

A Step-By-Step Guide For Rebuilding a Country

What Separates a Successful Leader From One Who Fails

Unedited Transcript

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They started meeting at their churches, at their church, not churches, but their church, on Saturday at 8 a.m. They're using the study with us. They call themselves Saturday Morning Men's Breakfast. Very original, guys. The River Christian Fellowship, Twin Falls, Idaho, and then Ron Hoffman is leading it. He's been leading small groups for six years and so both you men here in the room and then those of you online, if you would join me in giving a warm and very rousing welcome to the Saturday Morning Men's Breakfast group. One, two, three ...oorah. Welcome, guys. We're really glad to have you with us.

I took a long weekend and on Monday, when everybody's back at work, I went on a hike. It was a beautiful day, blue, cloudless sky, 50 degrees temperature, low humidity. I parked my truck on Highway 40 near Juniper Springs deep in the Ocala National Forest where the Florida Trail crosses over Highway 40 and then I started south. I had mapped out an 8-1/2 mile hike out and back. I'm just blissful. It's quiet. I'm wrapped in solitude. I hit the four-mile mark and suddenly, the silence is shattered by the thumping rotors of a helicopter that passes over me. To be honest with you, it was pretty exciting. It was like 500 feet off the ground. It was kind of exciting.

I continued on for another 2/10 of a mile and lo and behold, this helicopter comes back over again going the other direction and I said, "What in the world?" Then I went just a few hundred more yards and I came upon the clay road that I had marked as my turnaround point. Right there in the middle of the road and also in the middle of the trail was this white, big, giant, white pickup truck. I said, "What in the world?" Next thing I know, there's this big, ex-military guy getting out of the truck and I'm starting to try to locate my knife. I don't know what's going on. Then the helicopter starts hovering over me and this guy.

It turns out that somewhere just off the coast of Florida, a \$14 billion aircraft carrier is going back and forth up and down the coast. On this \$14 billion aircraft carrier are a number of \$60 million F-18 fighter jets. It turns out that the Top Gun pilots and their crew chiefs have just completed their preflight checks and they're getting ready to rumble off the end of this aircraft carrier to make the sub-10 minute sortie run over to the Pinecastle Bombing Range to strafe a mockup of a Middle Eastern terrorist caravan with live bombs about a half a mile west of where I'm walking.

The guy didn't seem that upset with me that I was on the verge of aborting what was probably a \$10 million plus training exercise that had been in the works for months and months. He drove me back to my truck. I waved to the guy in the helicopter and then he peeled off. Then the guy drove me back to my truck. His name is Brian. I did give Brian a copy of The Man in the Mirror and I thought to myself Ephesians 1:11, God is working out everything in conformity with the purpose of His will. God is

sovereignly orchestrating all human events, even this seemingly random circumstance, to accomplish His purposes. Could it be that who knows what might happen if Brian should find that book hits home with him.

It is interesting how we are part of a much bigger picture, one of which we usually are very unaware of, but every now and then, we get a glimpse into how everything is fitting together. We're coming to the end of this Nehemiah series now today. This will be the last in the series. We have been learning how Nehemiah was introducing a plan to rebuild his country and the steps he's been taking to get his people to adopt his plan.

Just by way of a quick review, the first time we met, we talked about figuring out what God wants you to do and that the first step to every great outcome is to imagine its possibility. We talked about the importance of praying to discern the vision that God has. Then we talked about the three things you would need to get started, the right team, the right plan, the right resources. In the same way that planning without prayer is presumption, so also is prayer without preparation presumption and so you need to make sure you have these proper resources, plans, and teams in place.

Then we talked about creating early momentum and we talked about the idea of dreaming unbelievably big, but then starting believably small and some of the details of that. Then as soon as you get going, we talked about the opposition. We looked at the opposition that Nehemiah faced and we talked about the three principles that we found in the Book of Nehemiah, expecting opposition, trusting God, but then taking responsibility for the outcomes. Then we talked about you get into it and now the wow factor wears off and so what do you do when that happens. We talked about bottlenecks and what one bottleneck, if you were to remove it, would lead to an acceleration toward your goal. Then we talked about what getting a quick win can do for you. We talked about nothing can turn doubters into allies faster than a quick win. Then we talked about last week is America ripe for another Great Awakening. We talked about how only God can send revival, but we can hasten the day with humble, repentant prayer and so Nehemiah's great awakening, Nehemiah's great plan.

What I want us to do today is as we close it out, I want to talk about what separates a successful leader from one who fails. We've seen specific steps, a step-by-step guide, if you will, for rebuilding the country or whatever it is that you're trying to rebuild in Nehemiah and how he brought people along, got them to adopt the change. Now, you may remember at some point in this series, I have said, on more than one occasion, that academically, this has all been studied, very studied, and that 2/3 of all organizational change initiatives fail outright. That's without regard to whether they're public, private, profit, or nonprofit. It's almost an iron law.

In other words, if you want to bring about, if you're going to rebuild a country or a business or a marriage or a family or a church or a neighborhood, it's almost an iron law that basically, 2/3 of those efforts are going to fail and only 1/3 of them will succeed. What is the difference between those who succeed and those who fail? What is the thing that separate or what are the things that separate a successful leader from the one who's not able to pull it off?

You can do all of the things that we've talked about so far and most of the things that we've talked about, people would know, leaders would know. Not all leaders would do, but there is one more thing and that is not only is it important to get people to adopt the change, but then the leader who separates himself is the one who's able to sustain that change, the one who's able to sustain that change.

The first thing about a successful leader is that he understands what makes change stick. We're really talking here about the principles of adoption and sustaining change. I mean in the technical sense, but we're also doing a Bible study because there are powerful spiritual principles that are at work here. There are these ... I ask this question often, every week, actually, what is the situation that called this text into existence? You'll notice that I'm skipping over chapters 11 and 12. Those are basically lists of the families that were involved. Then in chapter 13, in verse 6, Nehemiah says, "I was not in Jerusalem for in the 32nd year of Artaxerxes, king of Babylon, I had returned to the king." He came at the 20th year and stayed to the 32nd year, so he was there for 12 years. Then Nehemiah, the governor, went back to Babylon.

The problem, however, is that his rebuilding project had not been completely enfolded. It had been adopted, but it was not sustained. It had not been completely enfolded, or routinized, if you want to use a technical term, into the life of the people and so there were four situations that remained. Let's look at them. The first situation, reading on in verse 6, "Sometime later, I asked his permission and came back to Jerusalem. Here I learned about the evil thing that had been done in providing Tobiah a room in the courts in the house of God." That was covered in the first few verses of chapter 13, but the storehouse in the house of God had been misappropriated for the use of somebody who was an opponent of Nehemiah.

Then the second situation in verse 10, "I also learned that the portions assigned to the Levites had not been given to them," and as a result, they had gone back to the fields because they didn't have any money, so they had gone back to the fields to go to work. Then the third situation is found in verse 15. "In those days, I saw men in Judah treading winepresses on the Sabbath and bringing in grain and loading it on donkeys together with wine, grapes, figs, and all other kinds of loads. And they were bringing all this into Jerusalem on the Sabbath," so they were not keeping the Sabbath. Then the fourth situation, over in verse 23, "Moreover, in those days I saw men of Judah who had married women from Ashdod, Ammon, and Moab. Half of their children spoke the language of Ashdod or the language of one of the other peoples and didn't even know how to speak the language of Judah." He had left and there were these situations that had developed.

Now, he had been addressing all of these situations all along, but he had not seen these completely overcome yet and so we're going to talk more about those situations. Nehemiah did understand what it would take to make his changes stick, so he was able to address each of these situations. I'm going to talk a little bit about what he understood about what would make these changes stick, but first, I want to give you the big idea for the day, and it's this. Successful leaders, they have no illusion about what it takes for people to adopt change.

One of the reasons that 2/3 of all change initiatives fail is that leaders, they have this illusion that somehow, their brilliance or their skill or their expertise is going to be enough to carry the day, that on the strength of their personality and maybe their words, that they're going to be able to carry the day. They have this grand illusion, but leaders who actually make things happen have no such illusion.

Now let me give you some of these things. The first thing, of course, is just having a perspective, a Nehemiah perspective, or having a perspective like Jesus. Jesus understood that it was going to take time for people to get in His deal. Here we are 2000 years later and He's still waiting for people to get into His deal, to fully understand what He's doing. Jesus was big on repetition. He would continue to repeat over and over again the same things, as did Nehemiah continue to repeat over and over the same things because they both understood that people don't necessarily get it the first time. Not

everybody is an innovator. Not everybody is an early adopter. Some people are late adopters and some people are laggards that really come on very late or never come on at all and so to give these people time and to continue to repeat the vision over and over.

I was with a guy one day. People want to appear that they are with you and you do this. I do this. We all do this. Somebody will say something to me and I have no idea what they're really talking about. I go, "Yeah, uh-huh." I was with a guy one day and he was having a real problem with his son. I was talking to him about a passage in the Book of Romans. I said, "You know what it says in Romans." He goes, "Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah." It just hit me. I don't have the spirit of discernment, but I just discerned that he was lying. He was just ... He had no idea what I was talking about.

Here's what I did. This is a man who had a son who had attempted suicide. That's what we were talking about. He was embarrassed and he didn't want ... Anyway, I pulled out my phone and I looked up the passage in Romans and I gave it to him. I said, "Would you just read those three verses?" He began slowly. I watched his eyes slowly read over this verse. Tears formed in his eyes. It was the word of God ministering to him in a very deep way, but I could've easily assumed that he understood what I was saying. That's one of the things that Nehemiah made sure is that the people understood what was going on that Jesus did and so a successful leader doesn't have any illusions about what it takes for people to adopt change. It takes repetition. It takes time. It takes walking them through it so that they can understand. In essence, to disciple them. You have to disciple people. If you want to have people adopt change, you have to disciple them. You have to give them safe places.

We had our annual Man in the Mirror reunion with our field team. Brett Clemmer, our president, did a brilliant job because we were introducing a lot of changes and he gave those men a safe place where they could express their honest reservations and process them back and forth instead of just trying to do a cramdown. That's another characteristic of a leader who doesn't have an illusion about what it's going to take for people to adopt change. People have to have an opportunity to express their honest reservations and process them. If you don't give them that safe place, then you're not going to see your change stick. Remember what we're trying to do here is understand what makes change stick.

Then there are a lot of things we've talked about already, of course, in the previous sessions, but one of the most important things is actually correcting people. 2 Timothy 3:16-17. All Scripture is inspired by God and valuable for reproof, for correction, for something, and training in righteousness. The purpose of that is so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work, so they have to be disciplined into it. There are spiritual principles that can be used without actually letting people even know they're spiritual principles. I'm texting somebody right now Bible verses, but we're not doing it in a spiritual context. I'm just giving him the practical wisdom that the Bible has to offer. For example today, Proverbs 29:12 is the one I'm texted today. "If a ruler listens to lies, all of his officials will become wicked." "If a ruler listens to lies, all of his officials will become wicked." That's a principle that applies right here in Nehemiah.

Then I would say beyond that, making the change stick, the greatest contribution that you can make in this is just having the bigger perspective, the understanding that we live in a fallen world, that the heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it? People make mistakes. We need to have grace towards one another. We don't understand everything that's going on, but we do know that God is working out everything in conformity with a purpose of His will. We're out on the trail and we may not know about a \$14 billion aircraft carrier off the coast of Florida. We may not know that all that other stuff is going on, but it is going on.

It's to have this perspective. It's to have the perspective that the way we actually rebuild and we change includes understanding that we need to disciple people to understand that they're part of this larger picture of this thing that we're trying to do and there's more at stake than just them. There's more at stake in this than just me and that it takes a long time. The perspective of having and understanding, it takes a long time to make a disciple and having the understanding that it doesn't make any difference how the country or how the neighborhood or how the family or how the marriage or the business got into this current situation, that the only solution is to disciple our way out because making disciples is God's designated way to release the power of His gospel on whatever problem it is you're facing, whatever it is you're trying to rebuild.

God is sovereignly orchestrating all human events, even the ones that seem random, to bring us into right relationship with Him and each other. That's what God is doing. He's working that out through us. Leaders that understand these principles, both the perspective and these things we're talking about here today and have talked about, they're the ones that are able to make change stick because they understand that in everything they do, they have to manage against the fall. You have to manage against the fall. Successful leaders, they don't have any illusions about what it's going to take for people to adopt change. It's going to take a lot of effort, a lot of work.

Second thing we see that separates successful leaders from those who fail, he has the determination to see it through. In Nehemiah, he was in Jerusalem. He went back there to Babylon in the 32nd year and then he came back. It says in verse 6, "I asked his permission and came back to Jerusalem." Why did he do that? He did that because he had the long view and he was absolutely determined that he was going to be successful on his mission. In Collins' book, *Good to Great*, he talks about level five leadership and he talks about a level five leader as a combination of professional will and personal humility, this blend.

He tells this story about a guy named Darwin Smith. Nobody's ever heard of Darwin Smith. Darwin Smith grew up in Indiana on a farm, put himself through Indiana University at night by working during the day at International Harvester and put himself through Harvard Law School and then became the CEO of Kimberly-Clark paper products company in 1971. When their market performance had been lagging the general market by 36%, they were really in trouble, stodgy old paper mill company. He took it over and began to implement a long-term vision to rebuild the company. What happened was is that he announced the plans that they were going to sell all their paper mills and then move from the business that they were in into consumer paper products. They were laughed at by Wall Street. They were told it was a stupid idea. It would never work.

As it turns out, that stupid guy and that stupid idea over the next 20 years in that company ... I can't remember the numbers, so let me look it up, but they outperformed Coca-Cola, Hewlett-Packard, 3M, and General Electric. The thing that set him apart was this incredible determination, this unwillingness to relent, unwillingness to give up. He actually was diagnosed with cancer like a month or two after he took over as CEO and for the entire tenure, 25-year tenure that he had there at Kimberly-Clark, he was alternating between his job in Kimberly, Wisconsin, and then going down to Houston for chemotherapy treatments. An amazing story. 25 years later, Kimberly-Clark owned Scott Paper Company outright and beat Procter & Gamble in six of eight product categories. It's all being attributed to what Collins calls the will plus humility. Will, what you and I would probably call determination, it's a good word for it. He was just absolutely determined that he would not be denied, that he was going to be successful.

It was interesting because I noticed that in the research that I did with churches for my own PhD dissertation, and a lot of this is very similar to what I had studied there, and that is that pastors who had

men's discipleship ministries that succeeded when compared to pastors who had men's discipleship ministries that either languished or failed, inevitably, inevitably, there were three differences. Inevitably, one of those differences was they were just absolutely determined that men's discipleship, I'm going to make it work. I'm going to do whatever it takes to make it work. I'm not just going to implement the change. I'm going to see it through. I'm not just going to try to get people to adopt this. I'm going to make sure that we enfold this into the routines of the church, that this is going to become part of who we are. This is one of the great things that separates successful leaders is that they just absolutely are determined that they're going to see it through.

It's the difference between knowing and doing, if you will. Maybe that's an oversimplification, but you know. You already know what I'm saying here. You know what I'm saying here. The difference between these leaders that are getting these changes that stick and these tremendous ... It's not just that they know, but they do. They're men of action. They actually act and ... It's the Andrew Carnegie quote that I love to ... About once a year, I roll it out here. He said, "As I get older, I pay less attention to what people say. I just watch what they do."

In other words, talk is one thing, but actions are what actually get and just actually having the determination to go ahead. We see this in the life of Nehemiah, and we see it in the life of Jesus. You think Nehemiah was determined, how about Jesus? Do you think Jesus was determined to see it through? He went to the cross. He gave His life to make sure that the great commission would live on. The big idea here today, successful leaders, they don't have any illusions about what it's going to take for people to adopt the change. It's going to take a great amount of determination.

Then finally today, something that separates a successful leader from one who fails, he runs down everything, but depends on God for success. That's two parts, of course, but he just runs down everything. I learned this early on. I've run enterprises that are multiple people in them, so you can't know everything that's going on. You can't know every problem. I did learn early on that when I do have a problem big or small come to my attention, I have to run it down. I have to run down every little problem. Number one, it just sets the example for the other people, but not only that, if I don't run down every little problem, then things tend to come unraveled.

Willie Richardson's a friend of mine. He's a black pastor in Pennsylvania. He loves to tell the story that people will come to him. They'll walk into his office and they'll have this big, giant, 800-pound, snarly problem with these long fangs and slithering tongue and sharp teeth. He says to everyone, he says, "You know, we'll work on this problem, but why didn't you just bring this to me when it was a cute, little, cuddly, two-pound problem?" The thing is is what I've learned is that when you see a cute, little, cuddly, two-pound problem, if I don't go after it, if I don't chase it down, it's going to gain weight. It's going to become bigger and bigger and bigger.

Brian knows I chase down these little things. This morning, I was just chasing down one little tiny little thing with him. I still don't understand what's going on, but he's going to explain it to me and that'll be that. Actually, he's already assured me that it's not a problem, but I still want to understand it because I want to run down everything, everything that comes to my attention. Not everything is going to come to my attention. You can't solve problems that you're not aware of, but Nehemiah, you see the four situations that he found here when he got back. They converted the storeroom in the house of God into a mini warehouse for Pagan. They had not been paying the priests and so they had left and gone back to work in the fields. They were abusing the Sabbath. Then they had intermarried with Pagan cultures, so

the believers married nonbelievers, basically, and raising them up in the Pagan cultures. Those are the four situations that he found and he addressed them.

Let's just take a look at how he addressed them. In verse 8, after he finds out about Tobiah getting the mini warehouse, "I was greatly displeased and threw all Tobiah's household goods out of the room. I gave orders to purify the rooms and then I put back into them the equipment of the house of God." Then he had learned about the Levites having to go back to work and he says in verse 11, "So I rebuked the officials and asked them, 'Why is the house of God neglected?'" and made the other adjustments there. Then with regard to the Sabbath, verse 15, last half, "I warned them against selling food on that day." In verse 17, "I rebuked the nobles of Judah and said to them, 'What is this wicked thing you are doing, desecrating the Sabbath day?'" and so forth and so on.

Then with regard to the intermarriage with the Pagan cultures, verse 25, "I rebuked them and called curses down on them. I beat some of the men." That'd be interesting to do today. "I beat some of the men and pulled out their hair." I pulled out their hair. Wow. Scott, oh, I'm sorry. I can't do that. Pulled out their hair. "I made them take an oath in God's name," and said some other things and so forth. He tackled these problems. He ran down every single problem, you see, because he understood Proverbs 29:12, "If a ruler listens to lies, all of his officials will become wicked," you see.

Then ultimately, though, Nehemiah knew. By the way, you saw Jesus doing the same thing. Every little question that people would bring to Him, He would answer it. He would resolve that issue, so run down everything, but this leader depends on God for success. You see Nehemiah doing that several times here. He's done it throughout the book, but in verse 14, after he addresses the situation with the mini warehouse and the priests going back to work, he says in verse 14, "Remember me for this, oh, my God, and do not blot out what I have so faithfully done for the house of my God and its services." He's depending on God.

Then he prays again in the last part of verse 22 after he deals with the Sabbath problem. "Remember me for this also, oh, my God, and show mercy to Me according to Your great love." Then all the way down at verse 29, after the intermarriage problem. "Remember them," he says, but then the very last sentence of the book, he says, "Remember me with favor, oh, my God." He's depending on God and God's favor to do this because he's a successful leader and he just doesn't have any illusion about what it's going to take for people to adopt change. They're not going to adopt change because of the strength of his personality or persuasive powers, but ultimately, it's going to be because of the work that the Holy Spirit does. However, however, the Holy Spirit usually does his best work when people know what they're doing and so to be a skilled leader is one way to make sure that your changes not only are adopted, but then sustained.

One day, Saint Peter received a new man into Heaven and he said to Saint Peter, "I've always been a military history buff and I wonder who would likely be the greatest general who ever lived?" Saint Peter said, "Oh, well that's easy. It's that man right over there." The new arrival was a little puzzled. He said, "Well, that can't be. I knew that man in earthly life and he was a common laborer." Saint Peter smiled. He said, "Well, yes, he was, but if he had been a general, he would've been the greatest general that ever lived."

The idea of becoming skillful at what you're doing if you want to rebuild is just so integral to this whole part of rebuilding a country. It's part of what it means to be a successful leader is just to know what you're doing and so I hope through this series that you have gotten a step further in your quest to be

able to rebuild the thing that you want to rebuild and just remember that successful leaders, they don't have any illusions about how much it's going to take or what it's going to take for people to adopt change and they're willing to do whatever it takes to exhibit that determination to make sure that that happens.

Just as you are thinking about the things that you have put your minds and your hearts to, let's close in prayer and ask God to give us some of His special favor. Lord, as Nehemiah did, we come to You and we ask You to remember us for the efforts, the labors that we have already put into rebuilding our country, whatever that means for us, for the effort that we have put into getting people to adopt the change that we believe that You are leading us to implement.

Then, Lord, we now want to be able to last for 20 years like Darwin Smith and even when people are telling us that there's no way our idea will work or we're stupid or you should give up or quit, sometimes we are alone on the trail, Lord. Just help each of us to be able to see that bigger perspective of what You're doing in the world and how we fit into it. I pray that You would, so it would be encouraging to know that for each man here to know that they're going to get through whatever it is that they're going through, that Father, it would be hopeful for each of these men to understand that they can change their lives in Christ. They can do that through the power of Your Holy Spirit and Your Holy Spirit usually will do Your best work when we know what we're doing. I pray that You would use this series as an equipping series for us, each of us. Me, too. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.