

A Stop by Quiet Waters
by
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Maintaining Emotional & Spiritual balance

Last November 52 pastors met with Dr. Chuck Slagen, director of Hope Psychological Services, the speaker at our Gift Day for Pastors. He spoke on the necessity of maintaining our emotional and spiritual balance when everything around us as pastors keeps changing more and more quickly and with greater and greater intensity. The principles he drew from the life of Nehemiah were so helpful that I review them monthly to see whether I might be losing sight of them, and to remind myself that these are ways God can work with and through me if I will keep pursuing them. I want to pass these principles on to you because I believe that, even in summary form, they have a lot to offer as we seek to maintain spiritual and emotional balance in today's world.

Dr. Slagen used Nehemiah as his model because of the tremendous challenges and pressures put on Nehemiah and the opposition which arose against him after God had given him a work to do. Nehemiah had a secure, though hazardous, position in the king's household. He was his cupbearer, which meant he had a personal relationship with the king, but he also had to prove to the king that each beverage he brought him was not poisoned by taking a drink of it before putting it on the king's table.

Life for Nehemiah was very good until the day one of his brothers came from Judea and told him that though exiles had been returning from captivity for over a hundred years they were living in disgrace in Jerusalem because there was still rubble everywhere and the walls of the city had never been rebuilt. This broke his heart and he wept. Then he entered into three months of mourning, fasting, and praying over how to respond to the situation before he presented his request to the king to go back and rebuild the walls.

When he arrived he told no one of his plans. He secretly surveyed the situation personally in order to get a first-hand view of the problem. Then he called the people together and pointed out to them their danger living in an un-walled city. Next he told them how God had worked in the king's heart allowing him to come, and authorizing him to get all the timber he would need from the king's forest for the rebuilding project. Once they knew all this then he presented them with his plan for how they could rebuild the walls and make themselves secure from their enemies by everyone working together.

Dr. Slagen's first principle: *Advance preparation can significantly reduce conflict and frustration as we seek to fulfill the task (s) before us.* When Nehemiah accepted the task of rebuilding the wall he did four things: 1) He took ample time to pray it through in order to get the mind of God as fully as possible. 2) He made a thorough inventory of the situation before he proposed anything. 3) Then he gathered the people and fully informed them of the situation and all that had transpired up to that point. 4) Last of all, he challenged them to join him in the task, and delegated the work to the many rather than trying to do it all himself.

We are too driven by time, whereas God isn't. Take all the time necessary to prepare yourself for what you are going to propose. Thoroughly evaluate the situation from every possible angle. Then test it by seeking the counsel of a few godly, wise people. Proverbs 15:22 says,

*“Where there is no counsel plans fail,
but with abundance of advisors they succeed.”*

Then you will be ready to share your vision or plan with your people, and challenge them to share the load with you. This will significantly reduce conflict and frustration as you and your people move forward together. Note that I didn't say, *eliminate*, but *reduce*.

Dr. Slagen's second principle: *Establish boundaries. Being involved in too many projects at the same time will stretch you too thin and can lead to burnout and depression.* I simply want to bullet point several things Dr. Slagen touched on here:

- Learn how to prioritize your work and then work on first things first. We all have too much to do, and not enough time or energy in which to do it.
- Work on what is most important at the time, not what is of greatest interest. Leave the unimportant for another time, if ever.
- Partner with others who will work with you, bringing them into your plans and sharing the load rather than going it alone.
- Accept the fact that “evil” lives within us. Every bad thing that happens to us is not demonic, some of it is of our own doing.
- Don't dump all your frustrations and struggles on your spouse.
- Our spouse is the most important partner we can have, and without good boundaries in our lives we end up cheating our spouse. Our spouse needs us as much as we need him/her. We need to co-labor with our spouse. If we don't, we are abandoning one of our most effective supports for our life and that of our spouse.

Dr. Slagen's third principle: *Practice self-discipline for sanity. If the shepherd can't protect himself, who's going to care for the sheep?* We must make a decision about being involved every time we're asked to do something. People will constantly challenge us to break down our boundaries for their sakes. To yield to the request of another may seem like the Christian thing to do except that without self-discipline we eventually lose all self-control and will be in danger of self-destructing. How many times I have had a friend say to me, “I know you are very busy, but...” Even the Lord Jesus did not try to meet every need he encountered or heal everybody around him who was diseased or broken in body.

- Nehemiah 6:1-9 reveals that when a work is progressing well the enemy will seek to get at the leader. Nehemiah didn't try to explain himself, he just responded with, “I'm too busy, I can't come.”
- Learn how to say “No.”
- Find a confidant (same sex) with whom you can share your heart. This is one reason being in a John 17:23 Fellowship group is so invaluable.
- Learn to co-labor with the Lord rather than jumping into things because it seems they would be good things to do for the Lord.
- Learn to consistently care for yourself, for fatigue is now endemic in our culture, and one of our greatest problems as pastors. It is important to develop good eating, exercise, and rest habits. If you don't do these things for yourself no one else will do them for you.
- If you let self-discipline slip even a little bit, you can start an avalanche of failure.

I have prayed that these notes will be helpful to you. Dr. Slagen is planning to present this material in future seminars for pastors. If you missed our seminar you can contact him for a schedule of where he will be presenting this in the future. His email address is, cjslagen@juno.com.

Peace and joy in Christ,
Dick Germaine