leaders are to be disciplined by the teachings of Jesus Christ, the tendency to "lord it over" those who are being led must be replaced by a humble posture based on respect and concern for others. In Nehemiah, Chapter 1, identify the verses which reveal Nehemiah showing respect:

Verses	Respect for whom?	How Did Nehemiah show respect?
	For the delegation from Jerusalem	
	For God	
	For the remnant of God's people	
	For the king	
	For himself	

¹ Ted Ward. Nehemiah, with Respect: Study of a Developmental Leader. Bible study guide for use in a seminar, 1982

**Read as teams,
then discuss**

**Team A
Observing**

**Team B
Reasoning**

**Team C
Feeling**

Verses 1-3

Describe the situation in the king's palace.

Why did the king notice Nehemiah's sadness this day?

What were the king's feelings toward Nehemiah?

Verses 4-6

What questions were asked?

How would Nehemiah have known enough to answer these questions?

How would these questions have made Nehemiah feel? What attitude does he show the king?

Verses 7-10

Describe the fast moving action here.

How would Nehemiah have put letters at the top of his list of needs?

What connection does Nehemiah make between his feelings toward the king and is feelings toward God?

Verses 11-16

Describe this section in terms of who knows what at each stage.

What two-word phrase is repeated three times? What is the point? Why?

How would the people of Jerusalem have felt seeing this Jew coming in at the head of a large military unit? What if he had satisfied his curiosity about the desolation in broad daylight?

Verses 17-18

Emphasize the exact wording of the two quotations. Note the use of "you," "we," "us," and "they."

What might have transpired that would have brought the people to such a point of acceptance of Nehemiah?

Whose feelings are respected in the statements Nehemiah makes? What feelings are expressed in "Let us start rebuilding?"