

4. TOUGH AS A RHINO, GENTLE AS A DEER

From 1960's through 1970's, there was a famous sign among American hippies. They showed up their index and middle fingers and declared, "Peace!" They protested against Viet Nam war, they hated war and violence, yet they smoked dope and slept with anyone walking around. They obviously didn't understand the true meaning of the "V" sign. It was first displayed by the Prime Minister of the Great Britain, Sir Winston Churchill during the World War II.

In 1940, England was the main target of vicious Hitler and his Nazi Air Force. Every night, sirens would go off and people had to run for shelters. In the midst of pile of ruins in London, that famous cigar clenched mouth Churchill would stick two of his stubby finger as a sign of "Victory," not peace with marijuana and free sex.

The leader we see here, Nehemiah is like that Winston Churchill, "The Bulldog of Britain".

A. ALONE WITH GOD

Neh. 2:11 So I came to Jerusalem and was there three days.

Nehemiah came to Jerusalem without any fanfare or parade. Then he dropped out of sight. No press conference, no guided tours around the wall, only silence.

Even though he didn't meet any important officials in Jerusalem, but he met the most important person who would help build the wall, God. The first order of business for Nehemiah was to seek silence and solitude with God, as Jesus often did while He was on earth.

B. PAUSING TO LEARN

Neh. 2:12-16 Then I arose in the night, I and a few men with me; I told no one what my God had put in my heart to do at Jerusalem; nor was there any animal with me, except the one on which I rode. And I went out by night through the Valley Gate to the Serpent Well and the Refuse Gate, and viewed the walls of Jerusalem which were broken down and its gates which were burned with fire. Then I went on to the Fountain Gate and to the King's Pool, but there was no room for the animal under me to pass. So I went up in the night by the valley, and viewed the wall; then I turned back and entered by the Valley Gate, and so returned. And the officials did not know where I had gone or what I had done; I had not yet told the Jews, the priests, the nobles, the officials, or the others who did the work.

In the Scriptures, all great leaders exhibited one single character trait of "Pausing to Learn". They made a habit out of regularly seeking solitude with God, and not simply at holidays and funerals.

Consider Moses who spent forty years in the silence and solitude of the Midian desert leading only sheep, before God used him to lead two million people.

In the New Testament, James remembers that it was in the silence and solitude of prayer, pausing on his knees before the Lord, that Elijah did his greatest work.

James 5:17-18 Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it would not rain; and it did not rain on the land for three years and six months. And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth produced its fruit.

Paul, practically the second in command in Christianity, who wrote the majority of epistles of the New Testament, began it all in silence in a place we know only as Arabian desert (Gal 1:17-18). He spent three years there out of the public's eye, being transformed in his heart and mind from a Pharisee to a devoted Apostle of Christ.

Jesus had a habit of being alone with His Father while He was on earth. Jesus spent all night in prayer and solitude and silence away from the ever-seeking and ever-demanding crowds.

So, I have a question for you: What do you do with the time you are doing at your job location, in your home? Do you have to fill them with music or TV noise? Or do you spend solitude and silence with God alone? Talking to Him in your prayers, listening to Him through the Word of God.

God wants our full attention. Often we wouldn't give a bit of attention to Him, so He had to put us in tight corners, so that you may pay attention to Him. If you have wasted this precious time until now, stop and listen to Him. Let's spend time with Him. Let's give Him our full attention. We will be surprised how much He wants to talk to us and spend time with us.

When we leave this Bible study, we will face all kinds of interruptions. Please think this place as a training ground of our Christian life that was designated by God to train us and draw us near to Himself.

Being solitude with God without any interruption enhances our walk with Christ. Another good thing is keeping a journal while we are alone with Him. With praying and reading His Word, we get strengthened against criticism that will come in our way.

C. BLOOD, TOIL, TEARS AND SWEAT

Neh. 2:17 Then I said to them, "You see the distress that we are in, how Jerusalem lies waste, and its gates are burned with fire. Come and let us build the wall of Jerusalem, that we may no longer be a reproach."

Winston Churchill's first statement as Prime Minister to the House of Commons during World War II was, "I have nothing to offer but blood, toil, tears and sweat." In Nehemiah's first address God's leader for rebuilding the wall, he completely committed himself to the task of helping to protect their homeland.

Three times Nehemiah identifies himself with the people, saying "we" and "us." In Christianity, when we are heading to one goal, glorifying God through our lives, there is no such a thing as "I", "my", "me" and "myself". "I" shows up time after time between "S" & "N" as "SIN".

D. POINTING PEOPLE TO GOD

Neh. 2:18 And I told them of the hand of my God which had been good upon me, and also of the king's words that he had spoken to me. So they said, "Let us rise up and build." Then they set their hands to this good work.

Nehemiah doesn't forget where the credit is supposed to go. He could have said to those people, "I told king Artaxerxes what I want to build the wall. So I got what I want." But Nehemiah understands and remembers where good and perfect gifts come from as it mentioned in James.

James 1:17 Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning.

One thing we must notice is that Nehemiah had a very tender heart for the Jewish people's well-being and their heritage.

E. HANDLING CRITICISM

Neh. 2:19-20 But when Sanballat the Horonite, Tobiah the Ammonite official, and Geshem the Arab heard of it, they laughed at us and despised us, and said, "What is this thing that you are doing? Will you rebel against the king? So I answered them, and said to them, "The God of heaven Himself will prosper us; therefore we His servants will arise and build, but you have no heritage or right or memorial in Jerusalem."

It is nothing but a common thing to expect the enemy's resistances and attacks whenever we start to follow God's will and Word. Before, satan didn't care to give us hard time. Why? Because we were his. But once we committed our lives to God and started to follow Him, literally all hell break loose. From discouragement, disillusion, harassments, and wrongful criticism to persecution, satan has many ways to come after us. But we should take heart that the very God who resurrected Jesus from dead has power upon us to keep us from the evil one.

Looking for a role model on how to handle criticism? Nehemiah was openly criticized, falsely accused and grossly misunderstood. Each time he kept his cool, he let that criticism roll like water on a duck's back. He considered the source, he refused to get discouraged, he went to God in prayer.

We all need to have skin of a tough rhinoceros and heart of a gentle deer

F. APPLICATIONS

I'd like to point out four things for leadership quality.

1) We have to wait for God's call and time.

We need to wait upon God's timing. God is never too early and never too late. What we strive to obtain, we have to strive to maintain.

2) Once we get a call from God, we need to stay on the track for the goal He designates for us.

Distraction will come, disillusion will come. Attacks from the enemy within and without will come. But we need to stay at it.

3) We need to take criticisms with grace.

As I said before, consider its source. Put the criticism against the Word of God. If it is valid, listen to it. If it is not, ignore it. Let God defend you. Let's not go about defending ourselves.

4) We must depend on God's guidance and strength.

Let's not try to manipulate God's way. God cannot be mocked. It is better to follow His guidance than disobey Him and result in consequence.