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TRAINING LAY LEADERS AT PARKWAY BAPTIST
CHURCH, LEXINGTON, KENTUCKY, USING
PRINCIPLES FOUND IN NEHEMIAH

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TRAINING LAY LEADERS AT PARKWAY BAPTIST
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I dedicate this project to my beautiful wife, Sandy. She has encouraged me for many years to take this step of faith to pursue this degree. Her support through these years of training and ministry will never be rewarded this side of heaven.

She is an inspiration to me and everyone who meets her.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

- BDB Brown, Francis, Samuel R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs. *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2010

PREFACE

This project would not have been possible without the support of many people. First, my wife Sandy. She has been there to support me, encourage me, and especially pray for me throughout the entirety of this endeavor. Also, I would like to thank Dr. T. J. Betts, my faculty supervisor for his guidance. I am also thankful for the Christian spirit everyone on campus displayed in every interaction I had with them, mostly, I am thankful for my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, His grace is all sufficient.

Keith Allen Sands

Lexington, Kentucky

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Effective lay leaders are the backbone of an effective church. They provide direction and guidance in many areas of church life. Their ministry can help alleviate the burdens often placed on a pastor as they assist the work of the church. A critical mandate of the work of the pastor is to equip the saints to do the work of ministry (Eph 4:12). This project is intended to equip lay leaders at Parkway Baptist Church.

Context

Parkway Baptist Church (PBC) is a typical church in many ways. It has a history of success and failure that influences the congregation. PBC began as a mission in 1888 and constituted four years later. The church grew along with the city of Lexington. There were multiple relocations and name changes. Currently the church is situated in a prominent location and has a distinctive architectural structure readily identified throughout the city.

From 1949 to 1989, the church had one pastor, John Wallace. Many of the current procedures and practices were instituted under his tenure. His leadership style has been described as very hands on. Since his retirement, the church has had six pastors with interim pastors between each. I became pastor in March 2014. Membership is a broad mix of long—term members and others who joined in the last decade. Several members have yearned for a period of pastoral stability and expressed this sentiment.

The church has several strengths. The congregation is genuinely friendly. Many members were born in Eastern Kentucky, possess a strong locational identity, and possess a good work ethic. There is a genuine concern for the church and surrounding

community coupled with a desire to minister to both. Church committee vacancies are easily filled. Although there has been some history of financial difficulty, the church is debt free.

There are weaknesses as well. The biggest is the average age of the congregation. More than 75 percent of Sunday morning attendance is over the age of fifty. There is a dearth of children, and the youth program is, for all practical purposes, non-existent. These are a direct result of the lack of young couples with children attending the church.

Some of this is due to changes to the community. In the 1970's, the major employer in the area relocated. Over fifty church families were impacted. Since that time the neighborhood has slowly changed. What was once a middle-class neighborhood with well-maintained houses, meticulously mowed yards, and families with children has transitioned to a mix of retired homeowners and rental properties. Many of the retirees do not have the financial means to keep up maintenance on their homes but cannot afford to sell, as property values have plummeted. The houses that are sold become rental properties with little upkeep. Over one half of the houses are owner occupied, 38 percent are rental properties.

There have been other changes in the neighborhood demographics as well. Families used to occupy the majority of the houses in the area. Now only 28 percent of the households have children. The neighborhood is made up of 38 percent husband and wife households, 23 percent single guardian and 39 percent singles. The church no longer reflects the community.¹

Another weakness is overall attendance. The church has been in a lengthy period of decline. Attendance dropped by one fourth in 1996 following the departure of

¹ United States Zip Codes, "Zip Code 40505," November 13, 2021, <https://www.unitedstateszipcodes.org>.

one pastor. Since that time attendance has steadily declined, decreasing by an average of five people per year. There have been one or two years where this pattern was reversed, but nothing was ever sustained. Current attendance averages 105 in the Sunday morning worship service.²

Outreach is an area of frustration. In the past, large attractational events were used with little after-event success. Neighborhood clean-up, Easter egg hunts, Drive Through Bethlehem, and other similar outreach events have yielded sparse results. In recent years, saturating the neighborhood with publicity for such events has yielded no attendees. It has resulted in a frustrated what can we do mindset.

Rationale

Training lay leaders will impact many areas of the church. As leadership characteristics are developed, spiritual growth will take place. As skills are learned, confidence will increase. When these two areas of growth are combined, the church will be affected in a positive manner in the areas where the growing leaders serve. Such changes will also instill confidence as those who participate in the training equip the membership to implement and adapt to needed change. This approach should be fruitful, especially as members see such changes as developing from within the congregation as opposed to being externally imposed by a pastor.

PBC has a wealth of leadership resources. Many members worked in positions of management. Some have had previous leadership training. Others were self-employed or worked in family businesses. Part of the reasoning behind this proposal is to utilize the skills already in place and demonstrate their applicability in the church. There is a need to instill confidence in the limited number of younger members. Through training, they can realize the abilities they bring to the church and not just see themselves as holding a seat

² Parkway Baptist Church, Annual Church Profile, October 2019.

until they are old enough to serve or until the rest die and they are the only ones left to serve.

Purpose

The purpose of this project was to train lay leaders of Parkway Baptist Church in knowledge, characteristics, and skills using principles found in Nehemiah.

Goals

The following stated goals guide this project throughout development and implementation. At each step, evaluation will be conducted as to its effectiveness.

1. The first goal was to assess the current lay leadership at Parkway Baptist Church in knowledge, character, and skill.
2. The second goal was to develop an eight-to-ten-week leadership program based on the principles found in Nehemiah.
3. The third goal of this project was to increase the knowledge of lay leaders by teaching an eight-to-ten-week leadership training program.
4. The final goal of this project was to evaluate participants' satisfaction with the overall training program.

Definitions and Limitations/Delimitations

The following definition is used in the ministry project:

Lay leaders. For the purpose of this project, lay leaders refers to committee chairpersons (Stewardship/Finance, Personnel, Nominating, and Trustee Committees) and active deacons.

Three delimitations were placed on the project. First, the project involved those currently serving in lay leadership roles. Second, the project was confined to a twenty-week timeframe. This timeframe gave adequate time to prepare and teach the ten-week training sessions and conduct the post-series survey after sessions are completed. Finally, this project was limited to their training to enhance their knowledge, character, and skills.

Research Methodology

The four stated goals guided this project. The first goal was to assess the current lay leadership at Parkway Baptist Church in knowledge of character and skills by means of a survey instrument. Lay leaders took this assessment prior to the training sessions. This goal was to be considered successful when 75 percent of those serving in lay leadership roles took and returned the survey (see appendix 1).

The second goal was to develop an eight-to-ten-week leadership training program based on principles found in Nehemiah. It included such subjects as prayer and fasting, obedience to the Word of God, dealing with difficulties, conflict resolution, confronting sin, and worship. This goal was measured by an expert panel who utilized a rubric to evaluate the biblical faithfulness, teaching methodology, scope, and applicability of the curriculum. This panel included two association workers with graduate-level seminary degrees. It also included the professor of Old Testament at Clear Creek Baptist Bible College. I considered this goal successfully met when a minimum of 90 percent of the evaluation criterion met or exceeding the sufficient level. If any lessons score below this benchmark, the expert panel was to revise and reevaluate them until the stated level is achieved (see appendix 2).

The third goal of this project was to increase the knowledge of lay leaders by teaching an eight-to-ten-week leadership training program. I conducted classroom instruction on Wednesday evenings as part of the prayer meeting and Bible study. This goal was measured by administering a post-training survey identical to the pre-course survey that measured the participants' change in knowledge. This goal was to be successful when a t-test for dependent samples demonstrates a positive significant increase in participants' knowledge.

The final goal of this project was to evaluate participants' satisfaction with the overall training program. Several satisfaction questions, delivered as part of the post-

training survey, measured their impressions. This goal was successful when at least 80 percent of participants complete these survey questions.

CHAPTER 2
BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL BASIS
FOR THE PROJECT

This chapter will examine passages in Nehemiah with a specific focus on leadership characteristics and skills. It is intended to be used in a local church setting in order to equip lay leaders with some of the characteristics and skills necessary to become more effective.

**Godly Leaders Need Characteristics That Are Shaped
through Prayer and Fasting**

The words of Nehemiah the son of Hachaliah. It came to pass in the month of Chislev, in the twentieth year, as I was in Shushan the citadel, that Hanani one of my brethren came with men from Judah; and I asked them concerning the Jews who had escaped, who had survived the captivity, and concerning Jerusalem. And they said to me, “The survivors who are left from the captivity in the province are there in great distress and reproach. The wall of Jerusalem is also broken down, and its gates are burned with fire.” So it was, when I heard these words, that I sat down and wept, and mourned for many days; I was fasting and praying before the God of heaven. And I said: “I pray, Lord God of heaven, O great and awesome God, You who keep Your covenant and mercy with those who love You and observe Your commandments, please let Your ear be attentive and Your eyes open, that You may hear the prayer of Your servant which I pray before You now, day and night, for the children of Israel Your servants, and confess the sins of the children of Israel which we have sinned against You. Both my father’s house and I have sinned. We have acted very corruptly against You, and have not kept the commandments, the statutes, nor the ordinances which You commanded Your servant Moses. Remember, I pray, the word that You commanded Your servant Moses, saying, ‘If you are unfaithful, I will scatter you among the nations; but if you return to Me, and keep My commandments and do them, though some of you were cast out to the farthest part of the heavens, yet I will gather them from there, and bring them to the place which I have chosen as a dwelling for My name.’ Now these are Your servants and Your people, whom You have redeemed by Your great power, and by Your strong hand. O Lord, I pray, please let Your ear be attentive to the prayer of Your servant, and to the prayer of Your servants who desire to fear Your name; and let Your servant prosper this day, I pray, and grant him mercy in the sight of this man.” For I was the king’s cupbearer. (Neh 1:1-11)¹

¹ Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture references are from the New King James Version.

Nehemiah was a trusted man. As cupbearer, he was responsible for insuring both the quality and safety of the king's food.² This position also allowed him to serve as a confidant and advisor.³ His life was as was his name, comforted by YHWH.⁴ He had a comfortable life in a safe citadel in Susa, the location of the winter palace of the king.⁵ From his position of safety and security, Nehemiah asked about the welfare of his people and their homeland. It had been over 80 years since Cyrus allowed the exiles to return (Ezra 1:2-3).

The answer he received was as devastating as the situation. Trouble, disgrace, ruin, and a lack of protection defined the living conditions for Jerusalem. Leaders cannot live in comfort and security and lead people who are in disparate situations without a genuine concern for their situation (Neh 1:1-2).

The trouble in the city was both physical and ethical. Misery was everywhere. Evil, sadness, sorrow, wickedness, and general wrongdoing were rampant.⁶ People were living as a disgrace to themselves and to YHWH. Instead of lives that glorified their God, they were objects of scorn.⁷ Because the walls were not rebuilt, they were viewed as defenseless, either abandoned by God or serving a god that could not protect his people.

The physical condition of the city reflected the lives of the people. The city walls were in shambles. Walls served three purposes. There were retaining walls to retain weight. There were terracing walls to prevent soil erosion which would weaken the walls.

² Robert Cate, *An Introduction to the Historical Books of the Old Testament* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1994), 140.

³ J. G. McConville, *Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther*, Daily Study Bible-Old Testament (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1985), 74.

⁴ BDB, s.v. נחמיה.

⁵ Edwin M. Yamauchi, *Ezra, Nehemiah*, in *Expositors Bible Commentary*, vol. 4, *1 Chronicles-Job*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1988), 680.

⁶ BDB, s.v. רעה.

⁷ BDB., s.v. חרפה.

These also provided level places for farming. Walls were also protection. Protective walls surrounded the city and were symbolic of the protection of God (Zech 2:5). This left the people vulnerable and feeling abandoned by God. J. G. McConville sees the need for protection as necessary to preserve the people of God and not directly connected to the religious condition of the people.⁸ However, Nehemiah's prayer specifically connects their physical situation to their religious condition. The walls were in disrepair and reflected the people's disobedience.

The gates of the city were also destroyed. Gates were very important to the defense and daily life of the citizens. Gates were the meeting place for various activities. Official business, property transfers, and civil cases were handled at the city gates (Gen 19:1, 9; Ruth 4:1-4; 2 Sam 15:2; Job 29:7-12). Gates were also the weakest part of a city's defense. The gates were not just taken down, they were completely destroyed by fire (Neh 1:3).

Nehemiah's response to the news was brokenness. He stopped what he was doing and sat down. Realizing the judgement of God was upon His people, he wept, prayed, and fasted through his tears, broken and mourning over the news.⁹

Fasting was a common practice since the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 BC. There were formal fasts (Zech 7:3-5; 8:19) and times when people would fast and pray for specific requests (2 Sam 12:16; Dan 9:3; 10:3). Fasting is only mentioned twice in Nehemiah, here and 9:1. Both instances are coupled with a confession of covenant violations. In chapter 9 it is not just disobedience in general but specifically intermarriage with foreigners. Ezra includes fasting in reference to humility and intermarriage (Ezra 8:21-23; 9:5). Although there are few mentions of fasting in Nehemiah, it does couple with prayer as an act of contrition before God (Neh 1:4).

⁸ McConville, *Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther*, 74.

⁹ BDB, s.v. אָבַל.

Nehemiah's prayer teaches an effective manner of leadership prayer. It begins with a focus on God. God is a relational God. The covenant name of God is used, YHWH. It is a reminder to Nehemiah that the people of God are in a relationship with God. They have a responsibility to fulfill their covenantal vows just as God has a responsibility to fulfill His, which Nehemiah will come back to as his prayer closes. The people have a covenantal responsibility to obey. YHWH is responsible to protect and provide. When God's people disobey, He is required to punish. The people disobeyed and God removed His protection. They were still the people of God, but they were experiencing the punitive side of this relationship.

The next focus of Nehemiah's prayer was God as creator, the God of heaven (Jonah 1:9). This reminds the one praying of the uniqueness of God (Deut 4:39; 1 Kgs 8:23). This is also a reference to the reign of God (2 Chr 20:6-7). All three of these aspects of God harness Nehemiah's spirit to the realization that God is greater than their situation and in control of the situation. As creator, God owns everything. A unique God requires a unique commitment. A supreme ruler is in complete control of the situation.

Nehemiah focused on his and his people's God rather than the problems they were facing. Prayer is discussing the matter with God and seeking His answer.¹⁰ A leader must be able to see the problem but also see that a solution is possible (Neh 1:5).

Nehemiah's prayer turns to confession. After looking at God, he realizes his sinfulness and that of his people. Hugh Williamson denies this being a community lament containing a "complaint about the trouble and the shame it brings."¹¹ This section of prayer is precisely a confession of shame and acceptance of the consequences. There is no attempt to rationalize or justify any actions. There is only an acknowledgement of sin

¹⁰ Cyril J. Barber, *Nehemiah and the Dynamics of Effective Leadership*, rev. ed. (Neptune, NJ: Loizeaux Brothers, 1991), 67.

¹¹ Hugh Godfrey Maturin Williamson, *Ezra, Nehemiah*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 16 (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1985), 167.

and an acceptance of responsibility. It is not a communal prayer; it is an individual prayer being offered on behalf of the community. Throughout this portion of his prayer,

Nehemiah uses *we*, as an identification with the people and the sins of the nation. He does not blame others nor try to separate himself from the people. This identification is part of leadership. A leader identifies with his people and accepts responsibility for the problem, even when he may have not been directly involved. He does identify himself as a servant, and the people as servants, another identification with the people he will eventually lead.

The confession is very specific. Sins are confessed. The people acted wickedly; they broke their pledge. Oaths were taken, pledges were made and in spite of promises not to do it again, the people broke their word.¹² The people disobeyed God. They violated the specific commands stated in the Mosaic law.¹³ They disregarded the decrees, or principles, behind the law.¹⁴ They also neglected the laws. These were the judgements as to what is right and wrong in the sight of God.¹⁵ It was a total breakdown of God's people to live according to God's purpose for their lives. They had done wrong and had failed to do right.

A godly leader's prayer is grounded in Scripture. The prayer continues with a confession of God's Word. Nehemiah quotes Deuteronomy 28:64, acknowledging the exile as a result of disobedience. Nehemiah then refers to Deuteronomy 4:29-31, 12:5, 30:2-5, and Jeremiah 32:37-41. Nehemiah used Scripture as the foundation for his prayer. This insured his prayer was in the will of God (Neh 1:6-9).

¹² BDB, s.v. חטאת.

¹³ BDB., s.v. מצוה.

¹⁴ BDB., s.v. תק.

¹⁵ BDB., s.v. משפט.

The next aspect of Nehemiah's prayer is submission. This is an acceptance of their punishment as just and also an acceptance of the future outcome of the situation. They had been redeemed (Deut 7:8; 1 Chr 17:21), released from slavery and preserved.¹⁶ This was all an act of God, His great strength and power delivered them. Even though their current situation would seem to indicate otherwise, they were still God's people. Nehemiah used possessive pronouns to indicate this. This portion of the prayer is also a confession of total reliance upon the One who delivered them. Their current situation was desperate and required another act of deliverance (Neh 1:10).

Only after acknowledgement of God, confession of sin, and establishing a Scriptural basis, does Nehemiah move to his request. This is the only portion of the prayer that is individual in focus. The request was simple: for the prayer to be heard and for the favor of the king. Nehemiah reveals his position of responsibility, and this simple statement reveals why he needed to be temporarily released from his duties. Biblical leadership cannot be separated from secular responsibility (Neh 1:11).

Prayer will permeate the leadership of Nehemiah. Throughout the book Nehemiah responds to each threatening situation by praying (2:4; 4:4-5; 6:9, 14; 13:14, 22, 29, 31). The rest of his recorded prayers are brief and direct. But his foundation of extended times of prayer and fasting is laid out in the first chapter of the book bearing his name.

Godly Leaders Need Characteristics That Are Shaped through Obedience to God's Word

So the priests, the Levites, the gatekeepers, the singers, some of the people, the Nethinim, and all Israel dwelt in their cities. When the seventh month came, the children of Israel were in their cities. [8:1] Now all the people gathered together as one man in the open square that was in front of the Water Gate; and they told Ezra the scribe to bring the Book of the Law of Moses, which the Lord had commanded Israel. So Ezra the priest brought the Law before the assembly of men and women and all who could hear with understanding on the first day of the seventh month.

¹⁶ BDB., s.v. נָדַם.

Then he read from it in the open square that was in front of the Water Gate from morning until midday, before the men and women and those who could understand; and the ears of all the people were attentive to the Book of the Law. So Ezra the scribe stood on a platform of wood which they had made for the purpose; and beside him, at his right hand, stood Mattithiah, Shema, Anaiah, Urijah, Hilkiyah, and Maaseiah; and at his left hand Pedaiah, Mishael, Malchijah, Hashum, Hashbadana, Zechariah, and Meshullam. And Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people, for he was standing above all the people; and when he opened it, all the people stood up. And Ezra blessed the Lord, the great God. Then all the people answered, "Amen, Amen!" while lifting up their hands. And they bowed their heads and worshiped the Lord with their faces to the ground. Also Jeshua, Bani, Sherebiah, Jamin, Akkub, Shabbethai, Hodijah, Maaseiah, Kelita, Azariah, Jozabad, Hanan, Pelaiah, and the Levites, helped the people to understand the Law; and the people stood in their place. So they read distinctly from the book, in the Law of God; and they gave the sense, and helped them to understand the reading. And Nehemiah, who was the governor, Ezra the priest and scribe, and the Levites who taught the people said to all the people, "This day is holy to the Lord your God; do not mourn nor weep." For all the people wept, when they heard the words of the Law. Then he said to them, "Go your way, eat the fat, drink the sweet, and send portions to those for whom nothing is prepared; for this day is holy to our Lord. Do not sorrow, for the joy of the Lord is your strength." So the Levites quieted all the people, saying, "Be still, for the day is holy; do not be grieved." And all the people went their way to eat and drink, to send portions and rejoice greatly, because they understood the words that were declared to them. (Neh 7:73b-8:12)

This section of Nehemiah is a call to obedience. Nehemiah knows that the people of God cannot enjoy the blessings of God apart from obedience to God.¹⁷ The key word in this passage is understand which is used six times. Understanding is the ability to discern the practical and ethical implications of the message being proclaimed.¹⁸

There is discussion concerning the chronological placement of this section. Yamauchi believes that it occurred soon after Nehemiah's arrival or belongs after chapter 10.¹⁹ Joseph Blenkinsopp sees this as placed by an editor.²⁰ There is no biblical reason to doubt the timing of this celebration. After the completion of the wall, a celebration would have been a natural occurrence. The completion of the wall coincided with a prescribed

¹⁷ Barber, *Nehemiah*, 89.

¹⁸ BDB, s.v. יָדַע.

¹⁹ Yamauchi, *Ezra, Nehemiah*, 722.

²⁰ Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Ezra-Nehemiah: A Commentary*, Old Testament Library (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1988), 203.

religious celebration which added to the significance of the event.²¹ God's physical protection was secured, now it was time to ensure that the cause of the original destruction and deportation did not repeat itself.

The people called an assembly at the start of the civil year. Similar gatherings happened several times throughout the history of Israel to coincide with significant events. Before the Israelites entered the Promised Land, there was an assembly of the people (Deut 31:12). After the battles of Jericho and Ai, there was a gathering to renew the covenant (Josh 8:35). When the temple was in disrepair, the Book of the Law was found and read to the king, this brought on mourning, repentance, and another assembly which brought about a revival in the nation (2 Kgs 23:2).

This assembly was motivated by a unity of the people, they were as one man (Neh 8:1). It was already a sacred day as prescribed in the Law (Lev 23:23-25). It marked the Feast of Trumpets (Num 29). It was to be a "national confession, rededication, and reaffirmation of their covenant commitment."²² Sacrifices were to be made and their sin was atoned. The High Priest was to sound the trumpet and the people were to drop what they were doing and gather for a ten-day celebration. It was believed that God kept three books. One for the righteous, another for the wicked, and another for those in between. If someone was in the third book, they had ten days to do penance and be moved to the first book.²³

For six hours the Law was read aloud, daybreak to noon. Ezra read while the leading men stood to his right and left, the people stood as he began to read. The greatness of God was proclaimed. The people raised their hands as a sign of needing help

²¹ Raymond Brown, *The Message of Nehemiah: God's Servant in a Time of Change*, The Bible Speaks Today (Leicester, UK: Inter-Varsity Press, 1998), 127.

²² Cate, *Historical Books of the Old Testament*, 141.

²³ Elwood McQuaid, *The Outpouring, Jesus in the Feasts of Israel* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1986), 64.

(Ps 28:2). They shouted Amen, in agreement with what was being read. They were in agreement with the greatness of God, the appropriateness of the judgement they had received, and their need for mercy.²⁴ They humbled themselves by physically bowing and worshipped (Neh 8:3-6). This is a fairly rare occurrence but bowing down is always accompanied by worship in the Old Testament.

Several Levites assisted Ezra in explaining the practical meaning of the Scripture. This passage is often used as one basis for expository preaching and/or teaching. The text was read aloud.²⁵ It was made clear, distinctly read, and rightly divided (2 Tim 2:15).²⁶ They were giving the meaning-intelligence, wisdom, and application guided their proclamation.²⁷ Some see this as translating, reading the text in Hebrew then translating it into Aramaic.²⁸ This does not fit with Nehemiah 8:2-3, the people who could understand were gathered. If they could translate the text themselves there would be no need for translators. The purpose was understanding-the people needed to be able to discern how the Law was to guide their everyday lives (Neh 8:8-11).

The reaction of the people was profound. God's Word brought brokenness; the people wept (Jas 4:7-10). Nehemiah, Ezra and other instructed them to not weep but celebrate because a sacrifice for their sin would be made (Num 29:5). This was the time when the High Priest would enter the Holy of Holies and offer the sacrifice for the sins of the nation. It was to be a celebration of forgiveness.

²⁴ Yamauchi, *Ezra, Nehemiah*, 724.

²⁵ BDB, s.v. קרא.

²⁶ BDB, s.v. פרש.

²⁷ BDB, s.v. שכל.

²⁸ Terry J. Betts, *Nehemiah: A Pastoral & Exegetical Commentary* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2020), 135.

This is why Nehemiah would tell them to enjoy God's provision and celebrate. It was not to be a day of grief or pain.²⁹ They were to celebrate what YHWH has done for them (1 Chr 16:26-29; Ps 21:6). Their safety was God Himself and them delighting in Him (2 Sam 22:33; Pss 27:1; 28:8; 31:2; 37:39).

The Levites joined in comforting the people (Neh 8:12). They told them to be still and worship because there were observing a sacred day (Hab 2:20). Any demonstration of grief was misplaced.³⁰ There was to be a holy hush, not grief.³¹ The teaching that led to brokenness and then to celebration was effective. They people did as instructed because they understood the purpose of the festival was to remember YHWH and celebrate Him (Num 10:10).

Godly Leaders Need Characteristics That Are Shaped through Worship

Now at the dedication of the wall of Jerusalem they sought out the Levites in all their places, to bring them to Jerusalem to celebrate the dedication with gladness, both with thanksgivings and singing, with cymbals and stringed instruments and harps. And the sons of the singers gathered together from the countryside around Jerusalem, from the villages of the Netophathites, from the house of Gilgal, and from the fields of Geba and Azmaveth; for the singers had built themselves villages all around Jerusalem. Then the priests and Levites purified themselves, and purified the people, the gates, and the wall. So I brought the leaders of Judah up on the wall, and appointed two large thanksgiving choirs. One went to the right hand on the wall toward the Refuse Gate. After them went Hoshaiiah and half of the leaders of Judah, and Azariah, Ezra, Meshullam, Judah, Benjamin, Shemaiah, Jeremiah, and some of the priests' sons with trumpets—Zechariah the son of Jonathan, the son of Shemaiah, the son of Mattaniah, the son of Michaiah, the son of Zaccur, the son of Asaph, and his brethren, Shemaiah, Azarel, Milalai, Gilalai, Maai, Nethanel, Judah, and Hanani, with the musical instruments of David the man of God. And Ezra the scribe went before them. By the Fountain Gate, in front of them, they went up the stairs of the City of David, on the stairway of the wall, beyond the house of David, as far as the Water Gate eastward. The other thanksgiving choir went the opposite way, and I was behind them with half of the people on the wall, going past the Tower of the Ovens as far as the Broad Wall, and above the Gate of Ephraim, above the Old Gate, above the Fish Gate, the Tower of Hananel, the Tower of the Hundred, as far as the Sheep Gate; and they stopped by the Gate of the Prison. So

²⁹ BDB. s.v. עָצַב.

³⁰ Blenkinsopp, *Ezra-Nehemiah*, 288.

³¹ BDB, s.v. סָהַ.

the two thanksgiving choirs stood in the house of God, likewise I and the half of the rulers with me; and the priests, Eliakim, Maaseiah, Minjamin, Michaiah, Elioenai, Zechariah, and Hananiah, with trumpets; also Maaseiah, Shemaiah, Eleazar, Uzzi, Jehohanan, Malchijah, Elam, and Ezer. The singers sang loudly with Jezrahiah the director. Also that day they offered great sacrifices, and rejoiced, for God had made them rejoice with great joy; the women and the children also rejoiced, so that the joy of Jerusalem was heard afar off. And at the same time some were appointed over the rooms of the storehouse for the offerings, the firstfruits, and the tithes, to gather into them from the fields of the cities the portions specified by the Law for the priests and Levites; for Judah rejoiced over the priests and Levites who ministered. Both the singers and the gatekeepers kept the charge of their God and the charge of the purification, according to the command of David and Solomon his son. For in the days of David and Asaph of old there were chiefs of the singers, and songs of praise and thanksgiving to God. In the days of Zerubbabel and in the days of Nehemiah all Israel gave the portions for the singers and the gatekeepers, a portion for each day. They also consecrated holy things for the Levites, and the Levites consecrated them for the children of Aaron. (Neh 12:27-47)

The walls were rebuilt, internal and external problems had been dealt with, spiritual cleansing had taken place, and revival spread throughout the city. The people of God had many reasons to celebrate. This portion of Nehemiah describes the dedication of the wall as an act of worship. It was an act of the people formally giving the wall, symbolic of the protection of God, to YHWH and proclaiming that it is His and His alone. It was also to bring Him glory and not celebrate human accomplishment. Their protection was not the physical wall, but God (Zech 4:6).

Few things the Old Testament were dedicated. People could be dedicated (Lev 27:2). The firstborn belonged to the LORD by being firstborn. A Nazarite vow could be taken, when someone could be dedicated for life or a specified period of time (Num 6:1-21). A house, the Altar, and Solomon's Temple are some other things that were dedicated. To be dedicated was to be completely given to God for His purpose alone.

This was a celebration of abundance, a joyous celebration. It was a time of thanksgiving, literally extending hands, an act that physically communicated total dependence upon YHWH. Empty hands demonstrated total dependence on God, there was nothing the people could bring to God, and He provided all their needs. Songs, music, and praises filled the air (Neh 12:27-30).

The worship leaders were purified before the celebration. Any known or unknown contamination had to be cleansed. This would include contact with a dead body, unclean animals, certain diseases, and some activities. After their cleansing, the worship leaders assisted the rest of the people with cleansing rituals.

The wall and gates were also purified. The gates were the weakest points in their security. The wall was the total circumference of protection. For believers and especially leaders today, this is a reminder of the necessity of cleansing before God.

First, personal cleansing is needed. Any spiritual contamination must be dealt with before leading others in worship. Any areas of weakness need to be examined and fortified. Then the total picture is viewed. Viewing from smaller to larger is to ensure that seemingly little things are not overlooked in light of the bigger picture. The large overview is to see how everything fits together into an intertwined whole.

Nehemiah appointed two choirs to lead in thanksgiving. They were led by several men (Neh 12:31-42). Leaders must be replicating other leaders and give them places of significance to use their gifts. All of this is to be done biblically, as prescribed by David the man of God. Although this specifically concerns the instruments, it is a principle for the whole act of worship. The music was an important part of the worship. The instruments were specifically named in verse 27 and again mentioned in verses 34 and 36.

Their worship involved great sacrifices which were an act of confessing sin, giving thanks, and enjoying fellowship with God (Neh 12:43). The nature of a sacrifice denotes a cost to the giver (2 Sam 24:24). When a sacrifice is made willingly and cheerfully, it pleases God (2 Cor 9:7).

Five times BHS uses rejoice in verb or noun form, and is the intense verb form for God's gift of joy.³² The source of their celebration was God. Worship is a celebration

³² BDB, s.v. שמח.

of joy. Leaders are to demonstrate this, and it will spread. The spirit of worship was contagious, it spread to the women, children, and throughout the entire city. This worship celebration was boisterous. It was heard throughout the city and in the distance. This celebratory clamor would have stung the ears of the enemies of God who had expended tremendous energy to prevent the wall from being built.

An outgrowth of the joy motivated by worship was giving. The people were glad to participate in the ongoing support of the priests and Levites. Leaders were appointed to oversee the collection of tithes and offerings. These men faithfully ministered in the daily functions of the Temple, and performing the purification rituals as required in the Law of God. The people also supported those tasked with guarding the gates, access points to the city. True worship produces lasting effects, not just on leaders but on all those who experience God (Neh 12:44-47).

Godly Leaders Must Develop Skills to Confront Sin Wisely

On that day they read from the Book of Moses in the hearing of the people, and in it was found written that no Ammonite or Moabite should ever come into the assembly of God, because they had not met the children of Israel with bread and water, but hired Balaam against them to curse them. However, our God turned the curse into a blessing. So it was, when they had heard the Law, that they separated all the mixed multitude from Israel. Now before this, Eliashib the priest, having authority over the storerooms of the house of our God, was allied with Tobiah. And he had prepared for him a large room, where previously they had stored the grain offerings, the frankincense, the articles, the tithes of grain, the new wine and oil, which were commanded to be given to the Levites and singers and gatekeepers, and the offerings for the priests. But during all this I was not in Jerusalem, for in the thirty-second year of Artaxerxes king of Babylon I had returned to the king. Then after certain days I obtained leave from the king, and I came to Jerusalem and discovered the evil that Eliashib had done for Tobiah, in preparing a room for him in the courts of the house of God. And it grieved me bitterly; therefore I threw all the household goods of Tobiah out of the room. Then I commanded them to cleanse the rooms; and I brought back into them the articles of the house of God, with the grain offering and the frankincense. I also realized that the portions for the Levites had not been given them; for each of the Levites and the singers who did the work had gone back to his field. So I contended with the rulers, and said, "Why is the house of God forsaken?" And I gathered them together and set them in their place. Then all Judah brought the tithe of the grain and the new wine and the oil to the storehouse. And I appointed as treasurers over the storehouse Shelemiah the priest and Zadok the scribe, and of the Levites, Pedaiah; and next to them was Hanan the son of

Zaccur, the son of Mattaniah; for they were considered faithful, and their task was to distribute to their brethren. (Neh 13:1-13)

The walls were rebuilt, YHWH was glorified, and life was good. As the Book of Moses was read a problem was discovered, things that belonged to God were being misused and neglected. Specifically, the people neglected giving their tithes and the storerooms for them were misused. Scripture does not state which happened first or if one event caused the other.³³ Regardless, neither was excusable and both were wrong (Neh 13:13).

Eliashib the priest had given an Ammonite friend lodging in the storeroom of the temple, a direct violation of God's commands (Neh 13:4-5). Neither Ammonites nor Moabites were allowed in the assembly (Deut 23:3-6). This traced back to the Israelites journey into Canaan. These nations had not supplied basic necessities, provisions needed by the travelers, they instead tried to bring curses upon them (Num 22-24).

Also, Tobiah, the Ammonite friend of Eliashib, had been at odds with the Israelites. He opposed the rebuilding of the walls from the outset, it grieved him (Neh 2:10). It was like evil for him to see God blessing someone else, especially Israel. Repeatedly he had tried to stop the building. He used ridicule (2:19), belittling (4:3), threats of violence (2:8), intrigue (6:2), hired men (eh 6:13-14), and political pressure (7:19).

The priest and Tobiah were closely associated. It was an allied relationship of kindred spirits.³⁴ Eliashib the priest was respected, he had charge of the storerooms, but he had betrayed the trust of his own people. His grandson married the daughter of Sanballat, a Moabite (Neh 13:28). Sanballat was one of the participants in the continuing efforts of Tobiah to halt the building. Eliashib had effectively sold out his own people.

³³ Brown, *The Message of Nehemiah*, 229.

³⁴ Blenkinsopp, *Ezra-Nehemiah*, 354.

All this took place while Nehemiah was away, he had returned to his position of cupbearer for the king of Babylon. Upon his return to Israel, Nehemiah learned of this situation and was beyond upset. He was greatly displeased. The same feelings that had stirred in Tobiah at seeing YHWH bless someone were stirred in Nehemiah, but to a greater extent. Holiness cannot be compromised, what had happened was evil.³⁵ He realized this must be dealt with or the consequences would be devastating. He took action (Neh 13:6-7).

First there was a cleansing. All of Tobiah's things were removed from the storeroom. Next a purification ritual was performed. The rooms were essentially made bright (Neh 13:8-9). It is not enough to just remove the bad, something good must replace it. Unless cleansing sin is accompanied by replacing it with something else, the situation only worsens (Matt 12:43-45; Luke 11:24-26).

Sin rarely happens in a vacuum, it affects others. The people were not giving to support the temple.³⁶ Their lack of giving deprived the Levites of basic necessities. Since the storerooms were empty of grain offerings, there was nothing to give to them. This caused the Levites and worship leaders to essentially abandon their positions of spiritual leadership to provide for their personal physical needs (Neh 13:10-14). The revival from years earlier (Neh 12:44-47) had ceased. This was ultimately a sin against God.³⁷

Nehemiah's response was swift. He called those responsible for this neglect to repent and put the Levites and singers back in their proper positions. When confronting sin, the reason for the rebuke must be clear-a direct violation of a clear teaching of Scripture. Both of these situations were addressed in the Law. Repentance is not just

³⁵ Derek Kidner, *Ezra and Nehemiah: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries 12 (Nottingham, UK: IVP Academic, 2009), 142.

³⁶ Brown, *The Message of Nehemiah*, 229.

³⁷ McConville, *Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther*, 147.

turning around; it is a change of direction. Movement in the right direction must take place.

The second aspect of confronting sin is the restoration of right. It is not enough to point out the sin, things must be made right. In the case of Tobiah, it was not enough to remove his personal belongings, there needed to be purification followed by using the storerooms as intended. Where the Levites and worship leaders were concerned, they needed to be stationed at their posts.

Another part of confronting sin is ensuring that the same errors are not repeated. Nehemiah now put trustworthy men in charge (Neh 13:13). These men had proven themselves to be stable and reliable.³⁸ When someone has proven themselves untrustworthy, a leader cannot immediately place them back in a position of the same responsibility (Luke 16:11). Likewise, those who have proven character in one area can be trusted in other areas.³⁹

Accountability is another concern. As a scribe, Zadok would have been responsible for accurate records of what came in and ensuring that proper allotments were made.⁴⁰ This insured compliance with the distribution of supplies.

The remaining part of confronting sin is prayer. Nehemiah prayed (Neh 13:14). This brief prayer incorporated many of the elements of his opening prayer. There is a desire that his actions be pleasing to God. There is a desire that his actions be seen as a benefit to others. He was faithful to God and expected the same from others. Leaders are accountable to a higher standard than those who are led (Jas 3:1).

³⁸ BDB, s.v. אָמֵן.

³⁹ Brown, *The Message of Nehemiah*, 227.

⁴⁰ BDB, s.v. חָלַק.

Godly Leaders Must Develop Skills to Resolve Conflict

Now it happened when Sanballat, Tobiah, Geshem the Arab, and the rest of our enemies heard that I had rebuilt the wall, and that there were no breaks left in it (though at that time I had not hung the doors in the gates), that Sanballat and Geshem sent to me, saying, "Come, let us meet together among the villages in the plain of Ono." But they thought to do me harm. So I sent messengers to them, saying, "I am doing a great work, so that I cannot come down. Why should the work cease while I leave it and go down to you?" But they sent me this message four times, and I answered them in the same manner. Then Sanballat sent his servant to me as before, the fifth time, with an open letter in his hand. In it was written: It is reported among the nations, and Geshem says, that you and the Jews plan to rebel; therefore, according to these rumors, you are rebuilding the wall, that you may be their king. And you have also appointed prophets to proclaim concerning you at Jerusalem, saying, "There is a king in Judah!" Now these matters will be reported to the king. So come, therefore, and let us consult together. Then I sent to him, saying, "No such things as you say are being done, but you invent them in your own heart." For they all were trying to make us afraid, saying, "Their hands will be weakened in the work, and it will not be done." Now therefore, O God, strengthen my hands. Afterward I came to the house of Shemaiah the son of Delaiah, the son of Mehetabel, who was a secret informer; and he said, "Let us meet together in the house of God, within the temple, and let us close the doors of the temple, for they are coming to kill you; indeed, at night they will come to kill you." And I said, "Should such a man as I flee? And who is there such as I who would go into the temple to save his life? I will not go in!" Then I perceived that God had not sent him at all, but that he pronounced this prophecy against me because Tobiah and Sanballat had hired him. For this reason he was hired, that I should be afraid and act that way and sin, so that they might have cause for an evil report, that they might reproach me. My God, remember Tobiah and Sanballat, according to these their works, and the prophetess Noadiah and the rest of the prophets who would have made me afraid. (Neh 6:1-14)

Sanballat, Tobiah, and Geshem, along with a larger group learned that the walls were complete, only the finishing touches of setting the gates and doors remained. The defensive walls were strong, but the doors and gates were points of weakness. This trio of trouble had been active earlier and continued their efforts at every opportunity (Neh 2:10, 19; 4:1-7). Sanballat was governor of Samaria and a Moabite,⁴¹ Tobiah, an Ammonite, was his right hand. Both were descendants of Lot's incestuous relationship with his daughters (Gen 20:36-38) and excluded from the assembly of God's people (Deut 23:3-4). Geshem the Arab appears with them in their treachery (Neh 6:1-2).

⁴¹ Yamauchi, *Ezra, Nehemiah*, 687.

They had tried mockery, ridicule, and feigned assistance, but nothing had worked. Now treachery was used, they schemed, a cunning plan with evil intent was hatched.⁴² Brown sees this as plotting to kidnap Nehemiah.⁴³ Although this may have been a part of their plan, there is no solid scriptural basis for this conclusion.

Nehemiah's initial response was to focus on the task at hand. He responded to the situation, but kept on working (Neh 6:3). Brown states that it would take a minimum of three days for this meeting.⁴⁴ Nehemiah was nearing completion of a large task and would not lower himself to getting involved in anything that would halt progress. Getting sidetracked in conflict will distract a leader from the task at hand. As a big project nears completion the smaller details need attending. These details are just as important as the bigger, but they can easily get lost as small skirmishes spring to life. Doing what is required will bring progress and cause some conflicts to cease. Remaining above the fray by refusing to get caught up in it will also cause some situations to resolve themselves as they die down or lose traction. Doing what is required will also keep leaders busy and out of many harmful situations (2 Sam 11).

There are those times when a problem will not go away. This was one of those times. The scheme was repeated four times (Neh 6:4). This was an attempt to wear Nehemiah down. His response was steadfast.⁴⁵ When a proper response is given at the beginning, there is no need to change positions. A leader needs to be biblical in their reply to conflict and be willing to stand steadfast on that response. If a leader wavers, it can cause the conflict to grow.

⁴² BDB, s.v. חשב.

⁴³ Brown, *The Message of Nehemiah*, 100.

⁴⁴ Brown, *The Message of Nehemiah*, 100.

⁴⁵ McConville, *Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther*, 107.

When the previous attempts to halt progress did not work, another scheme was tried, they added false charges.⁴⁶ Nehemiah was accused of *plotting to revolt*, this is the same word as *scheme* from earlier (Neh 6:2). The trio also accused Nehemiah of setting things in motion to proclaim himself king. These charges were delivered in an unsealed letter. The unsealed letter would have allowed anyone to read it and spread this false charge even further.⁴⁷ This would also allow them to deny any responsibility since the charges were false (Neh 6:5-7). Conflicts can often start with rumor or secondhand gossip that gets passed along as fact. The original source is rarely revealed and if it is discovered, the guilty will often deny any responsibility.

There was also a threat in this charge, treason. A friendly nation that rebelled would have the king's favor removed (Neh 2:7-9) and be destroyed (Ezra 4:15). This charge had worked earlier in opposition to rebuilding the Temple (Ezra 4). Since it worked before, it was tried again.

Nehemiah answered this charge directly in two ways (Neh 6:8). First, he denied the charges. Second, he pointed to the actual source of them, making it up. The charges were a figment of their imagination.⁴⁸ Dealing with conflict involves not just pointing out the problem, it also involves getting to the source of the problem. Only when the root is discovered can the problem be effectively dealt with (Heb 12:15). Otherwise, the conflict can spring back up, usually in another opportune but untimely situation.

The goal of the conflict was to halt progress on setting the door and gates. When all the previous threats failed, they attempted to demoralize the workers, to *cause their hands to drop*.⁴⁹ Nehemiah turned to his source of strength in prayer. He was asking

⁴⁶ Emmett W. Hamrick, *1 Samuel, Nehemiah*, Broadman Bible Commentary, vol. 3 (Nashville: Broadman, 1970), 484.

⁴⁷ Frank C. Fensham, *The Books of Ezra and Nehemiah*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 202.

⁴⁸ BDB, s.v. מַלְבֵּךְ.

⁴⁹ Yamauchi, *Ezra, Nehemiah*, 713. This is a Hebrew idiom meaning to demoralize (Ezra 4:4).

God to use his hands, to fortify them, and to hold onto them. He prayed specifically about the threat to the work of his hands (Neh 6:9). When dealing with conflict, a leader must begin with prayer, a confession of God as the only strength to deal with conflict. Prayers must be specific and directed at the situation. Specific prayers get specific answers. A leader, strengthened by God will inspire others to stand strong as well.

A question for pondering, how did Nehemiah know their schemes, thinking, and goals? He had discernment. In addition to prayer, a leader must be allowing God's word to give discernment into situations, especially conflict (Heb 4:12).

There are times when conflicts must be dealt with directly. This was one of those times (Neh 6:10-13). Nehemiah went to the home of Shemaiah, who was hired to spread rumors. Nehemiah listened to him. When dealing with conflict, first listen. One word of caution, there is no record of Nehemiah having any witnesses, first person singular pronouns are used. Once a situation has escalated, always take along a witness (Matt 18:16). Also, expect consequences as intimidation, attacks without proposed consequences are no threat. Nehemiah was threatened with death.

Shemaiah proposed a solution, claiming sanctuary in the Temple. It was a personal solution, he offered to accompany Nehemiah. It was a religious solution, fleeing into the house of God. It was a secure solution; men were going to kill Nehemiah by night. On the surface it was the right thing to do. Seize the horns of the altar and claim sanctuary (1 Kgs 1:50; 2:28).

Nehemiah refused. Once again, he dealt with the problem and the root of the problem. He would not run and hide. Leaders cannot hide from conflict. They must face conflict and deal with it appropriately.

Second, he would not violate God's Word. Since Nehemiah was not a priest nor Levite, his access to the Temple was limited (Num 18:7). Entering prohibited areas of the Temple was a sin. Nehemiah would face intense personal reproach if he violated a

direct command of God. Leaders become ineffective if personal convenience supplants obedience.

Third, Nehemiah recognized that this deception was not from God. God does not violate His Word (Deut 18:20; Isa 8:19-20). Knowing God's Word provides the truth to refute falsehood.⁵⁰ Anytime advice is contrary to the Scripture, it is not from God.⁵¹

Nehemiah once again prayed, he returned to his security, his God (Neh 6:14). Prayer is not finished when a conflict is settled or not settled. This prayer is specifically directed at the ones who were causing conflict but were unwilling to repent. Even the wisest confrontation skills will not solve every situation. Some people will refuse any and all efforts at settling an issue, even one of their own making. A leader must be able to recognize this and then focus his efforts on allowing God to do what only God can do.

⁵⁰ Barber, *Nehemiah*, 126.

⁵¹ Mervin Breneman, *Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther*, New American Commentary, vol. 10 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1993), 212.

CHAPTER 3

GODLY LEADERSHIP AND CHURCH HEALTH

Leadership and biblical preaching are the basic needs of the church.¹ Biblical preaching sets the direction and goals for the church. Leadership helps the congregation reach those goals. It is vital for godly leaders to have the characteristics and skills to lead if the church is going to be healthy. Without godly leadership, a church will decline into spiritual morass.²

Effective godly leadership can help solve many problems in the church.³ This will enable the church to serve people better and achieve the goals Jesus desires for His church.⁴ Training multiple leaders will enable them to bring different perspectives on the problems and the solutions to them. These multiple perspectives can lead to better advice and delegation of responsibilities.⁵ Delegation frees the pastor to focus more attention on preaching.

Developing leaders will elevate the success of the church. Personnel, relationships, structure, and vision all are important and assist in growing an organization. The right people in the right position help set the potential. Healthy relationships promote good morale. A clearly defined structure fixes the size. Clear vision

¹ Mark Dever, *Nine Marks of a Healthy Church*, exp. ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004), 28.

² J. Oswald Sanders, *Spiritual Leadership: Principles of Excellence for Every Believer*, upd. ed. (Chicago: Moody, 2007), 19.

³ Dever, *Nine Marks of a Healthy Church*, 30.

⁴ Warren Wiersbe, *On Being a Leader for God* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2011), 118.

⁵ Gene A. Getz, *Sharpening the Focus of the Church*, rev. ed., Biblical Renewal Series (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1984), 204-5.

provides direction. Leadership determines success.⁶ This is why there is a necessity to train godly leaders.

Training multiple leaders can lead to exponential growth. A person's personal growth leads to personal success. Team growth can lead to organizational growth. Developing leaders multiplies growth.⁷ A leader can achieve success by equipping people to work toward the leader's own goals. Greater success occurs when a leader equips other leaders to contribute toward reaching those goals. The greatest success happens when a leader equips other leaders and then places them in a position to lead without needing constant supervision.⁸

Godly Leadership, Prayer, and Church Health

All of the characteristics and skills needed by godly leaders are interconnected. Prayer is foundational for shaping these characteristics and skills. Prayer is a godly leader's "first weapon," and "first priority."⁹ A leader should be praying not only for church growth, but also for church health.¹⁰ A growing church that is not healthy is a breeding ground for dis-function and can frustrate the efforts of leadership.

Prayer helps keep a leader properly focused. A godly leader must be humble and submit to God.¹¹ This prevents a leader from thinking, leading, and working as if everything depends on them. A praying leader honors God by demonstrating dependence

⁶ John C. Maxwell, *The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership: Follow Them and People Will Follow You* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1998), 267.

⁷ Maxwell, *The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership*, 249.

⁸ Maxwell, *The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership*, 260.

⁹ John R. W. Stott, *The Living Church: Convictions of a Lifelong Pastor* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2007), 135; James Montgomery Boice, *Nehemiah: Learning to Lead* (Old Tappan, NJ: F. H. Revell, 1990), 21.

¹⁰ Mark Dever and Paul Alexander, *The Deliberate Church: Building Your Ministry on the Gospel* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2005), 177.

¹¹ Boice, *Nehemiah*, 22.

on Him. Leaders who pray recognize that God is the One who changes lives and grows His church.¹²

A leader may be facing a situation much bigger than himself. Prayer helps a leader receive the necessary “wisdom, patience, skill and perseverance needed to complete [this] great task.”¹³ Prayer does not diminish the task, but connects concern with reality.¹⁴ Prayer deals with the reality of the situation and also the reality of God. It is an act of faith expressing the belief that God is able and willing to bring success. It believes that God is both omnipotent and faithful.¹⁵

Leaders must birth any plan in prayer. It is not proper to plan first, and only then to ask God’s blessing on a plan that excluded His input:

Planning that arises from and is the product of prayer is far superior to planning that is merely “backed by” prayer. The plan that is God’s plan, revealed by Him to those who wait on Him, is a plan that cannot fail . . . If the plan is not of God in the first place, no amount of prayer will make it count for eternity. It may “work.” That is, it may achieve the goals the organizers are aiming at. But if the goals are not God’s goals, of what value is it that they were achieved efficiently?¹⁶

Godly leaders model prayer for others. These prayers are to include “adoration, confession, thanksgiving, and supplication.”¹⁷ This helps communicate the necessity of prayer in the life of the leader and the necessity of prayer in the life of the church.

¹² Dever and Alexander, *The Deliberate Church*, 35.

¹³ Boice, *Nehemiah*, 9.

¹⁴ John White, *Excellence in Leadership: Reaching Goals with Prayer, Courage & Determination* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1986), 18.

¹⁵ White, *Excellence in Leadership*, 20.

¹⁶ White, *Excellence in Leadership*, 40.

¹⁷ Dever and Alexander, *The Deliberate Church*, 90-91.

Godly Leadership, Obedience, and Church Health

God's Word is to have priority in the life of the church.¹⁸ The Bible is to be the guide for every endeavor. It must also be the measuring stick for success.¹⁹ This cannot happen without prayer. Obedience to God's Word is wedded to prayer and a godly leader must first pray for personal obedience.²⁰

Godly leaders must possess a desire and commitment to personal obedience.²¹ J. Oswald Sanders vividly states, "The lightning of God's Word needs the kindling of a willing Spirit to light a fire of obedience."²² A leader must pray for personal faithfulness to God's Word.²³ God uses His Word to "create, convict, convert, and conform His people". A commitment to obedience by a godly leader serves as an example to others. This commitment of "radical and sacrificial obedience" is often supported by outward evidence of God's power.²⁴ The Holy Spirit may use a leader's example to inspire others to obedience. Nehemiah's commitment to obedience, seen by all, was interwoven with the miraculous completion of the wall.²⁵ When leaders model obedience, coupled with God's blessing of His empowerment, people are inspired to follow.

Obedience leads to church health. Church health is built on the foundation of the Word. There must be a deliberate yet careful approach to leading in corporate obedience.²⁶ There may need to be godly repentance before obedience:

¹⁸ Dever, *Nine Marks of a Healthy Church*, 39.

¹⁹ Dever and Alexander, *The Deliberate Church*, 28.

²⁰ White, *Excellence in Leadership*, 21.

²¹ White, *Excellence in Leadership*, 108.

²² Sanders, *Spiritual Leadership*, 110.

²³ Dever, *Nine Marks of a Healthy Church*, 247.

²⁴ Dever and Alexander, *The Deliberate Church*, 33.

²⁵ White, *Excellence in Leadership*, 109.

²⁶ Dever and Alexander, *The Deliberate Church*, 173.

Renewal begins as men and women break down and weep over their disobedience Genuine renewal is a quickened interest in and grasp of Scripture. Revived people delight in it. They become eager to practice it Wholesome healthy grief over sin is never far from joy, for it is always provoked by a God of mercy and salvation. Soon a celebration is underway.²⁷

Church health and success are measured by faithful obedience to Scripture. A commitment to obedience allows Scripture to determine both the desired outcome and the process that is followed to reach any goal.²⁸ When leaders model obedience, they demonstrate a desire for the Bible to guide everything that happens in the church. That is why it is vital for godly leaders to unify around obedience to the Bible.²⁹

Godly Leadership, Worship, and Church Health

Prayer is the first weapon and priority of a Christian leader and a church. Obedience the most important aspect of their lives. Worship is their preeminent duty. There is a connection between worship and obedience. If obedience to the Bible is not rooted in an awe for the God who gave the Bible, it is idolatry and is a sin.³⁰ Worship is to consist of faithful reading and preaching of God's Word.³¹ Worship is grounded in and guided by Scripture.³² Worship is an offering to God by His people gathered in celebration of His power and presence in their lives.

The worship service is a time to focus on God. He is the audience and focus of worship. It is a time when the people of God gather together to meet with Him and strengthen their commitment to Him. It can only be pleasing to God when it is done in a

²⁷ White, *Excellence in Leadership*, 113.

²⁸ Dever and Alexander, *The Deliberate Church*, 28.

²⁹ Dever and Alexander, *The Deliberate Church*, 110.

³⁰ Stott, *The Living Church*, 34-35.

³¹ Stott, *The Living Church*, 44.

³² Stott, *The Living Church*, 35.

manner that He has prescribed.³³ It is an expression of agreement “that only the power of God can account for the extraordinary things that take place.”³⁴

The weekly assembly of the church also to encourage believers.³⁵ The songs that are sung should be filled with words expressing the glory of God, the mighty works He has done and will do. They should help focus the spirits of the worshippers on Christ, His redemption, and His work in the church.³⁶ God’s people are strengthened. As the congregation worships, they express the holy character of the church.³⁷ Godly leaders must be active participants in this.

Worship does not stop once the actual worship service is over, it is connected to overall lifestyle. Leaders are to model this as well. A godly leader who worships sincerely in praise and prayer allows their lifestyle to be an outgrowth of their worship.³⁸

Godly Leadership, Confronting Sin, and Church Health

Confrontation is not an easy task, but confronting sin is a necessary task for leaders. Unrepentant, blatant sin must be dealt with in a godly manner. Once it is known, compromise is not an option.³⁹ An unwillingness to confront sin inflicts more harm to the overall health of the church than a perception that confrontation is mean spirited. Sin must be confronted, discipline should seek reconciliation, and love is to be the guiding principle for both.⁴⁰

³³ Dever and Alexander, *The Deliberate Church*, 115.

³⁴ White, *Excellence in Leadership*, 107.

³⁵ Dever and Alexander, *The Deliberate Church*, 98.

³⁶ Dever and Alexander, *The Deliberate Church*, 91.

³⁷ Stott, *The Living Church*, 39.

³⁸ Stott, *The Living Church*, 44-45.

³⁹ Boice, *Nehemiah*, 207.

⁴⁰ White, *Excellence in Leadership*, 122-24.

Trained leaders from within the church make this necessary action stronger. As Mark Dever and Paul Alexander state,

Performing corrective church discipline requires a leadership structure that won't buckle under the spiritual and relational pressures of the process. By adding wisdom, diffusing criticism, balancing pastoral weaknesses, and indigenizing leadership, plural eldership helps transfer the load of corrective discipline across the multiple pillars.⁴¹

This prevents the pastor and/or other leaders from bearing the burden of confronting sin alone.

Part of the reason for the reluctance of leaders to confront sin is the personal cost. Leaders are already in the crosshairs of opposition from without and within the church.⁴² Some leaders may be overly sensitive to the attacks from within the church. It is the attack from inside the church that causes the most pain.⁴³ Some leaders are unwilling to endure this hurt and will not confront sin.

Open rebellious sin must be confronted quickly. Allowing sin to continue unchecked, while investigating the matter, allows it to penetrate deeper into the body.⁴⁴ Sin is similar to a cancer that must be removed for the health of the body. Confronting sin is comparable to a surgical procedure. Surgery is often painful, yet necessary to prevent a more serious consequence.⁴⁵

Miserable people make people miserable. John White compares them to decomposing bodies spreading “gangrenous forms of unrepentant sin.”⁴⁶ Their lives are filled with unwholesome distractions, worldly temptations, degrading conversations,

⁴¹ Dever and Alexander, *The Deliberate Church*, 134.

⁴² White, *Excellence in Leadership*, 68.

⁴³ White, *Excellence in Leadership*, 122.

⁴⁴ Boice, *Nehemiah*, 206.

⁴⁵ Dever and Alexander, *The Deliberate Church*, 67-68.

⁴⁶ White, *Excellence in Leadership*, 59.

selfish goals, and carnal competition which are hindrances to church health. These sins must be recognized and removed to enable the church to more effectively proclaim the message of God's love, be the living presence of Christ in the world, and sense the fellowship of God in their midst.⁴⁷

Confronting sin, and discipline when necessary, delineates the people of God from the world. God's desire has always been for His people to live markedly different than the world.⁴⁸ Discipline helps communicate this distinction outside and inside the church. Outside the church, it strengthens the "corporate testimony of the church in the unbelieving community Without corrective discipline, the church has no way to protect the purity of her public corporate witness from the hypocrisy of members involved in scandalous sin."⁴⁹ Inside the church it communicates the importance of church membership, the seriousness of sin, and lets the other members "know whether or not a person is a member."⁵⁰ Members must know they cannot live in unrepentant sin and be considered "members in good standing."⁵¹

Church discipline can take different forms. It may be inspirational, nurturing, or more of a healing nature. Correction may be required. At times brokenness is necessary. Discipline is never done vindictively or with a meanness of spirit. The guiding force is love for God, love for the church, and love for the individual. Sin is always a danger and an individual's lifestyle may be displeasing to God and harmful to the overall health of the church. Discipline should always be done with a humble spirit and seek to promote personal and communal holiness. The ultimate goal is church growth. Church

⁴⁷ Raymond Brown, *The Message of Nehemiah: God's Servant in a Time of Change*, The Bible Speaks Today (Leicester, UK: Inter-Varsity Press, 1998), 232.

⁴⁸ Dever and Alexander, *The Deliberate Church*, 60.

⁴⁹ Dever and Alexander, *The Deliberate Church*, 134.

⁵⁰ Dever and Alexander, *The Deliberate Church*, 60-61.

⁵¹ Dever and Alexander, *The Deliberate Church*, 60-62.

discipline is always done for the glory of God and as obedience to God. It should not be a focal point of the church.⁵²

Part of being a leader is a willingness to receive corrective discipline. This strengthens a godly leader's identity with a church.⁵³ Leaders should welcome correction as part of their spiritual growth process.⁵⁴ When followers see a leader humbly accepting correction, it models the proper response if they need correction.

The church is to be “a community of mutual commitment to doing each other good spiritually-bearing each other's burdens, sharing joys, giving to support the ministry, exercising affectionate watchfulness over one another, and at times rebuking the unrepentant or submitting to correction ourselves as occasion may require.”⁵⁵ Godly leaders must be willing to demonstrate their part of this commitment.

Godly Leadership, Conflict Resolution, and Church Health

Confronting sin and conflict resolution are closely related. Confronting sin involves dealing with open rebellion. Conflict resolution may be a matter of different opinions or differing personalities, but it must be done to prevent conflict escalation. Unresolved conflict damages relationships, which hurts the morale of an organization.⁵⁶ Low morale can be absorbed and spread throughout the church.⁵⁷ Godly leaders using biblical skills help ensure that strained relationships are dealt with properly.⁵⁸

⁵² Dever, *Nine Marks of a Healthy Church*, 168-92.

⁵³ Peter Guy Northouse, *Leadership: Theory and Practice*, 5th ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2010), 4-6.

⁵⁴ Dever and Alexander, *The Deliberate Church*, 68.

⁵⁵ Dever and Alexander, *The Deliberate Church*, 110.

⁵⁶ Maxwell, *The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership*, 267.

⁵⁷ Brown, *The Message of Nehemiah*, 228.

⁵⁸ Dever, *Nine Marks of a Healthy Church*, 12.

Conflict may be the result of opposing values. A person's values may not match those of the organization. In extreme cases, this situation can foster disagreement and even lead to efforts that prevent the church from achieving any of its goals. The individual or group can then use influence and control to reshape organizational goals more to their liking.⁵⁹

Aubrey Malphurs describes two types of conflict causers: (1) Values & Vision Vampires and (2) Values & Vision Vultures. Values & Vision Vampires come from within the church. They drain the lifeblood from core values and/or vision, and erode values. These people may be well intentioned and see themselves as defending the faith. They are often tied to the past, seldom seek compromise, come out swinging, and spread their word to any who will listen. They are the strong willed, squeaky wheels.⁶⁰ Members unwilling to align their vision and values with a particular church should find another church and not allow their influence to divide the fellowship.⁶¹

Other conflicts may involve Values & Vision Vultures. These are not as intense as vampires; they only attempt to pick apart vision and values. They view the pastor as a hireling. Their faith is demonstrated by attendance. Any change is negative. They often hold to some unbiblical values, and are normally a minority that is publicly quiet but privately vocal. These are people who seek to influence beyond their numbers, and generally are the older generations.⁶²

When resolving conflict, a godly leader must have discernment. Conflict may be in the form of “intrigue, innuendo, [or] intimidation”.⁶³ A godly leader needs the

⁵⁹ Aubrey Malphurs, *Values-Driven Leadership: Discovering and Developing Your Core Values for Ministry*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2004), 49.

⁶⁰ Malphurs, *Values Driven Leadership*, 133.

⁶¹ Dever and Alexander, *The Deliberate Church*, 159.

⁶² Malphurs, *Values-Driven Leadership*, 135.

⁶³ Boice, *Nehemiah*, 101.

ability to discover where the conflict is based and what the conflict desires.⁶⁴ A godly leader must know: “Are the attacks from God or from the pit?”⁶⁵ Is the conflict a result of a Christian simply being “carnal and stupid?”⁶⁶ Discerning the source and goal of a conflict guides a godly leader in determining the correct procedure for resolution.

Leaders must deal with problems.⁶⁷ Conflict grows when it is not properly resolved. Leaders must do the difficult work of peace making, not peace keeping. Peace keeping, “ignoring or placating” problems and those causing them, allows the influence of the trouble and troublemaker to grow. Nothing is resolved.⁶⁸ Peace making involves the difficult work of facing conflict and working through it in an effort to find a godly solution.

Prayer is the starting point for any godly endeavor. Godly leaders must pray seeking strength, wisdom, and vision from God to help keep them focused. Part of this focus is a desire for obedience in every area of life. When a leader sincerely prays and lives an obedient life, they are keenly aware that it is only through God’s Spirit that obedience is possible. This realization, accompanied by the desire for obedience, causes worship. Worship encourages a leader to do the necessary work of confronting sin and resolving conflict in the church. All of these skills and characteristics mesh together and are needed for effective godly leadership. Training in these areas will help maintain church health.

⁶⁴ White, *Excellence in Leadership*, 97.

⁶⁵ White, *Excellence in Leadership*, 68.

⁶⁶ White, *Excellence in Leadership*, 67.

⁶⁷ Getz, *Sharpening the Focus of the Church*, 203.

⁶⁸ Malphurs, *Values-Driven Leadership*, 72.

CHAPTER 4

IMPLEMENTATION

The goal of the project was to develop stronger leaders in the areas addressed by this study. Implementing this project was a three-step process. The first was writing the actual lessons. These were then given to a panel for evaluation. Their critiques were used to refine the study. The final step was teaching the lessons and receiving feedback from the participants.

Step one involved combining the research of chapters 2 and 3 of this project into a series of cohesive Bible studies. The focus was on personal application of the principles, specifically as they relate to leadership and church health. Each lesson was prepared as a separate unit but the connections between them were to be noted and discussed each week.

Once these lessons were prepared, they were evaluated by an expert panel. This panel consisted of the Executive Director of the Central Kentucky Network of Baptists (CKNB), David Stokes; the former mission coordinator for CKNB, Alex Kinchen; and the Robert O. Fitts Professor of Old Testament at Clear Creek Baptist Bible College, John Ditty. Stokes has a masters level seminary degree, the latter two have earned doctorates. All have several years of pastoral experience. They were asked to evaluate the curriculum for clarity, biblical fidelity, application, and overall presentation (see appendix 2). The actual lessons were submitted for evaluation. Most of the suggestions concerned grammatical structure. Some statements were questioned for clarity. The suggestions were discussed and incorporated into the lessons.

The final step was the actual class. Classes were originally going to be held on eight successive Sunday afternoons prior to the evening worship service. The first session

was to involve explaining the purpose of the class and to distribute the evaluation rubric (see appendix 1), stressing that there are no right or wrong answers and that the evaluation is for personal reflection as much as it is for class evaluation. Anonymity would be protected by each participant creating their own Personal Identification Number (PIN). House address, birthday (day-day-month-month), or any other number they would remember was suggested. I would have had no way of knowing how each person answered. The PIN was needed for the final evaluation, which was the same form.

Although the chairpersons of each standing committee were encouraged to attend, the class was offered to everyone. Each standing committee consists of six members, one third rotate off each year. Members are appointed for one-year terms and can only serve three consecutive years. They are then required to rotate off for at least one year. Chairpersons for each committee can only serve as chair for two consecutive years. It was becoming more difficult to fill chairman positions and it was hoped that this study would give the participants confidence to fill the roles of chairpersons. There are also several ministry teams (Hospitality, Special Events, Benevolence) and those members were encouraged to attend as well. Several people have joined the church in the past few years, these were also encouraged to attend the classes. Classes were approximately 50 minutes each. All participants were encouraged to actively participate in discussion.

Sunday afternoon classes have been held in recent years. Evangelism and Sunday School teacher training sessions were offered but had low attendance and yielded limited results. Men's groups previously met on Tuesday evenings each spring and fall. Some type of study curriculum was used. After a few years, interest waned, and this was discontinued.

After considering the effectiveness and participation level of Sunday afternoon and weekday evening classes, I decided to teach the sessions on Wednesday evenings as

part of the regular Bible study. Most of the target group were regular attendees on Wednesdays. This also allowed a broader range of participation.

The evaluation rubric was distributed, and the process was explained. Participation was voluntary. Each person was instructed to select a personal identification number. It needed to be one they could remember, or they could record it somewhere. This PIN would be needed for the post training rubric. I assured the participants that their answers would be confidential due to the PIN. Seventeen people filled out and returned the rubric. The lessons started in late February 2020. All in-person meetings were suspended in mid-March due to Covid. The project was halted until Wednesday evening services were resumed.

Sunday morning services were online only until early June 2020. No small group studies were held at that time. Wednesday services were online only until April 2021. Small groups began meeting in June 2021.

The project was restarted in June 2021. I taught the lessons on Wednesday evenings. Due to Covid fears, attendance did not return to pre-pandemic levels. I did not know the original participants, so the class started from the beginning with the explanation and rubric. Nine survey forms were filled out and returned. Many of them were taken home and later returned. None of the new identification numbers corresponded to the original numbers from a year earlier.

Each class was taught as a separate unit. This insured that anyone attending the Wednesday night Bible study, who had not filled out a survey or missed a session, would not feel excluded. The connections between the lessons were stressed and specifically pointed out.

Discussion was encouraged. However, there was not much discussion. This has been the norm whenever I have taught classes at PBC. In Sunday School, Men's Studies, training sessions or any setting, it has always been extremely difficult to elicit comments. Awkward silence is the normal response to almost any question.

CHAPTER 5

PROJECT EVALUATION

This project was intended to strengthen those currently serving in leadership positions and equip others with some of the skills needed to effectively fulfill these roles. It was not intended to prepare any of the participants with all the skills needed for their position, but to give them some training in five specific areas: prayer, obedience, worship, confronting sin and conflict resolution.

The purpose of the project was to equip leaders. Many people at PBC are reluctant to take on new roles and especially those roles that require leading. When asked to serve on committees, most will accept a position they have previously held but are unwilling to serve as chairman. I had hoped to see people become willing to serve and lead in areas that they had not previously served.

Evaluation of Project Goals

This project did not meet two of the four stated goals. The first and third goals were not met. These dealt with assessing the current leadership and the results of the t-test. The second and fourth goals were met. These goals concerned the content of the lessons and the evaluation.

The first goal was for 75 percent of those currently serving in leadership to participate in the project. Because anonymity was protected it was not possible to know exactly who did participate, but 50 percent of the committee chairmen attended the sessions. Those serving as chairmen did personally return their survey. These surveys were then shuffled into the other surveys to protect anonymity. Additionally, 5 members currently serving on ministry teams attended. There were some who serve as both

committee chairs and ministry team members. Approximately one-half of the attendees filled out and returned a survey.

The third goal, improvement measured by a t-test, was not met. The returned surveys were entered into a t-test. Part 1 questions were not included in this process. When the surveys were entered, the resulting factor yielded a P two-tail factor of 0.07, indicating no significant measurable change.

There are several reasons for this. One is the overall age and experience of the participants. All those who attended the sessions were over age 60, most were over age 70. The participants have many years of service, and this is reflected in their answers to the Leadership Character and Skills Survey.

When they filled out the pre-training rubric, 6 of 8 indicated they had some type of previous leadership training. The answers to the subsequent questions left little room for improvement. Most answers that asked for opinions were answered Agree or Strongly Agree.

Personal practices had varied responses. All participants responded they Agree/Strongly Agree as to having a daily practice of praying. One response moved from Strongly Agree to Agree as to this habit. When asked as to the importance of praying when facing decisions, 7 of 8 said they Strongly Agree with this. This was not reflected when asked if they regularly fast and pray when facing an important decision. Half of the respondents disagreed with doing this in the pre-training survey. The responses changed to 6 of 8 agreeing in some manner to doing this in the post class survey.

When asked about daily devotional and reflective practices, there was a slight improvement. One respondent moved from Disagree to Agree. An encouraging area of improvement was Bible reading. Four read their Bibles once per day in the pre survey with three reading several times per week. Six indicated they read daily in the post survey, one dropped to once per week. Private worship practices declined according to the survey.

Pre-survey participants Somewhat Agreed to having the necessary skills to confront open sin, three-fourths Agreed or Somewhat Agreed as to having necessary conflict resolution skills. When asked the same questions in the post-survey, the responses were exactly the same for confronting sin and improved slightly as to conflict resolution.

The respondents consistently answered Agree or Strongly Agree as to the responsibility of leaders to obey God's Word, have an active worship life, confront sin, and resolve conflict. I think these answers were more reflective of their opinions as to what is expected of a pastor and less to their own personal responsibility.

The second goal of the project was met. The expert panel's evaluations were all sufficient/exemplary with only some minor grammatical suggestions and one clarification requested. This was discussed via phone and the statement was clarified.

The fourth goal, evaluating participant's satisfaction, was met. This was difficult to measure. The people who attended the session are reluctant to give any feedback that could be perceived as negative. When asked if they enjoyed the classes, there were only nodded heads. The members of PBC are always gracious.

Strengths of the Project

Although the project did not meet half of the stated goals, it does have strengths. It is doctrinally sound and personally applicable. Many people tend to see leadership, specifically in a church setting, as to what the pastor does. They neglect to see themselves as important leaders in a church. It becomes easy to fill comfortable roles only and let the paid staff handle the majority of leadership. Once this pattern is established, encouraging people to step up becomes even more difficult. It is easier to let the same people continue to assume the same places of leadership than it is to accept a position that may be a little uncomfortable.

When the same people continually fill the same roles it can lead to personal ownership of those roles, or at least the perception that others are better qualified. A person may have expertise or training in an area such as budgeting and finance, and then willingly use that when serving on the finance committee. Others see this expertise and comfort which can give them the idea that they lack the necessary skills to serve in that position. It becomes easier to just let others lead.

The characteristics and skills addressed are not just applicable in a church setting, but are useful in personal life as well. Christians, not just those in leadership, need to have a habit of prayer, fasting, obedience and worship. It was hoped that these areas of Christian life would be strengthened in every participant's life. When the surveys were initially distributed, most indicated this was already a personal practice.

Confronting sin is a needed skill for people in their personal life. Christians must confront their own personal sin. The Holy Spirit convicts of sin, Christians must repent. At times others may not be listening to the Holy Spirit. They may not see their own sin and need to be confronted concerning their sin. Hopefully, those who participated gained some insights and skills for times when this is necessary.

Conflict resolution is another skill that is necessary for life. Conflict can arise at almost any time in any place. A Christian with needed skills for working through conflict can bring about resolution in settings other than church. This can be in social settings, families, and any arena where a situation flares up that requires some level of skill to bring about a proper resolution.

Weaknesses of the Project

This project has weaknesses. If it did not, more of the goals would have been met. One weakness was the lack of room for measured improvement. I failed to account for the maturity of the participants. Wednesday evening attendees predominantly are the most dedicated members of PBC. These are the people who serve as committee members

and volunteer for any event or activity. They have servant hearts. They will privately ask questions about things they read in the Bible. They will share prayer concerns. They participate in worship services. All have been active in the life of the church for decades. It is not that they think they do not need to strengthen these areas, but they have established habits in them.

Discussion was another area that was not accounted for in preparing and implementing this project. There is a reluctance to actively participate in discussions. I have taught classes in Sunday School, evangelism, and other Bible studies. Open ended questions only produce yes or no answers. There is little if any give and take. I am unsure as to the reasons for this, but it is frustrating when discussion can help draw people into the lesson.

Another weakness was the setting. Teaching the lessons in the sanctuary puts a distance between people. A room that can hold over 100 people swallows a smaller crowd of less than 15. People sat more distanced from each other, especially after Covid.

Some were uncomfortable even attending. They had not yet settled into being at church. A smaller room may have removed some of the formality. Sunday worship services are not conducive to discussion. This carries over to the Wednesday service. Although it is less formal, there is still that carryover of formality.

But, with Covid, the uncertainty surrounding it, and the age of the participants, most would have probably stayed home if the sessions were held in a smaller room. Sunday School attendance in general was 30% lower than pre pandemic levels. People are still apprehensive about gathering together. They arrive later and generally leave quicker. Moving the class from the larger room to a smaller room would have caused even fewer people to participate.

What I Would Do Differently

If I were to do this project again, what would I do differently? First, I would not do the project in the midst of a pandemic. This is something I could not control, but I do think this impacted the project. In-person Sunday morning services restarted in June 2020 after a two-month suspension, it has taken over a year for a level of comfort to return. Wednesday services were suspended for over a year. A handful of people at PBC wanted Wednesday evening services to be held starting in early spring 2021. When services were restarted there was apprehension, attendance was approximately 60 percent of what it was pre-Covid. Seventeen people filled out the survey before Covid. In 2021 there were nine surveys returned. I deliberately waited to relaunch the project, hoping attendance and comfort would return, but I had to go ahead before what I thought was a good time to begin.

I think the survey questions need to be reworded. A group of senior adults who are long time church members are going to agree with questions asking about the necessity of prayer, searching the Bible for answers, and participating in worship. The questions may have also led to people viewing them as a test. Instead of giving personal answers they may have tried to give the correct or desired answer. One respondent to the 2020 survey marked Strongly Agree to every question. One couple compared answers as they filled out the survey.

I would also do the project in a smaller physical setting. Hopefully a smaller room would encourage discussion. I would be able to observe reactions and ask specific people for their opinions. Hopefully, people would feel more comfortable sharing opinions if others shared as well. I could ask people to look ahead and think about the next lesson. If the classes were held in a smaller room, I would sit instead of standing at a lectern. This would remove the lecture aspect of the class and give a more informal feel. This could assist in promoting discussion.

I have thought that the project may have been more successful if I would have invited specific people to participate. But, doing this may have made them feel obligated to attend. There is no guarantee they would have attended, and it may have made others feel excluded.

Theological Reflections

Probably the biggest thing I learned is timing, specifically God's timing. This project seemed to be a good idea at first, but not such a good idea as time progressed.

Nehemiah opens with a time reference, the month of Kislev. Chapter 2 opens with a time reference. Later the king specifically asks Nehemiah how long he would be gone. Nehemiah rested for three days before he began to survey the walls. The walls took fifty-two days to complete. These time references are not there just to fill the page, they give a timeline to the story. There was not a good timeline for this project. It was not just the Covid interruption but also the necessity of this project.

The past few years PBC has been running smoothly. Finances have not been an issue. Budgets were met or very nearly met each year. Attendance has been steady. We have added new members. People have been given the freedom to try their own ideas, good or bad. Successes have been celebrated, failures acknowledged but never seen as fatal to the person or their ministry area. There was not a need for this leadership project when things were running smoothly.

This project was needed several years, probably even decades ago. When the tenure of John Wallace ended in 1989, it left people wondering what was next. They had depended on his leadership in almost every area of church life. People have talked with me about his authoritarian leadership style.

The pastor who preceded me at PBC has been described by many as a micro-manager. He gave input into every decision that was made at the church. If something

was not to his liking, he overruled it. His ideas for the direction of the church were not aligned with the congregation's. This eventually led to his decision to resign as pastor.

When I was called to PBC there was some trepidation as to what direction and vision I brought to the church. People were hesitant to propose any idea that might be overruled. This gave me the impression that leadership skills were needed but lacking. It was not that the skills were not there, it was that people were unsure if they would be allowed to proceed with their ideas. What I thought was a lack of leadership was actually just a congregation needing permission to lead.

I also learned that God equips His church with what is needed. As Philippians 4:19 says, "And my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ."

Jesus is not just a statement concerning Paul's finances and personal comfort. God provided PBC with people that have knowledge and skill in specific areas. These people use their talents and gifts to serve the church. Some of them are reluctant to lead but readily will work when needed. God's resources are never exhausted, not just financial resources but also human resources.

Personal Reflections

By nature, I am not a planner. I am a battlefield general. I make quick decisions and live with them, good or bad. I accept responsibility for my actions and decisions. I need to be more of a planner.

Ministry is never boring. There is always something that requires attention, sometimes immediate attention. The necessity of preparing sermons for Sunday morning, evening and Wednesday is enough. Then add in the other responsibilities that are just part of ministry and a schedule gets crowded very quickly.

Planning ahead can help alleviate some of the time issues that invariably pop up. Even a well-planned schedule will be interrupted when a crisis hits. Funerals,

sicknesses, impromptu meetings, and any other of the myriad of issues that arise can and do cause the best planned schedule to be abandoned. This is to be expected. Ministry is all about people. Serving Jesus is about serving people. Interruptions are to be embraced. Being able to make quick decisions helps when these happen.

I have learned even more how to deal with frustration. I am a patient person; frustration is a different area. This project did push the boundaries of my level of frustration. I did hit the proverbial wall in the middle of this. I was not making any progress and everything I tried was unsuccessful. I tried changing the schedule I was following. I tried changing the physical setting for doing research and writing. I tried to take a short break from research and writing. When none of these worked and when a situation at the church worsened, I had to take a longer break. Several years ago, I learned the necessity for time off, but I had forgotten that and got myself in a rut. Being physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually tired is not a good place to be. It only exacerbated my level of frustration.

This connects with needing to be a better planner. I should know that time away helps to bring refreshment. Times of refreshing assist in clearing my mind and let me better deal with the routines of ministry, the interruptions, and the frustrations. I must do better in planning time off.

Conclusion

I have learned that I am a capable interpreter of Scripture. This is in no way saying that I have arrived as a preacher, but I have gained more confidence in interpreting a passage then delivering a theologically sound, presently applicable sermon. Every seminar added another tool that has helped me grow as a pastor and preacher.

I have learned that biblical exposition does not have just one style. Although I have never been tied to “three points and a poem,” I see even more the importance of letting the text dictate both the flow and style of the sermon. Some texts readily lead to

traditional points. Other texts naturally follow more of a storying approach. Both can be expositional when the text dictates the structure.

APPENDIX 1

LEADERSHIP AND CHARACTER SKILLS SURVEY

Agreement to Participate

The research in which you are about to participate is designed to identify the current understanding and practices of leadership of the participant. This research is being conducted by Keith Sands for the purpose of collecting data for a ministry project. In this research, you will answer questions before the project and you will answer the same questions at the conclusion of the project. Any information you provide will be held strictly confidential, and at no time will your name be reported or identified with your responses. Participation is strictly voluntary and you are free to withdraw at any time. By completion of this survey, you are giving informed consent for the use of your responses in this project.

Directions: Answer the following multiple-choice questions by placing a check next to the appropriate answer.

Part 1

1. I have participated in some type of leadership training in the past.

A. Yes

B. No

2. I have served in a leadership role.

A. Yes

B. No

3. I desire to be a good leader.

___ A. Yes

___ B. No

4. Character is important to being a leader.

___ A. Yes

___ B. No

Directions: Answer the following questions: (1) Place a check by the multiple-choice questions. (2) Some questions ask you to give your opinion using the following scale: SD = strongly disagree, D = disagree, DS = disagree somewhat, AS = agree somewhat, A = agree, SA = strongly agree; please circle the appropriate answer.

Part 2

5. I have a daily practice of praying.

SD D DS AS A SA

6. I have a time set aside daily specifically to pray.

SD D DS AS A SA

7. I have a specific place to pray daily.

SD D DS AS A SA

8. It is important to pray for God's wisdom when making decisions.

SD D DS AS A SA

9. I regularly fast and pray when I have an important decision to make.

SD D DS AS A SA

10. Obedience to God's Word is important to being a leader.

SD D DS AS A SA

11. I have a daily time private devotional study.

SD D DS AS A SA

12. I have a daily private time of spiritual reflection.

SD D DS AS A SA

13. I read my Bible (check only one)

A. more than once per day

B. once per day

C. several times per week

D. once per week

E. several times per month

F. once per month

G. several times per year

H. not at all

14. I meditate on Scripture (check only one)

A. more than once per day

B. once per day

C. several times per week

D. once per week

E. several times per month

F. once per month

G. several times per year

H. not at all

15. I pray (check only one)
- A. more than once per day
 - B. once per day
 - C. several times per week
 - D. once per week
 - E. several times per month
 - F. once per month
 - G. several times per year
 - H. not at all
16. I have a specific time set aside for prayer.
- A. Yes
 - B. No
17. I regularly search God's Word for answers when I have a decision to make.
- SD D DS AS A SA
18. An active worship life is important to being a leader.
- SD D DS AS A SA
19. I regularly participate in the worship life of the church.
- SD D DS AS A SA
20. I regularly practice private worship away from the church.
- SD D DS AS A SA
21. I believe it is important for leaders to confront open sin wisely.
- SD D DS AS A SA
22. I think I have then necessary skills to confront open sin wisely.
- SD D DS AS A SA

23. I think leaders should be able to resolve conflicts.

SD D DS AS A SA

24. I think I have the necessary skills to resolve conflicts.

SD D DS AS A SA

Personal Identification Number: _____

APPENDIX 2

CURRICULUM EVALUATION RUBRIC

Spiritual Leadership Curriculum Evaluation Tool					
1 = insufficient 2 = requires attention 3 = sufficient 4 = exemplary					
Criteria	1	2	3	4	Comments
The lesson is clearly relevant to the issue of leadership.					
The material is faithful to the Bible's teaching on leadership.					
The material is theologically sound.					
The thesis of the lesson is clearly stated.					
The points of the lesson clearly support the thesis.					
The lesson contains points of practical application.					
The lesson is sufficiently thorough in its coverage of the material.					
Overall, the lesson is clearly presented.					

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ABSTRACT

TRAINING LAY LEADERS AT PARKWAY BAPTIST CHURCH, LEXINGTON, KENTUCKY, USING PRINCIPLES FOUND IN NEHEMIAH

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The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2022
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This purpose of this project was to emphasize characteristics needed to be more effective as a leader in the local church. It also was to equip lay leaders with some of the skills needed to be more effective leaders in the church. It included biblical lessons from Nehemiah that dealt with prayer, obedience, worship, confronting sin and conflict resolution. The project also incorporated the importance of these relative to church health.

Chapter 1 is an overall look at the demographics of the church, the rationale, purpose, goals, and methodology for the project. Chapter 2 is the biblical basis of the project. Chapter 3 combines the biblical basis with church health. Chapter 4 describes the implementation of the project. The final chapter contains the evaluation and reflections from this project.

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