**BY JERRY PAGE**

The story story is told of a young man who loved to drive his sports car fast on curvy mountain roads. One day another car came careening toward him around a blind curve. The car pulled out of his lane just in time, and as they passed each other the driver leaned out of her window and yelled, “Pig!”

He was furious! “Hog!” he shouted back. “She was on my side of the road,” he muttered. “How dare she call me a pig!” His only satisfaction was that he’d had the presence of mind to yell an appropriate insult back at her.

Then he rounded the blind curve—and hit the pig that was standing in the middle of the road!

Sometimes apparent threats are actually helpful warnings. Our Lord always sees around the corner into the future. In every crisis He wants to warn us of the dangers and show us the opportunities available if we listen to His inspired words.

I see a major “pig” in the road ahead for Christians living in these last days. Many are following the example of our culture to “do what is right in our own eyes” instead of turning to God’s Word.

As this earth careens toward its final hour, God has exciting and sobering plans for each one of us. He is calling you and me to be influential leaders, to give the call to “come out of her [Babylon], my people” (Rev. 18:4).1 The only obstacle that stands in the way is our own choice to respond to the warnings.

**Nehemiah’s Example**
Nehemiah is a powerful example of the leader our Lord is calling each of us to be.

When we first meet Nehemiah, he is serving the Persian king Artaxerxes as his cupbearer. Though Nehemiah held an influential position in the Persian court and was surrounded by riches, his heart was with his father’s God and the people who had been given the sacred writings.

Nehemiah’s ancestors were captured when the Babylonians destroyed Jerusalem some 70 years before. Now under the Persian Empire’s rule, the Hebrews in captivity received permission to return home, fulfilling a promise that God had given the children of Israel years before (Jer. 29:10).

Many had grown comfortable, however, in their foreign land and chose to stay. Rebuilding from burned rubble was too hard. The Lord needed a leader who put the service and honor of God above all earthly things.

Messengers arrived with bad news about the conditions in Jerusalem: “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” (Neh. 1:3).

Nehemiah was heartbroken and turned to two sources of help: prayer and the Word of God. He wept, fasted, prayed, and confessed his sins as well as the sins of his people. Then he praised God for being faithful to His Word and took courage in God’s promises of mercy and restoration if His people returned to Him in repentance and faith (verses 5-11).

**Direction Through Prayer**
For four months Nehemiah poured out his heart before God. Then the Lord gave him a mission. Nehemiah was called to lead in rebuilding Jerusalem. He prayed, “Let Your servant prosper this day, I pray, and grant him mercy in the sight of this man [the king]” (verse 11). And he waited.

Jesus discovered God’s will for His life in the same way. Through His prayerful study of God’s Word He received a clear understanding of His mission as our Savior. He learned the Father’s will for each day, as Nehemiah did, and as we can.

Immersing themselves in God’s Word and prayer filled the disciples’ time as they awaited the descent of the Holy Spirit (see Acts 2). Praise God that the moving of God’s Spirit in our lives will bring the same wisdom, understanding, gifts, and zeal for the salvation of those we know and those to whom God sends us.

**Individual Areas of Influence**
One day King Artaxerxes noticed Nehemiah’s gloomy face and asked why he was so sad. Nehemiah told the king of the needs of his people in Jerusalem. “What do you request?” the king asked. Nehemiah quickly listed off his desires and was given everything  for which he had asked (Neh. 2:2-8).

Nehemiah was not a contractor or an architect. He hadn’t been to the “right” schools. Yet God had given him this mission and sent him to Jerusalem as His designated leader.

In the book *Ellen White and Leadership: Guidance for Those Who Influence Others*, author Cindy Tutsch, associate director of the White Estate, writes: “If you are a Christian, you are a leader! Part of our responsibility as followers of Jesus is to use our influence to lead others to follow Jesus. We do this in different ways, according to our spiritual gifts. But unless you’ve been living in an isolated cave for the past ten years and have seen no one during that time, there are people in your life.”2

Leadership is really influence over people—your children, family, friends, coworkers, and neighbors. Jesus is calling you to be a Nehemiah, someone who is willing to meet God and His Word in prayer daily so that He can gift you with a ministry of leadership. He is preparing a people for heaven and wants to use your influence to lead others to a revival of true godliness.3

**Leading to Success**
Nehemiah’s example is a lesson to all God’s people, teaching us that we are not only to pray much, but also to plan wisely and work hard. Nehemiah understood the word of the Lord given to Zerubbabel: “ ‘Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit,’ says the Lord of hosts” (Zech. 4:6). But he also knew by experience that men and women of prayer are believers of action, and that careful consideration and well-matured plans are essential to the success of spiritual efforts for our Lord.

When Nehemiah arrived in Jerusalem, he toured the city to assess conditions. His heart was sorrow-stricken when he saw the devastation. The outlook seemed bleak. But he won the hearts of the people as he recounted the answered prayers and providential happenings that had brought him to Jerusalem. Convinced, the people responded, “Let us rise up and build” (Neh. 2:18).

There was fierce opposition: ridicule, physical attacks, discouragement, compromise, slander, and treachery. Taunts used to mock the workers claimed their God had rejected them. But Nehemiah answered each attack with the Word of God (verses 19, 20).
Under Nehemiah’s leadership the walls were rebuilt in just 52 days (Neh. 6:15). Even the enemies of God’s people saw that the Lord was with them (verse 16).

**Nehemiah Takes His People to the Word of God**
Bricks and mortar would not keep the inhabitants safe. Nehemiah knew that the only true security for the people of Jerusalem was the rebuilding of their hearts. He brought the people together to hear the reading of God’s Word, which had not been done for many years.

As they were reminded of God’s warnings, they wept (Neh. 8:1, 8, 9) and made “an oath to walk in God’s law” (Neh. 10:29). Nehemiah urged them to remember God’s wonderful forgiveness and grace, adding, “The joy of the Lord is your strength” (Neh. 8:10).

Then Nehemiah went back to the Persian palace. In time he returned to Jerusalem and found that the people had fallen into serious backsliding. As God’s chosen leader, he did not shrink from the very specific work of reformation needed if God’s blessings were to remain with His people.

He took on the issues, such as mingling in dangerous ways with the unconsecrated and unbelievers (Neh. 13:23-28), failing to return tithes and offerings (verses 7-13), and disregarding the Lord’s Sabbath (verses 15-22). He understood that while some of his reforms seemed severe, they would prove a loving blessing. God’s warnings are always for our present and eternal good.

**Accepting God’s Call**
We are living on the edge of eternity. Solemn and frightening days threaten our safety. How the angels must weep as they see the condition of the Laodicean church—a people who are blind to their needs and the dangerous times.

“There is nothing that Satan fears so much as that the people of God shall clear the way by removing every hindrance, so that the Lord can pour out His Spirit upon a languishing church and an impenitent congregation. If Satan had his way, there would never be another awakening, great or small, to the end of time.”4

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| **Questions forReflection and Sharing** **1.** What does being a leader really mean? Must it involve holding a high-level position in the church?**2.** Some people feel they are "called" to be followers rather than leaders, that they have no special talents to offer. What would you say to such individuals?**3.** One of Nehemiah's "secrets of success" was his ability to wait for the Lord to answer his prayers at the right time. Have you developed this level of patience and trust in God?  |

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God is calling each of us to become one of His leaders, to pray and study Scripture with others, to be like Nehemiah and share what God has done in our lives, to be a contagious influence wherever we are.

Walking down the street one day, a man was stopped by a zealous young Christian who pressed a piece of literature into his hand. Not wanting to be overly offensive but still frustrated, he took the tract and shoved it into his pocket.

Later, at home, he felt the crumpled literature, pulled it out, and threw it into the fireplace. But he made the mistake of watching it burn. Before it was completely consumed, the last sentence glowed in brightness, “The word of the Lord endureth forever” (1 Peter 1:25, KJV).

Believing that the God of his earlier life was speaking to him in love, he surrendered his life to Jesus before the night was over!

The transforming power of Jesus that created the universe is in His written Word.  He promises that His Word “will not return to me empty, but will accomplish . . . the purpose for which I sent it” (Isa. 55:11, NIV).

Our Lord wants leaders who boldly speak God’s Word. Jesus is coming, and we’re told that Christ’s return will be preceded by a revival in prayer, the reading of the Word of God, and a commitment to complete surrender to Jesus. Around the world the signs of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit are rapidly increasing. What a marvelous time to be alive!

We have a choice to make, however—whether or not to be leaders for Christ. Let’s open our hearts to our Savior, confess our sins, accept His cleansing power, and ask Him what He wants for us. He will not fail to lead us to where we need to be.

1 Unless otherwise indicated, Bible texts in this article are taken from the New King James Version. Copyright © 1979, 1980, 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.
2 Cindy Tutsch, *Ellen White on Leadership: Guidance for Those Who Influence Others* (Nampa, Idaho: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 2008), p. 7.
3 See Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1958), book 1, p. 121.
4 *Ibid*., p. 124.

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