

HAND ME ANOTHER BRICK

Timeless Lessons on Leadership

STUDY THREE

Preparation for a Tough Job

Nehemiah 2:1–11

During Nehemiah's months of waiting, he was doing more than praying. He was planning. You should pray to God. But make your plans and set your sights. Think through the hurdles, and don't be shortsighted.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

WHAT happens to the athlete who steps onto the field without practicing? Or the musician who stands in front of a crowd to perform a never-before-rehearsed piece of music? Or the teacher who walks into the classroom with no lesson plan?

Some people have enough talent to wing it in these kinds of situations . . . but they can coast on their gifting only for so long. Inevitably, the competitor will tire out. The performer will flub it. The instructor will freeze up.

Thankfully, these kinds of embarrassing moments usually are easy to avoid. How? *Through proper preparation.*

Good preparation is essential for anyone in any role, but it's *especially* important for leaders. It allows you to plan out a project's steps and anticipate the timeframe. Preparation also equips you to work well with people—both those who wish to help and those who aim to hinder you.



Preparation for a Tough Job

Nehemiah 2:1–11

The book of Nehemiah provides an example of a leader who was both gifted and prepared, and his preparation served him well. Let's look at how Nehemiah prayerfully prepared for the task God had placed on his heart and learn how we, too, can prepare to carry out our roles in God's greater plan.



PREPARE YOUR HEART

The best way to prepare to study Scripture is through prayer. Prayer softens your heart, quiets your mind, and aligns your desires with God's. Here's one way you can pray:

Father, only You know what my future holds, but I want to be ready to face life's circumstances in a way pleasing to You. Use my time in Your Word today to prepare me for what You have planned for me. In Jesus' name, amen.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

Nehemiah was a man of diligent preparation as well as a man of patient prayer. When he heard that Jerusalem's walls sat as a pile of rubble, he pled with God to use him to rebuild them. Yet one major obstacle stood in Nehemiah's path: the Persian king Artaxerxes. Nehemiah served as the king's cupbearer, and the king wasn't likely to let his trusted confidante take a few years off to go live in a foreign land.

Despite this reality, Nehemiah boldly prayed, "Please grant me success today by making the king favorable to me. Put it into his heart to be kind to me" (*Nehemiah 1:11*).

One of prayer's closest companions is patience, and Nehemiah waited several months before he heard God's answer to his faith-filled prayer. And in his waiting, he prepared himself to be ready for whatever God had planned.



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Observation: Nehemiah's Patient Preparation

Nehemiah 2:1–11 records Nehemiah's conversation with Artaxerxes regarding the state of Jerusalem's walls. Read these verses in a couple of different translations to gain a crystal-clear understanding of what the text says.¹

Our passage opens by pointing out that this conversation happened in the month of Nisan. Nehemiah had originally heard the report of Jerusalem's fallen walls in the month of Kislev (or Chislev). Using your *Bible study tools*, determine what months on your calendar these Hebrew months correspond with. How long did Nehemiah wait to hear the answer to his prayer?

Kislev/Chislev: _____

Nisan: _____

Time spent waiting: _____

According to [2:2](#), who initiated the conversation between Nehemiah and Artaxerxes? What did he say? How did the other man respond in [2:3](#)?

What did Nehemiah do in [2:4](#) before he made his formal request to return to Jerusalem in [2:5](#)?



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According to [Nehemiah 2:6](#), what follow-up question did Artaxerxes ask after Nehemiah made his request? How did Nehemiah respond? (Note: we may not have the specific details of Nehemiah's response, but this verse shows that Nehemiah did, in fact, have a response prepared for the king.)

According to [2:7–8](#), what additional requests did Nehemiah make of Artaxerxes? How did the king respond to these requests?

So far, so good! Everything seemed to be going according to plan . . . at least, that's how it *seemed*. Yet not everyone viewed Nehemiah as favorably as Artaxerxes. According to [2:9–10](#), what happened when Nehemiah arrived at the province west of the Euphrates River? What do you think this scene might foreshadow for the rest of Nehemiah's leadership journey?



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When you walk by faith, you will encounter the hostility of people who walk by sight. They are rebuked by the life of faith. They are rebuked by your faith because they don't have it. You see, opposition doesn't mean you're out of the will of God. As a matter of fact, it may reinforce the fact that you're in the will of God. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Interpretation: Preparation and Prayer

After Nehemiah heard the news of the desperate state of Jerusalem, he had several months to prayerfully plan how he would serve his people and their capital city. List all the ways *Nehemiah 2:1–11* reveals the humble cupbearer's preparation.

Nehemiah knew that no amount of preparation could affect the decision of Artaxerxes. That's why Nehemiah began his conversation with the king “with a prayer to the God of heaven” (*Nehemiah 2:4*). What is the relationship between preparation and prayer? In other words, how does prayer help you deal with circumstances that stand outside the realm of control of your own preparation?



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STUDY THREE

SEARCHING
THE
SCRIPTURES

STUDY

Preparation for a Tough Job

Nehemiah 2:1–11

Based on your reading of Artaxerxes and Nehemiah's interaction, how did the king view his cupbearer? What kinds of character qualities must Nehemiah have shown to have earned such a reputation in the palace? How are these characteristics evident in their interaction?

Using the following template, write two or three timeless truths based on this passage: *A godly leader should prepare by . . . because*

I weary of people who call it “faith” when they can’t tell you their plan. Look at Nehemiah’s marvelous response. Hand-in-hand with this prayer warrior is both patience and preparation. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



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Nehemiah 2:1–11



Correlation: Jesus' and Paul's Preparation

Nehemiah is not the only hero of the faith who was well-prepared for the ministry God set out before him. In fact, even our Lord prepared before He began His public ministry!

In [Luke 2:41–52](#), Jesus and His family traveled to Jerusalem for Passover. During one of these visits, when Jesus was twelve years old, Mary and Joseph lost their beloved child in the city. According to [2:46](#), where did Mary and Joseph find Jesus? What was He doing?

The apostle Paul had a similar experience. After his miraculous conversion, Paul didn't immediately start out on his continent-wide missionary journey. Instead, he prepared. According to [Galatians 1:16b–18](#), what was the first thing he did after his conversion?



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Nehemiah 2:1–11

What similarities do you see between Jesus' and Paul's preparation? How do these examples relate to the account of Nehemiah?

Nehemiah, Paul, and Jesus all recognized that human preparation is meaningless if it isn't immersed in prayer and communion with God. Prayer aligns a leader's heart—and consequently his or her plans—with God's. In application, Pastor Chuck demonstrates this beautiful marriage of prayer and planning.

Application: Preparation Pays Off

Nehemiah's faith in God and his preparation guided every element of his conversation with Artaxerxes. Based on this example, Pastor Chuck identifies four practical lessons every prepared Christian leader instinctively knows.

1. *Prayer and waiting go hand-in-hand.*
2. *Prayerful waiting is not a substitute for careful planning.*
3. *Opposition to a plan often reinforces the will of God rather than hinders it.*
4. *Changing the heart of decision-makers is God's specialty.*



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Nehemiah 2:1–11

How have you seen yourself successfully prepare for a role, task, or project in the past? What role did prayer play in your preparation? What were the results of your prayerful preparation?

It's likely that, at some point in your life, you will prepare well, but things won't work out the way you had planned. Perhaps a stubborn decision-maker will stand in your way, trying to block your every move. Practically speaking, what would it look like for you to trust God in these circumstances?

As you look to the future, what lies ahead for your family, your ministry, your career? What practical steps can you take as a leader to prayerfully prepare? Write down three or four action items in the space below.



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Nehemiah set his sights on a task. He prayed, and he waited. But he didn't just sit around doing nothing. He used his time of waiting to pray more and to prepare himself to serve God. Don't put yourself in a situation when you think, *I wish I had prepared for that*. You won't be able to foresee every obstacle in your path, but by preparing, you can offer yourself to God and eagerly anticipate what He will do through you.



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, I want to live a life of service to You. I know You are always working in me to prepare me for what's coming next, but I want to cooperate with You in Your plan for me by doing what I can to plan for what's next. Give me a heart like Nehemiah's—one that has the boldness to pray and the faith to wait. I ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen.

ENDNOTE

1. To learn about Pastor Chuck Swindoll's *Searching the Scriptures* method of Bible study, go to the web page, "[How to Study the Bible for Yourself](#)."

