

Illus 2006 brought an increase to my salary here at church and with it came the idea that I pitched to Denise: *'The family that kayaks together stays together.'*
 So we began researching kayaks, which almost always only increases and justifies a purchase
 We headed into the Army Navy store in Whitehall, looking to get two kayaks, and came out having purchased 5 of them, and all the accompanying accessories
 What we thought would be an \$800 purchase ballooned to over \$2000
 That night, I couldn't sleep, I was so troubled by my impulsive and exorbitant purchase
 When Denise woke up, I asked her, *'Do you think we made a mistake?'* ... *'Yes'* she responded
 I called the manager who sold us the kayaks and confessed we overextended ourselves
 He told me how he went into Walmart to buy a small item and came out with a laptop...

We're going to see in this passage how we can handle promotion well when it comes to our lives
 Maybe the promotion is a higher position in your career, or perhaps promotion in a volunteer organization
 Or a promotion from the bench to the starting team, or JV to Varsity
 It may be in the form of a bonus or an increase in salary

PP Thomas Carlyle once declared: *"Adversity is sometimes hard upon a man; but for one man who can stand prosperity, there are a hundred that will stand diversity."*¹
 In other words, while many can endure and handle adversity, few can handle prosperity
 Let's watch how Nehemiah handled promotion: ***"Moreover, from the time that I was appointed to be their governor in the land of Judah, from the twentieth year to the thirty-second year of Artaxerxes the king, twelve years, neither I nor my brothers ate the food allowance of the governor."*** 5:14

PP 1-Promotions Move Us in a Downward Direction

If you want to advance in God's kingdom, you will head downward

PP There cannot be a better example of this than Jesus Christ, ***"Who, though He was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men."***

Philippians 2:6-7

When God promotes a person, it will be a higher calling to deeper service
 And He promotes those who are ready and willing to lay themselves on the altar and give up their rights and privileges

The position of Governor was a wealthy position, the highest post possible
 And it came with perks, one of which was similar to an expense account, which was how they entertained visiting officials as well as fed their families and staff
 This account was provided for by taxing the people in addition to the King's tax, and it was commonly abused

¹ Hand Me Another Brick, Chuck Swindoll, p. 110

I have a relative who runs an auto mechanic shop, who often adds in more than the customary % to the parts he orders for his customers, pocketing the difference
One of the reminders we on staff often give to each other, is that every penny we spend in ministry comes from your gifts and offerings
We encourage each other to steward those monies incredibly carefully, and adding Josh to our staff is only increasing the attention to how we manage your offerings

Illus When the citizens of High Wycombe, England, elect a new mayor, he/she is weighed at the beginning and end of the serving year, in full view of the public. They've been doing this since 1678 and when the result is known, the Town Crier announces, "And no more!" if they haven't gained, "And some more!" if they have. If they haven't they are applauded, since they haven't grown fat at public expense.

For 12 years as Governor, Nehemiah paid for this expense from his own pockets so he would not put any more strain on the people who were already struggling
He knew that promotion doesn't provide freedom to be served, but to serve
When the godly leader is promoted, he or she will proceed downhill, serving those they are responsible for

PP *"You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. It shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be your slave, even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."*

Matthew 20:25-28

The ladder of success in God's kingdom travels down into deeper service

PP 2-Promotions Expose Our Character

PP Illus *"The very fact that a man has risen to a position of leadership with its attendant prominence tends to engender a secret self-congratulation and pride which, if not checked, will unfit him for further advancement in the service of the kingdom."*²

Our son Andrew came home from church with a lesson sheet that defines God's sovereignty:
"God has the right, wisdom and power to do all that He pleases."

Psalm 75 shows that God is the one responsible for exalting some to high positions and others to low: ***"Do not lift up your horn on high, or speak with haughty neck...it is God who executes judgment, putting down one and lifting up another."*** Psalm 75:5-7

He sometimes brings promotion to us, and He sometimes He allows demotions

In either case, it will expose what is in our hearts and reveal our character

Notice the character of Nehemiah: ***"The former governors who were before me laid heavy burdens on the people and took from them for their daily ration forty shekels of silver. Even their servants lorded it over the people. But I did not do so because of the fear of God."*** 5:15

The Governors before Nehemiah were corrupt, as were their staff, who ***'lorded'*** over the Jews

² Spiritual Leadership, Oswald Sanders, p. 225

PP The writer of the book of **Ecclesiastes** uses this same Hebrew word for ‘**larded**’, in **8:9**, “***All this I observed while applying my heart to all that is done under the sun, when man had power over man to his hurt.***”

The word ‘**larded**’ means to exercise hurtful power over others

Illus Stalin, the murderous Soviet Dictator met with his leaders at the Kremlin in the mid 1930's. He gave them a demonstration of how to treat the Russian people. He reached into a cage, took out a live chicken, and began to pluck the bird clean. With the bird squealing he began a tirade of complaints against his ministers causing each man to fear for his life. Once plucked, Stalin released the bloodied, fear ridden chicken, reached into his pocket and threw a few kernels of corn on the floor that the bird slowly and quietly ate at the feet of its torturer. He began to walk around the table and following closely was the chicken. The message was clear. You can strip people of health, prosperity, security, and humanity. But if you give them food, they will follow you.

Like Stalin, these corrupt former Governors exploited and Larded over the Jews
But Nehemiah “***did not do so because of the fear of God.***”

The fear of God is what Stalin lacked as his deathbed experience demonstrated
I told you before that his daughter was at his side as Stalin was dying, and in one final act of defiance, he sat up in bed, raised his fist to the ceiling, and shook it before lying back down and shortly dying

The anchor for Nehemiah was ‘***the fear of God***’

PP “***The fear of the Lord leads to life, and whoever has it rests satisfied***” **Proverbs 19:23**
If you fear God, you won’t worry about anything or anyone else

PP “***Why was an innocent child taught to fear God? It took me many adult years to realize and understand the answer to that question. The more you fear, the more you attend.***”

A forum contributor on the potential destructive power of a mega church
Nehemiah didn’t need to skim taxes off the top, he knew God would provide all he needed
Generous Christians walk in the fear of God

It is trusting God and refusing to look for help or satisfaction in anyone or anything else
Fearing God is loving Him, desiring to be with Him, not dreading or cringing in His presence

PP “***As a deer pants for flowing streams, so pants my soul for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When shall I come and appear before God?***” **Psalms 42:1-2**

When God is the greatest and most center point of our desire, we long, we anticipate, not fear, coming before Him

PP 3-Promotions Increase Temptation

“I also persevered in the work on this wall, and we acquired no land, and all my servants were gathered there for the work. Moreover, there were at my table 150 men, Jews and officials, besides those who came to us from the nations that were around us.” **5:16-17**

My greatest surprise when taking the Lead Pastorate, was the weight of responsibility

I never truly realized how sheltered I had been underneath the shoulders of Pastor Dean
There were difficulties in youth ministry, but not like the ones I began to face leading a church
If you have received a promotion at work, you know then that the more promoted we are, the greater the weight of responsibility
And with that greater responsibility comes greater hardship
Nehemiah hints at this when he said he ***'persevered in the work on this wall'***
The rest of that sentence is in the plural... 'we acquired no land...all my servants'
But Nehemiah shouldered the weight of the work and had to persevere

But note what is below the surface in these two verses: ***'we acquired no land...'***
Think about this in Real Estate terms whose favorite saying is *Location, location, location*
What do you think was going to happen to land values when Jerusalem was rebuilt and restored?
They were heading in one direction...up!
We see why the officials and nobles were so greedily grabbing the lands of those who defaulted
Land was a hot investment, but Nehemiah refused, resisting the temptation to invest in anything other than the work that God had given him
So focused that ***'all my servants were gathered there for the work'***
Promotion often brings opportunity to increase wealth and power, but Nehemiah would have nothing of it
In short, Nehemiah rejected *worldliness: finding your satisfaction in what this world offers*
PP He refused to be like Demas in Paul's day, who, ***"in love with this present world, has deserted me"*** **2 Timothy 4:10**
King Solomon was similar to Demas
He became the wealthiest man in the world, in some calculations making 876 million a year
"[He] made silver and gold as common in Jerusalem as stone" **1 Chronicles 1:15**
But Solomon couldn't handle his promotion; temptations turned him away from God

Friends, the degree of temptation only increases with promotion...which is why God will not allow everyone to have it!
And those who are promoted quickly realize that with the increase comes greater burdens
Nehemiah now had a lot of people to take care of, a lot of mouths to feed
150 men, important officials and many more who were visiting dignitaries
Do your own math and add in their wives and children
In fact, the passage tells us how much food Nehemiah had to provide: ***"Now what was prepared at my expense for each day was one ox and six choice sheep and birds, and every ten days all kinds of wine in abundance. Yet for all this I did not demand the food allowance of the governor, because the service was too heavy on this people."*** **5:18**
You think your grocery bill is high?
Experts say this was enough food to feed 600-800 people
Yet even with this financial pressure he would not cut corners, take from others, or get distracted

PP 4-Promotions handled rightly bring honor

Friends, have you ever seriously thought how you want to be remembered?
Have you ever prayed that God would remember you in a certain way?
"Remember for my good, O my God, all that I have done for this people."

5:19

This sounds uncomfortably out of character for Nehemiah doesn't it?
I mean, so far, he seems utterly selfless, giving up a posh job with a lot of perks to go to his ruined people and their ruined city to help them rebuild and restore
Refusing the temptations of wealth and power, shouldering the weight and persevering
But now, his prayer, for the first time, is about himself!
That seems so selfish, doesn't it?
Look a little deeper with me and we'll see that it really isn't

When you pray and ask God to 'Remember me...', you are inviting God's full attention
And Nehemiah is inviting God to look and record all that he has done, to '**remember**'
Scrutinize my actions, my conduct and hold me accountable
Have you ever prayed that God would hold you accountable?
PP "***Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting!***" **Psalm 139:23-24**
This is the Law of the Harvest, which includes sacrifice, burdens and toil now, but will one day yield abundance
Lord examine me, examine my actions, all I have done for this people, and lead me in the way Everlasting, so I will one day hear, '*Well done, good and faithful servant.*'
I want to hear that more than anything else, it is fueling my life!
I'm not asking for treasures, or trophies, I want your favor, your *remembrance*

How well do you handle promotion when God gives it to you?
How well do you handle demotion?
God will lift up and put down as He wills
Kings, Presidents, CEO's, and regular people like ourselves!

Are you on the ladder of success?
In God's kingdom, promotion descends, exposes character, increases responsibility, and if handled rightly, brings eternal honor!

Pray

- 1-Promotions Move Us in a Downward Direction**
- 2-Promotions Expose Our Character**
- 3-Promotions Increase Temptation**
- 4-Promotions handled rightly bring honor**